

Interview with Harry Bass
April 21, 1992
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- Q: My name is Anthony DiIorio and I am here to interview Mr. Harry Bass about the experiences of his family during the Holocaust.
- A: Good evening.
- Q: What was your name when you were born in Poland?
- A: Herszel.
- Q: And when were you born?
- A: July 7, 1919.
- Q: And where were you born?
- A: Bialystok, Poland.
- Q: What kind of family did you have?
- A: There were six kids and my parents. Eight people in our family. We had some distant relatives, cousins and uncles.
- Q: What kind of house did you live in?
- A: Single family home.
- Q: A single family home?
- A: I remember that.
- Q: Did you have a garden?
- A: No, no garden.
- Q: So you lived right in the city?
- A: A short little distance, but it was considered the city.
- Q: What languages were spoken in your home?

A: Yiddish.

Q: Did you and your family speak other languages outside your home?

A: I speak Polish, I speak Russian, I speak German a little bit.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

A: We were always in the meat business.

Q: So was he a retailer?

A: Retailer.

Q: He had a butcher shop?

A: Yeah, three of them.

Q: Three butcher shops in Bialystok? What kind of schooling did you have?

A: I graduate, I finished high school.

Q: In Bialystok?

A: Yes.

Q: And what did you study? What were you going to be?

A: I wouldn't know exactly, I wouldn't make predictions now. But that period was the best times, the best years of my life. I was 19 or 20 years of age.

Q: Did you have plans to be anything in particular?

A: Absolutely. My parents didn't want me to be in the same profession.

Q: Did they have anything in particular in mind for you?

A: Nothing in particular, as far as I know. They never talked about it.

Q: Was your mother a housewife?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did she come from?

A: She was born in a little town not far from Bialystok. The name of the town was Kosoff.

Q: Do you know how many brothers and sisters she had?

A: They were a family of nine people. I mean nine kids.

Q: Nine kids. She was one of nine kids.

A: She was the youngest of nine.

Q: What did she do before she married your father? Did she have a job?

A: She never had a job.

Q: Did she grow up in Kosoff?

A: She grow up until she got married. Then she moved to Bialystok.

Q: Your father, what did he do at that time?

A: My father was in Polish army.

Q: Polish army?

A: Until the First World War.

Q: And then he settled down?

Q: He settled down. He got into the same line my grandfather was also in the meat business. My father wasn't because he was young and he was taken in the army. When he came out he was married so he helped out his father-in-law, my grandfather. That's how he got in his own business.

Q: And then he went on to have three stores?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you get involved?

A: Oh yes, I was a big help and my other brother I showed you in the picture, Boruch.

Q: Your brother, Boruch. When was he born?

A: He was born a couple of years after I am.

Q: In 1921?

A: What kind of schooling did he have? The same as you?

A: Most of the time it was public school. You see a public school in Poland was a little advanced, better rated than the United States public school. So if you graduated at 14 or 15 years of age, it's almost like a high school. Then years we didn't have universities like we have _____. We had gymnasium, something like between public school and college.

Q: Did any of you go to the gymnasium?

A: No.

Q: No. So you and your brothers completed grade school and then high school?

A: Then we helped out our family.

Q: In meat stores? Did anyone in your family play musical instruments?

A: I played.

Q: You played?

A: I played the accordion.

Q: You played the accordion? You liked to play at home or did you play outside the home?

A: I used to play mostly at home for our own entertainment. I used to play outside -- not professionally.

Q: Did you participate in any sports?

A: Yes, running.

Q: You were a runner?

A: I was in second place too, in 1939.

Q: Oh. In 1939?

A: Yes, the Russians. See the Russians occupied our town.

Q: Yes, in the fall of 1939.

- A: Sure, so the Russians came in and to them sport was a big deal. Everybody had to be involved. They let you off from work and I used to run seven or eight kilometers. I used to do _____.
- Q: Did you run before the Russians came in?
- A: No. I used to ride bicycles.
- Q: So you were a bicyclist?
- A: You saw it.
- Q: That was you on the bike?
- A: Right. It still has my name on it.
- Q: And that was bought when? When did your parents give you that bicycle?
- A: My Bar Mitzvah.
- Q: Bar Mitzvah?
- A: I hope I didn't forget my pictures over there.
- Q: No, they're on the table. Any other sports? Bicycling and Running?
- A: Dancing.
- Q: Dancing? Did you have girl friends?
- A: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. They were fighting over who would do the dancing with me.
- Q: They were fighting over you?
- A: Who was going to do the dancing with me. My wife knowed that because sometime we get together with friends we grew up together. There was one guy we grew up together, same age. His family had a bakery shop next to ours, we had the butcher shop, so _____. And luckily, I had a pretty good memory. Some guys sometimes _____.
- Q: Did you have a fiancée?
- A: A girlfriend? I sure did.

Q: Just one girlfriend?

A: Just one girlfriend.

Q: But you weren't engaged to be married?

A: No._____ she never made it.

Q: How about your brother Boruch?

A: He had a girlfriend too. Her brother survived. I remember she had the same name as my mother, Chaje. She didn't survive, her brother survived because he was in the Russian army. When the Russians occupied Bialystok they took the young guys, like 17, 18 years of age, they took them into the Russian service, 19, 20's they sent us to school. We used to call it military preparation. Teaching how to maneuver (?). If it would be another year, they would probably take us into the army too.

