Interview with Mr. Fred Wildauer
By Gary Stern
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is an interview with Fred Wildauer for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project by Gary Stern, at Mr. Wildauer's home on November 10, 1982. Please tell me your complete name,

A: Fred Wildauer.

Q: Do you have a Jewish name?

A: No, I don't.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born August 8, 1914.

Q: And in what town and country were you born?

A: I was born in Riga, Latvia, the capitol of Latvia.

Q: Was your town ever known by any other name that you're aware of?

A: Not since the year 1200.

Q What were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was Aaron -- or Adolf. My mother's name was Sophie or Shifrah.

Q: And what was your mother's maiden name?

A: Feitelsohn.

Q: Do you recall your grandparents' names?

A: The one side was the Wildauer, obviously, but I do not remember the first names.

Q: Any names of your great-grandparents?

A: No.

Q: Do you know where your grandparents were born?

A: They were born in Latvia, also. However, it was at that time Russia, and is now Russia.

Q: And your great-grandparents? Do you know where they were born?

A: Probably the same area. As far as I know, we hail from there. I do not know how we got that name because it us an unusual name. I don't know if somebody may have made it up because it's certainly a Jewish name and my grandparents were orthodox. My parents were orthodox in a way, keeping the holidays and a kosher house.

Q: What were your parents' occupations?

A: My father was a merchant. He had a ladies' and mens' furnishings store. Shirts, ties, stuff like that.

Q: And your mother?

A: My mother worked with him. They worked together.

Q: About how large was the town?

A: Riga is a big city. It was, at that time, before the war, 350,000 people. It's now over a million. It's the capitol of Latvia and it was known as the "little Paris." Very modern city and also old fashioned. Latvia is a buffer state between Russia and Germany, and it's located in the southwest corner, with borders on Russia, Poland, and Lithuania.

Q: What languages were spoken in your home?

A: We spoke German. The Jews in Latvia spoke either German or Russian, but we also all spoke Latvian. And all the languages were compulsory in public schools -- German, Latvian, Russian. As a matter of fact, our state signs were in three languages when I was little.

Q: You said your parents were orthodox. Could you describe a little bit more about their practices? Were they very observant, were they religious Zionists?

A: They were observant, but not very observant. They kept the holidays strict, and there were a lot of arguments in the house sometimes when the store was open, and before a holiday they went a little bit too late, because a customer was in the store. I would say they were orthodox. My father couldn't always afford to go to the synagogue because you had to buy a seat. Things were tough in the '30s. But it was an orthodox house. We children ate outside everything but in the house we kept kosher.

Q: Did your family keep Shabbos?

A: No. My father couldn't because it was a necessity of life, so he had to keep his store open on Saturdays. Once in a while on Holidays he laid t'fillin. But I'd say he was orthodox. He was very bricha, well versed. He knew practically the Hagadah out of his head. He could read, he was just standing and bubbling away. I don't know if he knew what he was saying, because he didn't know Hebrew, but he could read it and remember it.

Q: Did you receive a formal Jewish education?

A: No. I went to a German school and other Jews either chose the German or the Russian school. They spoke at home Russian or spoke at home German. Very few of them spoke at home Latvian. But they all knew the language.

Q: Were there any special times set aside when your father or your mother would give you any Jewish instruction?

A: No. They were actually a little busy with their business that they had. They had at one time a very fine business, but it deteriorated between World War I and World War II to the point that they just struggled to make a living.

Q: What events, local, national or international, were you aware of from the mid-1930s till 1941?

A: We knew everything, being as close to Germany as we were. The Germans were very strong, the Russians, they were very strong, and our radios picked up everything! When the war broke out in 1939, we listened to the war news from the Russian side and the German side and from any side. We could really compare. They were all overdoing it. The Germans were reporting they shot down 50 planes and lost one, and the other side was reporting they shot down 50 planes and lost one, so then you knew there was a battle and everybody lost some.

Q: So the radio was your primary source of information?

A: Papers, radio -- it was a free country. It was a democracy established in 1918, and it fell apart in 1939. Now it became a dictatorship. It was a very fine democracy in the early years, from '18 to '36. We had a parliament, we had about 300-some

members in the parliament, we had two Jewish parties, one orthodox, one not quite as orthodox, both very well, led by rabbis, Rabbi Neurock and Rabbi Dubin. One was liberal, one was not so liberal. But they had two parties and we voted. It took so many votes to send a member to the parliament, and there were enough Jewish votes. There were 40,000 Jews living in Riga and 90,000 in the total of Latvia. So they were concentrated primarily in the larger cities.

Q: Did you live in a predominately Jewish neighborhood?

A: No. We did have a Jewish and poorer Latvian neighborhood, but Jews in general lived pretty much all over the city, scattered.

Q: You mentioned that you went to a German school, and the next question regards your contact with gentiles, so obviously in school you had contact --

A: Yeah. I had contact with several -- we were friends. There was never brought anything up. There were anti-Semitic, little incidents, from a teacher sometimes, who called Jews "the black growth." It's one of those things. But you didn't pay attention to it, you was young. I only went to grammar school until I was 14 years old. That's all the schooling I had. We had a different system. To 14 you went to grammar school, and then you went to a middle school, which right now there is talk about establishing here in the United States. And then you came to the university. Our middle school was a rehash of what you learned in the grammar school. When we came out of the grammar school, we could read and write perfectly. That was a necessity. You could add, you were ready for life. And people that had to go out and work and could not afford a higher education, that's how far they went. I had to help my parents and so I went out to work. I was 14 and-a-half when I got my first full time job. I went to work in a factory as a mechanic. I learned from the needle, in the knitting factory.

Q: Back to the question about contact with gentiles for a moment, did you ever have gentiles in your home?

A: Yes, we did. I wouldn't say that was a routine. We didn't have much company in the home. It's the first time anybody ever asked me those questions. It was occasions that we had, but it's not like we entertain now. Most of the time the entertainment was done when somebody got married, or a bar mitzvah or something. I don't know if other people had it that way.

Q: Other than the occasional remarks from a teacher, do you remember any other incidents of anti-Semitism prior to the outbreak of the war?

A: Yes. Things started to change when Hitler came to power in 1933. There was always anti-Semitism in Latvia, but it was a <u>silent</u> anti-Semitism. People would go into a Jewish store, and if they didn't like anything, they would say, "Why don't you go to Palestine?" or they would say, "I don't like Yidden, you can sell it

cheaper," or they would even say, like that, "a Jew." It wasn't very common, but it was done. But the Latvians are an anti-Semitic folk, like the Lithuanians, like the Poles, like the Ukrainians, like the Romanians. They're anti-Semitic in this border area, and surprisingly enough, where the whole trouble started -- in Germany -- people in Germany, in general, were less anti-Semitic than the people in those countries. And when the Germans finally, in the war, marched in there, they found out that there was a beautiful ground there to get rid of the Jews, because they were in-born anti-Semites in those countries. I served in the Latvian army, and as I mentioned before, there were also some officers, they were anti-Semitic. A Jew could not get any rank, no sergeant or officer or anything in the Latvian army. The second rank, a corporal, that's as far as you could go. Give you an example. We were in the maneuvers someplace -- military exercises. And it just fell into the Jewish Holidays in September. There was an order from the top to let us off during the day, so we can go to the synagogues. There were some very orthodox ones -- used to go everyday in the stable and pray until we had a directive, because, as I said before, Rabbi Dubin was very influential in the parliament. There came a directive from the War Ministry that we should have the day off, so we can attend our services. Well, the commander out in the field was an anti-Semite and he said the hell with it, he didn't do it. One of the Jews wrote to Dubin and this officer was demoted for not letting the Jews off. So this is what kind of Jekyll and Hyde situation out there. They were trying to keep some kind of a democracy going, but then, on the other hand, it was counter-acted by the anti-Semites.

Q: Did you have relatives that lived outside of your community?

A: I had an uncle here in America, but no, the rest of them all lived in Riga.

Q: Would you like to say anything more about your experiences of having served in the military?

A: I just served eleven months in there, and it wasn't anything unusual. We were a group of Jews. In every regiment there were some Jews. And somehow the Jews always tried, in the worst way, to serve in the capitol of Riga. We had regiments scattered all over the country, as big as the country was. It wasn't very big. The longest distance was about two hours' train ride. But that was the most hated point -- way down on the Lithuanian border. My older brother, when he had to go in the army, somebody pulled a couple of strings, my Dad went to this Dubin, and they managed to keep him in Riga. He became a musician. He knew a little bit to play the cello, so they went to a teacher and he learned how to play the trumpet, so he stayed in the capitol city. I was too proud. I wasn't going to do nothing! I was going to let the chips fall as they may. Well they fell badly, because I ended up in that farthest point, in one of the worst regiments we had. But it was so far away, life just went on routinely. The soldiers were not babied like the American soldiers in U.S. armies. It was a pretty primitive way of life. There were some little anti-Semitic incidents. But in general, I would say, no. I was even put in

charge of a laundry out there while I was serving. And the guy before me who I took over from because he went home, he was also a Jew. They had a hunch that the Jews are a little bit more intelligent. That's a fact! This particular job was originally held by an officer, full time. And then it was turned to a sergeant. It was a laughable thing to do. And it went on and finally it ended up just the university graduates getting them. The man in front of me was a university graduate. I was the first one who came out of grammar school that got the job, because they thought I was intelligent enough to do it. The whole thing I had to do was just about two hours on one day and about two hours the next day, and the rest of them I could have attended all the exercises, but we didn't. We tried to string it out. If anything came along, a hike or a forced march, you stayed home, you did something about work then. So you tried to get away with it. I would say it was just a routine life at that time.

Q: What exactly was the job?

A: I was getting the laundry from the soldiers in and getting it to the laundry, have it washed, and when it came back, it had to be doled out. Just pretty much like a clerk in a Laundromat or something. In 1936, the thing started to change. Hitler was in power in Germany. The military leader, our War Minister, and another, with some help, overthrew the government and formed a dictatorship -- under pressure of the Germans. And then things started to change in Latvia. It became Latvia for the Latvians, and they didn't want to let the Jews have apartments -- decent ones. They tried quietly to suppress them, but it was not officially done. One thing that may have contributed to the trouble of the Jews in Latvia was that in 1940, the Russians marched into Latvia. They occupied Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. I think they had it partitioned off. That made an agreement with the Germans, and they had those countries divided up.

Q: That was the era of the Non-Aggression Pact.

A: Right. Ribbentrop was up there. It came as a surprise, of course, to the Western powers. To show that the Russians do not have any design to do anything to the Germans, and in turn, by showing the Russians that they don't have any design on the area, Ribbentrop decided to take the German population -- volunteering -- back to Germany. So people that lived there for ten generations -- everybody -- the ministers, the leaders in the community, everybody was working then to show the Russians that they do not want to stay. And a lot of people are afraid of the Communists. We knew what their life was like behind the Iron Curtain. So they went back to Germany. And that year, under the Russians, if you didn't mingle in politics, it went on, it was a normal life. I was a working man. My dad lost his business. It was nationalized. I worked there and I practically became <u>his</u> boss, because I was like the foreman there. But that lasted a year. The Russians came in June of '40, and the Germans came in July of '41. That's one year. When the Russians came in -- this may interest you. There was a large part of the Jewish population in Latvia that really had a hopeless way of life. The <u>sound</u> anti-

Semitism that was out there, a Jew could not get a job in a Latvian factory or in a Latvian business. It was unheard of. Maybe there were -- on one hand you could probably count them, in the whole city -- Jews that would work in the Latvian business. On the other hand, the Jews tried to employ some Jews. In our particular case, we had about 120 workers. We were only allowed a certain percentage minority. The majority had to be Latvians! Not just a majority, but an overwhelming majority, like 75 or 80 percent. So there was a large segment of the Jewish population that did not have anything to do, or couldn't find a job. It was just almost hopeless. When the Russians came in, they greeted the Russians as liberators, because all of a sudden the doors were open to them. They could get a job. They had chances. Jewish people became prosecutors, they became this or they became that. We never had a Jew on the streetcar. We didn't have a Jew on the police force. We didn't have a Jew at the telephone company. Never in an official function -- a Jew. As I said, it was not pronounced, it wasn't brought up, I never thought about it until later years. It was just not common, it was not our job. With that fact that the Russians were in there, the Jews started to have a little better way of life, they were equal to the rest of the population, because at that time in Russia it became a crime to call somebody "Jew." They had to call them "Hebrew." If somebody would swear to you, you'd arrest them and fine them. Of course, the Latvians resented that, and when the Germans came in, they were very willing to help the Germans in doing those things to the Jews. So our lot worsened because the Russians were in there for a year.

Q: Because it helped to build up the resentment of the population?

A: Yes, that's right. It increased it.

Q: You were how old, then, in 1939, when the war broke out?

A: That makes me 25.

Q: And do you remember exactly how you received news of the outbreak of the war?

A: And how! I see myself right now sitting in the apartment -- not in my house. I have friends, and I see that radio standing in the corner, and the announcement came. And immediately, we went downstairs, and within minutes there were lines at the grocery store -- people trying to buy things -- sugar, salt, these were things that we did not have in the country, that was imported. We're standing in line, buying immediately. Now we are 1939. This was the war between Germany and France, Poland particularly. I'll jump over to 1941, because that's the year when the Germans came in on July 1st. And the city was celebrating. The Latvians were celebrating, because they got rid of the Russians, which they hated with a vengeance.

