

Re-Transcriber note 1/2007: I feel sure that Terranianztut has to be Theresienstadt, especially as it is placed in Czechoslovakia, and I have spelled it Theresienstadt in the transcription. Then she mentions a place called Bechenwald, (page 24) in the same area as Auschwitz, and though I haven't changed it, I feel it should be perhaps, Birkenau. I have changed Mauthauzen to Mauthausen, and finally, the ones I am questioning are, Lipsitz (pages 27-28), and Lipzig (page 29) Of course I haven't changed them, but I think maybe they all might be Leipzig as she does write about being in Saxony

National Council of Jewish Women
Sarasota-Manatee Section

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Herbert Treitel, Survivor

May 1, 1986
Sarasota, Florida

I This is Fern Niven, speaking from the home of Mr. Herbert Treitel, in Sarasota, Florida. The date is Thursday, May 1, 1986. Mr. Treitel is a survivor of the Holocaust in Europe and he has kindly agreed to talk with us about his experiences, so that it may be a permanent historic record.

Mr. Treitel, so that the people who are listening to this tape may understand some of what you experienced, but also to understand you as a whole person, will you tell us a little bit about your childhood. Did you have brothers and sisters? And what kind of work did your parents have or engage in? And what did you live in, what country?

R: I am born in province Posen, a part was belong to Germany, was when I was born and later, after the first World War, to Poland. I had...my father lost...when I was seven years old, I had...my mother died. My father was still in the war, the year was 1917. My father was a horse trader in Rogozen, now Rogoschen.

I: Was that a country area? Did you live on a farm?

R: No. It's a small city with a well-to-do Jewish population. The most people emigrated after the war to Poland. So we emigrate - my father and stepmother, my brother what was older, my sister and I. We moved to Berlin and I was 12 years old then.

I: What year are we talking about now? About 1922?

- R: 1922, yes. Then we start over again in Berlin.
- I: What made your father decide to emigrate to Germany? To Berlin?
- R: Oh, then we should...he was a German soldier and he doesn't want to have the Polish citizenship. Most Jewish people emigrated. The most. A few only stayed. And in Berlin I went to school and finished my school with a lot of interruption - moving, political parts, a lot. I came out of elementary school.
- I: Did you go to a parochial school - a Jewish school or to a public school?
- R: Only in the province Posen we had a Jewish school which was closed right away when we went there, when Poland take over. I also was in Rogoschen. My father was interned. Mostly Jewish people were interned, while they were afraid they would go against Polish regime.
- I: While you lived in Poland, did you ever have any experiences of an anti-Semitic nature?
- R: The Polish people were born anti-Semites.
- I: Born anti-Semites - yes, I've heard that before. Can you remember any of these experiences?
- R: No, I was too small and I cannot remember, but you could hear what was said always, was said awful word against Jews.
- I: What's the earliest anti-Semitic experience that you can recollect?
- R: The early, it was in 1930s.
- I: Oh, so you were already an adult by then?
- R: Yah. In Germany there was no anti-Semitism at all, especially in Berlin, while that was in very "left" city - very Sozialistisch Komministisch...mostly...in this time...
- I: Wait, I didn't understand that expression you just used. It was not anti-Semitic, it was you say...
- R: Not anti-Semitic at all.
- I: Communist?

- R: 'Til 1933, where I was living, a uniformed SS man could not come in the street there. They would kill him. Yah, Berlin was very safe and we never would believe that a person like my father in the German army, was in Germany and had an honor from Hitler and Hindenburg. Why he was four times wounded in the first World War. Yah. We will stop and will rest up now.
- I: When Hitler made his bid for power and started talking against the Jews, like way back in 1923, when he wrote Mein Kampf, did you people have any forebodings that something bad was going to happen?
- R: No, no, no. It was the worst part of it that we never believed that something bad will happen. Then before in Germany we are 100% safe, we are German citizen and could do whatever we want to do like people in the United States.
- I: O.K. Was religion an important factor in your life as you were growing up?
- R: No, no. In fact, I had no Hebrew school and there were very few during the first World War and when I came to Berlin, I was then ready for a bar mitzvah and I had a fast courses, first bar mitzvah courses and I say...learned master. Also, my father was pretty religious. Our house was strictly kosher.
- I: So you observed the traditions more than the religion?
- R: Yah. No, my father was religious and 'til the Schishkeborg came...that was the first thing. I don't know the year.
- I: 'Til what came?
- R: Schischkeborg.
- R: (wife) It's a slaughter - the ritual - the kosher slaughter which...

There was a lot of people what was eating kosher. They couldn't get no more kosher. That was the first thing what he at all did. And that was not helping so much.
- I: When did he stop allowing - permitting ritual slaughter of animals?
- R: I don't remember. It must be maybe '35, 1935.
- I: That was the first thing you remember?
- R: Yah. My father was eating no more sausage. He was believing that there could be a chazer...
- I: Pork?

- R: Chazer...yah, pork. That was my first thing. Then we came on with the Jewish star. I forgot to tell you, I learned my trade in Berlin.
- I: You were 23 years old when Hitler came into power. So, you graduated high school?
- R: No high school.
- I: No high school.
- R: I learned sheet metal.
- I: Sheet metal. You were an apprentice?
- R: Yah. And I make my test in 1928...'28 and I learned it pretty good. This time it were not much electricity going on. My favorite was electricity. It was very important that I tell you that. I work very well in the trade school. I went for sheet metal.
- I: You'd rather have been an electrical engineer, but you didn't have a choice.
- R: Yes, yes. No, no. Then, but I learned a very good deal electric and sheet metal and a little bit plumbing. The boss did everything and I was working to 1929. In 1929 the Depression started in Germany.
- I: All over the world.
- R: Oh, yeh. All over the world. That were, yah...uh, huh. This were easy...easy...The Depression is all over the world and they know...the world know nobody will start the war than Hitler. They know that. They played it out for him.
- I: Well, there was already the Weimar Republic which was in big trouble, with a tremendous inflation.
- R: Yah, yah. The Communists were very strong in Germany. I can see in Germany, especially in Berlin or in Essen were a lot of working people out of work and they, Das Kapital, was afraid at get rid of everything when the Communists take over. They was afraid. So they a lot support the Nazis.
- I: To get away from the Communists they turned to the Fascists...
- R: Yah, I don't want to say it. Okay...
- I: What didn't you want to say?

