Holocaust Survivor

Oral Histories

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Can you tell me your name please and where you are from.

My name is Abe Pasternak and I am from Transylvania, Romania, I come from a small town, the name of the town was Betlan.

And how large was your family?

My family was father, mother, six brothers, we were six brothers, my older brother his name is Isaac, after him I had a brother Menachim, which -- he died -- in Auschwitz [pause] then I am next, and then I have a brother Yossi is after me, he lives now in New York, he used to live in South America, and then I, after is Schloime who lives in Israel and uh -- I had a little kid brother, his name is Mitzala, he died in Auschwitz.

Your parents?

My parents died in Auschwitz.

Aunts and Uncles?

I have most of my aunts and uncles died over here. But, my father side, we had, they were [pause] four, five and a sister they died, all of them died in Auschwitz. Six of them.

Including aunts uncles, cousins... how large was your family and how many survived?

Of all the family that has survived, there were, I would said that our family was largest was a large family 40, 50, maybe 12 of us, 14 of us have survived.

What about the community, what was the community like?

The community was a very lovely community, we had, the community was, had about 5,000 people were living there, the population was 5000 and uh, there were 250

Jewish families and among, there were Hungarians living there, Rumanians, Germans, and gypsies and Jews. And after the war, there were about six or seven families come home.

What was it like, say the Friday and Saturday in your household in your community?

Well, Friday night, Friday, they used to get ready for the Shabbas, oh they used to have a lot of doing, they used to clean up the house, used to scrub the floor, used to clean the windows, and my mother, may she rest in peace, she was getting ready for Shabbas and she was cooking and baking and. There was a lot of things going on then. We shined our shoes we brushed our clothes, it was a busy day, it was delightful. Oh God! and we used to press our old shirts and we went to, after that we went to the bath house because they did not have showers and bathtubs like they have around over here. We used to get ready, then us children, we were forced to sleep in the afternoon on Friday so that we should stay, we should be able to stay up for the Friday night meal and to be able to go to the synagogue especially in the summer because we used to start to eat late because the Sabbath was not, did not start until late in the evening around 8:00, 9, 9 o'clock. It was a must to sleep. Oh, I remember my father, may he rest in peace, insisted upon that we sleep so that we used to go to the synagogue and we used to see everybody coming home from the synagogue dressed up and it was a delightful, oh -- it was happiness -- and it was really except that once in a while, I mean some of the gentiles used to scream from the other side, from across the street used to scream and yell, "you dirty Jew" or something like that. That was in the early days when I was a youngster.

Was there lots of anti-semitism in the town?

Yes. Yeah there was because there was always anti-semitism there hasn't been a week gone by that I was not told "you dirty Jew go back to Palestine."

You went to public school or ...

I went to the, yes, I went to the schools, I have four years of secular education. We went to, we were forced to, everyone had to go to school for four years, that's all because the rest of them started out with a little, it was high school as they say it over here, but then, for that, uh, there was already a selection even in the thirties.

It was a quota system?

Yes, yes...if you were able to bribe your way in, but not too many of us wanted to bribe, not many of our parents wanted to bribe in, bribe the officials to get us into the school.

What business was your father in?

We had a yard goods store, we were,.. we had a fairly nice store and my father always used to say, "to put through six boys to go to cheder and to the yeshivas, that cost a lot of money." But, he was able to manage, we were able to manage but my mother was more or less the business woman in the family.

Tell me what it was like in the store.

She, well, we had a, my other brother who lives now in Israel and who survived, he used to work in the store and then my mother and father that was all. The big day used to be on Wednesdays, Wednesday used to be the market day, the shopping day.

But all in all, we were fairly, I would say for the community we were -- quite well-to-do.

Did you go to school outside the town at any point?

I went to, when I was 13, to study to yeshivah in Sighet which was, that was West of Transylvania and I studied there for about a year and a half and my brother, the one who died, my older brother, my brother who was before me, I studied with him for a little while, then he said two brothers cannot study with one another so he turned me over to somebody else. In fact, I run into my teacher about ten years ago in Montreal. [smiles]

Do you think you would have continued in religious education or taken over the business or would you have gone into a...?

Well, my religious life really uh would not have changed whether I would have stayed in the business, I don't believe that our business was that big that we would able to you know, so many families would be able to make a living from it. After all, I was number three in the family and there was number one and number two, so I'm number three, maybe I probably would have wound up in doing something else, probably gone into the same business someplace else, uh, it all depends on where I would marry, I mean uh, where I would find a girl to marry.

Was your household particularly religious or was the community as a whole?

No, my house, our household was very religious.

Was it a hasidic community?

It was a very hasidic community. It was a very religious house. I mean the fact that my parents, my father used to wear a beard and we all wore the side curls, we were all peos, we all had peos. And we wore the dark clothes, we wore the traditional clothes, I mean that [ah] Jewish people wear. And on Saturdays we had special clothes to put on which was, which expressed really the religious aspect of it.

When, do you remember when any of this began to change?

Well, it started to change around the late 30's, in 1939, 38, 39 but up, even up until then, there was always anti-semitism, there was always, Jews always got beaten up by some Gentile kids one way or the other, because there were many more of them and we were not, we were never taught how to fight back. Besides they used to have a practice in pulling our side curls, our peos, they used to do that and used to get us mad many times while we're not allowed to tie 'em up and then in 1938, when Hitler started to become very popular and everybody was trying to join the camp, the Rumanians and Hungarians, so uh, the uh, there were some laws, new laws, I would call them "nuisance laws", I mean, come out, I mean, for Jews, like in '39, let me start there, the Rumanians wanted to show to the Germans that they too are trying to punish the Jews because they are Jews, so they instituted a law that every Jewish store has to be open on Saturday. And when the Jews heard about it, they were stunned, I mean, on Saturdays to go in there to, to, to open up a store on Saturdays, I mean that to hasidic Jew, to a religious Jew, it's like cutting off an arm. So the Rabbi said that they since it involves, since one's life is dependant upon it, not to make the living, I mean they could jail them, so for the time being, let's hope that

it is not going to last for long, we'll open the stores...I'll never forget this, my mother, since she was the business woman that she went into the store and my father and us went to shul and, I remember those Saturdays, they turn into like T'ish a b'av, you know the ninth day of Av, you know like the day that they mourn for the destruction of the temple, was now we really to started feel the pressure so, she went and opened up the store. But interesting, you know everybody, there was, there was a blackout. And I remember that they insisted upon that if you opened the store you cannot just open the doors and let people go into the store, you have to open the windows, I, the show windows, like our store had four, six doors; two doors that locked up where you were going into it and then the two doors where we used to have two window displays. Those had to be opened up, but you had to open up those doors on Friday nights too, because stores were open from 7 to 9 o'clock. But if it is a blackout, what do you do? They insisted upon that you display the window to know everybody that you are open, yet at the same time, there is a blackout. So naturally, the blackout was more important because they didn't want the enemy to see that where you are located. So they punished you for the blackout, for not displaying out, for not opening up the doors to make it look like you were open. And if,.. so you were fined for that...you paid a fine. And, uh, [tense] I remember that one Saturday, my mother came home, and my father asked her and it was late around 7:00 no, no, not 7 it was 5:00, and while we were sitting down there and eating shelshidas, and my mother walks in and then my father asks "Did you do any business -- "Istes gemaht etwas beschäft, nein." And she broke down and cried, she said, "Yes, I did." And I can see

the anger in my father, but then he says, "Was kann ich tun, what can I do", he was just angry. [whispers] I know that he was crying but he did not want to show it, he was just.... and some Saturdays we were doing business, some Saturdays we didn't do business. They were very unhappy days, people were torn.

