

Interview with Henry Freier

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June 10, 1982

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HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is an interview with Henry Freier for the JCRC Holocaust Project by Joni Kibort Sussman at Mr. Freier's home, 184 Theodore Wirth Parkway, Golden Valley, on June 10, 1982. Please tell me your complete name, including your Jewish name if it is different.

A: My Jewish name is Tzvi Hersch.

Q: And where were you born?

A: July 22, 1914.

Q: In what town and country were you born?

A: Lodz, Poland.

Q: Was your town known by any other names or was it always known as Lodz?

A: During the German occupation Lizmanstadt.

Q: What were your parent's names and your grandparents' or great-grandparents'?

A: My father's name was David. My mother's name was Rachel. Grandparents, I remember only one, it's Moshe.

Q: Do you know where your parents were born?

A: The father in Kutno, mother in Sgersh, Poland. That's far away from Lodz.

Q: What were your parent's occupations?

A: My father was managing a paper and office supply company. He had his own business up to the depression of 1929.

Q: And did your mother have a job?

- A: No. My mother died when I was three years old.
- Q: What languages were spoken in your house?
- A: Yiddish, Polish, that's it.
- Q: Was your family secular or religious in practice or orientation?
- A: My father was very well educated in religion. He was a self-educated man.
- Q: Were you quite observant at home?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Can you describe, for instance, a Friday night. Did you have any special meals?
- A: Friday evening after the services the meal. Never missed.
- Q: Were your parents Zionists?
- A: Very much so.
- Q: Did you receive any formal Jewish education?
- A: Oh, yes. I went to Cheder and two years Yeshiva.
- Q: Can you describe what events you were aware of from the mid 1930's to 1941? Events in the world around you, political things, Hitler's rise to power?
- A: Well, number one, was 750,000 people in Lodz, a really big industrial town. We were persecuted by the Polacks from the day we were born. They used to say, in Polish, "Our streets and our houses." There was not one evening when I was going home -- from 11 years up to the war -- that we didn't have fights in the streets with the Polacks. When I was 17 years old I left Poland for two years. I was traveling around Europe trying to get to Palestine.
- Q: By yourself?
- A: No, with four other boys.
- Q: Can you tell me a little bit about that experience?
- A: It was a very great experience. There's a lot to say. Well, we were across the border in Polski Czesny, and we went into Czechoslovakia, and from there we went into Bratislava without a penny in our pockets. It was Friday. We went into

the synagogue and we start praying loud and we say the “Shema,” and they asked us who we are and from where we came. So we told them the whole story that we are going to Palestine and we run away from Poland, because by 18 years old you had to register to the army and you couldn’t leave Poland any more. They took you when you were 21 years old. So we were going from Bratislava and synagogue people collect some money for us and they give to us. From there we went to Prague and in Prague we were staying by head rabbi, I think his name was Professor Liebig. We were staying in his house and they collect money for us and we got money for Keren Kayemeth, too.

Q: How did you find the head rabbi?

A: In the synagogue, in Prague. (Laughs)

Q: Were your parents aware that you were traveling around?

A: We were eight children at home.

Q: Where were you in the family -- the oldest, the youngest?

A: I was the oldest. My sister was older than I but as the breadwinner I had to quit school when I was 11 years old, and started working at the same place where my father worked, very hard, and every penny what I made was taken away by my father to help feed the children.

Q: So when you told them that you wanted to travel or go to Israel, what was their reaction?

A: I was at this time unemployed because I went out from the place where my father was managing the place. He didn’t have the right to fire and hire -- the owner did -- and actually I was fired.

Q: Were your parents pleased that you were attempting to go to Palestine? Were they supportive?

A: They didn’t have nothing to support me. In fact, I had family in Chanstelhoff and coming early in the morning -- because we were going with trains from one to the other without any tickets -- there is a black Madonna cloister, and they were giving free breakfast after the services. We walked in and the Polacks were laying a cross, and it was already some Nazis, Polish Nazis that noticed a few Jews, and then they start chasing us.

Q: So what year was this now?

A: That was in 1932.

- Q: So your parents wished you well and you left home.
- A: The parents didn't have too much to say in those times. They did have some, but in my case they didn't have nothing to say. I had a stepmother and a father and seven brothers and sisters. One mouth less to feed, it helps a family.
- Q: So where did you go from Prague?
- A: From Praha we went into Germany. I was all through Germany. In Munich Hitler had a speech. I was with my friend listening to his speech.
- Q: Were you aware by then what was going on in Germany?
- A: Oh, yes, I wasn't afraid. I knew exactly what was going on. I saw what's going on. I was from the beginning and saw what would be the end of it, too. Then we went to Austria, to Italy, and in Trieste we were arrested.
- Q: All four of you?
- A: Yes. They call it Schupzstazion in Germany. They send you from station to station, from country to country, and they turn you over at the border. Then we came back to Polski Czesny on the Czechoslovakian side. The border police took us over the regular city police and the captain of the police was screaming, "You rotten Jews, why don't you go to Palestine?" We answered them, "We wanted to go to Palestine." Then we were sitting for seven days in jail. When we got out from there we went again across. Then we were traveling. We went to Paris and all over, but we couldn't reach Palestine.
- Q: At what point did you decide that you weren't going to make it to Palestine? How far did you get in your journeys?
- A: I was yet four days by water to Palestine.
- Q: From France?
- A: From Trieste. Then we were trying from Marseilles. We couldn't get.
- Q: Was it that you couldn't get boat tickets or...?
- A: No, we couldn't. When we went to Germany they used to...is this taped?
- Q: It's all taped.
- A: Well, in Germany we went to Hamburg. In Hamburg we signed up for the Legionen Etranger -- this is the Foreign Legion. They give you some money, to live for the time being, and then we run away.

- Q: You just weren't able to book passage then to Israel?
- A: Book with what? Always, whatever we did over there, wherever we went, it was illegal. My whole document what I had was my birth certificate in my pocket.
- Q: I see. So when you ended up say in Marseilles, what happened from then on? You were four young men out running around in Europe?
- A: I was running through Europe, all through Europe. We were all over. We didn't miss nothing.
- Q: And when did this journey end?
- A: That was the end of '34. I came back to Poland. We were in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia, you know. We were all through there. We went into Hungary, traveling.
- Q: And by the time you got back into Poland, by then had things changed from when you left?
- A: Poland didn't have too much to change because to me every Polack was a Jew hater. I never saw a good Polack. I was raised and born in a Polish territory where was 80% of Polacks and 20% Jews. We lived not far on Leyunov Street. That was a street about six blocks away from us, it was all military barracks, and there were nothing but Polacks around. In our building there were seventeen Polish families and seven Jewish families. But there were places in our town where there was nothing but Jews, like in Barlt. There was a concentration of Jews by the hundreds of thousands. We had 300,000 Jews in Lodz. In our territory it wasn't too many Jews, and I was actually raised with Polacks.
- Q: Did you have non-Jewish friends?
- A: Yes. I was a boxer. I belonged to the Hachor and the Maccabi. In fact there is here a good friend of mine, he used to be a champ in his weight.
- Q: Who is that?
- A: Lieberman. Mushka Lieberman we used to call him. I used to box with him together. And then I start boxing -- there was Ikaped, the name of the sport. The factory, was used to be a Jewish factory, had about 40,000 people work there, but the sport club Ikaped, there were only a few Jews in there. The Star brothers and I belonged there. And all my friends like Victor Bulchahalski, Henrich Meleskim, who came to New York, they were all members in this sport club over there. It was very well known. Karlich Kolidski lived across from my house and I was raised and born with this guy. We belonged to the same club.