- R: Not on tape. When you have the time, I will... Never mind. And I was working. And I thought, since I was a working man, then ... when I lost my job. My brother was going of markings...textiles. So, since I had nothing to do, I learned to drive a car - 1929 I learned to drive a car. We bought like a bus and we took people to market. Still in 1929 until 1938. In 1936 I married my wife, Gerta, and later I had two children.
- I: At the time you married, in 1936, you say for that nine year period you continued to drive this bus that took people to market.
- R: Yah, I drove without any salary, to support the family.
- I: But how much other interference was there with your natural way of life, because of...?
- R: Oh, a lot.
- I: Tell us about it.
- R: They came in small cities and the Jewish people could not display their merchandise. We had to put this together and we had a lot troubles starting out.
- I: When did you have to start wearing the Mogen David, the yellow star?
- R: Maybe '39 - after the Crystallnacht. By the Crystallnacht they were wearing stars. The Crystallnacht was in Berlin. They burned the synagogues, they break the windows from the Jewish people, they make a couple of mistakes for non-Jewish people. They had to straighten that out. But the Jewish people still was believing they have a right to live in Germany while they are German. So I have an uncle, a baker, they broken the window, he put the window in again and start to bake.
- I: They left him alone to do that?
- R: Yah. 1938 also I got an affidavit from Boston to enter the United States and I couldn't enter the United States, why I was born in the province Posen and they said they make me Polish citizen. But I never was. I am not ashamed, but I couldn't enter the United States. Today, I cannot forget and forgive also.
- I: You could have gotten out of Germany as late as 1940, if you had been...
- R: '38 I could have come out. I tried to go out to in Meineke Street in Berlin. I had a Palestine aunt and tried to get out. No, I was not too well-to-do. When you had a lot of money, you could get out.

- I: You could bribe people?
- R: Not quite. You could buy affidavits for Cuba. What happened to the St. Louis - I don't know, somebody explained...
- I: St. Louis? No, please explain.
- R: Oh, yes. There was a ship full with 900 Jewish people. The name of this ship was the St. Louis.
- I: St. Louis - okay.
- R: The St. Louis, they had affidavits. On a German ship they had to have affidavits to go Cuba. When they came to Cuba, they don't let them in. The ship was going around the United States a couple day. People jumped in the water to take his life. Nobody let them in. Not Cuba, not the United States. The ship went back to Germany, but the captain, I forgot what his name. He should have a ... He doesn't live no more. The captain promised us...the Shpaniel and so far, not to bring back the ship to Germany. And they said they will start a fire before England on the ship. Before England, Holland and France, they will start a fire and then they have to rescue the people.
- I: That's a desperate way to go, but at that point they must have been desperate people.
- R: Yes. And when they came there was...came a party to England, Holland. The people they went not back to Germany. (Wife added, "Many of them committed suicide.")
- I: How long a period was this ship at sea?
- R: A long time. A very long time. I knew the captain...there was a movie, no, a book is from it. Yes.
- I: Do you know the name?
- R: "The Voyage of the Damned."
- I: Oh, all right. "The Voyage of the Damned." Yes, I've never heard of that.
- R: You will surely enough - everyone will forget that part. So I stay on. I could no more...they had removed, they take me away my driver's license. So that was the end...with...
- I: ...with driving the bus.

- R: With driving. I had an uncle, he want to get me a driver for a hearse. I refused to do that and I should come around dead people. I refused that so I give up my driver's license.
- I: The choice was you drive a hearse or you lost your driver's license?
- R: Yah, well I had connection for that. Otherwise, yah, I lost the driver's license and I start to work again for an electrician. And I was working for an electrician by a private firm. And, one day, the year was 1940, the boss came...the war was already on and the boss had to come to the government and had the order to let me go. I was the only Jewish electrician. Then I went to the...I got a job again and they're Jewish people. They built a big factory. There are there 20 Jewish electricians.
- I: And what year are we in now?
- R: 1940.
- I: So even as late as 1940, Jews were still allowed to pursue most of their occupations, to build factories, to be citizens active in the country.
- R: Yes. So it were when you were a tradesman. When you were a tradesman. The business people had it much worse.
- I: And the professors? The educators?
- R: It was very bad. They had it very bad and they people were not used to work. They were not used to work. They had hand...they take opera singer to remove the...in Berlin when the opera was bombard... They had to take opera singer to remove the garbage and so on to clear the... Berlin, in 1940, started a stark bombard from England. We got a lot. So I went with the streetcar. It was only allowed to go with the Jewish star with streetcars to work and from work. Otherwise you could not use transportation at all.
- I: Was there a ghetto created in Berlin?
- R: No. No. He had to move in a house what the owner was a Jew. But otherwise, no ghetto. And, in 1941, they picked up my father, my brother and my sister. And I was working, they let me work out there.
- I: Did they have any warning that they were going to be picked up?
- R: They noticed them. They noticed them. Nobody know that he will be picked up and they kill... We was like an American citizen in America. We was young citizen. How can they come and...besides it was interesting is, before - I don't know if people told you that - before you get...oh, not before...when you get

in...they picked you up, you had to sign a paper - that I found out after the war - you had to sign a paper for the kids for everyone, that you're against the German government. And there is a law, like in the United States, you cannot take in haft (custody) people without any reason. I never heard from my father. I never heard from my brother or my sister.