How, can you give me an example?

Well, for instance like if you used to get certain packages, it used to be delivered through the post office. If your package was open, or it was torn, you couldn't complain. You just had to accept it. I'll never for..., I was there once at the post office, and I was there to pick up a package and there was another Jew over there from some, another person over there from the community, and his package had a big package coming and it was opened up and he was starting to complain. He said "aren't you familiar with the law that you cannot complain against, are you accusing us of stealing, are you accusing the Rumanian post office of stealing over there?" So he had to pay a fine on top of it. Or we were forced to go and do the, all the menial labor work for the officials. Clean their toilets, sweep the streets.

Did you ever go?

Oh, sure.

Your brothers too?

Well, yes, everybody went except that my little kid brother, I mean, that the youngsters the youngest brothers, possibly, they didn't go, but it was everybody had to go, there was no way of not. Then to top it all off, they blamed you for the war, they blamed you for all of the troubles that was going on. And that lasted not for

very long, until the, then Hungary, the Hungarians, uh part of Transylvania was turned over to Hungary and many of the people, the older people who said that who were, before Transylvania was turned over to Hungary, they said, watch when the Hungarians going to come in, they are more civilized then the Rumanians and they are going to treat you much nicer than the Rumanians did. Well, some hope. We thought we were going to have some hope. So the Hungarians came into Transylvania, what do you think the first song was there? We were stayed out there to greet the Hungarians like the rest of the people were greeting them with the Hungarian flag -- red, white and green, -- used to say long live Hungary, long live Hungarians, long live the Hungarian Army, and all of this propaganda, the first thing they sing over here that the troops come in and they sing is, if you have a Jewish girl for a girlfriend, go and hang yourself. No, no, slowly, slowly, we knew exactly what we are going to have, expect from the Hungarians, and we were through, we just, we went slowly home we did not watch all of the troops marching by. And that too was a problem. Why, are you against the Hungarians now? Then they started to institute a new law. The Hungarians said, that all of the able bodied Jewish people, strictly Jewish people, you will not be permitted to be part of the army, they were conscripted into labor force. My older brother who lives now in Israel, had to register for the draft, he registered for the draft and in the beginning they gave him a uniform. They did not care whether somebody was healthy or somebody is sick, anybody who was a Jew, who was the age from 20 to 22, has to go into the, oh, from 20 on over has to report and go into the labor force. And surely it did not take long

enough for my brother to be drafted. My other brother was 20, he too was drafted into the labor force. So for six months they used to wear the Hungarian uniform. And I'll never forget it, that, I was walking home and my brother came home on furlough, and we were walking home from the store to the house, and there was a gypsy, an old gypsy, who volunteered to oversee the Jewish people. And he was no rank, he had no rank whatsoever, and my brother passed by him and he did not salute him. And he stopped him right there on the street and he says to him, "do you know you are a dirty Jew and you are supposed to salute a Gentile?" So my brother did not want to cause any problems, he said, "I apologize". He saluted him, and he passed by there. But he did not stop there, he started to scream and yell, "I'm gonna teach you a lesson." Everybody became a [knacker?], became big shots. [pause] It eased up a little bit, not for very long, but in the meantime, they the Hungarians still insisted upon that all of the Jewish boys ought to go to work, had to put on a yellow arm band and used to report to what was called the [Leventer?], well, it was labor force, little labor force. And they too, we too had to go and work for the officials. A little later on, I remember, I was walking on the sidewalk and a the corporal who was in charge of us was walking with his girlfriend, I don't remember the day, he said to me, "do you know, you dirty Jew, that you are not supposed to walk on the same sidewalk when I walk on this, you go on the street, walk on the street, I mean, on the middle on the street," so...and it turns out to be a muddy day, and we did not have automobiles, we had horses and buggies and horses and wagons, and it was muddy and I was splashed just like that and he was having fun showing off to his girl what

he could do to us...Then one day we were walking we were marching down the street with our shovels, picks and axes and a priest, a Catholic priest, stopped and he said "stop!" So we stopped and then he said, that was already under the Hungarians, and he said "do you know that these people are responsible for the war?" I'm 14, 15 years old, I'm responsible for a war that is going on over there in Europe... Sermons we used to find out, sermons they used to hold right there outside, they used to tell the people what the Jews are doing, "they are a thorn in our eyes, we have to get rid of them".

Were there rationings and curfews, as well?

Later on in 1943, they started to ration, in fact, Jewish people were not allowed to slaughter cows, cattle...that law was prohibited, we were not allowed to do that. The only thing we were allowed to eat was chicken. If we were able to get it. Cause you see, the Germans took away a lot of stuff over there, then they started to ration, they started to ration the wheat, bread, flour, I remember my father once gave me a couple of big satchels, he says, I understand, he found out, that there is some flour available in the other community not far from Betlan, there was a Jewish miller, he said, he may be able to get something over there. I couldn't get it. We were able to buy some of it on the black market in the beginning. But all of these things, they were, I mean you started to get used to them. They were not really, it was a day-to-day restriction and we were always hoping that...it's not going to last for very long.

Did your father keep his beard?

Oh, yes, my father kept his beard, and I kept my peos with the exception that I used to tie them up now so that you were not able to see them...and I remember in late 1943 when things are really started to get bad, [tense] they insisted upon that all of the Jews have to register, every Jew has to take a picture...and one Friday afternoon, that too again, one soldier wanted to show off to his girlfriend. And the girl happens to be the daughter of the people that used to buy our milk and they used to come into our store to buy on credit and we always trusted them, and I had to pick up the picture because from the Kommandantur it's called, from the headquarters, and I walk in there so humbly, quietly, you know, and asked them, I came to pick up my father's picture, he said to me, let me look at you, he looked at me and he saw that I have peos, so he took, I remember he cut off this one over here to the left ear, the left peot [pause, sigh] cut it up and he showed it off to his girlfriend, to the very same girl, she didn't say a word, and her brother, by the way, used to be, used to hang around with most of the Jewish boys, never hung around, he was a mechanic, he was a more or less more intelligent, he used to hang around with, some of his peers used to be his Jewish friends... And I come home and I tell my father, it was Friday night and we were ready to go to Shul, I said, he cut my peot. My father was angry again, he was so mad, angry, because he couldn't do anything... he said okay, if I cut off the other peot, then he won. He deliberately cut off just one peot... but if you leave it on, first of all nobody is going to know whether you have a peot or not, because anyhow it's cut over there, but the mere fact is this, that you cannot give him the satisfaction that you will do this, that you will cut down the other peot... so

I left it on. It didn't last for very long, because for, let's see, about uh, a month or two months later, I mean, we were already picked up by the Nazis, I mean we were picked up by the Hungarians, that's a story by itself, too.