Q: Was this a Jewish friend or non-Jewish friend?

A: No, non-Jewish, a Catholic. I used to go with him to the church. When the German army walked into Lodz, two days later this man was wearing a hachenkreutz, a swastika. I asked him, I said, "You?" He says, "Don't talk to me. I found out that my grandmother was German."

Q: Did you see him at all after that?

A: I saw him once more. Once when we were in the ghetto and he had a horse and buggy he came by there and he said to me, "Henry, they are killing your brothers and sisters in Chelmno with hot steam."

Q: What did you think of that?

A: What can you think? I knew about it.

Q: So you believed him and you already knew. How about your other non-Jewish friends before Nazism?

A: Never saw them, never helped me, nothing.

Q: They didn't? Even ones who had been your childhood friends?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you remember any specific instances of anti-Semitism, specific things that happened?

A: Well, a man who had a transportation company, a Jewish man, very well known, and that was already when the Polish Nazis -- we used to call them Indeckis -- they used to fight in the streets every day and he came out and was waiting for a streetcar and they killed him right on the corner and I was present. They were anti-Semitic and every day I saw it; every day I witnessed it.

Q: It was when you were growing up, even before there was really Nazism?

A: That was not Nazism. That was Jew-hating, that's all it is. A Polack was taught right in the church to hate Jews. He was taught by the priest, Father Schlinka, who is very well known, said in the pulpit, "Watch your children because Passover is coming and the Jews will need blood from your children."

Q: How old were you when the war broke out?

A: 1914 and 1939 -- 25.

- Q: How did you receive news of the actual war breaking out? Did you read it in the newspaper or did you just hear it on the radio?
- A: No, we knew all the time on the radio. The Polish Marshal says we won't give not even buttons from our coat, that's how he was with the propaganda. We're so big that we won't stop before Berlin. Even the Polish newspapers, the paper in Lodz, "Our Polish heroes are 40 kilometers from Berlin." I was volunteering to be thrown into the army, but they didn't have ammunition, they didn't have nothing, the Polish army. The Germans started firing 6 o'clock in the morning and 6:30 they were over Poland.
- Q: So you volunteered to fight in the Polish army?
- A: Oh sure thing, this time. The Jews and the Polacks started being friends when Hitler started preparing for war.
- Q: Was there just a change of feeling in the country?
- A: Change of feeling. They were dancing in the street with the Jews and every one Jew knew what would happen and every one Jew was ready to fight.
- Q: It was sort of a feeling of unity, you mean?
- A: Yes. Not such a big unity but everybody knew what to expect from Hitler.
- Q: How did your life change after the actual outbreak of war? What sorts of changes did you begin to see?
- A: When the Germans came in, the entire life changed. In the beginning, the first few days, it wasn't terrible, but then they start preparing the ghetto and chasing the Jews into the ghetto and killing. The gornerenig, they used to call it. One "tsoris day" they came in, the Gestapo, and took out all the Jews and they killed every second one and with dogs they were jumping on the kids and everything. And then the Jews started running, everybody was running, into the ghetto.
- Q: Did your family at any point think of trying to get out of Poland?
- A: My brother got out. My brother Shmuel Drory, who lives in Israel. Before the war he was a very devoted Zionist and he belonged to Hashomer Hatsair and his job was building Achsherahs in Poland. He is an agronomer today, with the Hazeramar. Chaim Levich was his best friend and they both, the whole group, came to Kaunus, and they were pulling straws, who's supposed to go to Warsaw and build up the fight.
- Q: And Levich won that one?

- A: Levich ‘won’ that one, and my brother married his fiancée.
- Q: What did the rest of your family do, then? Did they even think to try and leave or was it too late by then?
- A: No, it was too late by then and they were evacuated to Majdanek. First they came to and from Czestochowa, they took them to Majdanek, and the whole family died, except the one brother in Israel and one here who is in Minneapolis.
- Q: All died during the war?
- A: All were killed during the war. My stepmother, my sisters, one sister was married, and she with her children and her husband and the whole family.
- Q: What was the family name?
- A: Rosenfeld, in Czestochowa.
- Q: So can you describe to me when the Germans started getting you organized to go into the ghetto, what the procedure was like?
- A: Going into the ghetto? Thousands and thousands of people were running like wild and every Volksdeutsch, every German in uniform was chasing and killing and beating up.
- Q: Was it all at once or was this over a period of days or weeks?
- A: A period of days. Three hundred thousand people takes time to get in there. There was a lot of killings at this time. I took my furniture and I got a horse and driving out from my street -- I was married at this time and I lived not far away from Legionanstrasse. It was a very nice street and in the same house a rabbi, a very big rabbi, lived there too. Driving out, a Volksdeutsch took away all the furniture with the horses, with the buggies, with the guy who I hired.
- Q: Now by this time, this was you and your wife?
- A: Me and my wife. My first wife, not this one.
- Q: What was her name?
- A: Ann.
- Q: Did you have any children?

- A: (Whispers) Later, I had a son, nine months old. They were thrown in a fire at Auschwitz.
- Q: Oh my God. Well, you and your wife, then, you moved into the ghetto. And you lived there for how long?
- A: Until 1944.
- Q: Were you working there?
- A: Yeah. My job was to prepare the potatoes and watch the potatoes all the time. I was a watchman.
- Q: Was your wife working?
- A: Yes. My job was preparing. We had people working, digging out the ditches and putting straw and putting potatoes, and covering them up with straw, then put sand on it and keep them through the winter, that the rations should last through the whole time. I remember one October came in hundreds of tons of potatoes during daytime; it was warm at night and came a frost and all the potatoes got frozen and rotten. We dugged out ditches and put lime on it. People were starving from hunger, and they were going over the fence and digging out those rotten potatoes and the peelings and cleaning and eating it. You could see hundreds of people walking in the ghetto swollen from hunger, all crawling. I witnessed all the evacuations, you know.
- Q: Yes, we'll get to that in just a minute. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the ghetto. Did you observe any Jewish holidays during that time? Can you describe in the Lodz ghetto were there schools set up, orchestras, any other?
- A: Yes, in the beginning, yes. It was all artificial, by Chaim Rumkowski with his clique, run. He taught the old men that he was an emperor. In fact I have pictures of him right here, and I have the letter of the ghetto, I have his picture here, too. We had concerts in the beginning. We had very good musicians. We had intellectuals, a lot of them. There were some schools, but not for a long time. Then come the first evacuation. They were going to send the people to other places to work.
- Q: Had you heard at all about the other ghettos? Did you get news when you were in the ghetto? How did you get news?
- A: People.
- Q: People coming in and out?
- A: Well, let's say that I had connections.

