

Q: This is an interview with Mr. Sam Bankhalter for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project. The interviewer is Jane Katz, Minneapolis, August 13, 1984. Mr. Bankhalter, would you please tell me your complete name and include your Jewish name.

A: Sam Bankhalter. And my Jewish name is Saja.

Q: And the Jewish name means...?

A: Joshua in English.

Q: Where were you born?

A: Lodz, Poland.

Q: And at what time?

A: 1926.

Q: Was your town known by any other name?

A: When the Germans occupied, they changed it to Littmanstadt.

Q: And I understand you said that you would give me the spelling of some of the terms - after the interview, and I will turn these in on a sheet. Wonderful. What were the names of your parents, your grandparents, or even great-grandparents?

A: My great-grandparents, I didn't know. My grandmother from my mother's side was Rikla Solski. My grandfather was Shimon Solski, Simon Solski. My father's name was Joseph.

Q: Now, they were all residents of the same town?

A: No, my grandparents lived in Biala Podlaska. In Poland.

Q: And what did your parents do?

A: My father was in the wood business. We used to build wooden homes, and we used to have forests, and cut the trees, and this type of thing.

Q: Did you live within the Jewish community?

A: We lived in a Jewish community.

Q: How large a city was Lodz at that time?

A: Lodz was a very large city. In fact, it's the second largest in Poland. It was Warsaw and Lodz.

Q: So you sold wood to people in the community?

A: We sold wooden houses.

Q: You built houses?

A: We built houses.

Q: Oh, so you actually were in construction.

A: At that time, what they used to do, is they put 'em together on our property, then disassembled, and then brought 'em over. Prefabricated.

Q: You were very modern. Prefabricated houses. Did you deal with gentiles?

A: Yeah, a lot of 'em.

Q: What was that experience like? Working with, communicating with, trading with gentiles at that time?

A: Well, it's very hard for me to say that, because I went in the concentration camp when I was 14 years old.

Q: I see. But your father did deal with non-Jewish merchants.

A: My father dealt with Poles as well as with Volksdeutscher, half Polish and half German.

Q: I see. Maybe you'd like to recall your father's feelings about non-Jews that he was working with?

A: Well, I thought at that particular time it was, you know, it was anti-Semitism in Poland. I don't have to tell you that. You know that. Besides pogroms, coming in and knocking out windows and all this type of thing, I remember an incident where they went down from a meeting which they used to call the Narodopses, which used to be on Hitler's side, Poles and Volksdeutschen, and after the meeting, they used to go out and knife Jewish people - kill 'em.

Q: And you remember that this occurred when you were...

A: This occurred in 1938 and 1939.

Q: Was this something that you actually witnessed? Or you heard about it from relatives?

A: Something I witnessed.

Q: Is this something that you're going to tell about later, or would you tell me about it now?

A: Well, it's not much. Just was a tremendous anti-Semitism in Poland, that was growing as Hitler came to power. It was growing more and more. Now I know my experience when I used to go to school, where I got beaten up and all this type of thing. I come from a pretty religious family - not fanatic, but religious. I used to wear payess. And there was not a day that I was not spit on or beaten up, and all this type of thing. Now this all occurred in 1937, '38 and '39.

Q: So the anti-Semitism intensified at the point where the Germans were coming to power, and enacting their laws, etc.

A: Right, right.

Q: So the climate was felt all over Poland.

A: Right, right.

Q: And very directly by you - on a daily basis.

A: Right. In fact, just to make a point, there used to be a town they called Nova Solna, like a suburban area, not far from Lodz. And I remember that when the Germans attacked Poland, that the whole town of Nova Solna, which was Volksdeutcher, half Poles, half German - attacked the Polish Army, even cooperating with the German military. So the whole town uprose against the Polish Army. This was the people that lived in Poland.

Q: Then what was the outcome of that?

A: There was no outcome. They helped the German Army to occupy Lodz, even fighting the Polish Army. They blew up tanks, and at that time there were horses. If you're a historian, you know how the Polish Army was equipped. Buggies and horses. There was no trucks like you have here today. By today's standards, it was a very primitive army. The Germans were all on trucks and wheels, and the Poles were not prepared for that.

Q: Interesting. What languages were spoken in your home?

A: German, Polish, Yiddish.

Q: (Laughs) I suppose one was always singled out as a Jew in school.

A: That's right.

Q: Your accent was different. You wore the skullcap to school every day? You attended a secular school or a Jewish school?

A: I went to school for eight hours, since I was four years old, five years old. I used to go to heder for eight hours. And then when I got into what's called "public school," which you had to take, which was the Polish language and learn about Poland, I went four hours to public school and the other four hours to heder.

Q: Now you mention that your family was religious.

A: Right.

Q: Would you describe the extent of that observance, please?

A: Well the extent of religion was that we kept Shabbos, and my father was every morning praying. And every Saturday we used to have a group of people coming into our house where my father was teaching the Bible, as much as 15 to 20 people every Saturday. There wasn't a Saturday that I remember there was not, since my childhood. All the kids had to play outside, and I had to sit, and listen.

Q: So your father was informally functioning as a rabbi within his small community?

A: My father was, if you want to call it, a Biblical scholar.

Q: I see. People came to him for his expertise. So, that was quite an intellectual environment for you, then. And you mentioned that you were a captive audience. Did you begin to become interested in the teachings? Were you reading...

A: Well, I was interested to a certain point, as a child is, as a kid is. I was 13, 12, ten, nine. When I got into concentration camp, I changed my mind a little bit.

A: All right, I would very much like to hear about that. But as a young boy, you felt very much a part of the traditions?

A: This is all I knew. We had a very strict home with a lot of respect. I would never sit in my father's chair. We never started eating until my father picked up a spoon, till everybody's at the table. And I'm doing this today, with my kids. It's the same thing.

Q: So you believe it's important to preserve the ritual?

A: I think it's important - absolutely. It's not a matter of being afraid. It's a matter of respect.

Q: Did you have a concept then, as you were growing up, of a Supreme Being?

A: Well, you know Fiddler on the Roof, what he says, "We're chosen people? God, please choose somebody else!" (Laughter) I don't feel this way.

Q: But then? As a child? When your father was davening and praying to God?

A: As a child, I believed, I was religious. There's no question about it.

Q: You were not into questioning when you were a young adolescent, before the war hit, right?

A: No, I was not into questioning, and I think as we get in, I'll tell you why I was not into questioning.

Q: Now, at what point did you become aware of the change in the atmosphere? You mentioned that there was persecution on a daily basis. At what point did this begin, really: Was it there from the start? Did it just intensify at the point where Hitler came to power?

A: You're talking about Poland?

Q: Yes.

A: The persecution was always in Poland. There was always anti-Semites. And the famous slogan in Poland was - as long as I can remember, and as people told me about it - you say in Polish, "Zejay ech de Palestini," "Jew, get out of here and go to Palestine." This was a very famous slogan with all Poles: "Jude! Go to Palestine!"

Q: And that goes way back in history. But, at the time of the Nazis coming to power, all of this became more systematic, didn't it? In Poland?