Q: Let me ask you a question before you go on. Before the Germans came, were there any discussions among you and your family about possibly leaving?

A: We were not scared. That's the interesting part about this. We should have been, because I had a sister living in Germany, in Berlin. She was married, too. She married in the early '30s. And she married a person who was stateless! Didn't have a citizenship. These were people that had what they called a Nansen Passport. They were cut off in World War I from Poland where he was born, and because he didn't have any sort of identification -- and that is a very important thing in Europe to have -- that Norwegian explorer, Friedhof Nansen, he was very instrumental in the League of Nations in Geneva, and these people being issued identification all received a passport, and it was called a Nansen Passport, because it was in his name. And that passport permitted them to live in the country where they are, to travel, that they would be allowed into another country. Let's say, if they wanted to go to France, the German government, if they happened to live in Germany, would give them a re-entry visa in advance. So, when my brother-in-law came to Latvia to get married, he had to get one of those re-entry visas into Germany, and he went back. There were some excesses that we heard a lot about in Latvia, all over Europe, but it wasn't that bad that he didn't go back. He had a job. He was a furrier, working for a business. My sister used to come to Latvia once a year for sure, but sometimes twice a year, with the children which they had. Conversations came up and in conversation they said, "Would you rather have the Russians?" -- was before the Russians came -- because we knew something will happen. And she said, "Yeah." And my dad said, "Well, if I had a choice, I would rather take the Germans -- after all, they're cultural people." So my sister told him, "Dad, you don't know what you're talking about!" I still remember that. The way she said that. She went back, of course to Germany, and she kept her Latvian citizenship, which you could. She had a passport and every six months or a year, she renewed it at the Latvian Consulate in Berlin.

In 1938, things started to get tough. That was when the Kristallnacht was in Germany, when they broke the store windows. By that time, my brother-in-law had lost his job. The department store where he worked was taken over by somebody else, and he was just without a job. At that time they didn't have any kind of a livelihood whatsoever. He was not paid for his work what he has done before. Lost it all! The decided for survival -- and other people are closing their stores -- they <u>opened</u> a store in Germany. They opened a furrier shop. You have to realize that Hitler was in power -- 1936. They opened a furrier shop, and they started to do very well, because the German population was not anti-Semitic. They didn't give a damn where they shopped, at least in Berlin. I'm not going to say that, in some part of the country, like Bavaria, there weren't different situations, but in Berlin, it was a big city, and they did a <u>fabulous</u> business in that little shop that they had. That store was smaller than this room. Lots smaller! Half of this room! And in the back another half where they had the little workshop. And the Germans were wearing at that time little fur coats, so they made a good living. As a matter of fact, in 1936, she invited me and my younger brother to go to Berlin for a visit, and she paid the trip. We were young at that time. She gave us some spending money, and we went of course back. We had a

couple nice weeks and we went back. And there was Hitler in power! In Germany! I didn't see any excesses there at that time.

In 1938 things started to get a little tough, and that's the time she came home. As a matter of fact, my younger sister went back to Germany and picked up the children and brought them to Latvia. My sister stayed with her husband. He tried to cross the border several times. They caught him. They sent him back. Didn't do nothing to him, just sent him back. But in 1938, my sister came home, a couple days before Christmas. I was too young to be really concerned about it. I had my girlfriends, and things like that. I know how tense they were at home. My sister was waiting for some news from her husband because he tried to cross the border into Belgium and he succeeded. He got into Belgium. Well, 1940, the war broke out there, and the Germans overran Belgium, so he run into France. Then they run into France and he run to southern France, and finally that's where the war stopped, and he was interned by the Vichy government in an internment camp, now under pressure of the Germans, obviously. By that time the Russians have come in in 1940, in Latvia. And the only message we received from him was a Red Cross card, "I'm released from the camp. I'm on the way to Marseille, and I want to go to America." He had a brother here. But he never arrived in America. It happened, like a lot of cases, either he was killed before it, or he may have been killed by the very people who were going to get him passage, or maybe somebody wanted to get him to Africa, and from there out, and take their money and drown them, throw them overboard, like it happened to refugees right now, from El Salvador. My sister was, by that time, caught in Latvia.

Q: So now it's 1940.

A: It's 1940. When war is near, or the situation is rough, Russians like to get the border population out, further inland, particularly the people who they feel are anti-Russian -- all former officers, all former policemen, all capitalists, who they have taken businesses away -- and they were not discriminating between Jews and not-Jews, although the percentage of the Jews that were deported is probably a lot larger than the percentage of the Latvians that were deported. And the way they did it, they mobilized every single truck in the city on a given night, and they went with orders to pick somebody up. All that was necessary, that somebody said that your wife had made a statement against the Russians. And they came with a list, and they were looking for Mrs. Wildauer. They didn't care about me. They wanted her! And if I would say, "Well, I don't want to leave my wife alone, I want to go with her," that was fine, as long as they got that person that they were deporting.

Q: Did this happen in your family, or are you just making an example?

A: No. Just an example. It happened to a lot of friends of ours. In my wife's case, where she worked, her boss -- husband and wife -- they were home, and two brothers were home, but their third brother wasn't there, so he stayed behind.

They picked up the two sons and the parents, and they shipped them to Russia, in cattle- cars, very inhumane. They put in a barrel there, for their needs, and they shipped them into Russia -- but they didn't kill them. A lot of them died because some were on medication, some couldn't take it, and they ended up somewhere in Siberia. A lot of them came back after the war. A lot of them survived. Some of them were sentenced for a certain period or length of time. I don't know how the darn thing worked. But that was the end of June.

Now that made the Latvians more bitter, yet. The rumors went around. If somebody said, "Well, wait a minute now. The Jews didn't do it, because there were a lot of Jews deported, too," the Latvians said, " No, those Jews only went there as supervisors! They just like to make it look good!" The day when the Germans came into the city, the daily newspaper, was a black border around it in memoriam of the deported people. They counted them as dead, all the deported people. And whenever there was a Jewish name, it was eliminated! It was not there. There were only Latvian names. And <u>everybody</u> knew that he had a friend or a neighbor or this guy who <u>also</u> was deported, but they weren't there. So they were still thinking about it. There was a silent anti-Semitism. It's a harmless way, I would say.

Now the things changed when the Germans came in on July 1, 1941. The very same night, the German army itself was pursuing the Russians, the first groups, the Russians were retreating. There was never really a big battle in Riga because it's strategically in the pocket on the coast, and the roads, the strategic roads, lead on the bottom, so in order not to get caught, they had to retreat, the Russians, out of there, and the Germans came in, so they were in pursuit of the Russian army. But the Latvians had plenty of time! So immediately they formed those "freedom fighters" -- not like partisans. They put on that bright red-white band on their sleeves, and the very first night, on July 1st, they came up to our house. We were about a half a block away from the big building which was the Ministry of the GPU -- or KCB, what they call it now. The GPU was the Gestapo, the Russian Gestapo. It was the secret service. And that's where the last group of Russian soldiers, before they retreated, camped in the yard. It was a huge building, with a yard in the center.

Well, they took all the Jews of our apartment out. Knocked on every door. For some reason or other, in Latvia, we could see a Jew, we could see a Latvian, without even having to look at them, by the way they walked, the way they dressed. That was not the case in Germany! It was certainly not the case in America. But in Latvia, the Jews somehow stood out. And we had to assemble downstairs. I think we must have been about 25 people, maybe. And we were taken that half a block down to the building of the headquarters of the Russian deal, and there were several Latvians out there. A group of them. And kind of a high-ranking German officer was standing around. They made us clean up the yard. It was a mess. The toilets were overflowing, it was just a mess! And after we got a little bit organized there, we got some brooms, were sweeping, and one

of the Latvian officers said, "Let's take them downstairs." Well downstairs the Russians had built a little vault -- torture chambers. They are known for things like that. They built those little cells. We saw them when they were building them, and people started to talk about them. They covered the windows up so you don't see what was going on. But from the ground you could see they were no larger than this.

Q: About three feet wide.

A; Yeah. Terrible. So if we would have gone downstairs, I would never have seen the daylight, because they probably would have killed us down there. They had Latvians down there -- tortured or something -- and it would have been terrible. Thanks to the German officer, he said, "Can't take anybody down." He said, "we have tomorrow morning the photographers coming." Which saved our life. In my next period of four years, I had those happenings that kept me alive. Lucky strokes. So we swept the yard. And my older brother was there. There were three of us -- three brothers. And he swept himself out towards the gate, and when he got to the gate, he put the broom down and he walked away. I followed him, my younger brother followed me, that same way. We just went home. Now I had made, over the telephone with my boss, an arrangement. I had the keys to the factory -- he was living further out -- and we started to go back to the factory, because he was thrown out by the Russians. All of a sudden the Germans are in, and they think it's my factory. So we decided that we will not answer the telephone unless both of us are there, because we thought, "Maybe somebody will stop us and we'll say, 'I have the keys to the place, I have to go to open it." Sure enough, the next morning -- after the first night, July 2nd -- I go to the corner, there's a couple Latvians standing there. They spot me right away, that I'm a Jew. "Where are you going?" I said, "I have to go to work." "We'll show you some work!" So they dragged me back to the damn building. But there was an officer. And I said, "I have to go!" I said, "I have to open the factory." I said, "I have twenty girls, they're waiting to get in the factory." I told him he should call, but I don't know if he called, or he didn't call, but he let me go. So I went back to the factory.

Q: Was your boss a Jew?

A: Yeah. The first day we were back in the factory, in walks a German. He walked in with a briefcase, and I was alone in the factory with the workers, and he wanted to talk to me. And he said, "You know, we want you to go on production 24 hours a day. We need the merchandise." We were making stockings, some underwear, and things like that. So we got under production. And I said, "We need materials, we haven't got enough yarn to do that." "We're going to give you all the yarn you need!" Braggers, you know. "You'll have all the material and all the supplies, and everything what you need." And he went on like this, rambling for a long time. Pretty soon my boss walks in, and I introduce him, "Mr. Friedlander, Mr. --? Whatever this guy's name was. My boss was not a good Jew

at all. He ate matzos all year. Pesach he was tired of it. (Laughter) Wouldn't eat any more matzos. He was not religious at all. And on that day I forgave him for everything because he said to the guy, "Gee, I'm sorry," he said, "that you've just let me know today, because we had to let a lot of people go." And we had. We had to let that morning all the Jews go. They just had to be kicked out of the factory. And the guy says, "Oh, just hire them back!" And he said, "Well, I don't know if we can." "Why can't you? Were they Communists?" "No, they were not Communists." "Were they Jews?" "Yes." "We don't want nothing to do with them!" the guy says. So my boss said to him, "Well, if that's the case, then you probably don't want nothing to do with me either." "Are you a Jew?" And my boss said, "Yes." And he said, " And you, too?' and points at me. "Yes." He said, "Then get out of here! We want nothing to do with you!" And takes his briefcase together and storms out of the office!

I went downstairs about a half an hour later, in the shop there -- I had some parts made -- and I hear, all of a sudden, some steps, military steps. I look out the door. I see here this German, civilian -- he had a uniform on, but it was like semi-military --and a couple Latvians, with their armband. Went upstairs with rifles. And I learned later what transpired. The few Jews that were still left, the foreman or something, they were lined up there, and they fired them all, and then they arrested my boss.

Q: You mean they shot their guns at them, they killed them?

A: No, no! They just "fired" them. They arrested my boss and took him down to the headquarters of the police station. He's dead now, but he played his luck that day, because when he walked in, if he would have stayed, some terrible things happened in that police headquarters. They were really playing with the Jews out there. They made them perform sex acts. I had witness reports. I read them from a fellow whose name I took. People jumped out of windows, they were thrown out of the windows, people were shot in the yard. Some terrible things happened to the Jews out there. But my boss says he walked in there, and somebody just came in and he needed some workers. He said, "I need ten men.' So they shoved him over, so he got out of there. That's how he played his luck.

I, myself, stayed on in the factory, because immediately a Latvian was named manager of it. A German officer walked in and he wanted to buy some stockings, from him for his girlfriend, wife. And this engineer who was supposed to take over the factory was a fairly young man, and he said, "You know, I have a man here, a Jew working. I would like to get a pass for him." And the guy sends him out a pass: "The Jew, Fred Wildauer, is under the protection of the Gestapo. He is not to be arrested without my knowledge." And I went to work with that piece of paper. Had to show it many times. It lasted maybe two weeks or three.
We were walking every day the gauntlet. When you walked home, we could not walk on the sidewalk. We had to walk on the curb. Two days after the Germans came, it was on a Sunday, we had to register at the yard. People would have been

daring, maybe they wouldn't have registered, but we did. We got a "Jew" stamped into our passport – a "J". And we were handed out a star. We had to put on the star. First on the chest, a couple of days later the ordinance came that we had to put it on the chest and the back of our clothes. And that's how we had to walk.