- Q: Okay. So you did hear that there were other ghettos, you had heard of the Warsaw ghetto, specific ones?
- A: Oh, sure. I knew a very prominent man in the ghetto. The name was David Gertler, who is very well known, in all the books written up. He was an agent of the Gestapo.
- Q: Did you know that at the time?
- A: Yes. It happened that I knew him from before the war and he helped me a lot. He saved my life.
- Q: Can you describe it to me?
- A: Well when I worked in the ghetto, I opened a little store with my present wife's mother and we used to smuggle food.
- Q: So it was a food store?
- A: Well, cheese, butter, other things. That was right in the beginning of the ghetto. My wife worked in there, I, and my present wife's mother. We had it together. That was at the corner of Melinarskaa and Zherjiska. Upstairs my brother-in-law lived and I lived across the street, and we opened a little store downstairs. We had a lot of smuggled merchandise in there, food, nothing else, and one morning when we opened up there, about 10:00, the kriminalpolizei came in, and they took me, and they took everything out from the store. They took me up there, and they gave me a good "lesson." I got ten on one side, ten on the other side, and I could hardly move. My wife run to David Gertler to save me, and he got me out at once.
- Q: Why did he? He was a friend?
- A: He was a friend of my relative, my present wife's father. He was a very fine man before the war, you know. He was a fine man even during the ghetto time. Officially he was an agent for the Gestapo, but he did a lot of good for Jews.
- Q: Can you describe to me where you lived in the ghetto, what your place was like?
- A: One room.
- Q: Furniture?
- A: Yes, I had some -- a bed. You didn't need too much. Two beds we had there. In one bed was sleeping my wife and me, and the other bed was my wife's sister and

my present wife and another sister. So in one room we were living and sleeping five people. You couldn't even turn around.

Q: Did you share a bathroom or kitchen?

A: What bathroom? The bathrooms were outside. The kitchen was a little kitchen on the side where we were staying and that's all. You didn't have much to cook.

Q: At that time did you still have family photographs, anything special? Artwork? Candlesticks?

A: Candlesticks we didn't have. But we did have a lot of things what we brought into the ghetto.

Q: Do you have any of these things today?

A: No, not even a picture. I've got pictures from Israel after the war from my family which were taken before the war.

Q: Can you tell me now about the deportations, when did they start?

A: I can't recall exactly the year.

Q: How about the season -- winter -- summer?

A: The first one started with the children and with the hospitals, liquidating. They took them out on those trucks and they took them to Chelmno.

Q: What did they tell you they were going to be doing?

A: They are going to work. They are going to other towns, to work.

Q: Children?

A: Yes. I will tell you what I witnessed. In fact I caught the same man who was next to the chief of the Gestapo. The chief of the Gestapo, his name was Fuchs, but this man, his name was Alfred Stromberg. What I witnessed with my own eyes, he killed, I will say, over a hundred people, and when I caught him I brought witnesses who testified together with me what kind of killing he was doing. Like I witnessed at one episode, there was a Mrs. Chomberg, a beautiful blonde woman with a daughter who was 11 years old. I knew her husband, Dr. Chomberg, who was a captain in the Polish army, because he was a good doctor. He never came back. So she was in the ghetto with her daughter. Everybody had to have a certificate of work that he's working, otherwise they took them.

Q: Starting at what age?

- A: They start with babies up to 11, 15 years. Whoever was walking in the street was stopped. It was in July. It was very hot and Alfred Stromberg was staying in, dirty boots, tall man, blond. They took Mrs. Chomberg's daughter -- she didn't have the certificate that she was working -- they took her on the truck to "out", so the mother ran with this certificate of work to this Alfred Stromberg. The kid was crying, "Mother, help me, save me." So she (the mother) ran up to him and started kissing his dirty boots. "Here is the certificate. My daughter is working, take her off the truck." So he said in German, "Go away! I command you!" So she got up and said, "Go ahead and kill me." So she kneeled down and he raised her blonde, beautiful hair, and he put a bullet in her brains and I was watching it.
- Q: And they took the little girl away?
- A: And the girl was screaming, "Mama, help me," and I will never forget this. I witnessed another story on Brezhinka 30-something, where a girl, he was chasing her up on the roof.
- Q: The same man?
- A: The same Gestapo man, Alfred Stromberg. The girl was hiding behind a chimney. He walked up there and put a bullet in her right there. He took a woman from the same house, and she was in a nightgown and she said, "Let me put on a dress." He pulls out a gun and kills her.
- Q: And you were witness to this?
- A: Yes. He walked in Andrarovska, was a hospital. People were trying to get out from the hospital because they knew where they were going. My present wife worked in this hospital. She got hysterical -- she was trying, babies to keep, over the fence, to save the kids. He came in Chaim Rumkowski's carriage, with the horse, with a machine gun, and start firing on the people.
- Q: Since you were a witness to these incidents, did you ever get a chance to testify against this man after the war?
- A: After the war I was liberated on the Austrian border, Laufen. The camp was Liebna, and I start working in this time for the CIC.
- Q: Well before we get into this, I want to do a little bit chronologically so we don't get lost.
- A: I want you to know what happened with the man. That's what I'm coming o. Walking in the street of Laufen I walk with my brother-in-law, who lives in Minneapolis. He looked at the man and he said, "Henry, do you remember him? This is Alfred Stromberg." I said, "You're kidding."

Q: You just recognized him on the street?

A: Right on the street. So I walked up and I said, "Alfred, is it you?" He said, "No, that's my brother." The minute he said that, I grabbed him. My brother-in-law, we were strong men at this time and we took him up to the CIC, which is today's CIA. And we brought a girl from a town not far away, and she testified what she saw with her own eyes, how he killed her father and her father's brother, Melich and Osher Kohn, from Lizmanstadt ghetto, known persons. I testified how many he killed. From Nuremberg, prosecutors came down to listen to the whole testimony. During lunchtime, the chief of the CIA says, "Henry, you can do with him whatever you want, but don't kill him, he has to stand trial." So we give him a very good "lesson." He was two months in hospital after. And then they sent him to Poland, the place where they committed the crime. He was hanging for a whole week in Lodz, in the ghetto.

Q: Is that justice?

A: Not enough. Not enough. To me, not one German is innocent.

Q: To get back now to the ghetto, can you tell me about the circumstances of your deportation? You say first they took the children and the people from the hospitals, and then how did they go about with the selections?

A: The selections? One time they took out 66 -- this time when they took out the first "auselung", when I heard about Chelmno and when he said to me, "They are killing your brothers with hot steam."

Q: Did you know what he meant?

A: Oh yes. Next few days, all the belongings that the people took with them came back to the ghetto.

Q: Was there any explanation? Did anybody say anything?

A: Who could say anything? The Jews were going to the fires like sheep. There was no resistance and if anybody was ready to resist, he's have nobody to help.

Q: This was the Lodz ghetto now?

A: That was in the Lodz ghetto, in fact Osher and Melich Kohn who were killed by Stromberg, they came and they wanted to start something because they knew what's going on. We knew exactly what was going on in Warsaw, in Warsaw was fighting at this time already. We knew who the Gestapo man, Heller was a Jewish Gestapo man over there, we heard a lot about him.

