

National Council of Jewish Women Sarasota-Manatee Section
Holocaust Oral History Project
Jack Fuchs, Survivor
June 2, 1987
Sarasota, Florida

- Q. Today is June 2, 1987. This is Fern Niven in Sarasota, Florida speaking from the home of Mr. Jack Fuchs. Mr. Fuchs has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project being conducted by the National Council of Jewish Women to record the experiences of Holocaust survivors. Mr. Fuchs, we appreciate your willingness to participate in our project and I'd like to start this interview by asking you to tell us something about your early childhood experiences. We want to know about more than just the time during the war. You know, how large was your family, where did you live, what did your parents do for a living?
- A. Alright. I was born in Bendzin, Poland. It was a town of about 75,000 people. It was very close to the German border. I was the youngest of seven children. I had five sisters and a brother. My father had a large family: there were about twelve or thirteen children. My mother's side I think there must have been about six or seven brothers and sisters. You see it was quite a large family.
- Q. They all lived in the same small town?
- A. All lived around in the area. Yes they did. When I was growing up my father was very religious. He used to go every Saturday to *Shul* (synagogue). He used to wear the special caftan, on Saturday. Not every day, just on Saturday.
- Q. The large, long black robe with the big brimmed hat?
- A. No, no, no Conservative. He wasn't very Orthodox, but Orthodox. Our home was strictly kosher. We couldn't put the lights on Saturday, or the switches or make fires to cook something. Everything was pre-cooked on Friday for the next day. I was a happy child growing up. Going to school.
- Q. During your growing up years do you remember any anti-Semitic events that happened in your town or that happened to you personally?
- A. Well, the Polish people were known for being anti-Semites. Their second word used to be "Jew Jew" or in Polish it was *Zydow*. And remember things like... We used to go behind a very good soccer team in our town, name was *Haomer* (*Hashomer?*). And they were an A-class team...used to go to the small towns over there and they knew you were Jew and they used to throw stones. And if you were wining, you had to leave ten, fifteen minutes before so you shouldn't get stoned to death. So that was some experience.
- Q. You talk about it now almost laughingly. But what was I like to live under those

- conditions?
- A. Well, our hometown was mostly Jewish people. Most of the store, the business, the store owners were mostly Jewish. The surrounding areas, there were the Polish people, the farm people, who used to bring in their goods to the city to sell and all that stuff. And in return they used to buy...like clothing or shoes. This was all in mostly Jewish hands.
- Q. I don't think you said what your father did to make a living?
- A. My father was in the empty barrel business. He used to buy up empty barrels from all kinds of firms...like from places where they sold herrings, so they had empty barrels. From places where they had...they sold tar, tar which you used for the roads, he bought up those barrels. For barrels...he bought up...from oil...heating.
- Q. Cooking oil?
- A. Cooking oil, all kinds and then he sold it back to the factory.
- Q. I see.
- A. That was his profession.
- Q. How much education, formal education, did you have?
- A. When the war started 1939, I just finished, which called in Poland, *poceknaskoya* which is equal almost high school. Just about...above Junior High would I say.
- Q. Were you an apprentice in anything? Were you being trained for any particular life?
- A. Well, I was supposed to...I had a...My brother-in-law was about 20...he was married to my oldest sister. He was a bookkeeper in a big factory. One of the biggest factories in Poland for bolts, nail and mesh wire. I was very good in school in drawing. So I supposed to go there...similar like maybe architecture something to that place at the big factory because I was very good at drawing. But then the war broke out and that was all crossed out.
- Q. When Hitler came into power or even perhaps before Hitler came to power, were you, in Poland, apprehensive about what that might mean to you people?
- A. Well, nobody could realize that this is what was going to happen. I mean who would stay there and wait for a slaughter like this? You knew Hitler was in power. As a matter of fact, I had two uncles who lived in Germany, they lived very well. But once Hitler came to power this whole thing started to turn around.

But nobody could realize that. Did the world realize what would happen? I mean...did they let it happen?

Q. Well, it's hard to say from the standpoint of someone who was in the United States during all this time...but I wasn't sure how you feel about it....

A. This is the way I know...this is way I feel about this. This is the way... It was never spoken about. We knew Hitler was in power in Germany. We never realized this was going to happen.

Q. Do you want to go on then and say how it did happen, step by step, so we understand how you became involved in it?

A. Oh, yes. My brother, should rest in peace. He went to the Polish army in 1937. You had to go to the Polish army when you were 21 years old. He supposed to come home, the day 1939, September when the war broke out.