There were people -- very few of them -- that had compassion. People would spit on you as you walked by. They were standing, waiting for the streetcar, and you had to walk on the curb in front of them. You couldn't ride the streetcar. We were only allowed to shop in a Jewish area, which later became the ghetto. So we had to walk across the city to buy our groceries. My wife is not Jewish. She stood in line for us. She was my girlfriend at the time. She survived us; all through my years in the concentration camp, she kept me supplied with food.

So that was their entry into the city. That did not last very long. Then they started to establish a concentration camp, the ghetto. They took a part of the city and fenced it in with double fence and they called the Jewish Committee. They had to allot a certain space to people. If it was a room like this, you'd probably have two families in there. I think it was two square meters per person. So sometimes they had two or three families living in one room, and they just put a curtain across or something. Tried to make it last. We walked in there and I bluffed my way into a little milk store -- tiny little place. It was a milk store, and my sister and myself -- my sister who's had two children -- and my younger brother moved in there together. My parents found an apartment. They had five rooms' furniture which they had to move, and my brother had three rooms and my sister had two rooms. They all moved into one room and a kitchen! The room was big, about as large as this, but it was a small kitchen, and obviously you couldn't get the furniture in. So the furniture that you couldn't use remained in the yard. We were not the only ones, there were hundreds of apartments that had the same thing. It was just piled up in the yard, and every morning they would go down and break up a piece of furniture and use it to kindle wood. We had a buffet that probably was forty years in the family already by that time, but it was all broken up little by bit. How long we would have lasted, I don't know, in the ghetto. They closed the ghetto in the fall of 1941. Then we were locked in. We could only go out under guard. Now we were picked up every day to work. My younger brother was caught on the street by some SS men -- several Jews out there -- and they put them on a truck and they brought them over to a place at the Latvian university and they hade to unload a car. And they were talking nicely to them. They were not hitting them, like in some places they were really very rough, but they said, "Now, you come back tomorrow to work.' So we could still go out at that time from the camp. You had to go work someplace, so my brother went there to work. And when they closed the ghetto, one man, a flunky of those SS men, would come down in the morning and pick the guys up to work. Most of the people were afraid of the SS. They would rather work for the Wehrmacht, because they thought they were nicer people. They probably were. But this particular unit was, in a way, harmless, as I will go on, you will realize. And the

guy would go out and bring them back, and pretty soon he had a tough time getting those guys together. He had five or six fellows working. The guys didn't show, didn't come to the gate. You had to go out to the gate. So my brother said to me and to my older brother, "Why don't you come along," because they weren't touching us, they seemed to be pretty nice to us. So we had to work someplace, rather than being caught. In the morning they were looking for workers, but you never know where you end up. We decided to go along. And that became a full-time job. Every morning they would pick us up, every night they would bring us back. That lasted from the time the ghetto closed till late fall.. And then they got tired of hauling us back and forth and they got a permit from the Gestapo to keep us at the place of work. They call it in German a Kazenmeirum. Which means like a "Kazan" that means "army billet.' So we got billeted there.

In the university they gave us a room, which was formerly a theater. It was a nice room. And they said, "You build yourselves some bunks." Which we did. We started out, made little bunks. Two tiered bunks. There were three of us, my two brothers, myself. There was a father and son, and there was a bachelor in there. Six of us. So we became handymen there. Everybody got a job, My brothers and myself, we took care of the mechanical things. Fixed cars, bicycles, motorcycles, repaired the electricity, we did everything. And later we used to go out in the country for firewood -- in the back of the truck. Pretty soon we became established and they were starting to talk very nice to us. They had a theory. They said, "My Jews are good Jews. It's the other Jews which are –" and they went to the extreme to give us bread sometimes, or I needed a pair of shoes, my shoes were worn out, they took is over to a clothing chamber out there, and he kept busy the SS man out there, and told me I should go upstairs and pick out a pair of shoes. I threw my old ones out and put on new ones -- army boots -- and I came down. That's how they were doing things. "My Jews are good Jews." Before this billeting started, we did go back and forth every day.

On Saturday, November 29, 1941, we came home and there were placards all over the camp. Pasted. "The ghetto is going to be moved. Everybody's allowed to take 20 pounds along." Now the people that worked that day in town, like we did and a lot of others did, were not allowed back to our families. But we were guided into a camp. You have to picture this square camp, and one-fourth of it, they divided up -- before the square there was a gate - divided it up and made a small camp in it. Moved all the people out during the day, told them, "Go wherever you want to." They moved them into the other part, and we had to move in there. We ended up nine men in one little room that belonged before to a horse and buggy driver. We had a tiny little room, a kitchen -- nine men. We lifted out the barn door. Laid it down on two blocks and we, all nine, slept on top of it. In the middle of the night, about three o'clock in the morning -- going on the 30th of November -- snow -- it must have been a couple feet on the ground and it was bitter cold, we didn't have a toilet in the house -- it was an outside greenhouse -- went outside to use the toilet. You could do it right there on the

wall. And I heard shots! Seemed awful far away! And I went back to the house. I told the guys, "You know, there seems to be in town shooting going on. Maybe it's an uprising or something.' What I didn't realize was that that noise was pistol shots, and they were muffled by the snow, and it happened right in the back of the little house on the main street out of the camp. During that same evening when we moved, the 29th, into this separate partition in the camp, they were taking the Jews out of the ghetto, out in groups, surrounded by Latvian guards. They were drunk, I heard later, because they gave them a lot of booze, and they were taking them out, into the woods -- the Bikernieku woods. Russian prisoners have dug out trenches there some time before. And out there these people had to take off, in German orderly fashion, their shoes, their coats, their glasses, their canes, whatever they had. In their underwear they went into the grave -- alive! And they were shot there. I lost that day everybody in my family! My two sisters, their children. Not both sisters in one day, because they did it so ingeniously, the Germans. By telling people that they're going to move them to another camp, everybody put their most valuable things they had on themselves. If somebody had some diamonds or money or gold or something hidden, and it was buried in the ground, they dug it all out to take along. They sewed it into their coats or something. And all their things got lost. The Germans knew that, so all that stuff they sent back later to the clothing chamber, and the Jews or Germans were sitting out there, ripping the whole thing apart, looking for valuables. We still went to work the next morning. We were picked up and we had to go to work. It was a terrible time. My wife came to see me there at the university -- like a student, she would walk through the halls -- and I met her in a corner, in a little room, and that was the first time I broke down, because I knew that something has happened to them.

Q: When did you find out exactly what happened?

A: For sure? We did not! That was the point! The Germans were so slick about it. A day or so later appeared a letter in the ghetto -- in our part of it now --that supposedly came from another camp:

"We are all well. The quarters are better here than what we had, and I'm here together….." and they list about twenty or thirty names who are on there.

And everybody was trying to find a name, somebody they knew. You have to realize that these were 20,000 people taken out, so 20 names is nothing! But everybody found somebody, a Jacobson or a Greenberg or something, and they would say, "That could be my uncle, it could be my friend." This was only to prevent the rest of them to run, because they couldn't get everybody out that night, and they didn't want to do it during the day. So they waited for the following weekend and everybody got a feeling that it was maybe not so bad, because maybe they are in a different camp. Otherwise people may have found some way to get out and hide. But people, in their heart, knew that things are not so good, because there you found the difference in nature in people. There were

guys that bribed the guards surrounding the inner camp where we were. They said, "I want to go with my family. Whatever happens to my family, will happen to me." Or the other way around, there were people that left their family and tried to get into that compound, because they had a feeling that this was the safer compound -- that bribed their way in there, and said, "I couldn't help my family." This is what the nature of the different people were. My boss, the one I was mentioning to you about, he was afraid that his daughter and her children are going to be taken, so he wanted to go into the fence and see what will happen. He put on a coat and a knapsack and his most important things in case if they grabbed it, he would be there. Sure enough, they saw a guy standing with all the outfit, they took him right in there. So he went with the first column, too. My sister and her two children were taken the second week. In the two Sundays, we lost 20,000 people. The ghetto had 24,000 people when they closed it. There was another ghetto in a different city -- Levou -- and a lot of people ran away, but a lot of people also were killed in those two days -- massacred down. That came out in the Nuremberg trial! But by that time, we knew pretty much what happened. Now this was about the time that the Germans decided that they didn't want to bother, and that's when we got billeted in the place.

The first day after they were taken out, in the morning, we had to go out and pick up bodies. There were some people that could not make it, older people. My grandmother must have been among them, because she was 98 years old. The people, they shot in columns. And the people that fell back, that couldn't cope, they shot there right on the spot. There were scenes! There was a Latvian hero. His name was Surkos. The Israelis got their revenge on him. I think they killed him in Montevideo later. Herbert Surkos. He was out there in Argentina with Peron and Peron protected him for all these years. They tried to get him out. Simon Wiesenthal tried to get him out. So many witnesses on him. He was taking babies out. He threw them out of the windows, picked them up, shot them. Just horrible, that man! He was the same a hero in Latvia like Lindberg was in America. He flew a self-made plane to Africa someplace -- an officer. So that was the time when we finally left the ghetto ourselves. And we were stationed, just six men, into that place

Q: So about how many weeks prior to those first shootings were you moved into the university compound?

A: I went back and forth every day. I was moved only after the shooting.

Q: Where is the compound?

A: In the ghetto. They took the ghetto and cut one-fourth of it off and they made a separate compound. They were all younger people in there.

Q: And you were mostly the people who were going out each day to some kind of work.

A: That is correct. They took all the people that came back to work -- most of them were younger people -- they moved them in there. Now that, in the beginning, did not last very long, because about a week later, they decided that this was still too many people. They still wanted to reduce the count. So one morning, they came in with buses. I wasn't there. I was at work. They went through the houses and the basements and the attics looking for people that didn't go out to work. They knew they had 4,000 people and maybe 2,500 went out to work. Where are the rest of them? So they rounded them up and put them on buses. How methodical they are. There was a man, he was a watchmaker, he had a wooden leg. They caught him, too, and they were chasing him to the bus. He got within fifteen feet there -- I heard later from eyewitnesses at the bus -- and then the German officer was standing with his watch in his hand. He said, "Shneller." "Faster!" And the guy couldn't go faster with his leg. He just didn't get closer than maybe this to this hallway here. And he said, "Time is up." They closed the bus and took off. Left him standing -- alive. The man survived the ghetto, I remember, because he started to work for the Wehrmacht and they went out with a large group every morning, several hundred people. He was always in front, because he set the pace of the unit. They liked him. He was a nice guy, and maybe valuable, too, because he was a watchmaker. He set the pace for the whole column to go to work. From then on, we were stationed at the university and we were there till fall of '43.

Q: So after these two weekends, did you have definite knowledge of what had happened to your family?

A: We knew that they were dead.

Q: You did for sure.

A: Not for sure, but we suspected that they were.

Q: So you didn't believe the letters.

A: We started to believe -- we saw what was going on, and we started to believe that they were probably not, any more, alive.

Q: Were you aware at that time of other events in the outside world -- other ghettos or the establishment of concentration camps?

A: No. We suspected that there were ghettos in Poland, and a lot of Jews have been killed. We saw what happened in Latvia, and we had to assume that there are some. We never knew about Auschwitz. But we learned about it later.

We were in the university out there. This was not a prison. The Germans were supposed to lock us in -- they had an agreement with the Gestapo that we are under guard -- but they didn't want to. So they told us at night, "You lock

yourself in, and if somebody knocks at the door, just tell them you're locked in." So there was no problem for us to walk away. We could have walked every single day or any time of the day away, and nobody would have known it for a while, but where would you go? Where do you go? You didn't know how long the war would last. Maybe Germany will win! Where are you going to be? Who will hide you? There were people in hiding. A friend of mine who worked with me in the same factory was stationed just like I was in the unit of the Wehrmacht out there. They walked one day away, and they both of them survived the war. I don't know where they lived, but somebody hid them out. They must have been a couple of years in hiding! As far as I'm concerned, our life was not threatened in that job. We became, more or less, valuable to them, because we did all those works.

There developed a situation out there with a man which you may have heard the name. Roschman? Roschman was a man who must have killed hundreds, even thousands of Jews. He was absolutely one of the worst. Did you read the book The Odessa File? You should read it, because it's my story. The fictional character which appears there with the name of Tauber could be me, because he went through all the camps as I did -- because somebody who was in the camp gave him all the information. Roschman is the guy who they're trying to trace down, because he was a many-fold murderer. And we had an episode with him in the same university! They had a party out there and one of our guys made a mistake out there and he spotted him. He said, "You're a Jew! What the hell are you doing here?" He hit him, and he said, "I'll be back tomorrow." And he came back tomorrow and he found us in the quarters, not locked in. Sunday morning, without the stars; we were supposed to wear them outside, but not in the room. He didn't care. He hit me. He hit the other guys. He had a list. "Where is Harry?' "Harry is my brother. He went out in the garage." Found Harry out there. He was working on a car, and they beat him up with a wrench. And he came back, and he said, 'You're all going to be replaced!" You know what that meant? That you go back to the ghetto. They will send them six other people. That we would be the next ones out in a transport. It was, at that time known that Auschwitz existed -- that that was not a good place to be -- there are smokestacks. In other words, "the first thing when you come back, you go into the ghetto, into jail. And then from then on, the next transport you are gone!"