A: There was more. The propaganda in Poland, as far as anti-Semitism, was absolutely terrible. I mean, starting up in young kids and all that. But you also have to remember, if I may get away and just make a point. You have to remember that Poland was really bad. For example, before Christmas. And you could see this. This was a pattern. And the reason was, that there used to be a propaganda that Jewish people, for Passover, are killing Polish kids and drinking their blood, or something like that! And so this, by itself, was enough to intensify the behavior.

Q: The animosity that was already there. There was an excuse for it.

A: Right, absolutely right.

Q: Now, did your teachers confront you with this kind of propaganda?

A: No. No. Most of our teachers were Jewish teachers, even in the public schools. In Poland was a tremendous amount of intellectual people - at least in my time - going to high school, so to speak, up 'til 13 years old. This is all that I went. I never finished it because of the war. My teachers, I remember, was mostly Jewish teachers. They must have believed in women's liberation then, because they mostly were women, my teachers.

Q: What about the old tradition that Jewish women stayed at home and let their husbands be the scholars?

A: Well, but this was public schools. In Poland, the majority of people worked. There was a very small segment of people that were rich, so to speak, but Poland was all very hard working Jewish society.

Q: And they were educating their daughters and letting their daughters make their own way in the world?

A: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Now, if you would, tell me please about the events that first made you aware that a war was taking place in Europe.

A: This was the summer in 1939. And my parents sent me to a camp called the Schnova Gurot. This was not far from Lodz, also. And my first experience in this camp, was there were a lot of Jewish people with us, kids from Germany, where they have to leave. I don't know if you're aware of it, but in 1937 and '38, Hitler kicked out a lot of German Jews from Poland. They came to Poland, left everything in Germany. And this was the bunch of kids that I was with. One day we got up in the morning, and they say, "Germans invaded Poland."

Q: How was the news transmitted?

A: The news was transmitted by radio. Germans invaded Poland, and they took us together on the playground and told us to find our way home. And there was chaos. I remember myself and a lot of kids, just walking - I cannot tell you right now how many miles it was - but we walked back from the camp to home. The airplanes were soaring overhead, and bombardment was going on. This was the first time that I came in touch with what war is all about. And I saw the ambulances and dead people on the street, and houses were bombarded, and shrapnel's flying all over. When I got home, there was blackouts. And I remember I was tickled to death, that as a kid I got a flashlight to have by myself.

And a gas mask. They used to hand out gas masks and flashlights and all that. And so this was my first contact with the war.

Q: What happened in Lodz at that time?

A: Well, this is what it was. Lodz was bombarded, Lodz and the suburban area. The Germans attacked Poland. They occupied Poland - I think the whole war took about eight days - but they had been standing four weeks before Warsaw. They couldn't get into Warsaw. They occupied whole Poland in about ten days. All the Polish soldiers, they assembled themselves in Warsaw, and the Germans could not get into Warsaw for four weeks. They resisted. They barricaded. And they'd been fighting street to street.

Q: But what about aerial bombardment? Weren't they bombing Warsaw?

A: They bombarded until eventually the water got cut off. There was no water, no food and everything else. In fact, I went to Warsaw. We left Lodz, my brothers and I, and went to Warsaw, because we felt that in Warsaw was going to be a little better, because we escape the Germans, as the Germans start coming in. Most of the Jewish people left their towns and tried to escape - go to Russia and other places. And we wound up in Warsaw.

Q: And what was that like at that point?

A: Well, this was Hell. The bombardment was hell, because it was day-in and day-out, night and day. The hunger was tremendous. People were eating horsemeat. There was no water, was nothing. And it was really bad then. Hundreds and thousands of people died. And eventually they came in and occupied Warsaw.

Q: What kind of dwelling did you have in Warsaw? Did you have relatives there?

A: I had an uncle.

Q: So you all were able to crowd into his apartment?

A: Right, right.

Q: What did you do for food? Was he able to provide food for the family?

A: No, in the first few days, we had it. Later on, it was real tough.

Q: So the city was surrounded?

A: They took whole Poland. The war was over between the Germans and Poland. They occupied Poland. This is the end of that. Then we went back to Lodz, and got back together.

Q: How were you able to leave Warsaw? It was an occupied city at that point.

A: Well, also, whole Poland was occupied. It was not a question of just a city. The Germans occupied Poland, and you could travel from one city to the other. Thousands of people were going from one place to the other. The Germans began to release Polish soldiers from the camps. And so there was chaos all over. But people traveled back and forth to get together with their families.

Q: Now you were, at this point, labeled as Jews? Were you wearing the Jewish star?

A: No. At that point nothing. At that point you had to watch, because they are looking for Jews all over, and they were cutting the beards and the payess. And what happened at that time, they just was more of an aggravation, but it was no Jewish star or anything like this.

Q: I think that became compulsory later in that year, didn't it?

A: Later it became compulsory, right. But in the beginning, as the Germans came up, if Jewish people were walking with the beard and payess and all this type of thing, they were just standing and cutting the beards, cutting the, payess, laughing at you, beating you up a little bit, and this type of thing.

Q: So there was daily humiliation but you were able to move about.

A: Was daily humiliation from Day One. That's exactly right.

Q: But your father, of course, was not able to continue his work.

A: My father, no, this was over with. After the German occupied Poland, this whole thing fell apart.

Q: But he was able to preserve his savings? So that he could buy food for the family?

A: Well, yeah, we bought food at that time. Was still available, and life got back to a little bit, so to speak, normal. And then, of course, the Germans start making a ghetto. Everything begins. They start making a ghetto, which they took a part of Lodz, and the put on barbed wires, and bridges. And all the Jews from all over Lodz had to assemble in one area, which was the ghetto area. You couldn't get in, you couldn't get out. And they took Poles, cleaned out the Poles from there,

where we were living, and got them to someplace else, and the Jewish people occupied a whole area which was called the Littmanstadt Ghetto.

Q: Now, what was that experience like?

A: That experience was bad. It was real bad, because you couldn't take much stuff with you. The Germans came into the houses and say you have to leave in five minutes or ten minutes or in half an hour or whatever. All the belongings was left. And then you got into the ghetto. And in ghetto there was just not enough places, and people moved in together. Families moved in together. Lived together. And there was really a lot of chaos. People lived on the streets.

Q: How many of you were living in one apartment at that time?

A: Well in our particular case, in our case was a little different, because my father was involved in the Jewish community - pretty heavily. And so we were on the Jewish cemetery in Lodz. On the Jewish cemetery there used to be a house, a beautiful brick house where the people used to live there year around, which are the people that buried the dead. So they lived right on the cemetery. And we got an apartment in this particular house, and my father ran the cemetery. There were so many deaths, that they had to be buried in mass graves, and this has to be organized in some fashion. I remember, it used to be winter, and they brought in frozen Jewish soldiers. They were in the Polish military, and they used to go out and try to find who was Jewish so they could be buried in the Jewish cemetery. And so literally, there was in the hundreds and hundreds! I remember that, because I helped bury 'em. And so my father was in there, and he'd been running the cemetery, to organize the burials and the cleanup of the streets and this whole business.

Q: Not a traditional activity for a Jewish scholar.

A: No, no, no.