Q. This is when Hitler invaded Poland?

A. September 1, 1939. When this happened.... When Hitler invaded Poland, the war started. In our town we didn't even realize that the war started. We saw planes coming over our heads and we thought that was Polish planes. Because we lived ten miles from the border, the German border, the 1939 border I am talking about.

Q. How old were you at this time?

A. I was 14 years old, fourteen and a half. So the war started five in the morning because my brother, he was fighting the Nazis for about five to six weeks until Poland was completely invaded and we didn't know where he was. We thought maybe he had been killed or something. Then a couple weeks later, he came home. He got out. Somebody gave him a civilian...he came home. It was like a miracle. And he told us, which I'll never forget, the war started (at) five in the morning. They were (at) that time on the border...the town name was Rybnik. Right on the border, Germany-Poland. The Polish army was bringing black coffee for them...like for breakfast that morning and all of a sudden they saw the tanks coming out of the woods. And they thought they were Polish tanks on training. That was the beginning of the war. The Polish men there didn't realize the war started.

Q. Weren't very well informed

A. Also, in that part of Poland, my brother also say they, another Poland, they called it *volksdeutsche* (German folk). They were shooting on the...there were Polish people living in Poland who were shooting on the Polish army. The Germans from one side, they were shooting because they were half German, half Polish.

- Q. And what was happening to you at this time?
- A. Well we were home and the Germans came in the same day into our town. We lived...the street was right on the river and right across the river was the beautiful synagogue for our town. That night, we peeked out of the windows, the synagogue was on fire. The Germans were laughing in the street, we were keeping quiet. As a matter of fact, my mother used to tell me...nobody should like breath(e). They were laughing down stairs...the SS, and the Germans. And they said "*Juden heis machen*" which means "we will make the Jews hot"...burn.
- Q. And then what?
- A. Then...was tough to get food once the Germans came in. Everything was in secret, all kinds of buying...potatoes from the Polish what they used to bring in from different places.
- Q. Black market?
- A. Yea. And that's the way...every else stopped...the business, everything else stopped. And it was getting tougher and tougher by the day.
- Q. What happened to your father's business? Did the Germans confiscate it?
- A. Everything was out. We couldn't travel no more. We have to stay put...home. There were no ghettos yet... it was just the beginning of things to come.
- Q. Well, go ahead and tell me what did come.
- A. Well... As I said, my brother came home. We and my brother...I was...especially me I always looked older than I was...than my age...somehow. So they [the Germans] said at home, that the young people, if they would work, get hard work around...us with a lot of coal mines. Would get hard work around there...they would get special papers like...they wouldn't...they start to send the people already...to take people to the *judenlager* (Jews camp). There was no consent. But the *judenlager*...in the beginning was...so they said if you work on the coal mines, something like that, they wouldn't take you to Germany. They leave you stay where you are. So me and my brother, we registered and we worked on the coal mines.
- Q. You were fourteen or fifteen years old?
- A. I was fourteen and a half. We worked, me and my brother, in the coal mines, the name was "Saturn". That was about six kilometers from our town. The town was Czleadz. So I worked there a few months, I don't know exactly for how long. And then they started to take more people. One night I came home from work...it was the middle of 1940 already. So my sister says...you'd better go away

because they were looking for you, the Germans were looking for us. Somebody says there's two young people here. So my brother, he went away and I said to my mother...I'll never forget that...I said "I'm so tired, I don't want to go away, I'm going to sleep here." Sure enough, 11:00 at night the Germans came...and it was Jewish militia...I can't stop crying...

Q. It's hard to recount this...

A. So, as I said, I didn't want to go away. I came home so tired from working a whole day on the coal mine. And they caught me at home and took me away. I was one of the earliest going to the camps. Most of the people are still home for a while. I went in the middle of 1940...I went to concentration, no it wasn't concentration it was *judenlager*, Jewish camp.

Q. Was your family allowed to stay in their own home or were they moved to a ghetto?

A. When I left, yes. I found out later that the ghetto...well the ghetto was formed I think 1942. My whole family...they took away in 1943 from the ghetto. Then everybody went to Auschwitz. But I was in camp, somehow I survived. I'm here... to talk about it.

Q. What was it like in the camp? What did they make you do?

A. Well, we came to the first camp, it was named Fulbrick. Over there we worked in a...how they call it in English...where they make bricks...bricks for buildings.

Q. Brick factory?

A. Brick factory. It was a very bad camp. After six weeks, I was almost out of my mind. They gave us very little food.

Q. What kind of food did they give you?

A. Well...when you came home, they give us two slices of bread and a little bit soup that you had to dig in to find...in order to find a little piece of potato in it. So...after six weeks over there, or seven weeks over there...they needed carpenters. So I said okay. I got to get out of here, it's no good, very bad. So I said I'm a carpenter. So they put me on a transport. I went to different camp. It was called Larahut. I was very happy because they was...I knew the family was still home. I thought maybe I be able to get in touch with them. So I went there as a carpenter, but I couldn't...there was no way to get in touch with the family.