- Q: So you don't remember any specific resistance in your ghetto?
- A: No, there was never resistance in Lodz ghetto.
- Q: Do you remember then when you were actually transported from the ghetto? Who you were with?
- A: With my wife and my son.
- Q: This was a baby son now?
- A: Yes. We went to Auschwitz.
- Q: Well, did the Germans come into your apartment one day and say you have to go? Did you get a letter?
- A: No letter. They come and they'd clean out the building.
- Q: Did you take anything with you?
- A: Oh yes, they told you to take as much as you can.
- Q: What did they do with the belongings?
- A: Women were sitting and opening every garment, and they found diamonds, and they found dollars in there, gold.
- Q: German women are you talking about?
- A: Jews in the ghetto were working there under the watch eyes of the Sonderkommando and the Gestapo, and they were opening every piece of garment and looking for valuables.
- Q: So when your day came to be transported, you all went down to the trains?
- A: What train? First we went on horse and buggies and then the trucks.
- Q: To where?
- A: To the train. We were going for 24 hours without any food. And it was hot. No toilet, nothing at all. Coming into Birkenau, that's part of Auschwitz, there were a few men who knew me, who were unloading the trains. They were clearly the big shots and they saw my wife carrying the baby. They said to me, "Henry, take away the baby, give it to an old lady, because this kid is going right into the fire."
- Q: How would it have helped to give it to an old lady?

- A: Well the old lady went into the fire, too. They were selecting. Mengele was standing there with the big shots there and they were selecting.
- Q: So you saw Mengele?
- A: Oh sure.
- Q: Do you remember who the other people were who were doing the selections there?
- A: I don't remember. Mengele everybody knew. Everybody knew about it.
- Q: He was already notorious.
- A: There was in the Strasselager 11 in Auschwitz was a Palich who was practicing on the most beautiful girls from his gun. They were throwing her in the air and he was practicing shooting.
- Q: This is incredible.
- A: If I could tell you everything even from the ghetto what went on -- it's indescribable.
- Q: What happened then during the selection? You lost your son then?
- A: Yes, the next day. It happened that from my town, people worked in this department in the gas chambers and unloading. So they told me that they throw my son in the fire.
- Q: Were you separated from your wife right when you came in?
- A: Yes, when we came there we were separated.
- Q: Can you describe to me what the process was like, when you first get off the trains and you're at Birkenau?
- A: You get off the train, men here, women there, then the Mengele stays with the whole bunch and they select. The old people go one way with the children, the women go one way and the men go one way.
- Q: So you were separated from your wife, and the men went a certain way, and before it got to be your turn, did you think they were going to let you through? Were you quite healthy?
- A: I was healthy, very healthy. If you wanted to see a picture, I can show you.

- Q: I'd love to see a picture. Maybe afterwards we'll take a look. So you then were selected and then what happened?
- A: Then we went to the sauna. They cleaned you up with the razors -- one razor for 100 people -- they didn't shave, they were scrubbing off the hair or tearing out the hair. Then they gave you Lysol all over you to wash you up. Then we went to Ziganelager.
- Q: The gypsy camp?
- A: Yes. The gypsy camp two days before all the gypsies were gassed, and we went in -- I was in lager barrack 22.
- Q: Were some of your friends still with you then?
- A: Yes, they're here in Minneapolis.
- Q: Who were some of the people?
- A: My present brother-in-law. Oh, there are quite a few here who were with me together.
- Q: You were describing what it was like, how you got into the gypsy camp before the gypsies were gassed. Were those Polish gypsies, or from all over?
- A: That I can't tell you because I don't know what kind of gypsies they were. Gypsies usually are not Polish over there. Gypsies they are from all over, you know.
- Q: You were with some people who you say now are even here with you?
- A: Oh sure. In fact, here's a man who saved my life two days before liberation. The bullet instead of going in my head went into the ground.
- Q: Who's that?
- A: My brother-in-law Benno Latarus.
- Q: Can you describe the incident for me?
- A: That's the end of it.
- Q: Did you hear at all from your wife at this time? You had been separated.

- A: We went from Auschwitz to Grossrosen. Going out from Auschwitz we were passing the women's camp and I saw her and my sister.
- Q: So your present wife is the sister of your first wife?
- A: No, my present wife is my first wife's sister's daughter.
- Q: Okay, I see. So you did see her at that time. Now it was just the men who were being taken out of Auschwitz? How long were you at Auschwitz?
- A: About six months it was. (Whispers)
- Q: What were you doing there during those six months -- working?
- A: Working. I was beaten up quite a few times by the SS guards for not doing the right way what I should do. They were looking only how to kick you, beat you up.
- Q: What sort of work did you do? Digging?
- A: Whatever – digging, going out to commandos and working and pushing wagons with sand, building the highways and everything.
- Q: Were you working in the camp or were you working in neighborhood towns?
- A: All around the camp I was working. Actually, I worked in a barrack. I was a little bit watching that the kapos and the stubeneldesters don't get caught when they were cooking in there. I was watching outside in barrack 22. It happened that in the ghetto, they took one man out, and his sister's daughter were a good friend to my wife. He committed something in the ghetto and they sent him out from there. He was a very big strong man. When they took him out from the ghetto he went through the potato fields, and he knew me, and he asked me if I had a cigarette. This time they used to give us rations every two weeks. I didn't smoke.
- Q: This was in the ghetto?
- A: In the ghetto. I had two packages of cigarettes and he was escorted by police and I run over and I gave him the two packages of cigarettes, so he asked me if I can, I help his sister and his niece. So in fact when they liquidate one side of the ghetto, I took them both across and...
- Q: Across to where?
- A: On the other side of the ghetto, and there was an empty room in the same house where I lived, same building. I give them the apartment right across from mw.

They took it. I didn't have to "give" it, it was empty! There was furniture there, they took out the people and they sent them out. Before I was taken away, a day before, the police took them, those two, and they asked me to help them. Like I mentioned before, I had connections. So I says I can't help you because I'm going tomorrow. So when they came to Auschwitz and this same man was the kapo, and the kapo was your man, for death or life. He could do with you whatever he wanted. In fact, the day kapo killed Rumkowski, he killed the chief of police from this ghetto, the Jew Rosenblatt. And the night one could do whatever he wanted. So when I found out that he is the kapo at night, I sent somebody to let him know that I am here. He came out and he says, "I am going to kill you." I says, "That's so? You're going to kill me? I'd like to know why." He said, "You didn't help my sister." I said, "How could I help her, when did she come?" He said, "Yesterday." I said, "How could I help her if I'm here today?" So next day he came into the barracks, in the gypsy lager and he brought me bread, he brought me cigarettes -- he gave me back 100 cigarettes for the packages. And he said, "You're not going out to work, you will work right here." Because he had to say whatever happened, he was a big man over there. "So, what would you like to do?" I said, "I wouldn't like to do nothing. I don't want to be anything." He said, "You have to do something. I'll tell you what; I'll talk to the stubeneldester this time, and you will watch in the front of the barrack. If an SS guard walks by, let them know, the kapos."

Q: Was that considered an easy job?

A: Oh yes. It was a horse barn where 1,600 people at night were sitting one into another, squeezed. It's indescribable. The kapos were running over their heads and beating up and if you had to go out, you couldn't reach a toilet, you had to go through human hell. At 3:30 in the morning they chased you out, the kapos, with sticks, beating, and outside it was drizzling. It was indescribable.

Q: Can you describe for me a typical day -- what time you woke up, what sort of...?

A: Like I said, at 3:30 they chase you out. some of them went to the washroom. Some of them -- a lot of them -- commit suicide, went to the wires, you know. That's what you could see. In back of the barrack were the electric wires. It's very hard to describe a day. They were staying a bunch of Hungarian Jews and it was drizzling and they were praying to God, and one SS guard walked by, and he took the whole bunch to the crematorium.