Q: That must have been terribly painful for him.

A: But he was chosen by the community to get this thing going, because, you know, people start smelling on the streets, which is bad. And due to the fact of the war, everything was disorganized.

Q: So people rose to the occasion, then, and did what had to be done.

A Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, absolutely. You know, this particular people: God will take care of all the problems. You know that.

Q: They believed that! (Laughs) Well, He was "resting" a few times, wasn't He? Did you have family outside of Lodz and outside of Warsaw?

- A: In Biala Podlaska, like I say, my grandparents. This is on my mother's side. From mine father's side - the Bankhalters - I remember my grandfather lived in Warsaw. And he passed away before the war broke out.
- Q: Okay, and what happened to the grandparents who were living in Biala Podlaska?
- A: My grandmother came in and lived with us. As the war broke out, my brother went there, and picked her up, and brought her, and she lived with us. And then she died in ghetto - later on.
- Q: Were there other relatives whom you lost contact with?
- A: Well, yeah. I got one aunt living in Paris, right now - the sister of my mother's.
- Q: Was she in the camps during the war?
- A: No, she'd been hiding out as a Pole under false papers. In Belgium and other places. She has her own story. If she'd be here, you should interview her. She comes to visit me next year.
- Q: Interesting. So, if you'd like to continue with your story - at the time of the resettlement.
- A: And so I got back to Poland, in this whole chaos, and then on the 28th of February, the Germans closed off all the streets in this ghetto, and picked up people from the streets and sent them to Auschwitz. And they called it the Bloody Thursday - the Jewish, they called it the "Blitigah Donestik." It was very famous in Lodz. This was on the 28th of February, 1940.
- Q: Would you tell me about that, please?
- A: Well, I went for an errand for mine father, and I got picked up from the street, put in a railroad box, and I wind up in Auschwitz. I run away from Auschwitz, because...
- Q: How does one run away from Auschwitz?
- A: Oh, at that time, we just builded it. We built it - the defenses and all that. I was the first one coming in there. Which was in 1940. I hided in a railroad truck with straw shoes, which they made for the German Army - for the military. I don't know where they came from. I hided and went back Lodz, been picked up again and send back to Cracow, from Cracow back to Auschwitz.
- Q: So this is before they were really organized, and there was little surveillance.

A: Right, right. Went to Cracow. Worked on roads. And then picked up and got back to Auschwitz.

Q: Had you not been tattooed when you first arrived in Auschwitz?

A: Yeah, they tattooed, but, like I say, at that time you'd be able to do something. It was not organized as they organized later.

Q: But was there punishment then for having fled?

A: Well, they didn't know that. The documentation was not as much, and we all looked alike, you know. To recognize somebody was pretty tough at that particular time.

Q: I see. Well, tell me about the experience then of being returned to Auschwitz. I suppose while you were out of the camp the first time, you had no contact with your family?

A: No. Well, in Auschwitz, you know, what can I tell you? I spent five years, from 1940 till the liberation - I think it was in May. I was liberated in Buchenwald. And being in Auschwitz, they sent me to different camps that belonged to Auschwitz. I'm certain names may not be recognized here, like Netzbachtahl, Krevinkl, Ohrdruff. I've got it all written out and I can give it to you at a later date. So it's all different camps that we been sent for labor. And then when the project was over, we got back to Auschwitz again.

Q: Now all during this time, there was no communication with family?

A: No.

Q: So as far as you understood, they were still in that ghetto area, in Warsaw?

A: Right.

Q: Let me go back a little to ask you about that experience in the Warsaw ghetto. What do you remember about that? Do you remember anything about Jewish organizations that were forming in those early years?

A: No. This was complete chaos. There was no organization. There was no leadership. There was nothing. There was strictly word of killing and surviving - the four weeks that I been in Warsaw. Everybody's on his own. And this what it was. Was a jungle.

Q: Did your father have any connection with any Zionist organization at any time?

A: My father was active before the war broke out.

Q: As a Zionist leader?

A: Well, I don't know as a Zionist - yeah, I could say yes because he always did want to go to Israel, and supported Israel, and worked on Aliyah Bet. I can remember that he supported young Jewish kids going to a port called Gadinyeh in Poland, going to Israel.

Q: But do you have any recollections of meetings to discuss some sort of organized resistance at any time?

A: No, no. I know my father went to meetings, but I never went with him, so I don't know what transpired.

Q: So you were telling me about your experience in Auschwitz, and you were how old, 14?

A: Fourteen. Yeah. In Auschwitz, what can I tell you? Every day people went to the gas chamber. There was hunger. There was not enough to eat. They used to get us up like 4:00 in the morning, 5:00 in the morning - in the winter as well as in the summer - standing for about an hour, an hour and a half - you cannot move, one way or the other - till we went out to work. There was no winter clothing, summer clothing, no such thing. There was no underwear. There was no socks. What you been getting is the striped pants and the striped jacket. In order to survive in the wintertime, I remember, we used to take cement sacks and put in a string on top of the cement sack, and we'd put 'em two together, and put it over your head, one in the back and one in the front, so to keep you warm. Paper in your shoes to keep you warm. And if they catch you with the paper, with the concrete empty sacks, they hanged you for that. Couldn't do that. This was stealing. You recycled the paper, so we couldn't take that.

Q: You did work in the crematorium.

A: Yeah, I worked in the crematorium for about 11 months. And able to escape from that.

Q: How did you escape from that?

A: Well, we went in to clean up people from typhus. There was the infected typhus in Auschwitz - I don't remember the period, exactly, the time - and we used to go in there with the truck and pick 'em up. This would not happen very often, because we never got out from the area from the crematorium. There was a barrack there, and we lived there. And they picked us to go in and pick up people from typhus, and this is the way I was able to get away from it.

Q: But then they brought those bodies into the crematorium for sanitary reasons.

A: Right.

Q: And so it was your task to place the bodies...

A: Not - not bodies! They were still living! They were still living, except going to the gas chamber.

Q: Living corpses.

A: Living corpses. Picking 'em up, getting 'em to the gas chamber, and then to the crematorium.

Q: How does a Jewish boy find it in him to do that? What was that like for you?

A: Well, at that time, when you with a mass of people, hundreds and thousands, and you fighting for survival, you don't think how you do it, how you don't. You just try to survive if you can. Any means that's available to you. And if they tell you to go and do something, you went to do it. There was no "yes" or "no." There are no choices. There is no choices in Auschwitz - or in any camp! And of course in my particular case, I think there was a little easier for me personally, because I didn't have the ties of a family, which means I didn't have the tie of my own children. I didn't have the tie of having my own wife. I was young. I was one of the youngest within Auschwitz. There were not very many of my age - at all. A very few - you can count 'em on your fingers - that came into Auschwitz with 14 years. I was lucky that I got in. For some reason the doctor said, "Right, left, left, right," and I got in there. But I think if I look back today, I think a part of it for me to easier to survive is because I didn't have the tie of my own children. I'm talking about a three-year-old, a five-year-old, a nine-year-old. Which most of the men had that! And they morally got broken down in pieces, because they knew that the kid goes into the gas chamber. It's not a question of guessing. As you got off from the railroad into Auschwitz, a part of the people went to the left, a part to the right, and this people went to the, to the...