Q. What time of the year was this? What season of the year?

A. Well, it was Larahut, that must have been 1940.

- Q. No, I mean winter or fall?
- A. Winter, I think, maybe fall...
- Q. Well, either one really. Did they give you warm clothing? Did you have blankets? Was it cold all the time?
- A. No. No. No. No, you had one pair of socks. You were lucky to have a pair of shoes. You were lucky nobody stole your shirt. It was some day when we didn't work, you walked around almost naked. You used to wash what you had, dry it up and put it on again. That was the procedure.
- Q. You must have lost a great deal of weight during this time.
- A. Well, I'm sure I lost but who was looking? We just were looking around the ground for something to eat. Digging in the garbage or find a leaf or something. Because the food they gave was outrageous. It was nothing.
- Q. Did people who worked in the kitchens do any better?
- A. Well, I guess so. Because they were right up there. I mean...couldn't stop them from grabbing something...eat a potato...another slice of bread. They were the lucky ones. That's for sure.
- Q. Now these were not extermination camps, these were work camps?
- A. This was not extermination camp, this was working camps.
- Q. Did a lot of people die though from the bad conditions?
- A. If you were sick, you had no chance. Then they send you away. That we heard already, Auschwitz. If you were sick, they sent you to Auschwitz. So it was a big thing not to get sick, even if you didn't feel well, you wouldn't tell anybody. Because you were gone. If you had fever or something, forget it. So...
- Q. How long were you in Lara Richte?
- A. Lara Richte, it must have been to about the beginning of 1941. Something like that. Then it was bad there, too. They needed carpenters again. So we went to Brande. Brande was called _____. Over there I worked on the German Autobahn for a while. But then they stopped it too because they found out that they couldn't afford...they needed all the oils, all the things for the armies...the Germans. So, they stopped it. There was no more work there. And again, they needed carpenters in a different...once a few thousand people, I don't know how many

thousand people were there. So they needed carpenters again, like I said. We went to the next *lager* (camp)...was Brundslau.

- Q. Were there mostly Jewish people in these camps or were there a lot of...
- A. Those camps, mostly Jewish people. Brundslau already...that was a place where you make barracks. Barracabau, in German it is called _____ which means complete barracks for civilians, for the army mostly, furniture. They shipped out complete barracks to be installed at this and this destination plus the furniture, everything complete. Over there I was there until February 12, 1945. I was there...this was a very unusual thing, to be in one place so long.
- Q. When you said they needed carpenters in Brundslau, was that...did that mean they asked for volunteers to go to these places?
- A. No, just who was a carpenter. But the reason I said I was a carpenter...I stuck with it because the other camps were so extraordinarily bad, I said I got nothing to lose I got to get out of here or I'm going to perish here. So finally I would up in Bundslau. This is...really was only for carpenters. We were over there 1,100 Jews. When I came in it was still *judenlager* (Jewish camp) but then end of, I think 1942, it became concentration camp. They gave us...we changed from the civilians we had only the marks, no hair, and the yellow stars. And then they switched it over...It was such a bitter cold...in the winter...we were standing outside naked and they gave us just a jacket and a pair of pants and some kind of shoes and nothing else. It was bitter cold. You almost froze to death.
- Q. Were you then being guarded by German soldiers?
- A. Yea, the Germans, the SS.
- Q. Were they especially brutal?
- A. Well, in those camps...they were watching us in the quarters, where we lived like. When we came in to sleep and all this. They had these...what you call...turrets...the *wacht thurm* ...
- Q. Watch tower...
- A. Watch towers. You know, high up, the machine guns over there and they were watching us. But where we worked, especially in Bundslau, I had a foreman...we were...I was in the...his name was Lesingham...I'll never forget that...and I was one of the good workers. I didn't look to fool around. But I...let's say they gave me work for ten, eleven hours...I had to do this, this. They say Yackov, you do this kind of work. And I did it from three to four hours and I used to run around the whole place there looking for food. But many times the other Germans used, when ever he looked...I worked on the bandsaw...on a big bandsaw,...six meter

bandsaw...whenever he used to look in there...so he used to complain I'm never there by the machine, the machine is standing still he says. But I did my job...and so he (Lesingham) says, alright so...Yackov stay by the machine, he says, because Schultz complained.