I: You came home one day, found your brother, your father and your sister had been taken by the Germans and you didn't know where.

R: In 1941. And I was working till 1942.

I: Meanwhile, your wife and your two children were not taken away. They were still in your home?

R: Yah. The 24th of December, 1942, I was at work and the porter came and said, "Mr. Treitel?" I said, "Yes." "The Gestapo's at home and they want not go alone," so I took the streetcar and went home. Then, there was a cousin by...no, no, I remember. I went home and we packed. We took anything and the people what picked us up explained we had a transport in the train. We will go east and so forth. And then we came in a Jewish school. There were a "sammelager." They keep...they had a full load for Jewish people.

I: "Sammelager" - what does that mean?

R: Gathering place.

I: What did you think? Were you frightened? Were you angry? What kind of emotions did you have?

R: No. There is one thing. I was so pitiful, the life already that you don't care no more what will happen to you. My father was gone, my brother was gone. We couldn't get meat. We couldn't get enough food. We had to see the black market to get something and life was so complicated that in your mind, let's get it over with. And still, 1941, you had no idea that they killed people.

I: Nothing had filtered back. Nobody had...

R: No, no, no. Nothing. So we arrived...came in a tent 'til about January 1943.

I: January '43. So it's winter time we are talking about. It's cold weather.

R: Oh, cold weather!

I: How did you get to the camp?

R: With a streetcar. To the what camp?

- I: I don't know. To the camp that you...
- R: In the city.
- I: Well, you first said you were in this gathering place, this school. And then, from there, when they had enough people, where did they take you and how did they take you there?
- R: With buses - with trucks to the main station.
- I: All right.
- R: And then in cattle cars. Closed...they were closed this time. Yah, closed cattle cars.
- I: And was there a place to sit down and lie down or was it crowded so you had to stand up?
- R: Very crowded. Very crowded. No, nothing no more. That was the end already. The train was going maybe two days and two nights. Some people lost their mind in the train. Some people want to jump, but there were no way to go out.
- I: Was there food or did you have to take food with you? Was there water?
- R: There was no food, no water.
- I: Sanitation?
- R: No. No. No. We were prisoners. At that moment we were prisoners, they brought in to Birkenau. We had no idea what Birkenau was. They unloaded and took away everything what a person had.
- I: And Birkenau was the city for what concentration camp?
- R: For Auschwitz.
- I: For Auschwitz. Okay.
- R: They were unloading and I saw then my wife and my two kids the last time.
- I: The last time. You saw them for the last time. This was part of the beginning of the selection process?
- R: Yah, I was selected for life.

- I: Did you know what was going on? Did you understand that?
- R: No. That is coming now. The next day they took everything away. Only I had a couple high boots. They left me that. Along when we was standing naked, along came a man, he had - Barbe.
- I: A band?
- R: A band with the name "Barbe." He was a prisoner. He was a prisoner, a sadistic prisoner.
- I: This was the Klaus Barbe we hear about today?
- R: Huh?
- I: This is the Klaus Barbe we hear about today. The man who was responsible for the death of many Jews. Is that the man you are talking about?
- R: No.
- I: Okay, go ahead. I didn't mean to interrupt.
- R: That's why, the other Barbe, that's very interested in me. Then he came, he asked questions. I don't think he had the order to do that. But he was a sadist. Then he came to me. he said, "You're married?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Was. In the past - no more married."
- I: No more married.
- R: "Kids?" Yes, two. "No more kids." Still I couldn't understand at all.
- I: How old were your children?
- R: Four and five.
- I: Four and five; very small.
- R: Yah. And then they came to Auschwitz. Took a bath in january, naked cold. I don't know how people could overlive that point already. Standing in the hallway, draft, naked, wet...
- I: In the wintertime?
- R: In January. They they give us prison clothing. When I was in Birkenau, we stayed there overnight. I had a topcoat. There was some money sewed in from a Jewish tailor and that coat was so nice that I don't want to lay on it. My cousin

said, "Take it off, lay on it." So we slept on it, on the floor and the rings. Jewish people - poor people know what will happen. People took off their rings, watches, and there was a "schuttekanne," what were used for waste, for human waste. This hold...in the...

I: Like latrines.

R: Yah, like latrine. They will know that they will find out. We had nothing. All I had a prisoner uniform and shoes -

I: You threw the jewelry in the latrine.

R: That fellow what asked me if I had a wife and kid, he looked at my boots and said, "You know what? So long the boots will last, so long will you live." Then we know.

I: However long the boots will last is how long you will live.

R: Yah, so the next day, you had the prisoner uniform; you know, they were very light and...

I: And your coat? What happened to your coat?

R: Everything was gone.

I: They took it?

R: Everything! Everything! Then we were loaded up in trucks, maybe 60 people in a truck and we drove. In a truck. Nobody told you something. You could hear...less you were talking, the better your chances are to live.

I: Just do what they tell you.

R: Don't ask any questions.

I: What kind of food were you getting?

R: There? Nothing. Nothing. We were still without food.

I: How many days did you go without food?

R: Oh, maybe four days. Four days. Then we drove in a truck. I have no idea where. Then finally we come close to a mountain and we hear explosion so far. I was think of nowadays, all of us are thinking, they will kill us.

I: Was there a lot of panic at that thought? Were people very upset?