Q: Wasn't there always the hope that a wife or a child might have survived?

A: No. No, there was no hope. No. Because if you had an older brother that went into someplace else or didn't come with you to Auschwitz, then the hope was there that maybe he's someplace else, and he will survive. But you have to remember that whole families came into Auschwitz. In my particular case, and a few other cases, there was a separation. We'd been taken from the street. But in most cases, they cleaned out complete ghettos! And the whole families came in. And so they knew, right there they knew, who is going to the gas chamber and who is not. It depends on which line you've been standing. And it depends

as you got to the doctor which was saying, "Right, left, left, right." I mean, you knew it.

Q: Was that Dr. Mengele?

A: Dr. Mengele was one. He was mostly in the experiments, but the guy that done that was not Dr. Mengele. His name slipped my mind, but this was a different doctor that was standing.

Q: Who had the power of life and death over those who entered the camp.

A: Had the power of life and death, yeah..

Q: So you did your job, because when faced with a gun, one doesn't argue.

A: I done a lot of things. And also, another thing, I think a lot of the older people, I was like "adopted," so to speak. I was little as a young boy, and so everybody had a little bit compassion for me - to help me, you know, survive, look, a young boy in camp. And this was for the fathers, especially, the people that like children. So I had to break, so to speak, from this sense. But then, like I say, I went through every phase in Auschwitz. When you're there for five years, what is there to talk about it. I saw Dr. Mengele's experiments on children - the kids that I knew became vegetables. And the daily killing: the hanging, the shooting, the crematorium smell. Day in and day out you could smell it. The ovens were there, and the smoke is going out, and me being pretty close to it. And so you really lived with life and death on a day-to-day basis. I think I was more of the fortunate, in a way or not, in that I was able to see my family. My father and mother came into Auschwitz in 1944. And at that time, I had a lot of privileges already. I was the "old boy" in the camp. I knew everybody, and I knew every trick in the book to survive. And so I knew that people are coming from ghetto - from Lodz. They'll be arriving in box cars to Auschwitz. So I went out and my mother and father came. I had a sister - I still have, she lives in Israel - she had a little child. And everybody that had a child on his hand, went automatically to the oven. Two years, three years, four years, five years, nine months, six months, it didn't make any difference. It didn't make any differences if you're 19 years old or you're 10 years old or 20 years old as far as the person that carried the child. Whoever carried the child went automatically to the oven, with the child. This is the way it was handled in Auschwitz. So my mother took the child, a young boy, I don't remember if it would be a year, year-and-a-half at that time. And she automatically went to the gas chamber. My sister, till today, is suffering from that, because she feels that she was a part of killing my mother - because she took the child. My living sister which lives today in Israel, she never overcame the fact that my mother carried the child, because she gave it to my mother. She carried some other stuff, and she gave the child to my mother. And so till today she suffers from that, and she's never the same person - not the same person. I went over to my father. My mother was on the other side. I just waved to my mother.

My father was staying in line. So I went over to my father and I says, "Day, where's God? All the teaching what you teach me: We're the chosen people." I says, "They kill rabbis, priests, ministers - the more religious, the faster they go! What has happened?" His only answer to me was "Look, my son, this is the way God wants it and this is the way it's gonna be." And this was the end of the conversation, him knowing that he's gonna die, because he was in the line going to the crematorium. Well I don't know how he felt inside, but outside, I tell you, religion must have a tremendous power, because he didn't show it. And his only answer to me was, "This is the way God wants it and this is the way it's gonna be."

Q: He was a true teacher, wasn't he? The true spirit of the rabbi is the teacher. And he was passing a value on to you, I guess.

A: This what it is. Simple like that. There must be something with it, you know. A lot of soldiers on the first line fighting wars turn religious, so religious has some kind of a power, I guess. But this was the last time I spoke to my father. Well, in Auschwitz, as you're probably aware of it, all together, 12,000,000 were killed. 6,000,000 of this were Jews. And the rest were all different nationalities: French and Poles and gypsies and all that. In 1943, 1944, they brought in gypsies. They cleaned 'em out. I don't know where they brought 'em from, from Romania, Hungary, Poland, whatever, and they injected typhus - intentionally. And they killed out, literally, thousands of women, children and men, just killed 'em out. And so this is an episode that I witnessed. Besides the daily life in Auschwitz - which we know all about it.

Q: Did you have any contact with other non-Jewish prisoners? Political prisoners?

A: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Q: Those who had worked for Jews? Can you tell me about that?

A: Well, there were political prisoners in there. We all had different signs, what is political or homosexuals, and the criminals, and you name it. Each one had a different star on him, and so you could identify them. And most of the gentiles, they had...

Q: Now I think you're saying, the Jews had the star, and the gentile prisoners had some other badge of identification?

A: The political had other badges, right. They were different colors. If you saw somebody, you know he's a political prisoner, or he's a homosexual, or he is whatever, because Hitler cleaned out all the homosexuals, brought them in, also.

- Q: Did you find that people were communicating with each other no matter what their nationality or background? Or that there was a drawing together of people in the camp?
- A: No, there was no drawing together in the camp. In the camp was survival. You maybe had one or two friends, which was very important for your survival. But everybody was fighting for his own life. There was no communication. There was no pity for somebody. You know, it was a daily-type life. People were lying there dying, and this is it! In fact, we used to say, "Look at how lucky he is. This is it. He doesn't have to suffer anymore." Death was actually a luxury. I got a little medal that I carry in my pocket, which says, "I remember times when death was a luxury." And this is what it was!
- Q: And did you witness people becoming brutalized?
- A: Absolutely, absolutely.
- Q: As if they were accepting the indignities as a natural course of things?
- A: Right, right. I'm not a philosopher, I'm not a psychologist. But I think what I went through in living with thousands and hundred-thousands of people, I'm a pretty good psychiatrist and psychologist, I think I can figure out people pretty good. I also came to the conclusion that circumstances guide our life a lot - more than how you've been brought up, what you learn, or all the ethics. It doesn't play a role once you start fighting for your life. Once you start fighting for survival, all the ethics are gone. And you live by circumstances.
- Q: So you don't subscribe to that school of philosophy that says you can be a human being no matter where you are.
- A: Not really...
- Q: That you don't really have to submit to the law of the jungle.
- A: I...I...I...well, it depends upon the circumstances. You can be a human being under normal conditions. When I say, "I want you to do this and that," and you have a choice and you go home and sleep about it and think it over, it's a whole different set of circumstances. But when you're talking you have to deal with hunger - and with survival - and with thirst - and with cold - and with heat - and physically draw down to the point where you cannot mentally think any more, where the only thing is the survival, and maybe have a little hope, if I survive, I'm gonna be with my grandchildren and tell 'em the story and all that, something to hope for, then the prescription is that you still can be a human being? No, you are not. In fact, let me make a point to you, and I think we can elaborate later. The fact of the matter is that the more intellectual you were, the more animal you became in the camps. The fact of the matter is that people that grew up not

being intellectual, suffered a little bit at home, had to go to work every day, had to sweat 19 hours a day working to make a living, these people adapt a little bit easier than the intellectual coming in there - the professor, the school teacher, the piano player and all that - under the circumstances.