Q: Did you do any praying to God during those times?

A: No. I was swearing. How can you believe in those times when they take away your most precious thing of your life, when you know that your whole family perished in Majdanek? My brother who is here, he is the only one who run away from the train.

- Q: So that's how you know what happened to your parents?
- A: Sure. I got this job staying watching and I don't know like from under the ground came an SS guard. And I didn't have enough time to let know this. But nothing happened and one of the kapos came out and he hit me over the head. So I don't want this job either. So next day the same man comes in, the kapo from the night Zonne, and he wants to know who hit me and if I would tell him he would kill him. But I didn't tell him. I said, "I don't want to stay in the front here." He said, "Well, I'll put you in the back." And in the back you have to watch that nobody runs to the wires. You have to stop the people who run to the wires before you touch the wire and you're dead. So I'm staying there and going up and down all day watching there, you know, so nobody from my barrack. But from another barrack, a guy run over and two SS guards came up and said, "Didn't you see this guy?" And I said, "No, I did not." So I got a swollen head from it.
- Q: Did you actually prevent anybody from throwing themselves on the wires?
- A: A few.
- Q: How did you do it?
- A: How do you do it? They want to throw down, you stop them. I was stronger than most of them because most of those are people without lot to live, undernourished. When I said before I worked by the potatoes, and if you worked by the potatoes you ate a little bit too. Not too okay, because it doesn't give you too much, but...
- Q: Then you worked in Auschwitz for how long did you say, six months?
- A: No, not six months, a few months. Then there was a transport to Grossrosen.
- Q: Do you know how many people that was?
- A: They took about, I think, 2,000 people. A funny thing, when we were staying and waiting for the trains, I didn't see the trains because they took us in front of the women's camp, where you walk out. On this side, were the women's and the gypsies, and on this side were the crematoriums, and we are staying there, and we didn't know that we are going to work, and I take a look and those chimneys start smoking, and the smell of meat, you know, of the flesh...
- Q: Where did you think you were going then?
- A: To the gas chambers.
- Q: So you didn't believe that they were going to be moving you?

A: No, I never believed. I was praying to God. Like I say, I didn't believe, but I was praying to God for one thing. God give me one hour to live after the war, sleep in a bed with a pillow under my head and have a good meal!

Q: It looks like you got your wish?

A: I got my wish, thanks to God.

Q: So you were transported. That was the last time then, that you saw your wife?

A: Yes. That was the last time.

Q: Just to sort of find out, did you then hear about her?

A: Well, I can tell you something else about her. When my wife came to Auschwitz, she was breast-feeding by the baby. And you know, when you breast-feed a baby and then you haven't got where to unload the milk, it hurts.

Q: I have a baby. I know. I nursed her myself.

A: So in her lager, in her barrack, there was a kapo who was raised and born with my first wife in the same house, and she begged her for a towel to tie up the breast. She didn't give her. After the war everybody want to kill her. I don't know where she disappeared but she lived through and I knew it, in camp, about it.

Q: You had already heard that in the camp?

A: In camp. Coming into Flossenburg, 2,000 men, who went to an alter commando in Neiderschlesien. The name of the town was Vistegiesdorf. There was the commandant, the SS guard, the haubsturmfuhrer, used to be a lawyer, and had a title. I don't remember the name. Neiderschlesien, where they took us, in the mountains, for the camp with the wires around, he had a speech that he is our God. The whole work is boarded up around, and he says he will be our God, for death or life. Well, it's a miracle, when we came down there we didn't have food for about three days until we reached the place from Auschwitz.

Q: This was by train now?

A: By train. They stopped, and they were going, and they stopped. No food. When we came there we got a little bit water soup and a portion of bread, maybe three slices, and they said this is for 24 hours. I finished it with one bite. It was evening and we went to sleep on bare floors. It was in the morning – I didn't have ac watch, I can't say the time -- and I had a tremendous headache and I went out to the toilet and there stays a group of people. The lagerelderster, who is a

Jew, was selecting men to work in the kitchen. I walked by and there was a German chef who worked for 40 years in Boiten.

Q: A Jew? A non-Jew?

A: A German, a Reichsdeutsch, with an SS uniform. He was the chef of the kitchen. His name was Franz Milotka. I walked by, and he called me -- "Schwartz" he called me. He said "Come here, Schwartz." So I walked up. He said, "Vos bist du." Like somebody put the words in my mouth, I said, "A metzker." I never was a butcher in my life, and I told him a butcher! But next to me was staying a real butcher who I know from Lodz. In fact we used to buy meat from him. So I says to him that he is a butcher, too. So he says he needs two butchers.

Q: And you had a new job?

A: But the lagelder didn't like, because he wanted his favorite there, his name was Schmulikl Blod, a Jew. So I started working in the kitchen and he took me in. The meat was horsemeat, hanging quarters. A butcher knows how to unhook and take it on his shoulder and I don't know nothing about how to take a quarter of beef or horsemeat. That wasn't for us. That was for the SS, this meat. We got the bones. So he told me to take a piece of meat and I take it like this around. So he stopped me and he said, "a Metzger?" So I told him the truth, no, I don't know how to work with the meat. Telling him the truth, I started being "his Jew." So the other butcher came in, too, and he showed me how to take off the meat from the bone. It wasn't too hard. There were 18 men working in this kitchen. The bones and a little bit of meat went into the big kettles of soup. I was designated to cook for the SS guard. There were potatoes and soup, and we ground the meat. So I ground the meat, and I ate a little bit of the raw meat, too. But I was, like I say, his Jew. When he was frustrated, every day I was beaten up by this man, and he was 72 years old. (Slow emphasis)

Q: And you say he took you under his arm and he still beat you?

A: Yes. But like "his Jew." First he beat me up, then he fed me. And that's the way it was.

Q: Very strange.

A: My brother was there. (Laughing) It's very strange. He knows about it.

Q: And this was now in Majdanek?

A: No.

Q: This was where?

- A: That was in Grossrosen.
- Q: And you were there, then, for how long?
- A: I can't remember. Until 1945 -- until the Soviet armies were five kilometers away from us.
- Q: Now these people that you were with, were those still some people from Lodz? The same bunch?
- A: Yes, the whole bunch. Everybody knew each other. So the lagereldester from this camp didn't like it that I got in there. The lagereldester, Jewish, Schmiel Radig, he came in, and he said, "How did you get in?" I said, "You saw how I got in. No connections." He give me with his stick a "klop" over my back. He told me to bend down and he give me a few. That's the way he was. There was a krankensteuber in there, a sick room. We had two doctors from Lodz, Dr. Mauvreski and Dr. Jakobovich. Jews.
- Q: Now by then were you quite ill, or were people still...
- A: No, I was strong, I never was ill. Of six men who weren't ill at all, I was one of those. I used to steal soups, put away and bring it in to the Krankensteuber. It was, after quite a few months -- I can't tell you when -- of 2,000 were left alive only 600. Every morning I was hearing the war was so bad, Hitler was losing. It was the Soviet armies. When we left Auschwitz, the Soviet army was staying 40 kilometers from us.
- Q: How did you know that? Just word of mouth?
- A: We had communications. In Flossenburg there were around 8,000 people. From our 2,000 was left only 600. Every morning I was carrying with two other guys from the kitchen ersatz coffee -- artificial coffee -- into the SS guards where they were sleeping, in their rooms, past the wires. They let us through and next to it was a room with machine guns, with everything, and I saw what's going on and I said to my friends in the kitchen -- we were quite a few strong men there -- I said let's get in there, because in this time they took out all the young SS guards and put in old men -- 50, 60 -- year -- old men.
- Q: Who did this?
- A: The Gestapo, the commandant from the headquarters, from Grossrosen.
- Q: And what were they doing with the young SS people? Sending them to fight?