- R: No, no. Life was nothing. There was no panic. Very calm, all of them.
- I: Very calm. Okay.
- R: Then we rode, then, in a camp. A small camp. The camp counted maybe 200 people. And funichtenslager, that camp. That means you come there, you work with maybe a little bit food in a stone mine. You work so long till you are dead. When you are dead, you come in to the latrines, and there were no crematorium and they picked up the people and brought it to Auschwitz for burning purposes.
- I: Did this camp have its own name?
- R: Yes, Goleschau. I went to court in Germany for that camp. For witnesses. We are both.
- I: During the war crimes trials?
- R: Yah. There was for that man especially. He came free anyhow. I never saw him, but obvious, very bad thing. So we are working. I went in the stone mine and we had right away an accident. A civilian worker, a Polish civilian worker - we talk only Polish there, a Polish civilian worker was putting in the stone mines the explosive. They would not trust a prisoner with that, anyhow. And one part, one prisoner got a piece of wood against someone. He died right away. That was the first accident.
- I: From the explosion.
- R: Yah. The first day. So I was working. Now...my experience. I was working in the stone mine about a year and I met somebody what he know my father.
- I: Wait. A year is a long time.
- R: Yah. Oh, yes, especially there. I met somebody and that somebody could talk Polish - from Berlin. He was non-Jew, his wife a Jew and he went with his wife automatically in the camp. But he know my father, helped him something, I don't know what. And we became friends. He was the first lifesaver to me. He was stubendienst. He cleaned up (room servant). First he went out. Polish people were beating us. If we ere working or not, they came also prisoner, Polish prisoner. They were mostly political.
- I: They were beating other prisoners?
- R: Yes. That was the profession. They came with a stick. And each time when they came to me, that little fellow - I forgot his name - turned around and in Polish talked with them and he said I am his friend. So they don't beat me no

more. That was only a lot. I mean, less food, very beating and working. not too much.

I: How did you keep your strength up to work every day?"

R: That friend was working by the SS. He brought me the SS pieces of bread, the crust of the bread they throw in the garbage can and cheese with worms they throw in the garbage can. He brought me that cheese. I washed the cheese and washed the crust from the bread. A big help to me. A big help the first year.

I: Did you lose a lot of weight?

R: Oh, I was thin already. I had later an accident on my toes. Somebody dropped a piece of crystal (?) on my foot and I lost a lot. I was a muselman.

(Wife added, "It's a term well known.")

Yah, very well known. Muselman is the end. They are ready to go to the oven.

I: People that were in such a debilitated condition.

R: Deteriorated. This I had already from what I still lost a lot of weight. It was too hard. It was two departments from Steinwald. Steinwald Einze and Steinwald Zwei. We had so long to stay up in the stone mine. We drove up with a train, little train. We had so long to stay in the stone mine till four trains are loaded with stone.

I: Every day?

R: Every day. The one commando went up from three o'clock in the morning and sometimes came back at four o'clock in the afternoon, without any food. In the morning we got food and then in the evening.

I: What kind of food did they give you?

R: Oh, yes. You had no knife, you had no spoon. You had only a brown dish that was yours and you got the soup. From yellow turnips. That was every day.

I: Yellow turnips. That was what the soup was made from?

R: Always.

I: So it had no nutritional value.

R: In the morning we got a piece of sausage and a piece of bread. You eat it right away otherwise it was wasted - somebody steal it. You know, it was going life or

death. There was somebody what stole bread from a sick man. A sick prisoner - privileged person. He was a little more than a prisoner. He had a better...he sold bread for him and they caught him, and the kapo he take them off the belt...when the caught him.

I: Kapo - police?

R: No, a prisoner.

I: Camp police.

R: Take off the belt when they caught him and say, "Please, here's the belt. I want to see tomorrow you hang yourself in the ...on the toilet."

I: They ordered him to hang himself? And did he?

R: He did, yah. Otherwise they kill him. I wanted to tell you there was a Hollander. I never forget that in my life - a Hollander. Peak was his name. And he stole the wash and all other things. He stole always and they beat him. He got for once stealing bread with the sausage 25 behind, with leather and on the end were a lead ball.

I: He got whipped on his behind?

R: Yah. The 25. And I stand with Peak. Very interesting, in the shower, then we have already a shower. I forgot something. In the shower. And I said to him, I saw him all open, the skin was all broken off. I said to him, "They catch you every time and you steal." He said to me, "It is better to be beaten to death than starving to death."

I: You developed a strange sense of values in those days.

R: He was ... I forgot something important. After a year, an SS man came from Posen and they start to build barracks there, for the SS. So he came and asked "Who is an electrician?" They came out maybe, the camp was then already bigger.

I: You're still talking about the small camp that you were in?

R: There was 200 people first. Then came a moment what the Jewish people, they run short on Jewish people. I mean, you take people out of those countries what couldn't get no more Jewish people, enough for work. They deloused us. We were full of louses. The louses...

I: Lice were a big problem...

- R: Yes, they eat you up from here and up. You couldn't do anything. One day came a machine and they cleaned us up and really we have no more louses. That was a very good thing. And then they asked who is an electrician? And so, 40 people went out. Everyone know that it saved my life. So I came out and he said and he asked where you working. I said, "Yes, the last time was working by Zehmans." And the labor command, a prisoner also, came and they pushed me inside and said we need him in the stone mine...me.
- I: He didn't want to let you go and be an electrician?
- R: Right. But the master from the electrician was a civilian person, a folksdeutscher.
- I: A civil person, not a member of the army.
- R: A folksdeutscher. And he saw that the boss electrician what saves electric. There were no electricians. All what we want to save the light. So, the SS man - one day i was sleeping...the SS man came and say, "I want that electrician what was working for Zehmans." That were me and that saved me my life. Then I was already a person. A prisoner, but a person.
- I: Because you had a specific skill?
- R: Yah, and I installed the box on this master wall. I know my business. They were very satisfied and I stay electrician. They sent me no more in the stone mine. Where no electric was, they sent me in the karek oven.
- I: What's that?
- R: That is where they burn stone for "karek" - what is "karek" - you need to - they grind it and make mortar. They use it for mortar.
- I: For mortar. Okay.
- R: Mostly were Polish people, also the Jewish people. Polish, then came the Hollander. He couldn't stand the cold. it's very cold there. And then came the Hungarian. The Hungarian came already with picture. One day...
- I: With what?
- R: With picture of his wife and wife...we had nothing there.
- I: So a lot of these people were not Jewish?
- R: Oh, yes, they were mostly Jewish and one day a Hungarian man - I don't know his name - he went away, he escaped from the camp. And he stayed out maybe

two days. They had already German shepherd dogs there and it was impossible to escape. And I was working in the camp. I had this much easier already. And this same man I hear, they don't let him out of the camp no more. When he try, they are afraid he will go again and they sew people like that big red points on the material.