So our SS people actually went to bat for us. They called up our boss -- their SS boss -- who was a Lt. Commander. He was an Obersturmbannfuehrer. He was the highest- ranking medical officer in that occupied area out there. Beside the point, I found out later in a Latvian book, they wanted to find him, too, to kill him because he supposedly had made some experiments. When I read that, everything fell into place, because the guys in the ghetto used to tell me, "Why is Bloedow (Dr. Bloedow was his name) always coming into the ghetto and going to the jail and picking up some people? And he's looking always for people who don't have any hair on their chest." I knew that he was with an air force officer working on some sort of serum against typhoid or something. I don't know what it was. He

probably killed all those -- used them for experiments. But he was nice to us. That's the funny part of it. We used to go out in the woods, cold days, and he asked if we would be warm enough dressed. If it was a cold day he said, "Take an army coat." We would put on army insignia, and we were sitting on the truck. I'm coming back to the same thing: "My Jews are good Jews."

He was a Jekyll and Hyde. The German soldiers feared him more than we did, because we'd make ourselves somehow useful out there, so they kept us. He went to bat for us. How far he would have gone, I don't know. But he told that Roschman,"I'd like to keep them." He had so much influence, the guy backed out. So we stayed on, and that saved our lives. That was a lucky moment. But then the unit was whittled down. Three of them were sent back. By that time they established a concentration camp outside Riga. Now, again, I was lucky. This particular unit at the university, it was a medical unit, and they got a delousing oven. Some were built in Germany. They wanted to rest it for the soldiers at the front. So they took me and the unit and a Latvian officer into this concentration camp ,which was called Kaiserwald. It was a nice area out there. My boss, at one time, had a nice home. And they had built a typical concentration camp with wooden shacks, with the boards like you've seen them in all the pictures -- barracks -- and when I was in there, there were youngsters in there! Fourteen, 15, 16 year olds who were not Jews! They were from all parts of the world. They spoke all languages. I wasn't allowed to talk to them, but they were so hungry, the poor guys. I had a piece of bread and I saw how hungry they were, so I laid it down and I walked away, and about twenty of them just tore into that place to grab that piece of bread. Now my fortune came in here. This unit needed water, so they put it next to the kitchen. The supervisors in the camp were German criminals -- not necessarily criminals, because there were a whole group of German Communists who, in '33, when Hitler came to power, he just threw them in a camp for the duration -- but there were also a double murderer, also a couple other killers in there. And they were leaders of the group. Now I was working, operating the machine, and they took one of those Communists who was in there, who by trade was a stoker in a ship, and he had to heat the unit. And the cook was right next door, and I was not allowed to talk to them, but I did. When I left that night, they asked me I could get them some tobacco. They smoked, I didn't smoke, but my brother did, and the old guy that we had in the unit out there, when we went to the farmers, he always brought those tobacco leaves and he dried them in the barn out there. He had lots of them. So the next day I was supposed to come back and I brought a whole bunch of those leaves to those guys and they were very happy. I thought I'll never see them again. But lo and behold, about a couple months later, they liquidated all those people that were billeted away, closed up all those units, and we were all sent into the concentration camp. They were going to concentrate us to get rid of us -- for good! So we realized that that was the first step into the concentration camp of Kaiserwald.

Q: What month and year was that?

A: It must have been in the early fall or late summer of '43.

Q: And was there any warning?

A: It was, in a way, because, as I said, three of our guys were taken out earlier. My older brother was among them, and he was sent to that particular concentration camp, from which I didn't know where they went! They made this camp. They had moved all the youngsters away. They left those German criminals and the Communists in there as our bosses now. And they made a Jewish camp out of it. So my brother was in there first, but by that time we knew that they were in the camp. They went to work, all under heavy guard. We were moving around pretty freely. In my place at the university, I used to listen to the BBC at night! I could go down in the university building and I'd listen on the radio at night because we could move around in the building. And all of a sudden now, they're behind the fence with guards, with towers, the whole works. And we knew it isn't good, because once in a while we went out someplace to work and we were working next to a unit that came from that camp. We were not allowed to talk to them. So they really kept them under guard. Then came the day that they were going to liquidate, and it came sudden. They came over there and they said, "You've got to get ready, you have to go back in the camp." They didn't let us go because they were afraid now we may take off. So they had one guy sitting there with a pistol, actually watched till we put our thing together. Then we were brought back into the ghetto and the next morning our names were called and we had to get on a truck. Terrible depressing! When I walked into the gate, there was a guy standing there with a pail with white paint. There was a big wide brush and he just dumped it in. It was white wash, what you wash houses with. And he went across my jacket. It went right across the back and the front. They did that to degrade you and to keep you from running away. Of course that was paint that dried out fast. Then you had to go in there and find a place to sleep. Just the boards. No sack, nothing. Later you got straw sacks, but before that you just laid down to sleep. That was a terrible, terrible let-down out there.

Q: You were simply taken on bused from the ghetto?

A: No. Truck.

Q: So you didn't have to go through a long train ride.

A: No. That was right in town! We had a ghetto maybe at the most three miles. That same day when I walked in there, I run across that cook that I was attached to. He says, "What are you doing here?" I says, "I'm here now." He said, "If you need something, you come in the kitchen." Now to have the right to walk in the kitchen in a concentration camp is just like having a ticket to the White House here in the United States. The first thing he asked me, "Do you already have a unit you're going to work with?" I said, "No." He said, "you're going out with Umbrey.: Now Umbrey was the stoker, the other guy who got the tobacco from

me. So in the morning we went out, several hundred people, and when we got to the place of work, they were gasoline storage tanks. The prisoners were putting a cement wall around each tank, in order if one of them blows up, all of them don't go. It was a very tedious process, particularly you work with prisoners, because they were half of them old women. They had to shovel that cement into that machine that lifts 'em up and makes the cement and they haul them up there. There were German craftsmen working with them, but the laborers were these poor Jews. The women were so cold. They had rags wrapped around their feet. People lose all their humanity. When they went out there, they could not make it, and they said, "Stop." "Austraighten" -- "Take a rest." They would run into the side of the road -- in Latvia the roads always have a little dent, like a little grave, a ditch on both sides -- and they would do their business there. Number one, number two, right in front of each other, men and women. Didn't bother. Came over to Umbrey and me and he said, "You know anything about technical things?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "Fine, tomorrow I got you a job." He said, " You'll be away from the rest of them." So in the morning when I got there, there was a German Blacksmith working -- a craftsman. He came from a storage yard which was about a tenth of a mile away. He came, picked me up, and I went to him. I didn't have a card, and I was working a little shed. My wife used to come from work. She would take off her lunch, get on the streetcar, drive out to the end station, walk maybe a quarter of a mile there and through the fence she would throw in some food. Sometimes hand it to me, but most of the time she'd throw it in, and that German, that old blacksmith, he would pick it up and save it for me. And I went to work there as long as I was in the camp. I was alone there at the beginning. Later they brought in about seven, eight guys from the other unit. They started to manufacture something, and I was like a foreman out there. When I was working I was okay, but when I went to the camp, I was in trouble. And that's how it was until fall of '44.

Q: You went into the camp in the fall of '43. Do you remember any more specifically the date when you arrived and who went into camp with you?

A: My younger brother.

Q: And did you find your older brother in the camp when you arrived?

A: No. By the time we got there, they had formed a group of several hundred people, and they sent them out to another area where they were in another camp that I understand was not a very good one. It was called Ballastdam. But my brother got a job like an electrician. We were not electricians but he knew something about it so he had a little shop, and he had it better there. But he didn't survive. I will continue the story and we will come to that.

Q: In addition to having the paint put onto you, what other types of things were done to you, or how were you processed into the camp?

A: We had to go through a delousing process. We had to take off practically all our clothes. We get into a shower and we got prison clothes. Striped clothes.

Q: And were you tattooed at that time?

A: No. I never had a tattoo. I was never in one of those camps. We had to take out first our things that we had in the pocket. Pictures of families, just everything thrown into piles. And the only thing we could keep is a comb and shoes. What for I need a comb, I don't know. And then we were put in the shower, and at that time we didn't have a fear that there may be something wrong with the shower, but what we did have afterwards, we had lice which we didn't have before -- after we went through the delousing! (Laughter) But that night happened something. A lot of people knew that while they were standing in line, on the other side was a woman's camp. It was just partitioned off with two strands of wire. And there was a guard in between. The men were already processed. They went through it. The women went through the same thing, so in order not to lose their things, they started to throw over a sweater and a jacket to the men. Word got around about it, and in the middle of the night, they turn on the lights in the barracks. They said, "I give ten or fifteen minutes. I'll turn off the lights again. And then I'll turn them on, and I want all that stuff that was thrown over the fence right here in the pile." They turned off the light, and they turned it on, and there was a pile -- people got scared -- but not big enough for him. He said, "There must be more." And then they did something what they called the Battle of Maisonite at that time. It's part of history, because the people in town thought something terrible's happening. It did. They gave us the order to line up outside.

Q: What was the name of the night?

A: The Battle of Maisonite from the history under Isabella in Spain, 1492, when they massacred the Catholics. That's famous in history. We gave it the name the battle of Maisonite. And we had to rush outside! People tried to get out of the windows because at the door, they were standing there, not only Germans were standing, Polish guards! Prisoners! The Poles with big sticks and they were hitting everybody that came out and hitting fiercely. Wherever it hit, the head or something, with planks, and you really had to run the gauntlet out there. We made it out. I got a knock on my shoulder but it wasn't too bad. And they lined us up and said, "Everybody back!" so we had to run back. Gauntlet again. Then he came out. "I want more of the clothes out here!" So then this whole process, fifteen minutes later, repeated itself. About three or four times that night. People were walking around with bloody heads and broken bones and it was something fierce that night, what happened. And it was done so loud that people outside the camp could hear it.

Q: Can you provide a physical description of the camp? The size, the number of buildings, about how many people were there?

A: I think we had three barracks. Each of them probably held between two and two hundred and fifty people. That's what I estimated. The camp probably consisted of a couple thousand, including the women's camp. They had another washroom which had a lot of sinks and other things where we used to shave or wash our things in the morning. Everything was cold water, of course.

Q: Could you describe a routine day from the very beginning through the day and into the night?

A: You had to get up early in the morning, obviously. There was a roll call. It happened occasionally that a guy was missing. It happened one morning, there was a fellow missing. They let you stand there for hours until they chased him down to the camp, where they found him on the toilet, sleeping. Fell asleep, a young boy, sixteen years old. They dragged him out in front and they beat the hell out of him. They beat him to a pulp right in front. They kicked him and beat him and then they dragged him into one of those barracks and they laid him across a bench, and they hit him, fifteen or twenty times, with a heavy cable. And every time they hit him I thought they were going to cut him in half! And finally he wasn't even -- just moaning. But people are stronger than I am. They dragged him out, and I thought, "The guy is gone." And about a half hour later he came in and said, "Has anybody seen my cap?" it was absolutely unbelievable what people can take, I tell you.

We had a commandant. His name was Sauer. He was a smart man. He knew that he could not supply us with food. there was just not enough to go around. But he was making money on us because when we were working on that cement place there, and other units were doing other things, he was getting paid something like 50 cents or a dollar a day for each of us from the construction companies. And he wanted to keep us going! So when he was in the camp, he did not let us be searched when we came back from outside. They used to sometimes search if you have bread, or bring something in, because we had all managed on the outside to get something. But he didn't let us be searched, because he knew damn well if we carried in a piece of bread, somebody well eat. Or salami or sausage or whatever they'd eat. But when he wasn't there -- sometimes he left early -- and the guards were out there, they would search us. And the chances some people took. There were a group of five, six guys, I think they were jewelers, watchmakers, and they had gold. Not a lot of it, but they had gold, they may have jewels or something. They always carried it handy, that they can put it away. They would stand up when they searched them, and they held that thing in their hand like this. Up there. They would search them all over but the things they were looking for -- they were really looking for food -- they had a list and if they had jewelry on it, they would have stripped them. But they were looking, really for food, because people got really inventive. They used to take a salami and put it right in front and close to the jacket, or a loaf of bread. Or you take a loaf of bread in the back with the hands, put the jacket down over it. When they search you, they usually go right there on the sides, always on the sides. You

took a chance. If they caught you, they marked you. They gave you white epaulettes. They painted you white here on top and then they didn't let you out of the camp. Now they knew that you are a candidate of running away, because you see you're the next one to go up to Auschwitz or whatever it is.

They used to have something else that they called the himmelfahrts kommando. A himmelfahrt means "going up in the sky." Who gave them the name, I don't know yet, because they're always picking up a group of 30 people and most of the time when we were standing on roll call they would tell the oldest in the camp, the leader -- who was a German prisoner, a double murderer, handsome like a movie actor -- would tell him,"I need 30 men." So they all knew what it was. That was for that himmelfahrts kommando. And he would take out the people that he either didn't like or people who had committed a little crime like taking something out, or people that were marked which he had to pick, or people that he thought wouldn't make it anyway -- older people. He put them together, and none of them ever returned. So we don't know for sure, but word was that these people are destroying evidence of some massacres or something, and then at the end, being killed themselves. This is at least what people are saying because it all the time happened. But many times, the commandant was standing nearby, or the SS there, and he took too long. And then the commandant would say. "Stop." And he'd walk up to somebody -- we're standing three deep -- and he just counts down ten, and there is his 30 men! I'll tell you, you sweated it out. They cut it off with the next guy, one time, from me. They came that close.