- A: To fight. One day we had a fight, the sky was red, and they took everybody from all the camps around. When we walked out from our camp there were 600 men there. Walking in the street, with my own ears I heard one of the German women ask an SS guard, "Who are those people in the stripes?" The SS guard said, "They are Jews." So she said, "Why don't you kill them?" Then they got together from all the camps around. There were quite a few camps around, a few miles, and we got together, and all together there was about 8,000 people. We went one way...
- Q: They were trying to push you further into Germany?
- A: Further deep into Germany. So one place we couldn't get by, then, we went to another, and finally we got loaded on the trucks, on the trains. One hundred and twenty in each wagon.
- Q: By now, did you know that things were not going well for the Germans?
- A: We saw the Soviet, we heard the shooting, day and night. (Gets very agitated) It was red. We saw what was going on.
- Q: Did you feel you were going to make it?
- A: No! We were sure we never will make it. Because going out from this camp, this Dr. Mauvreski was sick. Dr. Jakobovsky died on my hands in the train. Dr. Mauvreski took out an upper plate of teeth and he said to me, "Henry, I am going to die here. I'm not going no place. Take this with you, and maybe that will save your life. That's platinum."
- Q: How would that save your life?
- A: It did.
- Q: How?
- A: Well, we were in wagons on the train for nine days. Every day no food. People were dying. We were sitting on bodies, green bellies, falling apart. Every day they open it and they took out the dead bodies and were put in the one wagon and took the people and fill it up again. I think we went to Prague and they stopped and there was a German army train going and we were staying. When they opened the wagon one of the officers asked, "What's going on? Who are they? Women were there too so one of the SS guard, he was high ranking, he said, "Don't ask questions or we will shoot you." Questions. Well, finally we wind up, we are from Grossrosen into Flossenburg. Walking into Flossenburg -- that was a German camp -- which was built by prisoners who were taken out of Waibeek and other heavy prisons, like our Sing Sing in United States. So this was criminals, lifers, death sentence. They were the Germans, the

Reichsdeutschen, over there in this camp. When we walked into Flossenburg, first what they say, every stone would be built here. Was German camps that we had, now it would be Jewish camps. I was beaten up. It was one of the worst camps. Next morning the Gestapo, the SS guard, came in, high ranking, hauptsturmführers and other lieutenants like this, and they select some people, and they give them the gray gloves and we know what it means, the gray gloves.

Q: What does it mean?

A: Unload bodies. We have 3,000 bodies from the 8,000 people who were in the wagons. There were 3,000 bodies, and they took me to unload. But Flossenburg had only one crematorium. When we unload the bodies they were falling apart. It was warm. The smell was indescribable. So we would let them down -- the crematorium was down -- but the crematorium could take only so many, so we had to dig ditches and put wood and tar and people, wood and tar and people burning. We were burning the people and sitting on it. So after we were done with this we knew that nobody came back who worked in a crematorium, but we went up there two hours and back.

Q: So when you were doing that sonder commando sort of work, you really thought that was the end for you?

A: This is the end, for sure. All of this camp was so horrible. It was in February 1945. It was wet outside. Mud this deep, to the knee. 3:30 in the morning the Stubenelderster came in half drunk, with a bunch of musicians and chased us all outside. In the meantime, the guards around threw the light and they started firing. There was no walk over there. We were staying in the mud, so deep.

Q: And they were shooting at you?

A: Ya.

Q: Were people running?

A: People were running, and they were shooting. People were staying, they weren't shooting. But how can you stay in the mud? It was cold, it was drizzling. People were dying like flies. They put a number on their chest, their registration number.

Q: How did they put it on?

A: We write it with a red marker. We took the bodies into the toilet. I saw what's going on, that we won't get through here and I have in my pocket this piece of platinum. So I walk up to the Stubenelderster. He had a separate room. Every one of them had separate rooms.

Q: Back up a little bit to the writing on. Explain that to me again.

- A: Well, somebody would drop dead, because most of them were nothing but skin and bones. So when they fell dead or he was half dead, they took them, they write their number on the chest. Then this number is gone, and they took them out. they piled them up in the toilet, and then they let them down the chute to the crematorium.
- Q: So you really thought they were just going to let you all stand there until, who knows?
- A: Yes. So finally, in the evening, I walk up to this door where a kapo stays, and he asks me in German, "What do you want?" "I have to talk with the Stubeneldester. I have something for him." So he said to me, "You can't talk with him. You have to tell me." I said, "Even if you kill me, I have to talk with him." In the meantime the stubeneldester opened the door and he said in German to me, "What do you want?" So I took out this upper platinum teeth and I said to him, "I won't come out from here. And this is worth a lot of money. Take it." He said he can't give me enough. I said, "Take it." I said I don't want nothing. I want to be in barrack and I will do whatever you tell me.
- Q: So it was the metal itself that was worth the money.
- A: Yes. Platinum is worth a lot of money. So I said to him that I won't get out from here but you will and this is worth a lot of money.
- Q: Now this man you were talking to was...
- A: A German criminal who was taken out of Waibeek.
- Q: You had picked him because he was the one who was in charge there.
- A: He was in charge of the whole barrack. There were about 700 people were in there. We were sitting four on a bunk. There were bunks two stories up.
- Q: So he asked you what you wanted in exchange.
- A: And I said I wanted one thing, that you don't chase me out at 3:00 on the morning. So he said, "Well you have to do something, you have to work. I tell you -- I'll let you wash the dishes." We used to get a soup a day, and in cold water you washed the dishes. We were washing 600 dishes, so I say to him there was my good friend -- he wasn't my brother-in-law at this time -- I says I would like him to work, too. So we were both staying.
- Q: So it did save your life?

- A: Yes, it did save my life. And finally, after being there a few days we saw a commando going out to work. They were selecting people to work, so I and my brother-in-law were running to the group.
- Q: You wanted to be in that group.
- A: Out from there, out. Nobody wants to stay in there, a main camp. That's another interesting story, because staying there...my brother-in-law before the war, his father was dealing with wood.
- Q: Your brother-in-law?
- A: My present brother-in-law. At this time I didn't even know that.
- Q: And what is his name?
- A: Benno Latarus. He is very well known. You know him and Sylvia and his daughters.
- Q: Yes, I do. I just wanted for the record to know who he is.
- A: So like I say, his father used to deal with wood. So we are staying there to be selected to get out from there. There walks up an SS man and looked at Ben and he said, "Ben, you remember me?" So he looked at him and he said "Yes." He used to come to their house and his father used to do business with his father.
- Q: And this was a non-Jew?
- A: He was a Gestapo, a high ranking SS guard. So he said to him, "You are going out from here and we'll give you a good job." So he showed me and said without me he's not going because we were all the time together with stories, with bread, with other things, with sugar. So we got a job. We got the job to work when transports come in and they go to the baths and they take away all their clothes to look through the clothes and look for the money and look for valuable things. That's the job, in the sauna they call it. Coming down there the kapo of this department saw two Jews, he start, "Verfluchte Juden," that means, "Rotten Jews, how did you get down here?"
- Q: Was that considered an easy job?
- A: Oh yes. That was a prominent job. Everybody was dancing around you. For why? Because when you come back to your barrack, your barn, the Stubenelderster needs socks and he needs handkerchiefs and one needs a pair of pants and you bring those things to them, because you have the -- you are in it, you know They give you orders and they feed you for it, too. So we worked there for a few days and the kapo finds out who put us down there -- he had to

keep his mouth shut, you know, but it happened that they sent out, after a few days, this SS man who knew my brother-in-law in Berlin, I don't know for what, and when this kapo finds out, we got it from him. (Laughs) He chased us out with sticks.