I: So they would be conspicuous - like targets.

R: Can shoot easier. This same fellow was working in the camp and it happened I heard it. The commandofuehrer came. The commandofuehrer, an SS man, came and with him I was a witness in Frankfurt. The commandofuehrer came and said to that guy, "Why you was running away from the camp?" He get up, pulled his hat, you had to take off the hat when you talk with an SS man. He said, "I was camping side by side with the German against Russia, but in a situation like that, it is hard work and no food, too bad." Then Yom Kippur he got them - on Yom Kippur they made up a gallow and hang him. We had to see the gallow.

I: Just this one man?

R: Oh, yes. They before hung, I don't know what nationality. They went away, too.

I: So they made an example of this man?

R: They shot the people. We had a sleeping room upstairs for a thousand people. We built it. I was electrician, too.

I: How did you keep track of things like holidays? Like how did you keep track of when Yom Kippur was?

R: Yah, yah...very interesting. There were rabbonims in that camp.

I: Rabbis.

R: Rabbis. They counted. They know when Passover was, when Yom Kippur was. In person, I don't know if it is a Sunday or a Monday. We had no calendar, nothing.

I: I would think it would have been difficult to keep track of the days.

R: And they hung them, too. They shot and they let them lay in the blood that we pass by and you can see what happened when you ran away. One day, I was electrician, I was in the washroom, what you call the washroom; it was awful.

I: Was it just cold water?

- R: Oh, yes, only cold water. But we had then already a shower. We installed a shower. So I stay in the washrooms and do my duty and next to me is standing a man with on his arm Baraba. When somebody did something bad in Auschwitz, they brought in some "funischtungslager."
- I: You'll have to translate "funischtungslager." What does that mean?
- R: This is a camp where nobody comes out alive. They know exactly that they treat them there so bad that they will die and the Polish have a camp like that. And he stand next to me. But I was already electrician and I was able I could open the mouth, my mouth already. Then I told him...I said to him, "You see, for one year you told me so long my boots will hold I will live." And he said to me, "You were lucky." So I was camp electrician. Somebody remind me on that already. One day, we painted out...we had a lot of good people, good paint mans. They painted over the kitchen and I had a poem in my heart []. And they asked me one day if I know something. I say, "Yes." And they put it on big...over there.
- I: The poem that you remembered, they printed it and hung it up as a banner?
- R: Not hung. They painted it in writing.
- I: So you remember what the poem was?
- R: Hang by me in the bathroom. Still are with me.
- I: Can you recite it?
- R: Yah. Glücklich ist der niferlar, in kamp0f das lebens den humor. Lucky is the person was never lost in the fight of life his humor.
- I: That's important, isn't it, to keep your sense of humor.
- R: So, I was the camp electrician until January 1945, when they called us together and that we have made the first ... the death march.
- I: Everybody in the camp had to make this death march?
- R: Yah.
- I: What did they call it? They didn't call it a death march, did they?
- R: No, later they called it the death march. That was whoever couldn't walk no more they shot them and throw them on the highway. They left them in the ... what is the - "garden" ...

- I: In the ditch.
- R: In the ditch.
- I: How many people started this march?
- R: One thousand, complete with the SS. Not one SS man hided - came not with them. It was good for business.
- I: But there were 1,000 prisoners marching to start? How far did you have to march?
- R: One night we have slept - I don't know - we slept two days and two nights and the next day in the night they said, "Tonight we will shoot nobody. if somebody cannot walk, we will put them - they took a farmer - they put them on a wagon and drove them. Besides, I was nearly dead, too. I couldn't walk no more and there were - the last time we got Mischlinger - where the parents, one parent were German and one parent were Jewish. We were already in the army, the German army. They took them out of the army, brought them to the camp. Two of them grasped me under the arm and helped me out an hour. And so I made it. But when we came to the station, there were a lot, thousand upon thousand. They came to the station. Somebody came with a revolver and everyone who was sitting down, they killed them. But he will not stand to transport any []. So they put us on some open wagon that were awful. You have to stand up; you couldn't sit down now no more.
- I: If it was a sign of weakness...
- R: No, you couldn't - there was no room to stand up - to sit down. At night came - we had somebody was sitting on your feet, the next guy. But still there were two or three left over what couldn't sit down. It was so bad that somebody went out, opened his jacket and say, "Please, shoot me." But they did that. When somebody want to be shot, they would.
- I: The ones that they felt couldn't stand the transport, they killed them rather than keep them on the train?
- R: Ah, yes. Besides, the first time that women were on the transport and a boy hollered, "My mother's there." Imagine that. I never forgot that! His mother was there. So...
- I: But there must have been many dead bodies laying around then.
- R: Oh, yes. We went on the train then. The transport was so bad, it was so cold, that when we came to the "hangerwerker" in Balen (?), the SS, they took the SS off with stretcher. The SS.