Was there a ghetto?

No, I wouldn't say, because the Jewish people were living all over the community. I would not say specifically, this is the community, this is the section for Jewish people to live, no, they were scattered. They lived in all kinds of streets.

Did the Hungarians create a ghetto?

No, not then. When they came in, they did not create a ghetto because first of all, the community was not that large, that they could create a ghetto. And, uh, we just lived and we tried to be... tried to stay away from the streets, we stayed home most of the time or not, or else we used to go to the synagogue and we used to study over there, whatever.

You told me a story about your father and he shaved his beard.

That happened for instance like on May the 3rd in 1944, he started, he got up in the morning, as he usually did to go to the synagogue, and uh, he uh, was half way to the synagogue and then all of the sudden, this is he told us afterward, because in between while he was going to the synagogue, three, two gendarmes knocked at the door, it was a Wednesday morning, knocked at the door, they said get up, you be ready in 15 minutes and go to the school, you can only take so much with you...in the meantime, while we were getting ready, my father came home and he told us that this man so-n-so, who happens to be a customer of ours, he used to buy stuff from

us on credit, told him "you dirty Jew, this is the last time you will ever go to a synagogue", and unfortunately, he was right. So, we got ourselves ready and in the meantime the Gendarmes were over there in the house and my little kid brother had to go to the bathroom, to the out house which was not very far from there, you know the kid is 12 years old so what does he know about it, he does not know except that he is scared, you know you get up in the morning you are being awakened, so he said, "Can I go to the bathroom," and the Gendarme says "no you can't", "I got to go to the bathroom", "no you can't." Well, naturally, he could not hold it any longer, he got uh..... So, we went to the,, we got ourselves ready and like I told you Wednesday was the big shopping day, so all the Gentiles, all the people were coming, the Rumanians, the Hungarians, they all brought in their products to the market for sale. They deliberately picked us up on a day so that everybody could see what they can do to the Jews. So they, uh, we went to the school and we had some money and my mother decided that she was going to go over to a friend of hers, it turns out to be a German, they went to school together, they grew up together, by the way, my mother was a very intelligent woman and I don't know why I am bringing this in, but I can't help but mention it, my mother spoke four languages fluently... reading and writing... Rumanian, Hungarian, German and Yiddish, and of course some of it Hebrew. In fact, in some cases, she even spoke a little bit of gypsy. She went to her friend's and said, "look here, I don't know what is going to happen to us, I've got here some money. Keep it for me, keep it, I don't know whether I am going to come back but if the kids are going to come home, give it to them, give it to them, if not,

keep it." This very friend of hers went to the authorities and she turned in my mother. My mother came in, came back, she was pale and blue. I don't know whether, they must have, they must have hurt her. They must have beaten her up. It did not show on her face, but they must have beaten her up because she did not cry and she just said that this woman turned her over. That day, we were all in this school, everybody -- the sick, kids, -- it didn't matter, old, young, everybody had to be there, and you had to be there at a specific time. And the gendarmes they went over our luggage to see what we have and not too many luggages were there, because they didn't let you take, so we just tied it up in sheets, whatever you can do, they kept us there all day long not knowing what is going to happen, what they are going to do and everybody was just sitting there in their own thoughts, hardly anyone was talking to another. There was only one smart Jew over there. He got good and drunk. And we talked about him afterwards, we said he was the only one who had the rightest the smartest thing to do. We took our money, whatever we had left and we threw it into the toilet. Because we thought, "what good will money do?" Somehow we must have had a feeling that something is...really going to happen to us. So, it came in the evening. They had two wagons, where you were allowed to put some of your clothes. Some of your bundles on it. They marched all of us from Betlan, to Daiysh, which was about 30 Kilometers which is about 14, 15, 16 miles or whatever it is, and we got into an open forest, an open field, there were trees in there, and the day before it had rained, so the water was still, there was still a lot of water on the leaves, and they gave you a little axe to go and fend for yourself, no

tents no nothing, just an open field. My father, Olevasholem (he should rest in peace), was handy with a tool, so we concocted some sort of a tent. But it wasn't really that much and we were living like animals, like, like, like animals! We really didn't know. Then the Germans decided that all of the youngsters have to go and do some work... manual work, what did we do, we dug fox holes, ditches, one group was digging ditches, the other group filled them up. I don't know what the purpose was of that, but... and then they also put out an order that everybody has to shave.

This was the Germans?

No, these were still the Hungarians.

The gendarmes?

Yea, but they turned us over to the Germans, the Germans were there too. Everybody had to shave... and so, shave off their beards, their hair, everything. So my father, my mother asked me and said to me, "did you see your father?" He was with his back to us...and I said to her "tatti is du" and "he is right here", and he turned around and she saw him, [pause] and she has never seen my father without a beard, this was the last thing she could do, she broke down and she cried...[more agitated] ... I'll never forget her, she just looked so stunned, she couldn't believe it... she couldn't take it any longer. Well, then, she was a very strong woman and she finally calmed down a little bit. And then in the meantime, we were kept over there for three weeks, it was raining, it was miserable and muddy and it was really...it was just

unlivable, and then if they did not like you, these gendarmes, they used to punish you for no reason whatsoever, just for them to get kicks, just to get kicks.

Did anyone at any time talk about running?