Q: So that was the end of your working there?

A: Next day there is another group going out, and we got with the group going out. From there we went to Regensburg, to the Bahnhof, and were staying right in the heart of the city. We were working there on Bahnhof, in the train station and they were bombing, and this time the Americans were the ones.

Q: You could see the American planes bombing?

A: Every day they were bombing a two-mile stretch of the central station. Everything was turned upside down, and our job was to pick up the bodies. In fact when we were working there, the planes were coming down, they were throwing bombs, and we saw the bombs coming down and we were running the opposite way. They had special bunkers and they were looking with their rifles and when they saw one running they were firing at him. Running for life.

Q: How were you feeling by then? Did you feel that the war was almost over?

A: Yes, the Americans were in Nuremburg and we were in Regensburg, a 100 kilometers. Well, one nice morning...(interruption)

Q: You were talking about being able to see the planes overhead. You were only 100 kilometers from...

A: From Nuremburg and the American armies were already there. That was already after being there for a couple of months. So one morning we got very friendly -- there was a Polack, his name was Bishik, and the other one was Tarig, and he was a big macher, he was the cook -- he gave us a job to push every day the field kitchen. There was a field kitchen that you could move around and you bring it out to the station over there and give the soup. So two guys were pushing -- two in the back -- and two guys in the front, pulling. That's what I was doing. I was pushing or I was pulling. There walked by a captain, a German from the Wehrmacht and he threw a butt of a cigarette.

Q: On the food?

A: No, on the street. So one of the guys let go the front and runs and grabs it. So the SS guard -- there were two SS guards with us -- takes the butt of the rifle and starts hitting the guy. The German from the Wehrmacht -- he was a captain -- said, "How can you do something like this on the street?" So he says to him, "Ask Himmler. Go away or I'll shoot you." Exactly that's the way he said that.

When the American army, that was the 7th army, were in Nuremberg -- it was 100 kilometers away from Regensburg, they took us out, and we were marching, no trains, to the Austrian border.

Q: Where do you think they hoped to get you finally? You have no idea?

A: There was an order that nobody should be left alive. That was Hitler's order. That I know. No witnesses should be left alive, but he didn't have enough time to kill us all. We walked about 600 from Regensburg and from other camps around and got together about 2,000 men. And we were marching and we were pushing field kitchens.

Q: This was now in 1944?

A: 1945. 1945, March. April we are marching and every day they were cutting off at night and killing. Every day we lost about 50, 60 men.

Q: Were they picking people out?

A: They picked two. I'll tell you about picking. They picked me. I was pushing the kitchen. Finally during the daytime we couldn't march anymore because the Americans were coming and bombing, so we were staying during daytime in barns. At night we were marching. I remember one of the kids got shot. The guard who shot him -- he was bleeding and he was begging, "Give me another bullet" -- and this guard didn't want to give him another bullet, and when the guard was changed, the other one give him a bullet. I remember another thing when we were in the wagons going to Flossenburg, it was in winter time, one of the kids -- it was small opening and he pulled out -- we didn't have any food and any water -- he pulled out his hand to reach a little bit dirty snow, and one of the guards shot his hand through. The kid was begging, "Give me another bullet." And he didn't want to give him the bullet. It's unbelievable how cruel, how atrocious. One morning the chef from the kitchen picked me and another few guys, we were supposed to go to a butcher shop and to a bakery to pick up some bread. This was on the march. You have to feed the guards; us, they fed a little bit, but first they were worrying about themselves. In my striped uniform I had a pocket -- they're usually on the outside, but I had inside sewn together a piece of linen -- so going into the butcher shop, I got a piece of sausage in my pocket. Coming back I divided the piece of sausage with my present brother-in-law.

Q: You two have been together a long time.

A: With another guy who is here. He's in St. Paul. Everybody got a small piece. After I was done, one guy, and he was a German, walked up to me and said, "Give me a piece of sausage." I said to him, "No, I haven't got it anymore, how can I give it to you?" This Polack, who was Bishik, who was the cook, they used

to call him the “Jewish father.” So he was sleeping in the kitchen at night and we were pushing the kitchen, my brother-in-law, I and...

Q: Two more?

A: No! By this time they were sleeping on it and there were plenty of people pushing. Haubenstock was with us in this time -- who lives here in Minneapolis. The biggest killer, the guy who was cutting off and shooting, he came up and took me down to the end. Everybody knew that if they take you to the end, it's to death. So my brother-in-law woke up and Bishik said, “They took Henry down.” So he got up and ran to the Hauptsturmfuhrer who was right in the front and he had very good connections with him and when the Hauptsturmfuhrer came running down to the end, he pushed the rifle, and the bullet went in the ground instead of into me.

Q: My God!

A: That was April 28, 1945.

Q: A day you'll always remember. And after that?

A: So after that the American armies were always behind us. Some days 2,000 were left. They split our group and when we came into Lebinau was left 157 people. I don't know how many were from the other group but from our group was 157. From 157, six were not sick. The rest of us were so sick that it was unbelievable. Typhoid. In fact Poldek, Haubenstock, was sick in bed with typhoid.

Q: But you were okay?

A: I was okay, as I said. My brother-in-law and a few others, we were all okay.

Q: And you just kept marching then?

A: No, how we got away is, there were 150 --some guys were still together, and we knew that Hitler is dead by this time. It was the 30th of April. The 29th I think Hitler was gone, he committed suicide, we knew about it, and the SS guard, already they didn't know where they were going. They heard that the Americans are right behind them, that they are here, so they run away. We were in the barn. So our group started running away, too, and we were hidden for two days. We hid, a few guys, and the rest went into Lebinau. The guards left them in Lebinau. We were hidden over there. Would you believe that some of the SS came back and looked for us? When I was liberated, when I saw the first tank, the first American tank...

Q: You were in your barn now?