- I: Because they couldn't stand the trip?
- R: Six or seven, I saw. The prisoner, there was some prisoner they collected dead people then. And there was some prisoner you could see they were still breathing. They were laying among the dead people. Then, again, in the "hangerwerker" a friend of me was there.
- I: Where did this train take you?
- R: To Berlin.
- I: Back to Berlin. Where you started?
- R: Yah. And the "hangerwerker" they did once make planes there.
- I: An airplane factory?
- R: Yah. And from there they brought us to different camps. And I came to Sachsenhausen. We had known of its existence already. So, they came to Sachsenhausen...I came to Sachsenhausen. And in Sachsenhausen, baruch abu (?), I got louses again.
- I: How long had you been without lice?
- R: The whole...maybe a year. Oh, that was something!
- I: Did they...how did they keep you clean after they got rid of the lice?
- R: Each week we got new clothing. They were disinfected. I forgot to tell you in Polish how we have to go back. In Polish, how one day they deloused and deloused the camp.
- I: By spraying it.
- R: Or gas. And we was outside, but then we got new clothing. But for six people were no clothing and they went to bed without clothing. And that was between Saturday and Sunday. In the morning, they hollered "Gas, gas" and they broke the windows. Somebody was laying a "chesche;" Jewish people was laying his brother dead in his arms. Then I came, later I came to Sachsenhausen and here went out repairing cars from the army.
- I: Repairing cars?
- R: Yah. There I saw already German soldier in uniform without the bullet...in German uniform that mean when you have no more bullet they take the air. He

said something while a prisoner there already. On the 3rd of April, 1945, we was outside working in Sachsenhausen. The American came by air. It was day, the sun was shining. So the American came.

I: You say "by air." You mean they came over to bomb the camp.

R: During the day. The sun was looking like the moon. Everything was burning. Everything. And I want to run. Usually I was washing my shirt when the alarm went. On that days I was not washing my shirt. And I want to run. And there were two Germans, not jews. They take me on my shirt and hold me down, I shouldn't run.

I: Where would you have run to?

R: I don't know. You know, I never was a soldier in my life. Every day. Bombs were looking out. Everything was burning. So Hestlinger was burnt. Then was the "klingerfabrike" that day. The thing they call the "klinger" they make once bricks there. But they make hand grenades there.

I: Hand grenades?

R: Yah. And the "klingerwerker" and the American bombard that and they have over 1,000 prisoners and they were all dead.

I: The explosion must have been tremendous.

R: Oh! Some of the bombs were sticking there. They never exploded.

I: But I mean the hand grenades exploded...

R: No, no. Not from the factory. They make it on purpose, they make it on purpose.

I: So here we are...

R: It is not alles so kosher what the American did, what the English did was also not so kosher.

I: I know. We do not look good in history.

R: No, they could be nicely... They dropped like light bombs during the night and they stick up the camp. But still one bomb fall in the camp and they don't bombard what belong to American buildings, the American companies and so forth.

I: All they had to do was bomb a few rail lines and the concentration camps could not have been reached.

- R: And they know that all this time already. They know. They know. They know that. Then, at the end of April, then we are now a couple days. They sent me once before to another camp - Ravensbruck.
- I: Ravensbruck, yes.
- R: A woman camp. But when I came there, there were no more women there. There were only one barrack with scientist...
- I: Why did they send you to Ravensbruck?
- R: Should install gas pumps, electric gas pumps.
- I: Did you have a sense that the war was coming to an end in April?
- R: Then yes, yah. But I had no idea that we were ever lived at end. We did...I was come to that...we had tank traps. Some installed tank...that the Russian cannot come to the camps. They know exactly where the traps were. They went not over the traps; they went over the parts what were open or they're closed. When they brought this back to Sachsenhausen and came the attack. And then two days or three days later we are, they hit us again.
- I: Again. You were in a great many camps.
- R: Oh, yes. They brought us also what you call a death march. No food. Then finally after two days, the Red Cross - the International Red Cross - came and brought packages that were very good for some and very bad for some. In the packages were no bread. There were a couple cookies, butter and the people at that and the stomach wouldn't take that no more.
- I: It was too rich a diet for them?
- R: Yah, it was like...four or five men got one package. And then one night we was marching. We had no idea where we are going.
- I: The march was always to a railroad station?
- R: No, this time to the ship port. Bremen.
- I: Bremen. All right.
- R: We found out later they had two boats, two ships. They put them on and the ships went out and they bombard the ships.
- I: Who bombarded the ships?

- R: The Germans.
- I: They bombarded their own ships to destroy Jews?
- R: Yah.
- I: They really went to all kinds of peculiar lengths to destroy people...
- R: They did it with two ships - Capicona and the other I forgot.
- I: Made them sink?
- R: Yah. And when they was swimming, that is what I heard. That I haven't seen. They was swimming to the land. There were young kids standing and they killed them. Also, were a story, there was a captain. He went from Bremen to Hamburg with a bicycle. He got...refused to take the dirty prisoner on his ship.
- I: He didn't want his ship to get dirty?
- R: Yah. That is what I heard. So in Mecklenburg and Schwerein, we wandered in the forest, we was eating horse meat from dead horses what was killed in the fire line and we was eating the "brentessen" - it was very good vegetable, when you touch it, it bite you.
- I: A vegetable that bites you?
- R: No, no. It burns you.
- I: It burns you. What kind of vegetable was that?
- R: In German "brentessen" - I don't know; nobody eats it usually.
- I: At this point now, were you still part of the death march or had you broken away from the Germans?
- R: You couldn't break away. I will come to one day. On the 2nd of May, 1945 - I imagine that that's tomorrow...
- I: That's right, it is.
- R: On the 2nd of May, somebody came through - I know now. He said, "You know what? We will stay here 'til the war's over." In the forest. We were 85,000 men on the march. And, during that march, the American dropped leaflets. But we was marching...