There was no place to go. You know, we were not prepared for this. I did not know anything about a concentration camps. We've heard that the Germans are persecuting Jews, so we thought maybe they put them in jail, they leave them in jail there for a month, and they leave, let them go. The newspapers that we used to get was strictly censored, they were all censored, the only thing that you saw over there was the glorious German army with the way they are advancing and how they are capturing from one country after the other. We never knew, about -- the Voice of America it was, where did you have a radio to listen to Voice of America? There were a couple of radios, yeah, occasionally you were able to get it but you had to be very careful, if they catch you listening to it, they kill you without any hesitation. It means you are a traitor. I'll never forget while under the Hungarians, the German troops used to go by my home town and one of the gypsies, they tried to make themselves nice to the gendarmes, so just like that, they said that there were so many Jewish kids over there watching the trains go away to the eastern front or we pointed to them, this is going to happen to you, this and this and this, they will chop your arms off, and your legs off. Who would have the, the, the guts to, to, to do that, and besides, we didn't know, and this is exactly what the people tried to do. Everybody tried to turn in the Jews they thought they were maybe going to get some money or, or, or they were going to be promoted for something or they were going to get a

position of some kind. One day, I remember, I'm mixing you up things but they come to me, I remember my brother came home from someplace, the older one, and my father, Olevasholem, said to me, and to my other brother who lives in New York, go wait for him at the train so he shouldn't come home alone. And there was a gang of boys over there, boys that I have known, I went to school with, they got a hold of us, and they beat us and we could not even fight back. We walked into the house, my father looks at us and oh, [sigh] he was just saying, "what can I do, what can I do? I can't even help my own children. I can't take care of them. I can't go and fight back" or something like that. [angry, louder] Now these were supposed to be the civilized Hungarians and Rumanians and they were not supposed to be as anti-semitic as the Germans. [whispered] Yet, they were just as nasty and they were just as nasty as the Germans as I found out later on, I mean after I got into a concentration camp.

How long were you in this field?

We were there for three weeks.

And then what happened?

For three weeks and then, one Friday, it was the Friday before Shavous, I remember it was Friday, Saturday, what was it, yes, all of the sudden they just with a loud speaker, they said, get yourself ready and go over to the railroad station, it was not even a railroad station, it was just some sort of a railroad spur over there of some kind. And that was where they started us, they handed us buckets, and they threw us into those box cars. Eighty of us in a box car! They did not even write your name

or who you are or what you are or something like that, they just threw you into a box car. And those people would could not get into the box car, the younger ones had to help them, they could not help them, then the gendarmes used to kick them so that he should be able to move. So you finally did get in, about 70 or 80 was in the boxcar and the minute we got over there they locked us up.

What do you remember about the boxcar?

I remember about the boxcar it was hot! We were cramped! That's all we had, there was no room to sit. We could not even see out of the boxcar. Even that little window that was over there [points to the air] it was wired up with barbed wire. And when you have old people, and everybody is scared, little kids are crying, it was nothing but chaos and pandemonium. It was absolutely nothing that you can do... I, I, I looked at my mother and father, she was just [pause] sitting there and her mind was going God almighty, what was she thinking. And my father was just [whisper] quiet, quiet, quiet, he did not say very much. And we started to davan, and we davan, and usually they did the prayers, [pause] some of the prayers we have over there, God help us... you know, somehow they had a feeling that we are like little sheep right now and they are sending us somewheres... and to an unknown place, who is going to come back, who is going to survive, who is going to live, what will happen to us? I am sure that the older people over there they knew that this was their last ride wherever they are going to go.

Have you heard of Auschwitz?

No, never heard of Auschwitz. I've never heard of Auschwitz until I got to Auschwitz. Then Czechoslovakia -- I don't know, after traveling for so far and for so long they finally opened the door and there was immediately there were two German guards over there, watching us. And they watched for us to go and empty, I was one of them who had to empty, I mean, the buckets. We really didn't matter. You know it, as I think about it, here are, people, religious people, who always wore long clothes, and they were, you know their privacy was so... it was, I don't even, I can't even find the name [word], I mean, here is a man who is a religious man, and then he has to go and, and, and, and take care of his personal need right in front of so many people. I bet many of them just held it, they would rather suffer, pain, than go out and empty their bowels or bladders in, in, in front of people. Some of them couldn't take it any longer, they didn't even have anything to put up, uh, uh, uh some sort of a sheet or clothes, to... we didn't have enough clothes to make a, what is it called...

A curtain?

I can't think of the word right now. A curtain, yes...we couldn't do it, there was no room! And then, we were, standing, some of them collapsed, and then we decided to divide ourselves, to change, first of all one group of people are going to be able to try to sit for a little while and then change around, but it did not last for very long because some of them they couldn't even get up, I mean they were sitting down...

How long were you on the train?

We were for three days on the train. It was Shavuos.

Did people die on the train?

If they were not dead, they died right the minute the SS walked, I mean jumped into an Auschwitz, when we got to Auschwitz.

Tell me what happened when the doors opened at Auschwitz.

[agitated] Well, before the doors was opening, I mean we heard the train screeched, and they we all of a sudden, they came and they knocked at the doors and we heard voices, dogs barking, and Jewish language, German language, "Heraus! Heraus!" it sounded... and then there were people were jumping in, dogs were jumping in with them. And they were screaming and yelling, "Heraus! Heraus! Heraus!" and we were confused! There was nothing... and one guy walked in, he must have been a prisoner, he says, he says to me in Yiddish, [angry, louder] "hast du [gold], hast du brillianten" do I have gold or do I have diamonds? I looked at the guy, is he crazy or something? And then I saw people been thrown out of there. And I saw older people and they had to go and jump out of the train -- the platform was low and the train was high and people were beaten, and then when we walked out of there, we finally got out of the train, out of the boxcars all of the sudden there was a stench hit you and you didn't know what that is. And nobody told you what is going to happen, nobody told you where you are, what's going on. The only thing that you saw, you saw SS, and we saw prisoners in striped clothes, and I saw dogs who were sniffing, and I saw people being beaten up and they tell you to stand in line and way in the distance you hear music, a band playing. My God, it was such a confusion, you did not know what was going on. So then finally, after we were all out of the train,

[louder and louder] I remember my mother and father were next to me and my brothers, my two, three of us, no four of us, six of us, we were together, and this man came, this tall SS man, and he pointed with a finger, he put my foot, the three of us, the three older brothers together and my little kid brother there. He was with us. And I told my little brother, I said to him "Solly, geh zu tatte and mommy" go with my -- and like a little kid he followed, he did. Little did I know that--that I sent him to -- the crematorium. [weeps] I am, [pause] I feel like [pause] I killed him! My brother who lives now in New York, he used to live in South America, every time we would see each other, he talks about it and he says, no, I am responsible, because I said that same thing to you, and it has been bothering me too, I've been thinking, whether he has reached my mother and father and when he did reach my mother and father, [pause] he probably told them, [in German] "Avram told me to go stand with you." I wonder what my mother and father were thinking... especially when they were all went into the crematoria. I can't get it out of my head...it hurts me, it bothers me, and I... don't know what to do. I feel that I am responsible for that and my brother says to me that I am not responsible for it because he is as much responsible as I. There isn't very much... I guess I'll have to live with it. [long pause]

After the selections?