- A: Out already, when I saw the tank, I jumped on the tank and there were tears and dancing and singing and hugging and everything.
- Q: These were American soldiers now?
- A: Yeah. I took some revenge too, on Germans, right after. Walking by a farm a few days later I see a man and with my brother-in-law we went in there to him for milk and he's sitting in the sun. And he was one of the biggest killers from the SS guard. So we took him, we took seven other SS guards, from our guard, we caught them, and so we took them down to Lebinau. Those 150 kids who were sick went out from their beds, as sick as they were. They were tearing pieces from them, and they buried them right behind there. After we all of us left, they dugged them out and they put them in the cemetery. But they killed them right there and they buried them there and every day they went out, eliminating on them.
- Q: So now you are liberated and can you briefly tell me what you did now after the war? Here you were out, in Germany somewhere.
- A: I was in Laufen. I was the only one. I walked in a house where...
- Q: Were you still with your brother-in-law?
- A: Yes. I and my brother-in-law and two Polacks, Bishik and Talek, we took over a house from a German Nazi who didn't come back from the war, but his wife and daughter were there. They had a grocery store. They had a collection of items and china that was unbelievable. And we were three Polacks there and two Jews and today was my day to clean the house and wash the dishes, so we throw them through the window -- Meissen -- the most expensive dishes in the world. There was a collection of stems Waterford -- we throw it out. There was staying a train with German marks. We burned it and we found out that with 12,000 marks we can buy a carat of diamonds. There were millions over there. We did a lot of destruction after. We carved Mercedeses, everything.
- Q: And then?
- A: Then I started working for the American government.
- Q: Doing what?
- A: I'll show you what. This is an original document from the American army. When they went into Flossenburg, they found a file with about 30,000 names and here's my name. This is in Polish. Frager, Heinrich, instead of Henry. This is Polish, you know. Nationality: Polish. Birth: July 22, 1914. Place of birth: not given. Name: Frager, in German, Heinrich. Date of Birth: You have here. Wife: Verhafte. He has entered the concentration camp Flossenburg under A.D.

- 8/29/43. My number in Grossrosen was 18091. You can see it here. And why I was incarcerated -- the reason for incarceration -- Jew. That's in this original document. This is one of them. And here's this leader from the Lizmanstadt ghetto -- the Jewish leader Chaim Rumkowski -- and this is the Gauleiter of the ghetto. Here you have in the ghetto, the Polish.
- Q: You know the Anti-Defamation League would love to have copies of these photographs.
- A: Why not. I have a lot of copies.
- Q: Would that be wonderful. Oh look at this!
- A: This is in Kudno where they were hanged in the street. This is not by the SS, this by the Wehrmacht.
- Q: What we'll do is when we're done with the interview, Mr. Freier, we can go through some of this and maybe make arrangements for us to get copies.
- A: I wanted to show you this is what we built, a monument in our town when I was liberated. "In memory for the American military liberation from the survivors in concentration camp. Eternal thanks." With the cross and the Star of David.
- Q: You were telling me what you were doing for the Americans after the war.
- A: Yes. Let me tell you. First we opened the Jewish committee. We took the SS guards to dig out all the bodies and bring together. We made a big cemetery, Trauenstein. Here you see Jewish Committee, Laufen, Upper Bavaria. I was president, you see. Here's my signature. And my brother, the vice president, and he's the secretary. And I was collecting money for Haganah. There is some thank you notes from CIC, U.S. Zone. The "governor" was a Jew, Captain Benjamin from New York. He was a policeman. He was a colonel. Abraham Kippel, he was arrested, and I took him out the same day. This is what I did. An official office of the military government for the Landkreislaufen.
- Q: Maybe I'll just read the letter into the tape recorder here. It says, "To whom it may concern, from the Office of Military Government for Landkreislaufen detachment H281APO403. This is to state that Heinrich Freier, former concentration camp inmate, has worked for military government and CIC since May 1945. He has worked in the apprehension of SS and war criminals and also in the trapping of Austrian border smugglers." And it's signed: "Southgate Jones Jr., Major, Infantry, Director." And it's dated February, 1946.
- A: He was the governor. Before him was Captain Buchanan.

- Q: So now you were working for the American military government and for the Jewish Committee. So you stayed in Germany then after the war.
- A: Until 1949, any trouble the Jews had, they came to me, in our territory, because not far away was a big camp of former inmates -- Einring you know and there was Lebinau and I was running this whole thing over there, the president of the Jewish Committee, supplying with food, with everything. Taking from the Germans, giving to the Jews. (Laughs)
- Q: That must have made you feel good. And you stayed in Germany until when?
- A: In 1949.
- Q: And then?
- A: Then I came here to the United States.
- Q: And did you think at all about going to Palestine after the war? You had tried so hard once before?
- A: I didn't want any wars anymore.
- Q: Did you know people in the United States?
- A: I had an uncle here, Ephraim Freier.
- Q: In Minneapolis?
- A: Yes. Ephraim Fryer. He was a rabbi, a very well educated man with three Ph. D's. He lived in Minneapolis. His wife was my father's sister.
- Q: So after the war you knew then that your first wife hadn't survived and your son as well and you came to the United States. Did you write a letter or something telling them you were coming?
- A: Oh sure. We were writing all the time letters. I could come right away if I want to I could be the first one to come here. She wrote me a letter that she would replace my mother and father. But it didn't happen like this.
- Q: How did you meet or get back together with your present wife?
- A: Well (sigh) that's another story.
- Q: It must be a good one.

- A: After the war, it was a few weeks -- I don't remember exactly, maybe it's a few months -- it was still 1945, in summer. I had a boil under my arm. I was laying in the hospital in Laufen and they operate on me and I woke up and here stands my wife's sister by my bed and I thought it was a mirage, so help me God, and I says, "Esther, that's you?" She says, "Yes." So she says, "I found out in Lodz, I was in your house, in your father's house, and I found out that you are here and your brother -- who is in Minneapolis, who lives in Golden Valley -- is in the Polish army over there in Poland. He was liberated by the Soviets and he is a very intelligent boy and they took him right away and they made him a political lieutenant." And she told me that her daughter, my present wife, is in Mauthausen -- that's another concentration camp -- and the Soviets are supposed to take over this territory over there.
- Q: That was one of the camps that was liberated later?
- A: Yes, and we got her out from there.
- Q: How did you get her out?
- A: Well, I had connections. You had to pay for her.
- Q: The Americans helped you?
- A: Sure. Her sister went down there and they both came back. So I married her and Berek, my brother-in-law, married her sister.
- Q: Fascinating story. And then you came to Minneapolis here.
- A: They have six grandchildren now.
- Q: They do? And you?
- A: I have two.
- Q: How many children do you have?
- A: Two. Sarah and Danny.
- Q: Are you members of a synagogue here in town?
- A: Oh sure.
- Q: Which one?
- A: Temple Israel.

- Q: Are there any other Jewish groups that you belong to in the community?
- A: The Center. Any group.
- Q: Do you see survivors -- other survivors among your friends?
- A: Oh sure.
- Q: Can you tell me briefly about how you felt going back to Israel for the reunion a couple of summers ago?
- A: You read it in the paper. It wasn't for us. It was good for you, and for Americans, and for the youth. I am very hard. I can take any punishment, everything. But actually, what it was, it's coming back and back all the time. I didn't tell you half what I went through. I didn't tell you nothing.
- Q: Why did you not tell me?
- A: Because how can you tell everything at once?
- Q: Then we'll have to have another session and tell me all.
- A: There is so much to say. There is so much when it comes back to you. What you bring to the kids -- when one father was heading to the ghetto, his son died, so he kept him in the cellar for a few weeks to collect the rations of the kid's card. I was there. I saw it with my own eyes. I smelled it! How can you tell everything? Something like this?
- Q: How do you feel about Germans today?
- A: The same as I felt when I was in Germany in the concentration camp. They are no good and they never will be good. The best proof is the demonstration against Reagan. America built them up -- the Japs and the Germans.
- Q: How do you feel about Americans -- the United States?
- A: The best in the whole world. God bless America.