Q: Just from morning roll call.

A: In the roll call in the night or in the morning. After that we lined up. We had breakfast -- a piece of bread. I don't remember if we got soup or not. And then we went with the units. We assembled where the units were. We were marched out through the gates with the units, several guards around. Things were several miles away, where we worked, about 45 minutes walk. This became such a routine that it's just like going to work every day. At night we were sitting in the barracks, and got our little bit of food, tried to stay alive. We had occasions towards a little bit later when things started to get pretty much normalized. They started to get ships which had to be unloaded. Most of the times they were grenades, ammunition, but sometimes it was a supply ship with food. When a supply ship came in, the leaders of the group always selected some guys who could work and steal at the same time. They had to steal, not only for themselves, but they had to steal some of the food for the people in the camp -- to bribe the guard, whatever it was -- cigarettes or candy or chocolate or whatever it was. And they would. They would do some ingenious things. Unbelievable, the chances they took.

At the time our food improved. Earlier, before we went to the harbor, the people would steal from each other a piece of bread. Now all of a sudden we would get a double ration bread. Instead of a quarter of a German rye bread we'd get double

portion of bread. That made such a difference, that there was all of a sudden bread laying around. Nobody was stealing from each other anymore. (Laughs) Plus that the people got something in the harbor, too. But by that time the Russian army started to advance back towards Latvia and the Germans got a little bit itchy about it and they took about half the camp and shipped them into Germany -- near Danzig -- Gdansk -- into a camp called Stutthof. It was a big camp! 45,000 people in there. There was a German submarine commander, the whole Lithuanian government in there, a Danish police force -- anybody that had done something! The whole camp was subdivided into little camps and everybody had a different food, different supplies and different treatment. There were a couple barracks that were the Jews. They had it bad! The majority of the people in the camps were Poles. This is what Germany wanted to make out of them, cheap labor, give them a bedstead and a place and you got labor for fifty cents a day. But the barracks of the Jews, we had a barrack that was designed for 300 people, and they were excellent design for 300 people, for everything was room, with washing facilities. The only problem was they took in 1,500. (Chuckle) So we didn't have place to sleep. They would chase us in, too with sticks. Those were not the Germans, these were the Poles in the camp -- the leaders, the kapos. At night we would have to run and they would hit you with sticks so you get in, four men in a bunk. You know a bunk of three stories? Four in each. There was no way that four people could lay, so you had to triple and the fourth one had to lay on the other three until the lights went out. Then they crawled under and slept under the bed, on the floor, in between, wherever there was room.

And then they had a front room. They laid us down like sardines! At least there we had some air. We always tried to stay behind to end up in the front room, and still they didn't have enough room. Then they would come with a stick -- a piece of lumber or something -- and they hit a spot, wherever they want to, and everybody would pull in, and they would put another guy in there! Everybody had to lay one direction. We used to face just like sardines. With next guy's knees under your knees. And that's how we had to sleep. You took off your shoes, rolled it in your jacket, used it as a pillow to protect the shoes that nobody steals them. But lucky, it lasted for me only six weeks there. We didn't get out on the first transport when they took half the people out. We continued working. The food provision got pretty good. We all of a sudden had enough to eat. We started to look pretty good. Then in August of '44, they finally decided they're going to take us out too.

Now that was a time I was going to run away with my brother. By the way, my older brother was killed before. They came back, that whole unit, where I told you he was an electrician. They put him that night into an extra barrack in the camp. They didn't let us together, and they had guards around it all night. We didn't know why. In the morning they all came out and joined up with us. We were together in a roll call, went out together to work. At night the SS unit follows them back into the barrack, but by this time, we didn't get scared. If I

would have known what happened, I could have saved my brother's life. They decided to get rid of the entire unit. There were too many of them. They didn't have enough room. I had friends in the camp, and they would have done the same what they did with others, they exchanged them. They picked up an old guy instead, and took him out at night, and the guards didn't care as long as they had the right count. They would have got my brother out too. But I didn't know about it, I slept through it. So in the morning I heard there was about ten or twelve guys survived it. They came out, and there came one guy looked like my brother from far away -- but it wasn't him. They were gassed in those trucks, those infamous trucks that they gassed by running up a pipe in the truck, gassed on the road. The people in there knew what would happen, because a couple guys tried to save themselves and jump into the latrine, buried themselves in the dirt, and they hauled them out. They found them, and got them out, and there's all this smell and stink. They got in the truck and were hauled away. I felt pretty bad about it, because I had the feeling that if I would have not slept through it, I may have saved my brother -- the older one.

The younger one was with me all the time, and the only thing is he worked for a different unit than I worked, but every morning I went to the cook and, like shopping in a grocery market, I would pick up some potatoes, some peas or potatoes in huge kettles -- food for us. Sometimes the cook was nice enough, he gave me a little chunk of meat . They used to get half of a horse. Most of the meat was cut off already by the Germans, but there was always some meat pieces left, and sometimes he gave me a little piece, put it in there, too. Never forgot that I gave him the tobacco. I gave that container every day to my brother, to work. He had the chance to cook. I didn't need it because I would get through my wife.

There was a Latvian working out there. He was very good to us. Used to come early in the morning with a whole sack of white bread which he sometimes sold for whatever it cost him. Sometimes he gave it away. Then he would go home. At working time, eight o'clock, he'll come with a second load. There were nice people all over that helped you.

In August of '44, finally we decided -- my brother and I -- we're going to run away. Now the time is come, because the Russians are coming closer. So I had to get him back to the place where I work. I had a truck to repair there, something on the motor. I always was lucky to fix it -- I still don't know anything about it -- but I was lucky, and they thought I could do anything. I told them there was some electrical system not right. I said, "There's a guy in the camp. He really knows it well." They said, "Well, tomorrow morning, you point him out in the line, and bring him along here." Which I did. It was my brother! Nobody else knew about it.

I'll never forget that moment. There's a huge truck. Real high, big wheels. I was sitting on one fender, he was sitting on the other fender, we had this thing opened.

Instead of working on the truck, we looked at each other with, "What do you think, should we, or shouldn't we? Should we?" We were all alone. No guards. Just a matter to walk away. Should we, or shouldn't we? Should we or shouldn't we. We're putzing around for hours like that, and all of a sudden we see through the gate, the whole unit coming in there. They got a telephonagram we should be brought back to the camp. They're going to ship us.

Now we had still time to go in the barracks to say, "I have to change clothes," or something like that and take off. But by that time we'd already lost out guts, because you were afraid. So many people were running already from Riga that by the time you get someplace, a friend or something, they might be gone, too. They may have run away and you'll stand in front of a closed door. So we decided one thing. That we would go to the harbor, and if it's an old tanker -- because at night we were going to go -- we are not going aboard, because there were rumors that they torpedoed them. They threw a bomb and they sink in the Baltic. If it's a new ship or a good ship, we'll go aboard, otherwise we don't. And that night, everybody was running. The German soldiers were going, civilians were going, everybody. There was no lights, no nothing, we could have walked any moment away. It was pitch- black night and everything was headed for the harbor. We got to the harbor. There was a brand new ship standing there, a Hunter ship, it's just like American Liberty ships. Brand new. They ain't going to sink that one! It was a terrible journey. We were in the hull. Everybody was seasick! We had to stop several times -- there were submarines that were nearby -- but we made it to Danzig. We stayed there for about half-a-day, then they put us on a barge. They had hooked together a whole bunch of barges, with one tugboat. Everybody got on there -- the men, women. We were sitting on boards. They put the boards across. There were just too many of us. And no supplies, no food. They did have supplies, but they were all on the tugboat. They were not going to hand it out. They didn't have a way to do it anyway. I was lucky again, I stayed behind and they picked the last 30 men and -- because there was no room -- they took us on the tugboat. So I found myself a good warm spot right next to the smoke stack. That's how I sat there for almost the whole night. The next morning they landed in the camp. And they'd gone over, the Germans, and they told them that we have received supplies for another 24 hours, so for 24 hours in the camp the guys didn't get nothing to eat. We ate on the tugboat, because there was food. We found something.

But then we got to the camp and I'll tell you, we had a ceremony, every single day. They had a narrow little track railroad where they brought in potatoes. You had to take the whole cars and dump them out -- they're light -- and put them back on the tracks, pushed the train out of sight. Then they had to put the potatoes in boxes and put them on their shoulders and run -- not walk across the road and into a field where they buried the potatoes for the winter. They put them under mounds. And the whole population -- the German population -- had to walk there, two miles across, from the town to the railway station. If there's anybody that says they didn't know there was a concentration camp, they got a

liars, because they saw the way we were chased there, and beaten. While we were carrying, I used to eat raw potatoes right out there -- like an apple -- because of hunger. Very hungry. They hardly got any food there. Got a thin soup. That was all. And a slice of bread in the morning and a slice of bread on the way back. And a stick as you got back in the barrack. Was nothing to do. We would stand out there and actually freeze. By that time it was getting to be October. It must have been September when we got there. And about the area out there near the Vissla river, it's foggy and wet, and it was miserable, miserable.

There I saw for the first time one of those crematoria. It was a small one --just had one of them -- but every single day, almost, they took little groups of people. Mostly women would walk down. And the people knew where they were going, you could see it in their faces, the way they were walking. There were maybe ten, twelve of them, just little groups. One guard would go on the side. There was no way to run, because it was all within the camp. They would go down and they would throw in like a bullet of some type into the thing and it would explode and had the gas that killed the people. On the other side you opened the doors and there they had something like a lowering end on it, and put the bodies on, and shoved them into the oven. And it was always hanging, that pall of a smell, over the area. And this was only one. How would it be in the places like Auschwitz, I just can't imagine -- teeming with people. The people in this particular camp were orderly because each of them had their place. There was from Latvia the minister of transportation in there too. He had a separate room. A room about half the size of this one, all by himself.

Q: He was a prisoner though.

A: Yeah. But they treated everybody different. The German submarine commander -- the whole unit out there -- they were supposed to go out to sea, and they didn't want. They were mutiny. They put them all in the camp. But they got a different rationing than we did. We got the worst end of the stick. Then all of a sudden, some guy decided that he needs hire from that man mechanics. Everybody's always a mechanic. I happened to know something about it, but 90% of them didn't. They gave you a medical checkup. From here we had about 200 yards to run down. If you could run -- or walk even --you were good enough! (Laughs) And the guy came there from the factory – their representative. I must not have looked very good because he squeezed my arm. He said, "What is your trade?" I says, "I'm an auto mechanic." And he said, "Okay." Then they give us civilian clothing, because the Germans were methodical. They decided that prisoners are not allowed to work on ammunition, so they made civilians out of us. They gave us all civilian clothes. The way they did it, they chased us into a shower again, we took our bath, as we came out, we got from each pile, one piece -- one underpants, one undershirt. If by mistake there would have been an undershirt in the shorts, you would have gotten two undershirts, no shorts. That's the way it worked, one, one, one, one. I happened to end up with a pair of pants that fairly fitted me, and a winter jacket that fitted me very well. It was a three-quarter long

jacket and it was warm. So I was lucky. One guy had feet like this. And he had a pair of beautiful boots, those long ones that you lace up. One of the Polish workers there decided he liked those boots so he gave him another pair of boots. The guy couldn't get his feet in. Only the front went in. The back was sticking out. This man was about six-foot-two and he cried like a baby when he came out. He couldn't walk in them. But that's all he gets! So the friends in his cell say, "Go back and get it back from the Pole." And he did! Had a terrible fight, but he got the shoes back. Came out, dirtier than could be, went into the bathtub, but he got his shoes back! Every single day was a fight for your life!

Then we were put on the train. We didn't know where we went. They took us back to the city of Magdeburg, Germany -- that's on the way to Berlin. We got off in the middle of night. They brought us into a camp, and we really thought we are in heaven, because each of us got a blanket. All of a sudden we had a blanket for each -- for ourselves! Before that they used to throw about ten blankets in for everybody to cover in Stutthof. And he said, "Go pick yourself a bunk.' So my brother was with me. This is my younger brother. We got up there and we had to actually work in a factory, on the revolver benches where you make shells. The work was not very pressure, we worked twelve hours. But there again, the guards were stealing out food and selling it on the black market. Food was getting short. The factory was interested that we get our food. But they didn't let us have it. Then, in January of 1945, the Americans bombed Magdeburg. Damaged the factory, enough of it, that they didn't have enough air pressure and not enough water. So they took us out. Instead of work in the factory, they took us out building anti-tank traps against tanks. We would go into the buildings, pick up those steel girders and ram them into the ground and fill them up with rubble so prevent from the tanks to come through.

On April 12 -- I'm getting down to the nitty gritty -- we were working on the outskirts of the city. The Russians were coming from one side, the Americans from the other. And somewhere along the line an American tank saved my life. They pulled up a little closer to the city and some German panicked and sounded the tank alarm, which was a special kind of sound. When the thing sounded all over the city, the commandant of the camp told the guards, "Save yourself, the Americans are coming," and he took off. So some of the guards took off. We were working right there where the traps were. There was an SS man who was a nice fellow. He didn't want to take us back, he wanted to place in the hand of the Americans. He wanted to have the Americans overrun the position, but they didn't come. The Americans crept up close. They found a little resistance, they pulled back, they came a week later. So here we are in the city. Finally they decided to bring us back in the camp. Now we get somewhere in the middle of the city, and the guards are coming. One guy has a Polish prisoner under his arm -- they're taking off together. He's got his rifle hanging across his neck and carrying two suitcases. So our guards saw that, they take off, too. We're standing free in the city, all alone!