After the selections, we were turned over to the gypsies. Then they took over... they marched us around the camp... and, you know, a band was in front of us. And finally when they got through with marching us around the camp, they took us into shower room a big shower room and they shaved us off, whatever hair we had left, after we

were shaved you know in Daiysh in the ghetto, and they used some sort of a, I don't know what it is, they used and it was they smeared our body with it, it must have been a dis..., no not a disinfectant, but a delousing is what they used to call it, and then they tell you sit down, stand up, sit down, stand up, and they didn't like us, they used to go by and scream and yell, "you know that you are the most miserable people in this world and because of you", the gypsies, everybody seems to be feeling sorry for the gypsies... They apparently were dominating the camp they were all the kapos and Vorarbeiters by this camp. They were the bosses in Auschwitz! If they didn't like you, they just took anything they were able to get their, get a hold of and they used to beat you up. And then while you were walking out, they finally marched you into your barrack and while you were walking out of the shower room, after you were given those Häftling clothes, the striped clothes, they were standing at the door when you were walking out of the door post over there and they just for the sake of hitting, who was lucky who was unlucky, I mean to be just beat.

In one day, that very same day, there were so many things have happened to us... you really couldn't sort them out, and I'm still trying to sort out that day, how we've turned into, I mean we were just civilized people and all of the sudden we were told we are animals and we were treated like animals, worse than animals.

So finally, we got to the barracks, but you couldn't get into the barracks, you had to stand there and wait 'til the man in charge of the barracks is going to accept you,

so sit down. And while you were sitting down, they were looking, the only thing that you were left with, they were looking for your shoes. I said to my brother, "listen, it seems to me that they look at good shoes," apparently, there is something going on because otherwise we will wind up, and see how people were walking, you know, with those dutch clogs, I said, (in Yiddish "Better take your shoes off and give me one of them and I'll give you one of mine.") take one shoe from, I'll take one of your shoe, you take one of mine and I told my little kid brother, I mean the one to...and we were handed a couple of post cards to write to our parents. Can you imagine that? A couple of post cards. But you didn't get a pencil to write with but somebody did have a pencil so I said to somebody, where are going to write a letter to my parents, they didn't even give you an address to write it. I said (in Yiddish) "This is crazy," I said what do you mean, they gave you a post card to write, he said, "are you kidding, your parents are killed already." I can't believe that, so he says to me, "you smell that thing over there, that's probably them". Can you imagine that? Give you a couple of post cards, to do that. So, I, then I remember my brother was able to find a place where to lie down when we got into the barracks, there was an older man who came to him and said to him "I will give you my ration of bread and cheese that I have, will you let me sleep in your part of it?" My brother says to him, "sure." That was my little, my brother who lives in Israel. But then you got that cheese, I don't know kind of cheese it was, it was so bad, that you couldn't even eat it...but you were eating the bread because you didn't eat a whole day long...and then before you, before you were supposed to go to sleep, all of a sudden they started to count.

Somebody was missing. Everybody had to go out again and stand reveille they used to call it Appell. And then they used to call you Mütze an, Mütze auf, you know, take off your cap, put on your cap, and while going out from the barrack, again, kapos and Vorarbeiters and gypsies and Polacks and all kinds of Poles were standing over there and they were beating you on the way out of the barrack. To Appell.

When this person told you that your parents were in the crematorium, what was your reaction at that time?

I was in a daze, I couldn't believe it. I didn't tell my brothers. [pause] I know this, I didn't tell them. Unless they found out from somebody else, I didn't tell them at all. And then, I don't even remember if I slept that night, I'm sure I did not sleep that night. And, uh, I was sure that they were not dead, that was for sure, I was convinced that they were not dead. But, I was wrong.

What are some of the things you remember about Auschwitz after you got there?

Well, I remember, there was a red Kapo, he had a poker faced, blown up face and he was looking angry at everybody, every time that we were sitting down. You know, that was for ten days that we didn't do a thing in Auschwitz, just to wake up in the morning, and sit down on the floor and the minute an SS man came everybody had to stand up and if you had your cap on your head, you had to take it off. And uh, they were counting us at least five times a day. I don't know why they counted us so many times. And then they used to give us a little bit of food, back to the barracks, into the barracks, out the barracks and that was going on for ten days, I was not tattooed. I did not know what that means. Does it mean good, does it mean bad?

I didn't know about it. But there were so many things going on, [stammers] while you were sitting down there and... doing nothing... you got accustomed to the stench, and you saw people... you saw fires... you saw carts, two-wheelers, or then you saw some carrying corpses... and it become a natural thing to you... you know, you didn't see them anymore. How one can adapt himself, to situation like that so fast, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe how selfish we have become. We were concerned about food, food all of a sudden started to become a very important part of our everyday existence. Some guys, I've never seen, but I heard about it, some people threw themselves into the wire. First of all, I couldn't believe that the wires, they were electric. Then after they were told, I was told about a friend of mine that he threw himself to the wire, then I knew it was true. And I was not ready to die. I was not ready to die. I was not ready to... so we were kept there for about ten days and then finally we were awakened early in the morning and they told us "get ready, be ready in five minutes", we went out to Appell again, they counted us, then they marched us to the station. I don't remember the railroad station, how it looked like, I was in a daze. And uh, they herded us in like cattle again, you know, that German word "raus, raus" and "macht los." There was a time whenever I used to hear that, I was going mad. Every day you must have heard it about at least five, or ten, twenty times a day, who knows how many times, anything that you did, "los, macht schnell, macht raus." It was like a pain... it used to get you so mad... I was afraid that I'm going to react to it one day and I'm going to get killed for it. But somehow I survived it and after the war, when I heard that, it used to create that, that, that

angry, I used to get so angry, when I hear it, even today, every time I hear that word, concentration camp comes into mind... I associate it with concentration camp and Germans. So we finally were thrown into those, those boxcars, and we went, where to, we did not know. We stopped, it was June the 6th, we stopped in, how did I find out it was June the 6th, I found out afterwards that it was June the 6th, we stopped in Leipzig was it Leipzig or was it Dresden?, no, it was Dresden, they opened up the door, the gate from the boxcar. I was sitting next to the gate, and the guard who was sitting opposite from me, saw a soldier reading the newspaper... and he asked him, "what's new?" He says "the allies, die Alliierter haben gelandet, the allies have landed, the allies have landed." My God, I kicked the other kid over there, "(Yiddish)", "I think things are coming to an end." I mean, we are going to be out of here soon. Yeah, but it took another almost a whole year before we were liberated, and then we were taken to Buchenwald. When we got to Buchenwald, we were, I was still together with my brothers, we were in the same boxcar, we were still together, and uh, we were kept there for about a week until they started to... you know, sort us out sorting us out where to ship us. We were shipped to uh, finally we were shipped to Schlieben. I don't remember whether I told you that story about what happened with my eyes, that I put dust in my eyes, and I was lucky enough to go back to Buchenwald, but anybody who is a survivor would never believe this, anybody who has been in a concentration camp will never believe this, this is my only proof I had, is when I was waiting once for my automobile later on after the war when I worked for National Dry Goods, there was a young man with beard and peos

came to me and he said to me you are Avrum Pasternak, now I am mixing in something here, but I want to give you something, and I said, Yes, I am, who are you, I am Chaim... remember you and I went together from Schlieben to Buchenwald, I said, oh my God you saved me. I've been trying to tell this story to somebody, to my wife at least, and I want somebody to be a witness, will you come over to my house and confirm this what I am going to tell to my wife. He said I will be more than happy to do so. And this is the first time I've told that story and that was in 1955. But, yet you tell it to a survivor, he will never believe you, that I was able to get away saying that I was blind.