- I: What did the leaflets say? Do you remember?
- R: Oh, no, I was not in leaflets or nothing. I was interested to breathe the air. I don't remember. They were in German, that they should give up and all that. And we wake up the next day - no more SS there.
- I: They just ran away?
- R: Yah. But it seemed very simple. There were a lot of people. Wrong way from the SS were going. We was going behind them always. Now was no more SS; where you should go? There came the American, they don't want us to march, so many people...
- I: There were 85,000 people?
- R: Yah, they need the soldier bring in more inland and so far, we had no idea. So Ireland (sp.?) Schwereinen, Mecklenburg. I personally split it up. Everyone did what he can do. there were Belgian, Romanian, Hungarian - name it, all the nations in the world were from somewhere.
- I: You never actually got to Bremen then?
- R: No. Not even to Hamburg. They want to bring us. Next day, I went up there...I was sleeping in a German truck and then, from the German army, but then they drove the truck, so I had no idea where to go at all.
- I: When the Americans came, did they say "The war is over?" How did you come to know the war was over?
- R: We don't see the war today. Till we are finally - they make camps. They said, "Halt, you cannot walk no more. The Americans. You cannot walk no more; stay here. There was civilian people what went from their homes, they were afraid for the Communists. They were all going. Were no more...regular and you stay in the camp and then they took us there. The Hungarians, they brought them back to Hungary.
- I: Did they bring food in the camps?
- R: Yes, we got food. I know now. The Americans brought in food, right...
- I: Right away? You must have been getting pretty hungry, is what I've been thinking.
- R: No, we eat a little bit. There was potatoes already in May. You know the storage potato. You could eat potatoes and you could go by a farmer and get water already and get washed. And I went to Hamburg, not to Berlin. I had a cousin, a

step cousin in London and I had a sister-in-law in London. I was saying, in Hamburg, "From Hamburg to London is no distance." But I stay in Hamburg also for 4 1/2 years.

I: Four and a half years after the war was ended and you were still in Hamburg?

R: Yah.

I: In those days you had to get papers guaranteeing that you would not become a burden to this country. Somebody had to put up the money for you.

R: Yah. But the people what come now in here, they don't need papers.

I: That's right. It's changed.

R: They don't need papers and the people what people came in here was good, but tradesmans. They go right away to the welfare. I never take any compensation from that country. I am a citizen and I was working over 30 years in that country and I am retired and live happily afterward.

I: Well, let me fill in a couple of little gaps here. What did you do in your 4 1/2 years in Hamburg?

R: We was working for the American Joint.

I: Joint Distribution Committee?

R: Oh, yah, very interesting. There were special Polish people. They had kids. And they know then already that they will be killed. The kids and all they were not over living. they were already with the Warsaw ghetto. They put the kids by farmers, in convents and so forth. And we was working to collect the kids in []. Is pretty big banker in German, international.

I: International bankers? And what did they do with these children when they got them?

R: They collect them. They smuggled them to Israel. Then I want to go Israel. There are the use for guards in there.

I: In the Jewish brigade?

R: They make us a lot trouble. They could not understand us very much and they don't want me here. They brought in a musician. And he was dancing and couldn't dance no more. then the Jewish Brigade came and say, "You cannot dance about German music or German people. And a lot of people say you want to dance and we don't care for the music what you play."

R: (Mrs. Treitel): We were all living in a collective. In a commune.

I: In Israel?

R: No, in Hamburg. We were organized in various places. Pretty organized. And that's actually where we were. They called in Blanken the Vobel estate. It was an estate like a city, it was so big.

I: Did you come to this country together?

R: Yes, we were married in '47. And immigrated in '49.

I: And where did you come to in the United States at first.

R: We arrived in New York and we were...our destination would be Chicago. That's where we lived all these years. In Skokie. Came a cousin send us job and housing that you need and he was happy that he could live alone. They put us in a hole there. We were not spoiled. We was used to live again. We started very hard and we made pretty good. We started. Very hard.

(Mrs. Treitel) The first thing he did when we arrived, after we arrived, he went to night school for one year.

I: What did you study?

R: To learn English. I don't want to study no more. I study my trade.

I: But you could still be a sheet metal worker?

R: The year was '49. A lot of people out of work here in the United States. It was hard to get a job. So finally, I went with the streetcar to some Jewish organization and they recommend me a job. The job was okay. Only the boss. I'll make it short. The check were no good. So I worked there and later I got my money. I have to say that. I got every penny. After three months I saw I have no product...

Moss products. Shipping trees, one in a store. One in a nursery. Always the same. I was not used to that. So then I got a job on Madison Street, the same salary. I was not good for that job. I was no good. The job is maybe okay, but also Jewish people. So then finally I came to a job in plumbing. So the language were bad. But I could talk a little bit already. And so I was staying in with a working helper. I had to change anyway. The plumbing in Germany is not the same plumbing...

I: ...as in the United States?

- R: Right. So there I stay and work. Nonunion, but I got already a little bit more money. And we got finally an apartment. Very interesting. An apartment. There were rent control in Chicago and that were a kitchenette apartment. A Jewish owner.
- I: A small apartment, but it was your own.
- R: A Jewish owner, with a big building, with elevator. he took a nice price and we paid it; we had no choice. But finally, after a time, I get a real apartment. We found out that a Jewish fellow, we found out he overcharged us.
- I: But you didn't know any differently.
- R: No, I had no choice. But over the court, he had to give back the overcharged money. That was a very good experience I had.
- I: That was justice. I wanted to ask you, you said something earlier about having gone back to Europe to testify in the war crimes trials. Can you tell me a little bit about that? You're the first person I've met who has done that.
- R: (Mrs. Treitel) That was only a few years ago.
- I: How did that come about?
- R: When I was living in Chicago, the German consul find out, or some reason, that I was in Goleschau. So they called me. How they got it, I don't know. The called in...Germans were very precise.
- I: Yes, they kept all the records.
- R: Very precise. I want to go back again. I want to go back. After I was liberated, I went with the train to Berlin from Hamburg. I want to see what is what. I went to - first of all, I went to people what helped me. Catholic, bakery - they always give a bread to me, while they were in danger, too.
- I: Yes, anybody that helped was in danger.
- R: So I went. I have already chocolate. I went in, but I don't know if they recognize me now. I went up. I was thinking maybe I'll be able to find a picture from my mother. There was nothing. Only my uncle was there from my wife's side. The uncle was there. He was in Theresienstadt. He lost a leg during the first world war. So he...
- I: And he survived?