Q. Shouldn't look bad for him.

A. And that was...over there that camp wasn't as extraordinarily bad as the other ones. They gave us a little more food and sanitary places. We had some cold water even in the winter. Hot water was out of the question. We used to take a cold shower, even if it was zero outside.

Q. So keeping clean was another way of deterring the _____

A. Somedays we used to have a panel, an *appeal* how do you say...everybody out.

Q. Line up.

A. Line up, yes. Counting the people, nobody's missing. You had to take off your clothes, wash it...whatever you had...one piece of everything...and you dry it up. And they had barbers, our own barbers...they gave us...we had no hair. The men were shaved out...shaved out in case somebody escapes they recognize you right away, you are from concentration camp.

Q. Did you have any contact with your family at all? Did you have any word of them all this time?

A. No, none at all. I only found out after the war, that the liquidation of our town...my people were home until 1943 then everybody went to Auschwitz. Nobody survived. The reason also is that they were young people. But five sisters and my brother were young people. But what happened was, somebody says they made a ...they tried to fight back...the Germans. So for that reason they didn't...but they came with older people, from the ghetto, to Auschwitz. They didn't select anymore. They put everybody to Auschwitz. Young, old there was no selection.

Q. Like a punishment?

A. A punishment, exactly. That's why I have a feeling that nobody...my sisters and my brother survived. They were 26, 28 years old. One 27.

Q. What a terrible loss of life.

A. Well, what can I tell you?

Q. In the *Judenlager*, were there any women or girls?

- A. This was a camp for only men. When I was liberated, this was later on. I have a long story for you yet. I was in Bergen-Belsen yet.
- Q. You said you were in Brundslau until February, 1945.
- A. Now I tell you I was there in this camp until February 12th. All of a sudden, we heard some rumors that the Russians were coming from Silesia, from Poland. Brundslau was close to Silesia, Bressla (Breslau?), have you heard of Bressla? Not far from that. Between Berlin and Bressla. It was a town. And in the middle of the night, the SS started screaming *Abtraetn, abtraetn*, everybody out of the barracks. We didn't know what happened. Once we came out, it was about twelve, one in the morning, we saw far away a lot of shooting, fire, *Raus, raus* (out) they screamed. Whoever...they took us on the road. Whoever remained...was a few sick people there...whoever remained over there, they next day they were all liberated. We walked six weeks on the road. We walked through Germany. Finally...bitter cold out...it was wintertime. No food, no nothing. As a matter of fact...you probably heard of the famous bombing of Dresden...that night, that night I was...we were on a big farm...all of us, a tremendous big farm. The sky was lit up. That was the night we were there in Dresden, the...marching through. The sky was so lit up like in the daytime. They were bombing Dresden, the famous bombing. We were that night. I had a tremendous...I got a bad earache. I was going out of my mind with pain. Food, drink, that didn't mean anything. But the pain of my earache was unbelievable...bitter, bitter cold. So we walked for six weeks, every day we walked I would say twenty, thirty miles...and then we rested... in a barn then again walk. Until finally we wound up in Dora Nordhausen. Did you hear that camp, Dora? That's in Hartz, Nordhausen. This is the place where they had...it's called *Hartz Gabete*. "Hard section" of Germany where they had the big mountains...and that's where the ...inside the mountains they were making the V-1 and V-2...Dr. von Braun, who was the big chief in the United States of America.
- Q. Yes, during the war...
- A. And, I came into Dora...that was an unbelievable camp again. There was a big room over there...they called it a cinema. We were sitting...I don't know how many hundred...if one wanted to get up, everybody had to get up. One sitting (next) to the other, they pressed us in like this. And if you wanted to sit down, everybody had to sit down.
- Q. You were sitting on the floor?
- A. Sure.... Finally they said they need workers, so I say okay, I want to get out of here. So I worked for about two weeks. I worked in the mountains with the...again carpenter. I was helping out with...you know where you dig out a

- mountain it's just like a coal mine. You have to put boards over there (so) stone shouldn't fall down...
- Q. Shouldn't collapse.
- A. Shouldn't collapse. That's what I did. I worked for two weeks. And then this was...the war was coming already to an end. The Americans from the southern side, the Russians were pushing from the east, English from the north. All of a sudden you didn't go to work...they put us on the trains.
- Q. This would have been like early part of May.
- A. No, that was March. That's March.
- Q. Well, if you left the other camp February 12th, and you walked for six weeks, that would have already brought you to April.
- A. Wait...March the 12th...let's say we came in a month to Dora, six weeks, make it...I'm alright, it's six weeks, because six weeks make it until March what, March the 12th.
- Q. March the 26th.
- A. Okay, for two weeks I worked in Dora...make it...
- Q. Middle of April.
- A. Not middle of April. No, no, no. Not the middle of April. That's like April... April, let's say the 8th, 7th, 8th. Then from there they saw that the...the armies...the Allies are coming from all over...they put us on the trains. And we didn't know where to. Finally...they put us in, 120 people, in one wagon.
- Q. Cattle car, box car?
- A. Cattle car. 120 people. We were choking. There was no air, no food. The hysteria...every day traveled a day, let's say they opened...the SS opened the wagon, "How many dead?" Throw them out. Garbage...you know. Close it up again...they give us five days, six days...they didn't give us, never mind food, no water.
- Q. That's more important than food.
- A. This is unreal.
- Q. Did you have...were there rumors that the war was coming to an end? Did you understand this?