Tell the story.

Well, the story is, when I got to Schlieben, there was an old man who was a foreman, gave me a big sledge hammer, and he said I want you to knock off this wall. Oh my God, I said, how am I going, the fact that it was bombed before by the I dont know who by the Americans or the British, I don't know that, and I start to knock it, I notice that when I was knocking the wall, there was a dust, a red dust, I'm creating a red dust, so I took that dust and I said I am going to gamble. They said that if you go back go Buchenwald, things are not as bad over there as they are anyplace else. I took that red dust and I put it in my eyes and I said to him I don't see. So the old foreman said take him into the infirmary. They took me in there and there was a Hungarian doctor, and he said that "I will send you back to Buchenwald" and I heard that, it sounded... I didn't know what was going on... I really was... to me at the time, I felt was good, it somehow... I'll get out of this hell... And my brother came up and

I said to him one word in the Rumanian language, and I said to him, "vred," which means I can see. He said to me, "good luck..let's hope..." That's all the time he had for him to see me. I was sent to Buchenwald. And when I walked into the infirmary, there was another Jewish doctor and he said to me you can open up your eyes, you were lucky. [pause] You know, when I say this story, I tell people, I don't believe it myself, but this is the truth, this is exactly the way it happened. And I was lucky, I was lucky to be in Buchenwald for about at least about two months.

Did your brother stay in Schlieben?

Yea.

What happened to your brother?

My brother survived. Both my brothers survived, in fact one of them lives in Israel and the other one lives in New York. He too went to Israel, but then he moved to South America and he moved back here, he moved to New York, because his children, his daughter lives here.

So at this point you were separated from your brothers?

I was separated from my brothers.

And you were back in Buchenwald?

I was back in Buchenwald, I was there in Buchenwald, but I did work, menial work over there, the garbage and all kinds of..., things were just as rough over there as they were anyplace else. So you worked in a different camp. And uh... one day there was... we were standing in line in front of a garbage can... to wait for the potato peels, and who knows little extra cabbage or something they were going to throw into

the garbage can so we could pick out something to have something to eat. So one of the kapos, he must have been a German, came with his dog and he said "you know the dog wouldn't eat that". So we said to ourselves, I wish you would treat us like you treat the dog. [pause]

What kind of sanitary conditions were there at Buchenwald or at Auschwitz, because you haven't mentioned it?

We were full of lice. We had lice. We were full of lice. They had some sanitary condition but the sanitary condition didn't amount to anything, the only time they had a sanitary condition was one particular section of the Lager it was in the Grossen Lager, where they used to show it off to the other people, but in Kleinem Lager, they used to have, we were... so many lice that we didn't know what to do with them, didn't know how to get rid of them.

Was there disease?

Oh, sure, there were all kinds of diseases over there, typhus, I mean, that didn't bother them. They ah...,somebody finally discovered something, the pipes, the steam pipes, if you take the ah, if you take your clothes and you wet them and you put them, twist them around the steam pipes with the lice, all of the sudden the lice get killed, and this is how you were able to get rid of your lice.

This is Buchenwald?

This is Buchenwald. This is supposed to be the camp, the Lager that the Germans were showing off to the world.

What else do you remember?

I remember about Buchenwald, one day I was in the bathroom, [sarcastically] into the bathroom..." I went to the latrine, the outhouse, it was in the afternoon, and all of a sudden and I just looked up over there and I saw a big circle around the...in the sky. A plane came and made a circle, then he flew away and then all of the sudden I heard tremendous explosions, noise, and all kinds of things, they bombed the Grossen Lager, they bombed. I mean the factory that was there in Buchenwald. And naturally after they bombed that factory there was one good thing that they did see over there, that was during noon time, and the whole barracks with the SS were killed. That was the only highlight of the day. We were..., after that I wasn't very long and they took us to Schlieben, not to, ya; they took us to Schlieben. No, excuse me, the one I said before, I didn't go to Schlieben, that was Seitz before originally. I made a mistake, I'm sorry. Now this time, I was taken to Schlieben and this is when I really started to go through hell in Schlieben. Schlieben was the pits! They used to work on the Panzerfaust, I used to be in the GieBerei, but I used to do was I used to take the sulfur from a bucket, and I used to pour it into the missile and we each one of us had a quota of doing it. And if you didn't do it, you were beaten. And that is when that "los, raus, raus, mach los" used to be every second, every minute, it would driving you out of your mind. And to top it all off, that foreman, come lunch time and he used to come in and have a sandwich, a thick sandwich in his hand with all kinds of wurst, kielbasa, it used to smell, it generates, and you were hungry anyhow, and he used to eat it in front of you. And after he go through with

it, he would throw it down on the floor so that we could all go and try and grab a crumb out of it. You know, things like that.

Were you ever beaten?

Oh, sure I was beaten up once by a blond SS woman, she gave me such a beating with a whip, just because I stepped out a little from line marching home. I was beaten up so badly, I couldn't move, but it didn't mean a thing to them. I remember one night we were, I was transferred from the GieBerei to put in the actual bazooka into these wooden cases that they were packing them in and sending them out to the lines... And I was lucky and there was a young man, young kid, my age... and he was working next to me and somehow he was not as fast as, he held up a little bit, the line. And one of the SS man saw that, that kid was beaten up all night long. All night long, can you imagine that, and that poor kid. And to top it all off, he had to work, make up for the time. [pause] [whispers] And you couldn't do a thing. You couldn't do a thing, and that was such frustrations that we had over there, it was, it's beyond description. I sometimes I wonder how we survived it. With that little bit of food and then when it came, they used to give us that bread finally to eat and they used to give it to us to slice it, we had to slice that bread. Why they had all kinds of gadgets to it with. And they gave you thirty or forty minutes, they gave you for lunch, it took ten minutes to slice that bread because God forbid if you slice it just 100th of an inch in the wrong direction... why it is like, [stammers] what right do you have to do that? They used to fight. All these things, they were things that they should.... we were treated to. And then, you were trying very, very hard to eat it very

slowly, eat that bread slowly. You know try to, whether it was to enjoy or, or, or every bite of it and pay attention to every bite of it. As I say it to you right now, I remember sitting down there, you know, like in a corner by myself, I don't want anybody to disturb me when I eat it. And maybe that was my will to survive.

What happened after Buchenwald, I mean after Schlieben?