Q: Those were the people who broke down.

A: Those are the people who broke down.

Q: They couldn't do what you had to do to survive. Then those people who passively accepted the reality as God's will, and said, "God wants this to happen," these were the ones who were not likely to take the measures to ensure their survival?

A: To a certain point. You know, if you say that this particular people - the fanatics, religious fanatics - which decided that their life is in God's hand, that what he wants, this is what's gonna happen. I'm sure it's a little easier, because I think it lies in human nature to have a little hope. And so to them, this was the easier thing to, to reach to God. And I'm not saying right or wrong, I think it's a fantastic tool...to die or to live a little easier.

Q: But those weren't the people who survived, for the most part, from what you're saying.

A: Those were not the people that survived. They died out of hunger, they died of cold, they died of a whole lot of things that thousands of people died. They went to the crematorium. You have to remember there used to be a pattern. They made use of you. First way, you didn't have the food. You had very little food to eat, very, very little. And you been out going to work, and as you became not useful any more - besides, as you came into Auschwitz, the elderly, the kids, the mothers, the pregnant women and all that, the "undesirables," so to speak, they all went right off the bat to the crematorium, and then the other part that got into camp, you worked until you can no longer function - and then you went to the gas chamber. And so there was a cycle of elimination. They make use of you as they can, then you cannot work. And some of us that survived, learned how to steal and how to risk their life, because it really didn't mean much to live or to die, you know. Under normal conditions, I wouldn't be here. I apparently learned at a very young age how to survive. And I was close to death. How I lived, is behind me today. When I look back at things that I used to do, and risk my life...but this is what survival does to you. I don't think you will find 20 people alive today with my group that came into Auschwitz in 1940. I keep on looking. I found two guys in Brooklyn - that's all - living, from the group that I got in in 1940.

Q: Are you part of an organized group now that searches for survivors and makes contact with them?

A: Well, I belong to the Holocaust...what do you call it...which just formed not long ago in Washington. And I travel. I always look for people, if I can find somebody. Although you have to remember, my connections from home are very, very small, because I went away as a young boy. My connections are the people that survived in concentration camp, or survivors today that are alive, that we have something in common that we can talk about.

Q: So from the start, then, after your release, there was a real need to communicate with those who had shared that experience, I gather.

A: Absolutely, absolutely. We're still today, because you cannot talk to anybody that really can...can soak in. For example, when the film Holocaust was shown, I was very upset because there was never should given the name "Holocaust," because it was not one-tenth shown what really went on. I think it was a disgrace to give this film the name "Holocaust."

Q: Do you think there was an intent to distort and to deny reality?

A: I don't know if it was "distort." I think the word "Holocaust" for this whole episode going around two families which was shown, it's a distortion. Intentional or not intentional, it is just not the true what was going on.

Q: If you tell the truth, it's no longer entertainment, is it?

A: That's right. I don't know what it is, but this was not what I know.

Q: Well, it seems as if...this culture and other societies have had great difficulty in dealing with reality - a movement today to alter history and pretend that it didn't happen.

A: This what is happening, I guess. Well, this is now. But let me just give you a little bit what happened later. I got out in 1945. We...

Q: Excuse me, do you remember the names of the major German personnel at your camp? The commander and the officers?

A: Well, you got Dr. Mengele.

Q: Was he the commander of the camp, or simply the doctor in charge?

A: He was the doctor in charge of the hospital, of all the experiments that he done. I don't remember all their names, you know. In my particular case, there were changes, so many changes. But I remember Eichmann coming in - visited us. Very nice guy, as you know. (Laughs) And you know, other visitors. I know Goering came in once to visit the camp. But as far as remembering all of 'em - I've got it written down some names, but I don't really remember right now.

Q: Okay. Now you escaped again from Auschwitz?

A: No.

Q: You transferred to other camps?

A: I was in Auschwitz then - for good.

Q: You were in Auschwitz until the liberation?

A: No. Before the liberation - which was a few months ahead of time - the Germans liquidated Auschwitz, because the Russians start coming closer and closer. So they took us out what's called the "death march." If you gonna talk to survivors, they can tell you about what the death march is. And I wind up at Buchenwald.

Q: Were you there when they were actually destroying the gas chambers?

A: No.

Q: You were taken out before that. Okay, tell me about the death march. The "dead march" or the "death march?"

A: Death march. You know you have to be careful with my accent. Well, they took you out and they put you in railroad boxes. They put in 125 guys in there. You cannot sit, you cannot stand, you cannot lay.

Q: Were they sealed?

A: You're sealed. And people died in there. And they went with the back and forth. This was actually just to eliminate us - as simple like that. So the railroad was going in one direction one day, and then going back the same direction the other day. No food. Nothing at all. Every day we cleaned out the dead, put 'em in the back boxes - railroad trucks (cars) - and fill out again 125, take out the live people in back and fill in the boxes again. I would say you had hundreds of cars - railroad cars - where we were in there. There were literally thousands and thousands of people. I don't know if it was 50,000, 60,000, 100,000. I cannot tell you. But it was a lot, a lot of people. People froze to death, and they died in there, for hunger, whatever. I remember, we wind up in Prague one night. We were able to open up the boxes and we got out. And then once of a sudden, they gave us something to eat, and what they gave us is herring - salt herring. Was barrels, full of herring. And this was a luxury. And we said at that time, "My God, look at the Germans! They getting to be good people! That's really something! Before they weren't." After everybody was eating herring - just as much as you can - they closed us in the boxes. No water, and nothing. And this was terrible. And this is a fact: people used to drink their own urine. This is as bad as it was.

And then they took us out from the boxes; and I don't know where it was. And we were marching! Night and days. We were marching. People were dying. The people that couldn't march, they shot 'em right there - wherever - they left 'em lay there! It was before the war start coming to an end, and so they used to shoot the people that couldn't walk any more. Literally in the thousands died on this march, because they couldn't - they couldn't physically walk. When we were before cities, they used to put 'em on trucks and cars and whatever they could find and bring 'em into the city, and shoot 'em. And we kept on marching. And I wind up in Buchenwald. And I got liberated in Buchenwald.

Q: How long were you in Buchenwald?

A: Oh, I don't know. Must be about three months.

Q: Now were the circumstances better there?

A: No, the circumstances were not better. It was a little bit better in a sense that we have a little small crematorium. The difference was that the killing was not as extensive, except that they cut off the water and they cut off the food. Also, they took out all the people from the camp and tried to transport 'em someplace. And so every day, you used to hear in German, "Achtung! Achtung! Alle Juden entreden!" Which means, "Attention! Attention! All Jews get together!" And so they didn't give you anything to eat or to drink. They cut off the water, the food, everything. Then you went out wherever they want you to go. This means they tried to clean out Buchenwald, liquidate Buchenwald, as they liquidated Auschwitz. So whoever went out on this march, on the gate they gave you a piece of salami and a piece of bread. And a lot of people in Buchenwald, they all went. I hid. I hid underneath the barracks, but I didn't go. And there's one fellow alive in Germany - he lives today in Germany - and one guy's in Israel today living... Well, we survived together in Buchenwald. We opened up a septic hole, and we crawled in there. And we're laying there for three days.