At night, we started to look around, but we didn't have any place to go, so we went closer to the camp. We see people coming out, people going in. I stop a guy, he says there was no guards. He said, "You can go back." So we went in there, we found something to eat. They had broken in all the supplies and I got a bowl of soup from a guy. I couldn't eat more than two spoonfuls. Up to here. Stomach shrunk. I stayed with my brother, and we laid down to sleep in one of the guards' quarters -- SS. In the middle of the night my brother wakes me, he says, "I just heard an announcement on the loudspeaker. We should be ready in an hour. They're going to take us back." Because the tanks didn't come, some of the guards came back, because they're deserted. And we dumbbells are sitting in the camp! A lot of other guys hid out in the city someplace, but we were in the camp. I told my brother, "Get dressed." It was a pitch- black night. And we went through the men's camp into the women's camp, not Jewish women, Polish women. And we looked. We couldn't see the towers. It was really pitch black. No moon, nothing. We pulled out a board out of a fence, and another board out of the fence. And that noise that nail makes -- that sound of nails being pried out of boards -- terrible at night! I went, like this, outside. Didn't feel nothing. Then I thought, "If I don't see them, they don't see me either." I stuck my shoulder through and I was outside. Gives you an eerie feeling, because inside you were allowed to be, outside you're on the run. My brother followed me. We went a few steps and we hid in the bushes. And after about five minutes the rest of the guys were standing out there. They all took off, and running on the cobblestones, we started to walk like soldiers -- in step. In the city, we headed into the area where we were pulling out the girders, closer to the American line. Plus that we wanted to get into the bombed out area. When it started to break the light around 3:30 in the morning, four o'clock, we decided we better get off the street before somebody sees us, so we started to climb behind the buildings in there -- over the rubble. We found a basement. We climbed into the basement.

: This is a place where a guy should enter religion, because I think in the whole city of Magdeburgt ,here wasn't a basement like this. The building was blown away from a bomb. It was sitting there waiting for us. There were three compartments. One belonged to a painter, It had supplies and ladders and everything. The other one just had empty crates in there. The third one was locked, where tenants keep their stuff in the basement. We took a brick and knocked off the lock. And <u>everything</u> was in there that a guy on the run should want! There was a cabinet with canned stuff in there, but they were not put up in glasses in Germany. Everything! Asparagus and carrots and anything! Vegetables. I found matches. I found potatoes. We found a loveseat and a huge wicker basket, like a trunk, and I made myself a bed up there, and my brother on that loveseat. We were dead tired. We went to sleep and the next thing we woke up, there's a German standing in there -- civilian. He said, "What are you doing in here?" We said, "Well, we're on the run." He says, " You've got to get out of here." I says, "We're tired." He said, " Okay, you sleep a couple of hours, but then you're getting out.' Well, it was not his basement. We found that out later. He came there himself to steal something. So he came back a couple hours later. And he

was a very gullible man. He was afraid that the Americans would kill all the Germans, so it may be nice to have a friend next door. So he came back, he said, "You can stay here, but you have to help me when the Americans come in." Obviously we promised him. He was a nice man. Brought us every day a bucket of water -- sometimes a couple potatoes from his wife. Brought sometimes a piece of bread. Never told his wife about it. And always came early morning hours. One day there was a raid. And after about seven days, he said, "I think the Americans are going to come in today." Next day he didn't come. "I heard a lot of noises going in the back. I thought any minute the Germans would walk in. A couple of times I had near misses. A couple Germans were standing, I could see their feet, their boots, just standing there looking their territory over. Then all of a sudden, that man comes in. He used to knock before he opened that gate. He just walked in to steal something. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Don't you know the Americans are here in town?" I said, "Where?" He said, "there's a unit right across the street." And as I walked across the street, there was a guy standing at the truck. Looked like a gentile, but he said to me, "Vis der Yid?" We said, "Yes." He said, "Me, too!" And he gave me some cigarettes and some K-rations.

To make a long story short, his mother brought us to the United States. It's the very first American soldier we saw. He introduced me to the cook, but after a week they left, and he left me his address, and when I finally couldn't find a sponsor here, I wrote to him. His mother was very religious, and she had promised herself, "If my son comes back from the war unharmed, I would like to do something for somebody." And then she got our letter asking to get me in touch with the Jewish organization, and the mother said, "That's for me." And so she sponsored us and that's how I come, my wife, my brother, myself. We got married in Germany. I found my wife, which is a long story, but I'll tell you that some other time. A miracle that I found her in all of Germany! But that's the story of my life, and I came to the United States in '45.

Q: There are a lot of specific questions about the camp life. You mention that there were a lot of different groups in the camps. Did you have contact between the other groups or just with the other Jews or just with the other people in your barracks?

A: No contact whatsoever.

Q: But you were aware that there was different treatment.

A: Of course. We could see that!

Q: And in that large camp, there was a small crematoria.

A: That's correct. That camp's name was Stutthof. I have talked to people that come from that area, Germans here. They all lived in that area. They never knew

about any of those camps, they told me, but as I said, the people living in that little village of Stutthof -- there's no way anybody can say that they didn't know about a camp, because they had to go by, every day they went to the train.

Q: While you were in the camp, were you aware, very much, of the war effort? Of what was going on?

A: Everything. The day that they tried to assassinate Hitler, we knew it, within the hour.

Q: Did you know when the Americans landed in Normandy?

A: That was announced. That was the Germans. They didn't announce it to us, but these were speakers. You always managed. There was news. They called them "VISA" Surprising its called "VISA" like our VISA card. It was an abbreviation for "Eden Villenlasse." The Jews liked to have news, would love to have, so they made up. We used to have rumors that the Swedes are going to come in, and we're going to be released, because there were exchanges. The camps thrived on rumors. They used to say, when we met somebody, "Anything new?" All the time. And they said, "No. Didn't hear nothing." Well thank God, no news were good news, because any news that came were always worse. Always worse. The first relief that came was the time when we had a chance to go to Magdeburg -- 500 men. It really was a drastic difference from what we had there. We were standing in Stutthof in the cold out there. In order to keep warm, we would build "furnaces' -- five, six guys would stand in a circle, and they keep calling any other guy that went by, to stand on the outside, while the guy on the outside would call some other people, so pretty soon, came like a huge beehive. Hundreds of people were standing in one mass. But inside was warm. The body temperature was actually warm. And we didn't have nothing to do. We sometimes sing something. We just start to sway, the whole group out there. And we could stand for hours and hours and hours that way. Four o'clock in the morning we were outside, and I remember nine or ten o'clock at night they let us back in with a slice of bread or so on, but never saw the barrack before. We had to fight our way into the toilet!

Q: So there was no work at that time.

A: There was nothing to do, except once in a while we unloaded the potatoes.

Q: Do you remember the names of any of the major German personnel at that camp? The commanders or officers?

A: We never saw them. They were on the outside. Occasionally they'd take us out in the middle of the early morning or something, and they would hang somebody. They would hang them up. We never knew who it was. Usually somebody either refused to work, or had done something.

Q: Do any other memories come to mind about specific actions of the German personnel in the camp or any behavior of the personnel in the camp?

A: Well, there were always some bastards in the deal. The fact that I'm here is because I got away. We were caught in little things. Got a couple times hit over the rear-end with a stick. Because one guy stole something, the whole unit that went out to work, fifteen guys, you all had to lay down on the bench and they beat us. Some of the guys were all the time beatings, hittings. There was a discipline more or less in the camp. Some guy, at night, would steal from another prisoner things, and what they would do, they would call in the camp "eldester' -- that was a Jew, too -- and put him at night on the table and he would spend the rest of the night on the table, and in the morning they would give him 15 on the "toches."

Q: Was it an organization among the prisoners?

A: Right. Always is. There is immediately a society. We had in the camp a fellow with the name of Karpen. He came into the camp like the rest that were standing in line, and a Polish prisoner walked up to him and says, "I see you got a watch. They're going to take it away from you. Why don't you give it to me?" And the guy tried with him, "Mind your own business." So this Pole was a boxer and he hit him. And this Jewish boy, Karpen was a short guy like I am, but powerful guy. He was an amateur boxer. He turned around and he let the Pole have one. And there just happened that a good 500 yards away the commandant was standing, and he saw it happen. He said, "Bring me that man!" And immediately he made him the boss over 2,000 Jews. He, all through the years, was transferred from camp to camp, always as the leader. He had a separate room in front. He did have a little bit better -- strictly by his fist. And he had to, in order to keep his authority, he had to rule with fists, but this guy was not good. He was too rough on the Jews. Tried to improve himself with the Germans. People decided, "When the war is over, we're going to hang him." But he had a brother, sixteen years old and when we were all liberated in Magdeburg he sent out his brother. He went into hiding. Sent his brother out to investigate: How's the sentiment? Well we were all busy looking for our own places, to find clothes, to find food. Nobody bothered with him. We all forgot. So he found out nobody's looking for him. So he came out, and he moved in with one of the guys he hit most! Then came the time he had a chance to leave for America right away, and one of the questions you have to answer, if you were ever a kapo in the camp. And he said no. We all knew better. The Jews decided, "Let him go. Let him fight it out with his own conscience," -- not to stand in his way. Otherwise he would have been still in Europe.

Q: Have you ever heard of him?

A: I don't know. He must have had some relatives here.

Q: Did you give much thought to the matter of survival?

A: Yes, we did. It was a "will to live" to the point that they always let you know that when the time comes they wouldn't need you anymore, they'll kill you. But you always thought that maybe the time comes, you're not going to let them. You're going to take off before. And in my case, that's exactly what happened. Now I'm not a hero in this point, because two other guys came the same night. Two good dear friends of mine. They also ended up in a basement some place in town. They were also surprised by a German. But this guy told them, "You can stay here." But he went to the Germans and reported them. So they picked them up and they took them to the river and shot them. The one guy Max Schneider, got a bullet in the back, which is normally fatal, and it came out here and didn't touch a tooth! But the shot stunned him and they kicked both of them into the Elbe. The cold water woke him up, and he climbed out of the water and he was in a basement for five days without food, with a bullet wound. After five days, he was crawling out on his hands and knees as the American tanks were pulling up. He ended up in a hospital. They nursed him back to health and I met him when I went to look for my wife -- about four or five weeks later. I met him in Braunsweig with a cane. He'd just been released from the hospital.

Surprisingly, when I was in Leegard, at the University called the Hegain Institute, it was in the middle of winter, and there was an epidemic or something around there, so they decided to inoculate all the soldiers. Since we were there -- the Jews -- they thought we should get the shots, too. But they wanted to show the difference between the Germans and the Jews, so they got two shots, we got one shot. (Laughter) We all had to strip to the waist. I had from my wife a man's ring, a wide one, and she had made two rings out of it. I'm the only guy who was engaged to a wife where the wife bought <u>him</u> the ring. She had the two rings made and she gave me that ring. I made myself a little cover and I wore it around my neck on a chain under my shirt, so nobody knew about it, because we were not allowed to have it. You get so used to it, you don't pay attention to it anymore. And the guys went up there and they said, "Strip your shirt off." I took off the shirt, and this young SS doctor in his 30s gives us the shot. And he comes up to me, he says, "What have you got there?" real quietly. I look down. My heart sinks down there. Here's that ring. The ring was in a cover, but you could see the shape of it, it's a ring, because it pressed itself down there. Now another guy may have taken and ripped it off, and maybe knocked me around. The guy said, "Put it away." And he went on to the next guy. Must have been a nice fellow. You never know about these guys. They are people like other people.

We had a driver and we used to go out in the country with him all the time. We asked him how he ever got into the SS. He said he was a boy in the Hitler Youth, which was just like the Boy Scouts here at that time. And automatically, he said, he was just of age, he became a guard in a camp. I asked him, "Mr. Kolbe, did you have to shoot somebody?'" He said, "yeah, once," seventy people he shot. We said, "Who were they?" He said, 'they were enemies of the state." We said,

"They were all men?" He said, "No! They were from the babies up to the grandmothers!" I said, "Kolbe, how can a baby be an enemy of the state?" "I never thought about it," he said. "You know, when they asked for volunteers, nobody volunteered. But then they said, 'You, you and you,' and I was among them." And he said, "My stomach turned, but by golly, after you do it once, if I had to shoot my mother, I could do it now."

That's how it hardens down the people. And he was a nice man! I was driving with him, and you learn to know a man after a long time. But that's what war does to you. That's what the leaders will do to you. Particularly, they took the responsibility off the people.

Q: When you came out of the cellar and you saw this first American soldier face-to-face, what kind of feelings did you have right then?