After Schlieben, I was there until the end. You know, would you believe we become experts already on how to put together a GieBerei, so I don't know how many of us were selected to into Flossenburg to open up another GieBerei, because apparently, I don't know, the panzerfaust may have been their magic weapon or something, or for tank or something like that, that was the bazooka, this is what a panzerfaust. I would like to relay a story over here, I was in Oslo, Norway after the war and I went into the resistance museum, and I walked into a certain particular section. I saw the panzerfaust, I froze. Gerry says to me, "what happened?" I said to her, I said, "Gerry", I pointed like this and I was shaking, I said, "I made this. I made this..." and I pointed to the missile. See, this is where I put in the sulfur in there. So, they took us to Flossenburg to teach a new group of people how to work. For the first time we got a big slice of wurst, this much, and a half a loaf of bread. For that alone it was worth it going. But, we were afraid while we were there for 12 hours, afraid that they were going to keep us there and that was really the pits. Nobody has gotten out of Flossenburg. When they asked me what happen to Schlieben, I stayed there in Schlieben and we went through this tsores [misery] day in and day out. Every day there was something different. There were fights among ourselves,

unfortunately, remember I mentioned to you, sinisclina, pettiness. The fight was for one only thing. Food. And...there was one Jewish kapo who I would say of all the kapos that I have known was the nicest person I have ever seen. He was a tall man from Lithuania or from Poland, I don't remember, but he deserves to be mentioned. He used to alert us when potatoes used to come into the camp, and those who were lucky, to steal some of it, he says "I hope you got yourself big ones." And he looked aside. He deserves to be mentioned. He was the only one. There was another two kapos over there, I would used the word, youmachshemum, they was screaming and yelling raus and mach los all the time, then you got out of the barracks and when you went into the barracks, they even told you, and when you went to work, and when you were marching, two guys, the only guy of all the kapos that I've known, I mean Jewish kapos, that was the only decent guy who used to turn around and say, "I hope you got big ones."

And, in all of this time, from the very beginning, do you remember any help that you might have received, small, large help from the non-Jews?

None whatsoever. The only thing that I remember, now I didn't hear it myself... when you talk about help, what do you mean by help?

Well, someone giving you extra piece of food, giving you uh...

None!

relief from a job?

Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no, no. The only thing that once there was one of the guards, who was an older man and he said to somebody, I heard it in the barracks afterward,

I was not there, he said, he got a postcard from his son who was captured by the Americans and he is now in Florida. So he wrote in the postcard, he wrote...uh, "schwartz wie a neger und fat wie ein schwein" "black like an African and fat like a pig." So he said from now on I'll look away when you do something wrong.

Because of his son?

Yes, because of his son. You know, everybody was in the same position. Everybody was in the same situation, if somebody did have more bread than the other, than you were suspicious. Why does he have more? Where, did he get more pay than I did? Nobody got paid. Nobody got more tobacco because they didn't give any tobacco away. Tobacco was the main thing over there. They didn't give you, why would he get more bread? He must have turned in somebody, then he is a stool pigeon.

How long were you working then, in Schlieben?

In Schlieben, I worked in Schlieben, I worked over there from July 'til April.

Until the Liberation?

No, til the Liberation. Yea, but then they picked us up and they put us into boxcars for ten days, we were locked in and I don't know where they took us. We were driving, travelling... [stammering] with hardly any food. [pause] I'll never forget it... once we were raided by the Americans. The train stopped, the guard ran away and they left us over there in the open. I saw, now this, it'll give you an idea what we were like and what kind of a, what level we were in. I found that eight plum pits next to a piece of manure. I took them out of there, I wiped it off with whatever I was able to wipe it off with and I took out the pits and I ate them. There was man

who was a very kosher man, he actually ate grass! He just eat it! [pause] We were left over there in the open we could have gone anyplace, anywhere, but then you didn't know where to go, you didn't even know where you were. So we finally arrived, after so many years, we finally arrived, I mean in Theresienstadt there too, rumors were going around, that the war is practically over and that the Germans are going to kill us off. Machine gunning us.

What was it like in Theresienstadt?

Theresienstadt was already, uh, it was better than it was anywhere else, it was better than it was in Schlieben, it was better than it was in Buchenwald.

Were there SS guards there?

Oh, sure they were walking around and they were looking and looking us over. ..

Not Wehrmacht.

SS, they were laughing, enjoying like the Reich is going to last God knows for how long. Naturally, you automatically take it and you take off your Mützeh and salute them.

What happened in the final days?

Oh, the Russians came in. You didn't know whether they were Russians or whether they were something else. But we noticed that the people were coming back, it was just as much of a chaos because people started to get sick. They started to extract typhus, they really started to get sick. I had typhus and I was put into a hospital. I had diarrhea and I had typhus and I was put into a hospital. I was, I lost... I was 80 pounds. I couldn't sit down. I lost my hair, I lost, I just couldn't walk, I couldn't sit

down, I couldn't walk, I couldn't sit down because I was just bone. Period. There was not even a piece of flesh. Then I was treated in the hospital, there was a Jewish nurse. She was from Czernowitz, from Rumania. She took care of me.

Uh, how long were you in the hospital?

I don't remember.

What do you remember next?

I remember that I was in a daze and I remember that I was very sick. I remember that they gave me, I got better food, that I remember. I remember that I was lying on the floor... on a mattress, but you would not call it a mattress, but it was a strohsack, it was on a sack that was full of straw. That's what I was lying over there, and they used to come in occasionally and used to look us over.

Were you thinking about returning to Rumania?

Yeh.

Did you?

Yes, I was thinking about going to see whether my parents are alive or who was home or what was going to happen. Yes, we did.

What happened when you went home?

I haven't found nobody. I found my brothers. By the way, I was reunited with my brothers in Theresienstadt. That was the best thing that had happened. Then my brother got sick, too.

Tell me about the reunion.

We looked at each other and we... were stunned, we cried... and [quieter] then we didn't have anything to say to one another. The first thing, then finally, because, we were divided into separate barracks...and I was very angry at myself, you mean to tell me that I didn't have anything to say to my brothers, that bothered me. Then we finally got together. [pause]

When you got back to Transylvania and found no one there...

I left, I'll tell you what had happened. What happened was this, I was, I saw there was one Wednesday, everything happens on Wednesdays, there was a group of people, Jewish people were coming back, coming from the East. Oh by the way, I forgot to mention this to you. After the Russians came into Theresienstadt and I knew a little bit of Russian, so I ask him, [in Russian], give me a little piece of bread, so they were supposed to be very friendly, you know that they were supposed to be comrades, and share with one another uh, he didn't bother, then he says to me just like that, out of thin air, I told him I was in a concentration camp, he said why didn't I go Partisan.... why didn't I go Partisan... [in Yiddish] or tell him a story how I was captured, how the Hungarians gendarmes had come in and so on and so on and so forth.

Okay, so go back to Betlan.