- A. We can see that something was going on. We're talking...but again after a while like this, so long, you didn't believe it will ever end. So what happened...after five, six days, finally wound up. We found out later was on the North Sea. I guess they wanted to dump us in there. So we stood there for I don't know a day, half a day. Then they brought us in to...finally to Bergen. To unload us...and we walked in because...Bergen is called Bergen-Belsen. Bergen is actually a small city, 3 kilometers from Belsen. From Bergen the train stopped, we didn't know that. I know it now. We walked in...they walked us into the camp. I'll never forget that we walked in...the front was very quiet. I said to a few, a couple of friends of ours...you know we were together from Brundslau...I said something like, "My God, it looks so quiet, I don't like it, what is this here? What's going on here?" Deeper in was the camp. And that camp...when we came in there...that was unreal. That was un...the sight of this thing...skeletons, dead people left and right. Typhus was raging...big...how you call it...lice...
- Q. Lice.
- A. Lice, big as roaches. I could actually...Bergen-Belsen, this is to say it was unhuman (inhumane) is nothing. It was...I can't find words for it...I actually saw people eat human flesh. I saw it...I did.
- Q. That's desperation carried to the ultimate...
- A. I actually saw it. There was chaos over there. Typhus was raging. We came in...we came in the 11th of April to Bergen-Belsen. Four days later the English army came in. In between, I got to tell you...see the marks over here? This is 43 years old.
- Q. Some scars...
- A. I had gangrene. When I came into Bergen-Belsen I had gangrene on my left foot. My foot was swollen from toe to the groin like a ball. I couldn't walk on that foot. But I just...I was lying there in the barracks with everybody on the...there was no furniture, no beds, no nothing. In the morning I got up, next guy to me was dead, and this guy was dead. The Germans, around the 12th, 13th, they knew the English (were) coming. They made us...they made us...they made me...a got a couple strings, or wires or something...they made me tie up two skeletons and drag them from the barracks out maybe a kilometer on the road to the big graves that now the monument stands there that President Reagan visited not long ago.
- Q. Even with your infected leg you had to do this?
- A. In fact, I couldn't walk. With this leg, I was lucky also. The 15th of April in the middle of the night they said the English are here. They were robbing the kitchen whatever was there to rob...I was laying...it was dark...and I was laying on the floor and I said, "My God, I'm so hungry I got to get something, too." And as I

- got up, in the middle of the floor was a hard chair and I banged into this and this came out like an ocean.
- Q. The infection...
- A. The pus. So this floating out...I never made it to the kitchen. The next morning the English army came in and they liberated us.
- Q. And until the English army came in all these people who were on the verge of starvation had no relief, nobody did anything?
- A. People in Bergen-Belsen were dying left and right. It's unbelievable how many people died after liberation. I was almost one of them, too.
- Q. What did the English do for you?
- A. The English, in my estimate, they didn't realize what they (were) going to find over there. They came in probably with ten, twenty doctors, they needed a thousand, two thousand doctors. People were dying of typhus, typhus was raging over there. They came in...they gave us a can of candy, hard English candy, a can of baked beans. What else did they give us? (Lillian Fuchs "peanut butter, egg powder") we were so hungry we ate everything up and everybody got diarrhea. Killed a lot of people. Instead of, we needed a little dry potato, dry bread, just to...(Lillian Fuchs "They meant well but..."). They meant well, but this is what they gave us. We ate it up and everybody diarrhea. It was...the sight (at) Bergen-Belsen was unreal, unreal.
- Q. Was there any reaction on the part of you and a few people like yourself who were a little healthier to the fact that the war was over, or was it like it didn't really matter?
- A. Well, I stood holding on to the...when the English army, they came...the first...first the wagon came in was an English Red Cross. It was a military Red Cross, which is completely closed (in), has four crosses on each side. And the speaker (said), "Behave yourself," it said, "this is the English army...you are liberated." And we looked at each other, who every stood there. Did we hear right? Is it possible? We couldn't believe it, we were liberated. And that was the end of it.. They caught the Germans over there then they made the Germans clean up the barracks. There are thousands of thousands of people, there are big graves over there in Bergen-Belsen, one day I would like to go back. I told you I went back to Auschwitz ten years ago and I'd like to go back to Bergen- Belsen because they had about three and four graves; three with three to four thousand people in each grave at Bergen-Belsen.
- Q. So how long did you stay in Bergen-Belsen and where did you go when you left?