A: First I had a scare. Before I saw him, I saw two Germans with a Red Cross deal, doing something. Barked to me like an old military, "What do you want!" We were scared, we were out there in the open now. I said, 'We're looking for food." and all of a sudden I hear a big guy say, "What do the people want?" in German. I look around. There's a big officer standing there. Also with the Red Cross. And this guy snaps to attention. He said, "These are prisoners. They're looking for food." They said, "Well, we don't have any for ourselves, you have to ask them." And he points back in the yard and that's where the Americans were. He said, "Those are Americans." They didn't have any insignia. Just green uniforms. But I thought, "if those are Americans, we don't need you anymore."

Q: So then you went over to the Americans.

A: Went over there, yah, and there was a guy with a truck out there. Oh, unbelievable! As I walked off the street, sun was shining! It was a beautiful day, April the 20th. Seven days -- 12th I went in, on the 20th I came out. Every time I get in spring, a day like this, I am there! It's hard to explain! I'm walking on that street. I feel exactly that moment, how it was. I was walking like on a cloud! You cannot explain to anybody unless you've been through it.

The very same thing is if outside is snow, in the middle of winter, I sometimes walk out at night, and I'm alone and it's quiet. I am back in the ghetto -- how the ghetto looked, because we tore down all the gates and all the fences. We burned them all up. We needed firewood, but the whole thing was an empty field, and the wind was blowing and there was a dreary, hopeless feeling out there. Again, I'm standing out there and it comes to me, just like that! It's true. But only if I'm alone, it's quiet, because I did went out a couple times, out in the yard. Right there, vividly, comes back the memory --that night when I heard the shots.

I'm not paranoid about it. I didn't get any, what you read about Vietnamese veterans -- that they have some sort of shell shock or mental thing. It has not

really affected me, because we were very fortunate. We came out of the camp. We were hungry, but we got food the first day from my butcher. He gave us some horsemeat -- a chunk of it. We made a whole huge bowl of hamburgers and we ate it all! It could have killed us! A lot of people died afterward. There's one thing. In the camp we never fought for an extra bowl of soup. The people in the camp usually eat, eat, eat fast the soup, but then they wait. There's sometimes a second, because they don't give you the full quart. They give you two-thirds of a quart, or three-fourths of a quart, because they're afraid it may be short at the end. If they're short, that's it! So they always hold it down a little bit and then they have a few extras. So some of the guys would just eat, eat, eat, and then with one foot all ready, wait until the guy says, "Seconds!" Then they run – kill themselves. Sometimes instead of getting the soup, the guy would take that thing and hit them over the head. But all the things we were drinking down was just water. And in the morning, the last four or five months, it was a pitiful sight to see the guys. They would woke up in the morning. Couldn't put their shoes on, because their feet were swollen. You couldn't see their eyes, because they were just like a blob of meat. Whole head, everything swollen. They were on their way out, those people. A lot of them, I'm sure, did not make it anymore after the liberation, because they were just full of liquid, full of water, all puffed up. Fortunately, we were weak, but we made it. There was one guy in the camp. He slept right next to me. He was my size, my age and somehow I saw myself in him. I was watching him, because we didn't have any mirrors around. We used to shave looking in a glass, into the barrack. I saw myself in him and I saw how he was deteriorating fast from day to day. Then they didn't let him go to work anymore. He was laying in bed all day long. Then one day I came home and he was dead. I took his death more than I would have taken today, my brother's death, because I saw myself in him. I was on the way out! We had twelve or eighteen steps to walk up to the factory and I actually could not make it anymore. I couldn't lift my feet up. I was weighing about eighty pounds. But that was only the last six months. How people did it for years with that kind of food! Because as I told you before, I had always chances to get some food. Was from a Latvian I worked with, from somebody else. Always managed. My wife brought me some. Always managed to get something.

Hunger can do terrible things. We were in Magdeburg, the last place. We were walking down the street to the bath and I saw a frozen potato laying in the snow. I knew damn well you march in lines surrounded by guards, you don't putz around. But my hunger was so great, that I run out of line -- right in the middle of the street -- like in a trance -- and I picked up the potato. The next thing I got, I was getting hit with a rifle butt and I didn't care. I could hold onto the potato. Hunger does that to you, A second time it happened in the camp. We were bringing in a load of rutabagas. There were guards around, no horse or anything, but a lot of prisoners were pulling and pushing the thing. Just like in a trance, too, I run up there and grabbed one of those rutabagas. The next thing I was laying on the ground, and they were hitting me, and I had to get up and take that rutabagas and put it back on that load. Didn't even get it. And I was lucky because for that

they could have sent me away. But I was really fortunate. I ate what a dog had left over. Sunday morning, volunteering to clean the barracks from the SS -- out in front -- we went into territory where the prisoners normally are not. So you always find something. They had a can, big can there where they dumped all the food for the dog, and the dog could only reach a certain way. It's some mold in there, but I took that can. I put it in the pushcart, and covered it with a sack and I carried it into the camp. Was the middle of winter. We cut it out with a knife. With my brother we knocked it out. Pulled out a couple of dog hair and we had a Saturday dinner, because the food was good what the guards ate. Didn't care it was for the dog. It was good food, nourishing food that kept you alive, that little extra.

Q: Did you return to Riga?

A: No. My wife was back. I did not go back. I was liberated in the American zone. The Elbe River was the dividing line. The Russians were on one, the Americans were here. Now I wanted to find my wife, and we had made out a lady, an address, in case we survived the war, we would write to that lady on the west bank of the Rhine River. That's across whole Germany. I thought, "I'd better go there first. If she's not there, if she went back to Riga ,I can always go back to Riga, but you cannot come out from behind the Iron Curtain." So that's why we waited for mail. Didn't go, no telephone, no mail, no nothing. No transportation! Then finally there was talk that the Russians coming in to the west of Magdeburg, which eventually turned out that way. I decided with my brother we're not going to wait, we're going to walk! And we walked across Germany for three weeks. We hitched a ride once in a while, sometimes on a train, and we got to that little village, and the lady had died. The people that were there, at first they didn't want to talk to me. Then they finally said they think my wife went to Solingen, which is a town in Germany where the forks and knives are made. So we went back there and I looked at the police records. We couldn't find her anywhere. Germany's easy to find somebody because of the police records, you've got to register, but couldn't find them. They were bombed. I finally, after staying there a couple of days, decided I'm not going to find her anymore. We're going to the American zone -- which is Frankfurt -- and try to get in touch with my uncle in the United States. We had his address. I remembered it all these years. He run away from Europe when he was 13 years old, have been living here all his life. So I walked with my brother out of that little village. Always with my brother on the side and we didn't get along that well. We had real arguments, but he never ate anything what he found without sharing with me, and I never ate anything. I pulled out, one time, a root out of the ground -- the last day before the tank alarm sounded -- and we broke it in half and we ate it. Today if I ate it, it would kill both of us. (Chuckle) Poison. It's been in the ground, just the root. But we walked through that little village on the way out of town and we saw a little store with a little sheet, like a typewriter sheet. They were just government announcements, real fine print, up there. I didn't know anything. I was dumb about these things. I went in and I said, "I would like to put in a search ad. I'm

looking for a person." He said, 'Well there's a couple of more million people like to do the same thing. We don't have any paper. We don't have a permit to do it. But if you want to pay me," he said, "I'll put it in whenever we get the permit. Give me the name." I said, "Okay." So he gave me a piece of paper. I wrote down my wife's name. Lucky for me that she had an unusual name. Her first name is Tamara and her last name was Lilget with an apostrophe in the French way -- not too many of them around. He picked that thing up, and he says, " I know her!" He said, "She lives in the next street someplace. She wanted to subscribe. I think it is an even number." So I went up and down the street looking for that even number, one after the other. Asked them about it, is she wasn't there. Time was running out, because of the curfew. Then I tried the uneven side. I finally got to a house, and there was a lady sweeping outside, and I said," I'm looking for a Tamara." "Yes, she just moved out of here," she said. But she had the address. It was just a street away. I knocked on the door and there I found my wife. We were just on our way out of town. If I wouldn't have passed that store, I would have never found my wife again! Coincidence! And that's my life story -- or rather, the story of those times.

Q: How did you come to Minnesota?

A: My sponsors were from St. Louis, Missouri, and that's where we went, originally.

Q: Why didn't your uncle sponsor you?

A: My uncle had financial problems and he had some family problems, and he <u>never</u> answered us! But then he did make some step to bring us over, because when we landed in Boston I got a whole bunch of papers out from one cabin on the ship, and we were standing in the hallway and about half-an-hour later, another cabin, I dumped everything in. During that process I went from the emigration to the immigration, and there I found one telegram where it says, "Bernard Fidelsohn welcomes the arrival of his nephew and niece and brother.' But that was the only thing I saw from him. He was not capable, he was like a lot of Americans, he didn't know very well to write, he didn't have a lot of education and he, like most of Americans, couldn't understand the urgency. A lot of people don't do those things. The people who finally sponsored us, they were being talked at by the Jewish Family service in St. Louis. They said, "You are crazy to do that! People don't do it for their relatives! You will be responsible for five years!" Which they would have been -- five years. But that old lady says, "My son knows him. He says they're going to be all right in America here, and I <u>want</u> to sponsor them!" She had to insist! So that's why, right now, we'd be in St. Louis. My brother is still in St. Louis. He is married there. We didn't like the town at all. I can't stand that warm climate, the humidity and the dirty parts. We were about three and a half years there. We had a little grocery store there for a while.

My wife had a doctor here and so did I, and we decided my birthday, August 8th is going to be the last day we are in business, no matter what. We quit on August 8th

and we decided to take a trip up to visit Minneapolis. We didn't like it. At first we came in from the wrong side of town. We came to Milwaukee Depot, Plymouth Avenue. He was living on Morgan Avenue, around there, lousy neighborhood, an old orthodox Jewish neighborhood. By that time the better ones had left already. Decided we don't want to, we're going to go to Madison, Wisconsin. We went through the town. I liked it. It was impossible to find a room to stay! Oh, in those years, you couldn't find one here, either. I had to beg, steal and borrow to get a room here. We couldn't find nothing in Madison, so I finally put my wife on the train back to St. Louis and I came back to Minneapolis, and this time, somehow, for some reason, I missed the highway. I came in from south of Lyndale Avenue and I saw the lakes and everything. All of a sudden, I liked the town. And I'm glad I came here. So we came up here and found myself a job to sell insurance and made a living.

Q: Do you maintain contact with the Jewish community?

A: Just with my personal friends. I have a lot of Jewish personal friends here which I made, but they're not really European. I know Fred Baron -- met him in Europe. There's a couple of them like that. There is Alex Freisinger. German Jews, primarily.

Q: Do you belong to a synagogue?

A: I don't. We have a mixed marriage, and my wife doesn't belong to any. It's maybe not the right thing to do, but we don't have any children today, so it isn't important. We are free thinking people. I'm not religious anymore. I cannot understand the things that God let happen that time, for all those innocent people to die, and that the guilty ones are still walking the streets. There's a lot of them right here, Latvians, officers. They can't even deport them, there's all kinds of flaws in the laws. Unbelievable stories -- we have read them -- those guys protected by the CIA or something. They actually hired this Romanian guard out there, a whole group of them were criminals, but they were important to them, because they knew something that may help them against the Russians. Politics makes dirty bedfellows. What is it called?

Q: Politics makes strange bedfellows, yes. Can you tell me what it has meant to you to be a survivor?

A: Luck, fortune. And being in the right place at the right time, doing what it was smart to do, possibly some little luck that came with it. Maybe I acted right, too. I found myself in the situation where we worked, managed to make the best out of it. An example is with the fellow that we gave him those tobacco. Tried to do a good deed, came back to me. That old German fellow helped us. We came back to him. We gave him a lot of aid, we came back to him with a lot of food after the war. He was just a plain, ordinary worker, paperhanger or something, very simple man. It's just fortune. My time wasn't come.

Q: And in the years following the war, since you've been in the U.S., do you reflect back on your experience often? How has it influenced your life since the war?

A: Yes, I do, but I have many times been asked about these things. I had to tell many times, little excerpts of the things that I told you today, and it seems to people a miracle. These things happened to me. The time that I survived is the thing that we got into, that we came in to the other places. It was really one of the best places of any, that billeting -- of any place in the city. Because we were just six men, and we -- my two brothers with me -- we had practically all the food we wanted. We used to eat in the university. A cellar for storing food. Went to the country and the soldiers, the drivers -- they used to trade stuff which you weren't allowed to -- gasoline and boots and everything for food. They traded some for us. I had to do the translation with the Latvian farmers. When we arrived back into town, they used to sort the things out that belongs to the Jews -- that's ours -- and they'd take it back. And we had, at that time, food. Even among the Germans I could find some decent people, but there's one thing -- if there was a bad, rotten apple in them, he spoiled the rest of them. If they were alone with you, they were wonderful, but if that one guy was there -- (click sound). Wasn't good. I got so daring when I think back. I built one of the guys a lamp out of wood. I made the frame and those things, and a tube to move. A fantastic lamp with a table underneath. I liked it myself. I'm not a carpenter, it probably was pretty raw, but it was a lamp, and it worked! Well, another guy came, but the guy never treated me nice. He hit me one time and I told him, "I'm not going to make you a lamp!" When I think back -- the guts I had! The guy threatened me after that and I decided I better start making him a lamp. But the guts I had to tell the guy that, "I'm not going to make you the lamp." When I think back today, I sure must have felt pretty safe there. (Laughs)

Q: Can you describe any general feelings about human nature based on your experience, non-Jews, Germans, Jews?