So I came back to Betlan, so that particular Wednesday, so then, there was a group of people they were going someplace, it was a caravan of horses and wagons, so uh, I asked this man "where are you going," in the Rumanian language, so he said to me uh, "where can I find a Jewish place?" I said to him "I am Jewish, why do you want

to know?" He said "I want to eat something", you know, as a rule, Jews help out one another. And he started to talk and he said to me just like this... "if you have two cents worth of sense you will pack together, you will pack yourself up right away and leave this hell hole." I said, "Why? The Russians are supposed to be good people..." and this and that? He said, "like hell they are just as bad as the Nazis." You know, it did not take very long and I picked up myself up and left.

And where did you go?

I went to Hungary. And from Hungary, I didn't wait for very long and I came over to the United States. I was in a Lager in Germany again after the war. I was in Ulm. A waiting displaced persons camp waiting for me to be... I came over to the United States. Oh God, when I came over to the United States, I remember seeing, we arrived at night and I saw all this flash, you know those lights, what is this, what is going on over here? Someone says to me, you dummy, those are automobiles. "That many automobiles? Every second an automobile, that is too many, how is that possible?" Well, then in the day time, so I started to see them, there was a lot of automobiles going by there. Which was great. So then I, uh, we were processed and I, uh, as we got off the boat, they assigned me a hotel and I stayed in a hotel in New York and I went out for a walk. I don't remember what the name of the street or anything. And I looked in the windows and I see those big hams, it must have been a butcher shop and bread and all kinds of stuff, oh my God! So much food! And as I looked at the window I started to proceed a little further down the street and I see a tall policeman coming in front of me. I immediately went into my pocket and

I was ready to take out my identification card and to show him that look I am here legitimately. [pause] It was, coming over here was a daze... coming in from, from, from hell and all of the sudden you are in paradise...that is the only way I can put the two things together.

How did you get to Detroit?

I have an uncle here who paid for my ticket. And they waited for us at the train and I stayed here for a little while... and I have some relatives in Los Angeles, they wanted to see me. And they asked me to come down there, and I went down there and uh, the first time I saw them, the first thing they said to me, "I don't want to hear anything about a concentration camp, because I know everything about it." I was stunned. Really I was disappointed. You don't want to know about your parents? Or you don't want to know about... why the hell did you bring me here all the way? But then the other brother, pumped all the information from me.

Did you talk to other people about it?

Uh, no somehow in the beginning when we came over to this country they like my uncle used to introduce me this is Abe Pasternak my nephew who just came over from Europe he was in a concentration camp. (In Yiddish) And that was left. And all of the sudden we started... my first sentence in English was this. "If you laugh, everybody laughs with you and if you cry, you cry by yourself." It never occurred to me why would anyone tell me that story. And it was not one individual who told me this, many of them have said it. I guess, uh, I went to Los Angeles, I stayed there for four weeks, but that was uh, not my lifestyle. I was not used to it, maybe nothing was

appealing to me. Uh, I was, I didn't know what I really wanted. The only thing I do remember, I wanted was to go in a corner and cry. Cry myself out pretty good but I was not able to do it either. But I managed and I uh, I was in uh, drafted, I got here in 1947, and I was drafted in 1948, I went into the army late 1948, I was drafted for 21 months. I went into the army late '48, my first basic training was in Breckenridge, Kentucky. Somehow, I found a home in the army. Then they found out that I was in the concentration camp, they turned me over to a psychologist. And he asked me about my experiences, but he could not speak with me, I didn't speak English well at the time and he did not speak Yiddish. So there was a frustration between us. It was frustration for him and it was frustrating for me. And he picked out that much that I was a yeshiva [Bücher?] so I was assigned and they really needed somebody who should be able to davan and conduct services so they made me an acting Chaplain. And they took me to school and I started to pick up the language and would you believe it, in addition to my activities as an acting Chaplain, I was the TIP man I was Troop Information Program. I had a hard time to read that bulletin which I was supposed to talk to them about it. But having been familiar with a little bit of European history and geography and a little bit of the area, so I was able to make out and mostly at that particular time, it was the Wall, that the East Germans were building so this is where I was assigned to talk about. I managed.

When you were made Chaplain, after going through what you went through, did you at any time lose faith?

[pause] No. I was very religious in the concentration camp. In fact, while I was in Buchenwald, we had access to some paper and pencil and you know, Jews always stick together, we wrote down the prayers. I remember many Hungarians, people who were not religious at home, said to me, "please say some prayer with me..." We did. We always used to davan (pray). After we got out of the concentration camp, that's when we started to question. While we were there, we didn't. Anybody who got a hold of a siddur, there was, because there was a group of people from Czestachowa came and they were able to bring some tfilin and... oh to put on tfilin. They used to surround you, put on to something, my God, that was like having a loaf of or eating a loaf of bread.

Let me ask you something about your life after again. Up to now, are you regularly affected by your experiences during the war?

I am.

How? Tell me. You said when you hear German words that you're right back there.

Flashes come through, flashes come through about my experiences. I still have dreams. And somehow, one way or another, whenever I have a conversation with or I talk to many of the people I know, my friends or survivors, we always seem to be ending up in talking about a concentration camp. Somehow the conversation comes up.

What are your dreams like?

First of all the dreams is about my brother... I know, I feel in the dream that he is alive and if you are alive why don't you come home? My brother was a very

religious young man. He was a very well learned man. And uh, I am sure had he been alive today, he would have stuck to the religion as he was, as a child. I was, after the war, I have changed [pause], I come from a religious family, I went to the yeshivas, I ate traif, I smoked on Shabbas, but I felt uncomfortable with it. I was very uncomfortable with it. Every time I used to go by a synagogue, it used to hurt me, on Shabbas. So why am I doing that? If it hurts, why am I doing that, if it hurts why am I, I have been fighting with myself, for I don't know how many years. So finally, one day I've decided. I have had enough of it. So I reverted back.... I mean, I said, this is not my life. I was raised differently, what happened in the concentration camp, [pause] I don't know, maybe God does things that we don't understand. I used to question, going through what I went through and survive it. [pause] Little did I know when I was in the concentration camp that 30 years later I am going to go to the schools and tell them about my experiences in English, in the United States. Who has ever dreamt of something like that?

Why do you do it?

Why do I do it? I do it because, I don't want, it is enough that I have suffered, it is enough that my generation paid for it. I feel that this future generations are much better people, they are much kinder to one another. Why are <u>you</u> doing it? Why are you going through it and asking all of us, I don't know how many people you have interviewed. There is a different type of a person right now. It's a kind, people are kinder to one another. I live in a country right now where the people are nice. People feel for one another. And I don't want, God forbid, for these people to suffer

like that. And maybe that is why I survived, because I am supposed to go out there and tell the people that don't let any bigot do what that guy did in Germany or what the Nazis did in Germany.

I think that is a good place to stop.

Thank you.