- A. I'm not finish. Bergen-Belsen, I was there...they start to take out the...who was more healthy...there was the camp it was called *Hohne*, *Hohne* Camp. It's near, it was right next to Bergen-Belsen. That's where the German armies used to stay. They shipped them over there. But I was...then I got sick with typhus. I got typhus in Bergen-Belsen and we were ten guys from...still from that camp Brundslau we were holding together all the time. We were all in one room there and everybody was talking from the high fevers...we didn't realize. We knew it was typhus, but we didn't realize what kind of sickness this is. And I'm...that was the beginning of May already. And I'll never forget that...I was laying and like a window over here and the sun was shining, my head next to the widow, and I would...I could hardly get off the bed. I had some jars, I don't know who brought it to me. In the next room like it was a sink and I used to fill them, the jars with water, and crawl on all fours back to the bed and just lay there. It must have been the fourteenth or fifteenth day...this is a true story...
- Q. I have no doubt of that.
- A. And there were no doctors, because again they didn't realize what they were going to find, the English. And all of a sudden, I was laying like this...must have been no more than 80 or 75 pounds...it got dark before my eyes. That's two weeks after liberation. And my mouth opened and got rigid. And I said to myself, now I am dying. I had one regret, I said to myself, in my mind, that I went through the whole thing, liberated, and now I have to die. And this lasted maybe 30 to 40 seconds and the light came back and I started to move my mouth again, and I looked around slowly, where am I here. That I realized now, was the crisis. Because in typhus its either you go or you make it. I guess I was young enough. I was only 20 years old and a strong heart probably. And here I am. And I was one of the last ones that couldn't recuperate that was...and I'll never forget there was a guy there whose name was Lubnick, Lendall Lubnick, one of my friends. They wanted to throw him in between the dead ones even after I said...the crisis, because I couldn't walk, they had to hold me up. I begged, put me on the truck, throw me on the truck there because I knew he was going to *Hohne*. And he threw me on the truck and I was the last one out of the concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen, because I was so sick. It took me about three or four months until I got to myself. I used to walk around that *Hohne* camp and if I saw a truck or car, everything went like this; I had to grab on to something, I thought I'm falling onto to the ground...so weak...
- Q. Did they take better care of you in *Hohne*?
- A. Well, they gave us food then...
- Q. This was still the English?
- A. That was the English and then they created a committee, a Jewish committee. They got portions of food. It wasn't much. And when I felt better I started to go

out and do some black market or whatever to get some more food, to get myself back into shape. It took months.

Q. And where did you go when you left Hohne?

A. I was there. I was there.

Q. You were where?

A. I stayed there until I came down here, to America, in 1949.

Q. Then you came from there directly to the United States?

A. I worked, I helped out in the post affairs.

--Tape over--

A. We made a team, a soccer team. And I was...from home, from Poland that was the...I mean, all over Europe it's the national game. So I had some talent in that game and I played in the team, a Jewish team, only Jewish. We played against other camps from Germany, southern Germany, northern Germany, all...I stayed there until 1949.

Q. And how did you go about getting to this country, did you have to have an affidavit from someone here in America that they would take care of you?

A. Well, she...my wife's uncle, my wife had uncles and aunts here, they sent papers through the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), through the JOINT committee.

Q. How did you meet your wife? In Hohne?

A. In Bergen-Belsen. I met her (in) Bergen-Belsen after liberation. She was (in) Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen was a camp, one half was women, one half was men. What month was that, 1945 (Lilly Fuchs "September 1946). Something like that...

Q. What was it like for you, to come to the United States?

A. It was....Well, I could have gone to Sweden, I could have gone to Israel and, as a matter of fact, I was in Hamburg to go to Sweden. The trains were waiting and waiting, there to loading I don't know, to ship or something and I said "Ach, I'm going back to the camp," and I went back to Bergen-Belsen. Then I registered...came up United States so I registered United States. I mean when I was a kid growing up in Poland, you always heard America, America, so let's go

to America, that's the place. Finally we got papers and we came to the United States.