A: Human nature tells me that every nationality there's some good and bad people. Some of the example, the people in the camp. I mentioned that one kapo as an example. There were a lot of them like that. We had in another unit -- where I told you the guy with the wooden leg was in the Wehrmacht -- they had a guy by the name of Glazer who was a commando leader. He really knew how to run it. The Germans thought that he's the toughest guy against the rest of the Jews, because when he was out there, they built his authority. "Yes, Mr. Glazer. Yes, Mr. Glazer." But when at night they caught one time a couple guys stealing chicken from this transport that came, instead of going to report them to the camp, which would have cost them their life, they said, 'We'll tell Glazer!" That's how Glazer built himself a position. "We'll tell Glazer," And they used to go to Glazer and the first thing Glazer would do, he'd give them a slap in the face! He said, "When you get back in the camp you're going to get the rest." But then at night, they would take the chicken home and eat them together. He was a born

leader. He built himself the authority, that the Germans think he's really tough, when he was not. Now that guy we had, that kapo, he was just plain tough. So there again, people are different. Human nature is hard to understand.

Q: Do you believe that films and books about the Holocaust accurately depict it?

A: Absolutely. I think they are some of them obviously probably a little tainted, but the facts are there. The facts are absolutely there.

Q: Can you remember any of the books and films that you've read or seen that you think are worthwhile?

A: Me and my wife has a book there which is from Latvia, taken from German pictures of Europe. They were showing scenes in Latvia where the Germans actually took pictures where the women are standing at the grave naked. And you may have seen those pictures someplace. This book is printed by the Russians! They've sent it here, accusing some of the Latvians that live in the United States that they were part of this massacre. And they have everything. They've got the names and dates and everything on those people, but nothing is being done. They don't do nothing. Everything that has been said about it is true --– and a lot more that really hasn't come out -- the most gruesome thing that history has ever written.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: All I can say, I'm fortunate that I've been alive. I've had my years. I had a couple of near misses, but I was very fortunate. I'm sorry that my older brother didn't survive with us. The rest of the family, they were gone in 1941 already. Lost about 40 members of the family in one day. Uncles, aunts and they were just wiped out! One of the uncles -- I don't know how he was in the Kaiserwald camp, which was quite a lot later -- he was older, and he didn't feel well, and he decided one day not to go to work. He asked to be excused. So they let him stay behind. They took all the people that were there, they said, "You should go and clean up, go in the shower.' So they went in the shower. As they came out of the shower, they wrote down everybody's number: "What's your number?' He didn't know what it was for. They decided to send them to Auschwitz. And by that time he knew it's bad. So he asked me, "Fred, what am I doing?" He was a smart man, he was a very wealthy man, on my mother's side. And I said, "Uncle, the only thing you can do is, if they call your number, don't walk out." We had numbers written on, not here, just written. "Just don't walk out." Well, they called the numbers. There were several other guys. They called his number. He didn't go out. They called his number again, and a third and fourth time, and probably the fifth time. In those minutes he must have lived five life times for fear. Then finally he just decided to go out. Walk out. That's it. They sent him to Auschwitz. He was gone. Otherwise he would have shown up in America here, because he knew his brother was here. Same with my brother-in-law. He

has a brother in New York. I have his address. He was a furrier, too. Got married to an American girl. He was lucky. Here was this gal, a Polish girl, that came to Germany and she was not the best looking gal, but he was a best looking one. He looked like a movie actor. So she fell in love with him, and for him it was a passage to freedom. They got married and he came to the United States and maybe she wasn't so bad, because they're still married, family. And it was his ticket to freedom.

My sister was telling me that some people actually went and forged documents. They "bought" somebody in an embassy. I think it was a British embassy in Berlin. They produced document that they own half a million pounds or something in a British bank. Forged papers. And after the thing was signed, they have seen those papers were destroyed, and these people were let out of Germany because Germany, in the beginning, let out a lot of people. They wanted to get rid of them. Actually wanted to get rid of the Jews. It's later on that they came and found out that they would never get rid of them unless it became a priority. If they would have put all the people's minds -- all their engineers, in that big nation, all the professors, that worked on the destruction of the Jews -- to work on the war effort, that would have helped them! If they would have utilized the brains of the Jews that they actually chased out of the country or killed, they could have won! They probably would have, too! I just read about Ilse Meitner, here, who did part of the atomic bomb here, developing. So many of these Jewish specialists -- Oppenheimer, Einstein -- all the people that just they gave away. It's all right for us. Without the war, we wouldn't have had an Israel. I strongly believe that. I think Israel would never have come to pass, if not that the sentiment of the whole world of the thing that had been done to the Jews. And even then we barely made it! We would have never been, had the vote, to take that piece of land and to make a country. So for all what it is, maybe it has to happen in history. We have, right next to my business where I was. There's a couple men out there, Scandinavians, and they are both religious, but the one guy is really a very true Christian, and he studies quite a bit there. When the war started in 1967, and I was worried about what may happen to Israel, he used to come in every morning, he says, "Fred, I don't know how you can worry. If you would only read the Bible, if you'd trust –" He really believes in the thing -- "It's all there." He said, "You will not have any worries, because it says right clear that Israel will be big again, and grow, and be a country." The man is absolutely convinced. He still talks today about it. He says, "If I were a Jew I would never worry about it, because they're here to stay." Good if a person can do that.
I met an awful lot of nice people in my life. But I met plenty of sour ones, too. I have friends, even, with the Germans. Really met them through our store. One brought in the other one. They had some parties. There are a couple of them I don't like to associate too much with them. I don't know them -- what they are in their heart. They're all very nice to me, but what they are in their heart -- But the majority of them are nice, honorable people. Can't keep them guilty for their parent country. I ran into, one day, a Latvian by accident. He was a realtor, he showed me houses one afternoon. We're looking for a house, and I found out he

was from Latvia. I had an accent. He had hardly an accent but he was a baby when he came to this country. And we started to talk about what happened to the Jews. I was interested in sounding him out. He didn't know a thing about it! He said I opened his eyes. He was really so interested. He said, "After you tell me all those things, I understand what the Latvians did to the Jews." He said, "I understand why my parents never told me about it." I have told many of my Latvian customers in the store, "If the Germans did it, they came to Latvia as conquerors. That was government-inspired anti-Semitism, a new anti-Semitism, to do the killing, on the programs of Hitler." He said, "But the Latvians never waited for the Germans to come. They did it to their neighbors, to enrich themselves. They just did it on their own." He said, "and only two kind, rats and people, kill their own kind." And I said, "The Latvians, I can only associate with rats." I used to tell many Latvians about it. In the small towns in particular, they would kill the neighbors. They would take their neighbors out in the woods, right in the first days, and massacre them down, so they could enrich themselves with a chair or a couch. They did it. Because the German army, as I mentioned before, they were in pursuit of the Russians at the beginning. Later the Gestapo came and all those things, but in the beginning, there was not any of those destructive programs. Was entirely done by the Latvians!

The massacre of the fall of '41 -- that was inspired by the Germans. There was a reason to it. They made room for the German Jews. They wanted to get out the German Jews, so the site of the ghetto Riga -- that's where they would take them. Germans -- we had a lot of them -- lived in Riga. In order to make room for them, that's why they killed our families. Later became a German ghetto. And the German ghetto is like a home away from home. They had a police officer. A German police, Jewish police officer in there. The Germans used police, and they were buddy-buddy with the Gestapo out there -- not that they were denouncing, but if they could do it to save themselves, they could denounce the Latvians very good. They were on top. They thought they were Germans.

As a matter of fact, I read a book by a German lady who came to the ghetto of Riga's. she was a teacher. She said that when they came to Riga, they thought nothing would happen to them because why would they have killed the Latvian Jew in order to bring the German Jews in? Because they want the German Jews to survive. Because they're Germans after all. That was her comment. But she said, "Then later, some transports came, and right at the railroad station, they sorted them out, and half of them were killed right away." She said, "Then we thought we're not so safe, either." She wrote a very good book. I forgot the name of it. For what people really could experience in a camp, you have to read the book by Martin Grey For Those I Loved. You ever get hold of this story about a man that went through the real camp -- Auschwitz and other camps. This man did. I had a picnic if you read the stories that this man went through.

Another story. We all used to do it occasionally where we worked there – we tried to get a piece of bread, something on the side. Well, this guy was a little bit more

careless than most of us. He had a little fur collar which he got in the ghetto or from his wife -- it fits on the coat -- and he traded that fur collar in for some food. He got something for it. But the woman he traded with, somebody in an apartment up there, she just happened to be the wife of a Latvian policeman who was a super-duper anti-Semite. So when she told him that, he said, "Where did you get it?" She said, "I got it from a Jew down there who works…" The guy went and reported this to the military police. In Germany they had these "chindogs," they used to call them. They had a great big metal shield here in front. And fortunate for all of us this officer in the military police happened to know this staff sergeant, Rehren was his name. He called him up. He said, "My God. Carl -- how the hell do you let the Jews all alone to roam around in the house there?" "They're supposed to be under guard! You can get in trouble for it." He didn't report it. They dropped the case. Lucky for that guy, because he would have been in trouble. Now this Rehren calls all six of us up in the office at the university. He said, "One of you guys traded in a collar in the building where I live. I want you to go out and the guilty one to come back in." Well when we walked out, we all looked at each other. At one time or another we had all done something. We looked at David Shapiro, because we knew the guy's careless. Sure enough, he said, "Yes, I did it." He thought maybe I'll help him. So he said, '"Come in with me." I said, "okay." So we knocked on the door, came in and he said, "Oberstafuhrer, I was the one." He said, "I know that. I just wanted to see if you're going to report yourself. They described you to me, so I knew exactly. I talked to the woman. I knew it was you." "David," he said, "I wanted to let you know what I said. I saw you one day standing at the gate. I knew you were waiting for somebody to meet. I saw you another day out there, standing there. I acted like I don't see you because you were on the premises. You were careless and dumb! But I want you to know one thing, David. You should remember one thing, that in the house where you eat, you don't crap." In other words, if you have to do it, do it somewhere else, but I'm not getting involved. He was so right about it. Now here was a case where they played it down. He played his luck. He got away.

Another episode. We went out one time to the country for some firewood. We always traded some stuff in. One lieutenant or stafuhrer -- corporal -- went along. He wanted to trade something. But this guy was a black marketer. He brought along army boots, gasoline, stuff which -- treacherous. He stayed in a little town before we dropped him off. We went for our wood, and we came back. We picked him up. He was sitting there with a box this size and about this high -- huge box. Sitting on the highway with his feet dangling down from the box waiting for us. The box was full with food. Nailed shut. We loaded the box up there on the truck. A woman comes running up, she said, "I think the military police knows about it. Somebody reported it that this guy's sitting out there." Now my driver gets scared, because once they get caught, on the front, you know. So he tried to take a side road. He did not know that, you had to go through one point which was called Mittau and there's a military police station there. If they got called, they'll wait for it. So we drive up the side roads, and about a mile off

the side road, the axle breaks on the truck. Now they get panicky. So they go to a farmhouse nearby and they call this Rehren, Oberstafuhrer, and tell him their problems, to ask him to send out a car so that they can go back to town. They want to get away from this scene, and who will be left is the driver of the car! Suppose the police comes and they ask him, he'll say, "I don't know from nothing. I wasn't here, the Jews were here." There were the two of us, myself and my brother. Lucky for us. Told you I had luck. The guys sent me up the road, because we are on a side road. They sent me to walk up to that road after an hour or so to meet the car, because the guy would never find us if we're on the side road to that main road. I walked, but evidently I didn't think about it, and we started too late, or a regular car is faster than a truck. When I got to the corner he had passed the crossing, and he went out to the farmhouse where we used to go. He couldn't find us out there and decided, "To hell with them." He ate dinner and he stayed overnight at the farmhouse. Our luck! Because this evening, the military police shows up at the farmhouse, the SS. If we would have been there, we would have been caught. This way the two Germans were there. The one guy says right away to me, we're going to the barn, they have meantime buried it in the barn. I didn't even know where it was, but there was out in the field a huge barn, and they said there was a pile of straw in the back where you walk in to the left of the gate. It's covered there! But they had a lot of bundles on the truck, and half-a-dozen or more of them, bundles were ours. They belonged to us. That they put into another pile on the back of there, under the straw. "Now," he says, "When you come in the barn, you go to the left, and tell them that box, that's yours." So the other driver was smart enough. He's the kid that told me about the shooting of the people. He said, "How can we tell them that we didn't know any bit? How can we permit the Jews, they're supposed to be under supervision, that they can trade all the stuff and we don't know anything about it?" The guy finally saw how it really was. So he didn't even wait for me to do anything. He just walked up there to the box and said, "That's where it is." They never found the bundles. They looked for the box. They opened it up, and I thought, "This is the end of us." "Now we got a nice dinner," he said -- that German to the Latvian policeman. They took him along, but our big boss -- this high ranking officer -- had so much influence that he didn't want to have a mark against his unit. They turned him over for punishment to him. And all he gave him is six weeks of telephone duty at night. So we got away.