Q: In other words, you didn't trust the purposes of this march?

A: No. I know I'm going, I'm dead. The fact of the matter is, that they took the people out and took 'em into Weimar, which is a city next to it which is big forests, and they machine gunned 'em all. The didn't go nowhere.

Q: So it was your instincts, really, that preserved you.

A: Well, a part of my survival is instinct. Till today, I guess. I wouldn't go. I'd rather die in the camp, because I knew what it is. And also, physically, I couldn't handle it any more. I could barely walk. And a lot of people I warned, and they didn't go! And they survived! I said, "Don't go! Just don't go. You're not gonna make it."

Q: You had the choice of refusing?

- A: No! You had to hide! You had to hide!! You hid wherever you can, in all corners.
- Q: So, what happened after that?
- A: Well, as I got liberated - which I don't know much about it at all, because I just passed out - they dragged me out of the septic, and I wind up in Marseilles in a hospital. The American military took me and flew me to Marseilles, to a hospital.
- Q: I see. But you have no recollection of being found.
- A: No recollection of anything. The only thing I have, the night before, that I felt real good listening to the guns closer and closer. When America attacked, it was a real good feeling.
- Q: Remarkable. So you would up in a hospital in Marseilles.
- A: And then as I recuperated... Of course after that I went back to Germany and begin to travel all over, looking for people, like anybody else. Looking for my sister, which I couldn't find her. I forgot the name of my older brother, an older brother, committed suicide in Auschwitz. He felt that because his wife doesn't live, his children are gone - he know they died - he felt that, even if he survived, there's nothing for him.
- Q: Nothing to live for. Did you witness his suicide?
- A: No, I didn't witness the actual suicide. I witnessed that he was talking to me a day before, because that was not something that happened just like that. He was thinking of doing it! He couldn't take the cold, he couldn't take the hunger, and he couldn't live with the fact that his wife is dead and his children are dead. And so he told me, "You remember, you've got an aunt living and her name is so-and-so. And you've got a cousin in America by the name of so-and-so." And when I survived, I couldn't remember - for three years - after the survival - I couldn't remember the name Solski, which was my mother's parents. I just couldn't remember it. Blocked out completely. One night in a dream, the name came back to me. And this is the way I found my aunt later on.
- Q: You were truly a displaced person when you got out of that camp.
- A: Oh, yeah.
- Q: What was that sensation like?
- A: Remember again, I was very young. I was 19 years old when I got liberated. 19 years old. Having nobody.

Q: Were you getting some support from HIAS at that point?

A: Yeah. HIAS and IRO. The Jewish community begin to organize themselves and you start immediately, somehow, put your life together. But we been busy for probably two-and-a-half to three years to find people! Hoping somebody maybe survived. Again, there's the hope.

Q: So you were traveling at that point? Or did you establish any kind of base?

A: No. At that time, I was living in Germany, a town they call Fulda.

Q: How were you able to go to Germany?

A: Well, this is all the place you can go. You had to go! There was no other place to be at that time.

Q: That was a D.P. camp?

A: Right. And then I went out on my own. Then I lived in Fulda, I lived in Frankfurt.

Q: You began to find jobs and to support yourself? Or HIAS provided for you?

A: HIAS provided in the beginning. I also worked for the American government, for the military, as an interpreter, in the beginning. And then I got married.

Q: Where?

A: In Germany.

Q: Was your wife a camp survivor?

A: She was in Breslau in a working camp. There were 800 people there. She's half Jewish, so she had a chance in Breslau. At that time, there was a group of 800 people that the Germans kept, working for the hospitals in Germany. So it was like, not a camp, but a working little ghetto, so to speak.

Q: And how did you meet her?

A: I met her in Germany.

Q: Okay. And then you settled where?

A: Later on, I settled in Israel. I lived in Israel. And later on I worked for the Brichah, smuggled ammunition for Israel, and all. I don't think this...on tape is not...

Q: I think that is really relevant, that as a camp survivor, you felt a necessity to work for Israeli survival.

A: Well...Yeah. I had been working very close with the Brichah. I got into the mechanical right away, with buying equipment for kibbutzim, where they needed it, and also transporting. I had a transport company in Germany later on, where I been transporting Aliyah Bet all the time.

Q: The people who were going to Israel to make aliyah.

A: Yeah. Bring 'em to Belgium, to France, go picking up, and transporting to Israel.

Q: So that became a very important goal for you then? To help other survivors?

A: At that time, sure, absolutely. It still is.

Q: What did Israel represent for you then?

A: A homeland! Israel represents that this is a place, till today, that I think you cannot feel as good as you can feel in Israel as a Jew. It's simple like that.

Q: And a chance for young people to start out in a new world.

A: A chance for young people to start out in Israel.

Q: So finding those survivors and those who chose to go to Israel, became something that was meaningful for you?

A: Right. I was heavily involved in "Exodus."

Q: Would you tell me about that?

A: I brought the people to Hamburg. Then they went from Hamburg to Haifa. They sent them back. They wind up in a camp with the British, in Germany. And I transported food and clothing. My wife was a big help. She would go with me all the time on that stuff.

Q: What was the organization that you were working with at that time?

A: Well, the organization I'd been working with was the Brichah, actually, which was the Jewish military, taking on a responsibility of helping Jewish people going to Israel.

Q: Then you came to this country, obviously. Under what circumstances?

A: 1956, it was.

Q: What made you come here?

A: Well, what made me come here is a lot of things. The thing that made me come here, mainly, is we had an ambush, by Arabs. We were eight people...I had a fantastic job in Israel. I built one of the biggest irrigation plants in the world. I had a part in that. In fact, Leo visits me up there.

Q: Leo?

A: Leo Gross. Leo Gross in Minneapolis. Leo Gross that owns G & K! You don't know Leo Gross? Who doesn't know Leo Gross?

Q: I don't. (Laughs)

A: Going through five years concentration camp, and then, in Israel at that time, you had the Arabs attacks, from the Istananim, which were the terrorists, coming in. Now remember, we're talking about '55, '54, '53, '52, '51, this period. What happened is that we went from a birthday party - I took friends of mine back - I lived in Ashkelon...

Q: At what year did you arrive in Israel?

A: In '49. So I took friends of mine, with their children, to Migdal, which is about four miles from Ashkelon. And we had an attack, an ambush, with machine guns shooting at us. And my older daughter was ten years old at that time, had a nervous breakdown. And so did the people that were with me in the truck. Because we were so far (indicates with hands) from being dead. The machine gun was not adjusted properly, so most of the bullets went into the ground, rather than into the tires. He was sitting in a valley. A truck behind us that came, which was military, they got hit. Killed three people, killed a girl. In fact, I stopped and took one of the girls to the hospital. She passed away later on. And so mainly this had to do with the ambush on us. And so the doctor said, "You have to get out of here, and get away from this atmosphere." I make it sound simpler than it really was. I'm not going to go into a lot of details.

Q: What happened to your daughter?