Q. And you first came to the New York area?

A. Yes, I came into New York. (Lilly Fuchs, "No, you came to Boston.") Well, I landed in Boston then came to New York.

Q. Did you come separately?

A. (Lilly Fuchs, "No, we were married.") Yea, I was married. Well there is another story that was funny. We went...you had to go through all kind of red tape. We came on the DP quota, you know, space persons quota. My wife's maiden name is Friedman, mine is Fuchs. F-F. Everywhere we went together we were married. It came to put us on the boat there was a list on the boat, my name was there, and hers wasn't there. I said I'm not leaving without her. Whatever we had belongings was on the boat already, couldn't take it back again. I said I'm not leaving. They were calling my name all over the place. It was near Hamburg, near Bremerhaven. Jacob Fuch, Jacob Fuchs...I'm not going. If I don't know what happen to her...Maybe they find something wrong with her, with her lungs or something, then they wouldn't let you in...in the States. Finally I went up...How come you...I said "What's happening with Lilly Friedman?" I said that's her name. "You'd better go" (they said). I said "I'm not going." Then somehow was a bunch of papers like this were laying over there and an office, I don't (know) who the office was run by...I guess the Germans...And I was mixing the papers and all of a sudden I look up and there is a family Friedman and Lilly Friedman is over there, too. And I said "what is this here, what kind of papers is that?" "Oh, this that's families go to..." (they said). "But my fiancée's names is over there." "Where?" she says. "Take a look." By mistake they put her with a man with a couple children whose name was Friedman. So they put... once I cleared this up, "Oh my God" (they said) "there was a mistake." Next day she was on the list to go too, but we went on different boat. I was in New York already three days, so I waited for her on the docks. Who's Jacob Fuchs, she couldn't believe it, in New York, three days waiting for her. (Lilly Fuchs, "Big American, he's there already waiting for me. I don't believe it.")

Q. You must have been relieved?

A. (Lilly Fuchs: "I was...because somehow, I don't know, my aunts they were very nice when we came but you know how it is, they didn't know me actually, so they just didn't show up. They weren't very warm, towards, you know they figured...father is gone...and who the hell am I already. So they didn't even come. And he was standing there.") You still have this aunt. Well, I guess I gave you all the...stuck to all the details...but it's hard...

- Q. Did you ever go back to town in Poland before you came to this country to find out what happened with your family?
- A. I went back ten years ago.
- Q. No, I mean before...(Lilly Fuchs: "Jack you sneaked back.")
- A. Oh, yes I went back 1945. I went back from Bergen-Belsen. I was riding six days...there was no trains yet...I rode six days and six nights until I get back. It was unreal. (Lilly Fuchs: "Sneaking.") Without papers, without anything. The Russians almost took me away. I had no papers.
- Q. I've talked to other people who have said that they were afraid when they realized they were going to be liberated by the Russians. They were afraid to be liberated by the Russians. You said you were liberated by the English. But I've never quite understood that, could you explain it?
- A. I don't know, maybe they went through something with Russians. I was...when liberations came up I was only 20 years old. I couldn't care who liberated me, the Japanese or the Chinese, just liberate me. It didn't matter to me. If I knew what I was going through when I left Bundslau, February 12th...what I would go through with the typhus in Bergen-Belsen and almost die. If I could have stayed there I would have been liberated five hours later. Who knew? Everybody would have stayed. Nobody would have gone on the road. Who cared Russian or not Russian.
- Q. Did you continue to work as a carpenter when you came to this country?
- A. I worked for about a year. Then I went into the delicatessen.
- Q. And you did...and that's what you did for the rest of your time working?
- A. No, I did this for about 15 years. I had couple taxis for 18 years. I drove a cab. Somebody else drove and then I drove.
- Q. I've asked you a lot of questions, Mr. Fuchs, but maybe there's some things I haven't asked you that you'd like to add to this?
- A. Like what?
- Q. I don't know. Any recollections, or personal comments or anything you'd like to have on the record. Or something you maybe, you remembered after we talked about that part, you can always add it.
- A. The things that we went through...losing five sisters and a brother, my father, my mother, uncles, nieces, nephews...I told you in the beginning we were a

tremendous big family...oh, there's one cousin in Ft. Lauderdale, one in Montreal, and I have a cousin in Toronto...we're talking hundreds of hundreds people just...And right now, even so many years after...many times...well, you have dreams, bad dreams about it...still...So many years after it's so hard to believe that (it) did happen...that something like this could have happened...that the world stood by and did nothing about it. And now, after all these years, it shows that actually the world didn't care to liberate us as earlier or step in or do something...it's hard to believe.