R: He survived, yes. So that uncle was working by the Jewish congregation in Berlin. One synagogue were not burned in Berlin. There were a bunch of synagogues. A beautiful city. Fifty, over fifty years ago. His synagogue was now a museum. Protection. There were the SS in there. And kept all the papers. So I went there and say, "Please can I see the paper from Herbert Treitel?" Max Treitel, Lipman Treitel, Seigfried Treitel...Herbert Treitel. There I saw the first time that I had to sign for the kids and for myself that I am against the German government. There I found it out myself. That were interesting.

Now we go back to Chicago. It's a wonderful city, too. In Chicago, I make it short. Finally my boss, what also was Jewish, Harry Kaufman, make no attempt after I was working there a year, no attempt to bring me in the union. He make a helper out of me. When he was still alive, I would be still a helper. But he died. And the business was sold and the business agent from the union came in and Mrs. Kaufman said "he is a good worker, put him in the union." And they put me in the union. I had to make tests. They put me in the union and later I got a wonderful job. I was there and that only job in Evanston, 17 years with this firm. A plumber usually in record. Usually a plumber stay to build a new house. When family house, or high rise is finished, they let him go. But I was on job and I was specialized in heating, electric controls on boilers, and then I kept a pretty good job. I make a good living. My wife was no more working and we have a daughter.

I: You have one child, a daughter. Is she in this city or in Chicago?

R: In Chicago area. Then I move to Sarasota. Then you want to know about when I testify.

I: Testify, yes.

R: I went to Chicago to the consul. I told him there was a kapo there what killed Jewish people. Oh, he told me he's already in [] house, in heavy prison. When we moved here, I got a letter from German consul in Atlanta, if I am willing to go to Germany to testify. I went. We both went. They paid for everything. The bad thing was that fellow what were for court, he wasn't there. The SS man.

I: Was this Barbe, the one you'd encountered before, or someone else?

R: No, no. Somebody else. A Polish name. And I was so - really that I was an electrician there. I was really a key witness. Finally, a year later they call me again. Then the consul called me and say, "I have already the airline tickets."

(Mrs. Treitel) We were supposed to go and he became ill and...

He became ill and I wanted to see...for me, I only went there I want to see that guy. But I never saw him and through another newspaper I heard that he came free and then he came to another place for court again. He's still on trial.

I: After all these years?

R: Yah.

I: That must have been a terrible letdown for you.

R: To find out that he a little bit younger than I am.

I: Mr. Treitel, before we conclude this interview, I would very much appreciate it if you would single out the one, any one event that occurred during the Holocaust that you think was the most remarkable for yourself.

R: Remarkable. What can I say? This is hard. The people what...I don't blame people that say don't understand us. Is was indescribable. Never ask. I have a neighbor here. I said, "Do me one favor. We live different than you. Not that we are different people, but all that make us awful people. Really, not awful. I cannot say it."

I: What you're saying is that we cannot understand. And you're correct. We cannot understand.

R: No, I don't blame the people that don't understand. I don't blame. A fly outside had more liberty than we ever had. They killed us like nothing.

(Mrs. Treitel) For no reason, Just for being.

There were...on one death march there were a potato raid. Two Russian boys went on the potato raid, to take a couple of potatoes and they took a machine gun...life was nothing.

I: Life had no value.

R: No. No value at all, at all. Then we had no chance to come out. The chance was so flum.

I: Okay. When you came to this country, were there things that were disappointing to you, considering what you had expected?

R: Two points were very disappointing to me. That when I had the affidavit in 1938 for the United States, I had an affidavit that was worth more than a barrelful of gold. And let me not in. That I will forget and unforgive. They say the law

was like that. Where were my rights? Where was Miss Liberty? When they know we are in danger there.

I: That's a very sad commentary on this country. What's the other thing; you said there were two things.

R: First of all, we had here from Jewish organization or from any one, we had no personal help. We came on in New York, in Ellis Island.

(Mrs. Treitel) I don't know that it was Ellis Island.

Yah, sure it was Ellis Island. We came on there. For my wife her aunt was standing there whole day. We was there. They searched our luggage. All that we had they searched like Nazi don't search for munition or for dope. They searched all about our what we had. WE had a little bit. What could you bring in. A box. They searched it. In fact, there was a Jewish officer...

I: Immigration officer.

R: No. What searched. Immigration officer got me, too. Custom officer. A Jewish one. He said, "For what you bring more?" He was living like a human being all his life. He said to me, "For what do you bring all his stuff with you?" My wife had a guitar with her. She was in the newspaper next day. I don't know where the piece of paper still is. And people brought things... We had trouble in Germany from the English people. They went from Hamburg. And then they try to take the watches from the immigrants and the pictures. The English. And they were tough guys. They were...lived that through. There came fights with the English.

I: So your introduction to the United States did not really amount to a warm welcome.

R: Yah. The Red Cross was there and gave us a donut. No, not very warm. And now we are citizens and we are very proud. After hardship in the United States, we are very proud to be here. I was in a lot of countries in my life. I was in Poland, Holland, Belgium and in Israel - for more, Germany. And there is not better country in the world.

I: Well, I agree with that.

(End of interview)