A: Well, my daughter, like I say, she had a nervous breakdown. She was scared to death. She couldn't sleep at night. Every time shooting was, she was out of her mind. She was the best in school, and she couldn't concentrate at all. She'd been listening to news every day. She was trembling! And the only thing was to get out of Israel and come here to the United States.

Q: Was she hospitalized?

A: She was hospitalized, yes, for a very short period of time. In fact, I tell you, when we were on the ship, coming to this country, her question was, "Is there terrorists, too, in America?" And this type of thing. But I actually came just to be here five years. That was my goal. To remain here for five years and go back.

Q: Why?

A: Because I did want to live in Israel. And as I came here, I found another experience that was not very pleasant. And the experience was that my daughter was ten years old when she came to this country. She was the best in school up there. She spoke a perfect Hebrew and German and Yiddish - which she still does. She came here, she started out with no English at all. I spoke very little English. My English was more in the professional side - looking at prints and this type of thing, but conversation, I'm still, as you see, very rusty with my grammar. But my daughter had nothing! And now she has to go with first graders, to go to school! And this was a very, very painful experience. It took her about two year and she was the best. And she just jumped classes from one to the other. But she always wanted to go back to Israel. And I said, "When you finish high school, I'm gonna send you back." She finished high school, she came home, there was a ticket behind her pillow. And she went back to Israel. She's now back here, but she lived there. And so my little one - that was three years old when we came here - then she had to go to school. We decided we're not gonna to do this. Now she spoke English and no Hebrew!

Q: So you wanted to give your family some kind of stability, so they wouldn't be living on the run as you did.

A: Right. And I'd be traveling a lot. I've got three daughters - each one born a different country. This will give you some idea. I had jobs all over the world - in Africa, in Burma. In Israel I had a job which took me all over the world.

Q: At this point, what are your feelings about human nature, having witnessed all of these events?

A: Well, when I was younger, I handled it a lot more easier than I can handle this whole episode the last five or six years. Probably a part of it ought to do when I was younger, I had to strive for making a living, and the family, and trying to reach all the "goodies" in life, because I realized, life is not forever, so you want to make the best you can of a certain period of time. The other thing, I don't have uncles and cousins and aunts and everybody else. I have to rely on my own ability to do the things that I have to do. But as you get older, and I'm sure that if this is what happened with me, it happened with everybody else: this whole thing becomes very painful. It doesn't go away. In fact, it becomes more painful than ever. You now begin to think about your brothers. You begin to think more about the children that went to the crematorium, and their faces. I sleep at night, I can hear the screaming and hollering, it drives me nuts! I have to get up. Many

nights I don't sleep. So it begins to work on you much, much more than you would say as you came out! There's a reverse. The older you get, it becomes more and more painful - at least in my case. Then you begin to think about the children. You got three children. They don't know what it means a grandfather. They don't know what it means a cousin. My friends in St. Paul are their uncles and aunts - friends. So this begins to bother you. They really didn't grow up under normal type... Fortunately, we are a very close-knit family, and there's something in our house that we have to offer: being good parents, and all this type of thing that goes with it. And I'm very lucky. I have pretty good children - all three of them. So I'm lucky from this way. So now this begins to work on you. Look, they grew up, no cousins, no uncles, no aunts, no Passover sitting as a family. If we Seder, it's all our friends. And this becomes a very painful experience. A very painful experience.

Q: I guess maybe that's why the continuation of the connection with Israel and with other Jews all over the world, is important. That gives you a sense of community, doesn't it.

A: Oh, absolutely. There's nothing with religion.

Q: No. But a sense of extended family...

A: Absolutely! People always important in our life. I believe in that! I'm a people's person. It may be something good or bad. I'm not isolated. I never lived for myself - all my life never lived for myself. I'm a little smarter today, I do a few things for myself, but my life was always for everybody else.

Q: Is that why the pain of that concentration camp experience has grown more intense over the years - because you have this sensitivity toward other people? I mean, have you come to terms, really, with what it was like?

A: Well, I don't know if there's more or less. I know that people that came out from concentration camp, some of them are literally going nuts, are mentally disturbed. Maybe because some of my work...I cannot answer that. I just can say that this whole episode of concentration camp, as you grow older, you start taking it apart more in detail. And it comes back to you! It begins to haunt you more! Like I say, you know, about your parents, about your brother. Faces come back to you! Faces that went to the gas chambers! Certain faces just come back to you! You see 'em! The screaming! The hollering! And the few seconds when they throw in the gas in the chamber before the people - the people were seized. The screaming and the hollering of the women and kids and men. You hear that - this voices! You know, I was a happy, lucky guy! I mean, I survived, and I felt pretty good about it. And then you go through a period - which I go through - you feel guilty living! You actually feel guilty! And so, right, wrong, I don't have the answers. But this is what is happening.

- Q: You judge yourself? In terms of your behavior - to survive? Is this what one does? The "survivor's guilt" concept?
- A: I don't know if you can call it "judging." I don't know what it is. I think for this we need a little bit more taking it in detail. I'm giving you more in generality. I really don't know. I don't have any labels for that. I don't know if I "judge" myself.
- Q: But the discomfort grows more intense over the years.
- A: Absolutely. There is no question about that.
- Q: How about the belief in Judaism and the connection with organized religion here in this community? Has your practice of Judaism and your belief in Judaism continued strong?
- A: Well, my kids all went to Talmud Torah.
- Q: Are they willing to hear about your experiences? Are they willing to listen?
- A: My kids? When they're small, I didn't do much with that. I've been speaking in their schools. I gave a lot of talks. One of them was in the schools. And as they get older, more and more we talk about it. As they were younger, is really no reason - nothing to talk about. My kids - all of 'em - been in Israel. My daughter just came back. And the whole subject, in Israel, she related very good to that, was what happened to the Jews in Auschwitz and all over.
- Q: Your young people are willing to deal with the reality.
- A: Absolutely. I wouldn't hide it. I think a part of my suffering was because I was bottling it in me. I always talked in generality what happened, but never about myself.
- Q: As you pointed out, there was almost nobody that one could share it with, who could really understand except somebody who had lived through it!
- A: Well I felt there's really maybe some mistake, maybe not. You know, people do not understand it. We're kidding ourself. I talk to a lot of Jewish - people - I'm not talking now about things - I talk to a lot of Jewish people, born American people, and you can feel in conversations that there's really not so much an interesting subject to them. They listen, but they really don't relate! I mean, "So what?" You know? And I don't blame it! I think it's probably, maybe, they don't really understand! They can't understand it! And it's hard to understand! Sometimes myself, when I sit by myself, when I go out on the water - I've got a place up north - and I've got a lot of time to think, it's hard for me even to understand the truth of this whole thing. Did it really happen?

Q: What about the books on the Holocaust - other than the Gerald Green story? Do you think those accurately depict the events?

A: Most of them.

Q: Okay. So you don't feel that there's a systematic effort to deny the truth?