Q. I can understand how you would feel that way, because recorded history does show that we could have stopped...

A. I have a bitterness in my heart and you can't know it out of myself. It's impossible. You have to understand that, too. I love this country, don't get me wrong. I hate the Russians. I love democracy, but things read in books and what you see what coming up...special I'll give this booklet so you going to read.

Q. Yes I'd like to look at it.

A. The western world did very little. And it's a fact. And it's...the archives and you cannot erase it. It was under Roosevelt...he's a lot to blame for it, that he did not step in the way he's supposed to step in. They knew what was going on.

Q. That's right.

A. But they were dragging their feet like a molasses. Kill another million Jews, what's the big deal? It doesn't hurt me, it hurts them. So I have a lot of bitterness in my heart.

Q. Well I can certainly understand that.

A. But you have to live with it. There's nothing you can do about it. I'm not going to lay down now and die. My grandchildren...

Q. Well I'm certainly glad that you survived. I appreciate very much...

A. Sometimes, I wonder...I wonder. Plenty guilt feeling.

Q. Yes, I've heard other people say that. Even though there's no reason to feel that way, but people do feel that way. But I certainly appreciate your sharing your experiences with us and we hope that it will do a small part, an accumulative part in preventing anything like this from ever happening again.

A. Let's hope. With the things what's going on in the world now, only God knows. You have learned...weapons like this that could destroy the world right now with

the weapons ten times over. I have a feeling eventually somebody's going to come around and push the buttons. I mean...

Q. Well, it certainly could happen...

A. You can quote me either way you want. This is my...If this (the Holocaust) happen...they say history repeats itself, I hope not.

Q. Well I hope not, too, and thank you again.

Added later—

Q. Okay, go ahead and tell us about your time in Auschwitz when you went back.

A. 1977, May 13, the whole day I spent, me and my wife, in Auschwitz. We went back because it was nagging on me...I lost a whole family...I had to go back. We came into Auschwitz, we were so nervous, I thought we (were) going to die right there. We were there with a Polish man with a car...he took us around...we were lucky to find him. He was one of the better Polish people. He stood with us the whole day.

Q. What did you do there?

A. We went into the...in Auschwitz the crematoriums are still standing...the ovens where they used to burn the people. Each block has one...each block has a different significance. One block they have all the luggages what the people came and they took away from them...piled up. In one block you have the kids' shoes...with the clothes...Next block you have all the glasses piled up what the people used to wear, they took it away from them. Then you saw the religious things, the shawls...in the next block. Then there was a famous block in Auschwitz, number eleven, they used to torture the people there...the Nazis used to torture them...for really no reason. The one room down there had no windows, they put you in there until you suffocated. One room had a little oven, they put 300 degrees of fire until you just melted away. If you were still alive they put cold water on you that was outside the block is a big wall with a tanning light...they put these people from that torture block to the wall and they shot them there. There's millions of bullet holes in that wall. That's Auschwitz. When you come in, there's a sign there "Arbeit Macht Frei" which means, work makes you free. It's all standing there. If somebody tells you its not true, take a ride to Auschwitz you'll see it before your eyes. Then we went into Birkenau, that was the big...where they used to bring in the people with the trains. At the end of the road where the trains couldn't go anymore, they have a tremendous big monument from the Polish people to those who...from the Polish people who got slaughtered in concentration camp Auschwitz. Then, in front of it, you have small plaques on the ground like...this is from the Bulgarian people, 300,000...this is the Polish people 3,000,000...Hungarian people, from all over Europe, from

Holland, France. And we lit some candles over there. There's an eternal candle...it's a funny thing...the eternal candle, it was very windy and it got so cloudy and the eternal candle went out. And there came the Polish soldier...to light it...(and I said) "you give it to me, I'm going to light this" and I lit back the eternal candle.

(Long pause)

Q. I think you were very brave to go back there.

A. I will finish...(long pause)...This is from Auschwitz, from the barracks...a latch from the door. And we lit candles and laid flowers over there and you can imagine our hearts. And they have some people around the world, even in the United States that got to tell you that this never happened. Take him by his neck and bring him over there and then let him tell you it never happened. I would once like to go once more to Auschwitz. Like I said, we so out of our wits, we couldn't concentrate. I would like to go back once more, if I could.

Q. Is that connected with the guilt?

A. Everybody is there. People go to cemeteries here. I have to go there. I have everybody there, where ever they are. It's funny, I said to my wife, "I would like my ashes spread over Auschwitz." She says, "Are you crazy?" That's what I would like, when I die. (pause) I figure that's where I belong, that's where my whole family went, that's it.

Q. Thank you for sharing that with us.

A. I guess you've had enough.

Q. I guess you have had a tremendous experience.

A. Experience? It's a disaster to live with...

END