A: Is not enough written. There is no detail written, because there's...you know, where do you...where do you find in a book that in Buchenwald, Ilse Koch took pregnant women and put 'em down against a wall and have a hose, with a regulator, and try to get pressure until till it makes a hole in your stomach? Now where do you have this in a book? I saw that! I mean, it's a whole variety of things that happened in Auschwitz besides just going to the crematorium! You know? Where do you see that? I used to carry the food for the dogs. Ilse Koch used to have a bunch of dogs. I had to steal a bone - to lick it - before I gave it to the dogs. Where do you have that? And if they catch me, they would kill me for that. I mean there's so many hidden things that is impossible, you know? What do you have about the children of the gypsies? Where do you have 8,000 Polish kids they brought in? Trucks with Polish kids! And they killed 'em all. Non-Jewish Polish kids - and they gassed them all. Where do you have in a camp in Flossenburg, where I was just a few weeks in there. They brought in Russian soldiers, what the Germans captured. They brought 'em in to Flossenburg, shot 'em, and we put 'em down on wooden logs, and they burned 'em - over 25,000! Russian prisoners. War prisoners. Where do you got that? So there's a whole variety of things is in there. And I'm sure that each one had his own little thing he went through on a private basis.

Q: Of course the propensity to hate and destroy, perhaps, others who were different, isn't exclusive with the Germans. They just carried it to extremes. But you see some of the same tendencies in this country, don't you?

A: Well, absolutely.

Q: There's a riot this week in Massachusetts, and whites turned against Hispanics. What do you think about the potential for violence...

A: The potential for violence in this country is much greater than in any other country in the world. Not of violence - anti-Semitism. Let me explain why I say that. People in this country live fairly good - the majority of people. I think it's a beautiful country. I don't think there's a country in the world that can offer as much freedom as this country can offer, or the general philosophy of democracy. But the truth of the matter is, let's take a few things what happened here. Let's follow the history here that you know better than I do! How long ago in this country was a colored person not able to go to school? How long ago was it? Was in your life time and mine. No drinking from the same fountain. Sitting in the back of the bus. How long ago? Just yesterday! How long ago was this

what General Mills didn't hire a Jewish person here in Minneapolis? How long ago that American Hoist and Derrick didn't hire Jewish people? How long ago was this that you had the Bund in this country - the Nazi organization of the Second World war? What is the name of the minister or priest that went around talking against Jews, right in this country?

Q: Father Coughlin.

A: Father Coughlin. The truth of the matter is, the Ku Klux Klan is not outlawed here. The truth of the matter is that the Nazi Party existed here. I don't care, anybody may say, "Well, these small and de-dah-de-dah..." The fact of the matter that they exist, they're working! This country is supplying anti-Semite material to the whole world - comes out of his country - they're printing it here, and they're shipping it all over! Right from this country. But getting back to the first point that I made, that this country is more prone than any other is because two things: People live here pretty good. They make a pretty good living. It's the mechanic, the janitor, the driver, the machinist, you name it, whoever it is. And what you need here is the economy turn a little sour, and have one person to go up and give the propaganda, which works all over. With 65% of the population, the propaganda works. Well, with 65% the propaganda works, the other 30 or 35% is powerless to do anything about it. And this where the danger lies here. And so you can always get the mass here much faster to go along: "The Jews are the richest, the Jews take away your money, the Jews do this..." or whatever the propaganda may be. "Look at the children, they're all professors and doctors. Why do you think they have that? Because they - from you money, from you blood." Propaganda is dangerous. You know that. The oldest propaganda is worse than bullets. So you got the material here. Well, let's take a look what happened in the last Democratic convention. They're supposed to go through an amendment or whatever, that they're condemning anti-Semitism. It didn't go through. Just three weeks ago! They've been sitting on it - for whatever the reason is! Who the hell cares? But the fact of the matter is that it didn't go through, did it? Now I don't care about the politics behind it. There is any question that anti-Semitism has no place in our democratic society? But here the leaders by themselves, they're supposed to be our next president, and all other people that we support, the amendment didn't go through. How quickly they forget, isn't it? So you got it. It's there.

Q: It could be explosive.

A: Could be explosive. The material is here, because like I say, the people more materialistic oriented. And so the values are not there. You know, let's not kidding ourselves. When I travel, and I travel a lot, I can sit in a plane and see 65% of the people will pick up the sports. They don't care what is on the front of the page, what happened in Massachusetts, or what happened over here or there. It doesn't hit 'em in the face. And so you ought to understand that the society is much easier to motivate when it comes to this type of a situation.

Because they're really not in what is really going on in the world, what really happened.

Q: It's easier to manipulate them with propaganda.

A: I think you got the right word. Easy to manipulate them.

Q: What is your sense about the future - as a Jew? Or do you feel that you've already said enough about it? Is there anything that you'd like to add?

A: It may sound paradox, what I'm saying here, because I'm living here and not in Israel. I think our future would be grim already if it wouldn't have Israel as a Jewish state. I feel very strongly about it. I think that Israel, over the years - it may now diminish a little bit - put prestige on all Jews around the world, religious and not religious. And I think that without Israel we will be much worse off. And so we have to do everything possible in our power to have our Jewish state. Without it, if we live there or not live there...

Q: My question is, we have this strong ethical tradition which is a part of all of us, it's part of our teaching, how do you react to the militancy of the younger generation of Israelis, many of whom are saying, "Let's go after the Arabs. Kill them or we'll be killed.."

A: Well, if we go with the philosophy that we are the chosen people, then this has no place. If you go with the philosophy that we as a nation, as any other nation in the world - except with a little bit different background, history - then you will find this in our society, as much as you find prostitutes in Israel. I never believed that there can be such a thing as Jewish prostitute. I was brought up...I just...just didn't believe it! It just blows my mind! So you have to live with the facts that we are a nation, and in our nation you're going to find all the things that any other nation will find - Jewish or non-Jewish.

Q: So at this point, being more moral, more ethical than other peoples is not pragmatic in terms of wanting to survive?

A: I think so. You know, I don't agree with them. This is not the philosophy that I have. It doesn't make us better with this type of philosophy, but you've got a Rabbi (Meir) Kahane there, in my book a little nuts, in a way.

Q: Well isn't that destructive to what the Israelis want to accomplish?

A: That is destructive. I don't believe in it. What I'm saying is that if you're going to try to justify that, "Look, this is Jews and this shouldn't happen," I'm saying to you that you will find in the Jews, a percentage more or less, the same thing as you're going to find in any society in the world.

Q: Okay. So your experience leaves you, I think, with a broader understanding of what human nature is all about.

A: Sure I have. And the fact of the matter is that they (Kahane's followers) go to jail, right? The fact of the matter is that the Israelis condemn it. And if you have a small group of 20 or 30 people, it should not reflect a nation.

Q: And you have confidence in the Israeli leadership to deal with these various groups.

A: Absolutely, absolutely. I think we need some changes. There's no question about it. I hope when peace will ever come, I think it's going to be the greatest nation in the world. We have the heads and the intelligence and the know-how to deal with a lot of things. So I really feel that if we wouldn't have to spend this much on the military, this country. You're always going to have some disagreement, and 9,000 parties. This is the way I think is a healthy situation - this is what democracy is all about it! Listen to people's views. And this what you got there!

Q: You see the potential for reaching peace through accommodation.

A: Absolutely!