Q: Your brother Boruch, what sort of sports was he active in? He looked like he was the athletic type.

A: None.

Q: Did he play any musical instruments?

A: No.

Q: What do you think of most when you think of him as a young boy?

A: Young boy?

Q: Yeah. Did he have any career plans?

A: He was like the other boys. I don't think so. The young sometimes you don't think those things. Especially when you are young you were so tight in the family. We lived like the other young boys, wild.

Q: Wild?

A: Sometimes you do things then you realize you made a mistake. I don't have to tell you -- you know.

Q: Were your parents strict?

A: Oh yeah. My father didn't have to do nothing -- just look at us.

- Q: And your mother?
- A: My mother, no she was a softie.
- Q: A softie?
- A: We used to take advantage of her sometimes. One thing, my mother, when it came to her daughter, you couldn't say anything to her, you couldn't touch her, my sister. Only one, she said, only one daughter.
- Q: Was she the youngest child?
- A: No, she's between the two younger ones.
- Q: She's the middle.
- A: She's the smallest. Of course I have another brother who lives in Florida. I told you, he's the one, he's next to Boruch and older than my sister.
- Q: Did you mother have any hobbies at home? I know she was a very busy woman with all those kids. Did she sing or play the piano?
- A: No. She used to make knitting.
- Q: Crocheting?
- A: Makes people or animals.
- Q: Paper Mache?
- A: Hand knitting.
- Q: Needlepoint?
- A: Needlepoint. Oh yeah, she used to make all kinds of animals and sceneries and all that. She liked to make animals and sceneries and all that. _____. We survived because of this. They used to come down and ask him to take pictures _____
- Q: What can you tell us about your youngest brothers, Izrael and Iszmuel?
- A: They were little boys. They were still in school. _____ (very difficult to hear) August 16, 1943 it was the liquidation of the ghetto.
- A: What day was that?

- A: August 16, 1943, they liquidated Bialystok ghetto. _____(Very difficult to hear.
- Q: So your mother and your three brothers?
- A: Two.
- Q: Your two younger brothers.
- A: The second one to me, couldn't come out of the ghetto _____. (Very difficult to hear)
- Q: Do you know when that was?
- A: 1942.
- Q: 1942?
- Q: And you mentioned that under the Russians there was interest in sports?
- A: Oh yeah. The youngsters participated.
- Q: Were there any other changes under the Russians?
- A: A lot of changes. _____
- Q: Was it better or worse?
- A: I would say better. The problem of the last years of 1938-39 you see Poland had a history of it's own. The President passed away, Pilsudski, I don't know if you heard of him.
- Q: Of course.
- A: When he passed away we used to call him the Jewish grandfather. He was saved by a Jewish guy. How he was saved, he broke up that time with Stalin and Lenin. They were all together when they started out the Revolution. He was a Socialist when they broke up. He start running away. When he came into a village and that particular village was a blacksmith and he run into the blacksmith and put him down the arm against the wall with Jewish religious things on him and the Cossacks chasing were chasing him, they came in, they looked for him and they couldn't find him. They saw him and when they came out back so the officer said to him did you see him. He said no, there's an old man, an old Jew with his pals and his tzitses (spelling). And he survived.
- Q: Now he became a Jewish grandfather?

- A: That's it. And he was there. As soon as he passed away --
- Q: What happened?
- A: Anti-Semitism. They used to have boycotts. It's a privilege to boycott _____
- Q: So even in Bialystok you had boycotts?
- A: Oh yeah.
- Q: How about your father's meat stores?
- A: Oh yeah. Meat is another story to talk about. We used to kill kosher meat _____. They passed a law that they wanted to take away from people Jewish kosher killed. The whole world protested at that time, 1937, 38. So finally they permitted to kill kosher so much and so much. I will never forget as long as I live, we used to sell a lot of restaurants in Bialystok. So one morning I came in like 5:00, 6:00 in the morning _____. The main meal is lunchtime, so they stopped cooking about 7:00, 8:00 in the morning, so I had to be in the store 5:00, 6 o'clock in the morning. We had one store wasn't too far from the railroad station so at 5 o'clock when the shift changes in the railroad workers so they banged on the door. Mr. Bass, Mr. Bass, grandfather died. That's how we heard the news that the grandfather passed away.
- Q: Grandfather Pilsudski? Besides the boycott and the limit on kosher killing of animals for meat, were there other changes after he died?
- A: Well, I wouldn't say I exactly remember. Like I said before, you're young and you don't realize those _____. Naturally there were a lot of changes _____. (The tape is difficult to hear). The Germans had a lot of influence at that time. In our hometown lived a lot of Germans. They remained from the First World War. They were manufacturing textiles. Bialystok is the second largest city in Europe in textiles. _____
- Q: You described the German population of Bialystok. When it came to anti-Semitism who was the greatest danger to you, the Germans of Bialystok or the Poles?
- A: The Germans maybe they did it more in intelligence, but the Poles did it like pogroms or fighting or things like that.
- Q: So there were pogroms in Bialystok?

- A: Not in Bialystok direct because Bialystok was 85 to 90 percent Jewish city. So they didn't start it up. But there were some other cities _____
- Q: Who controlled Bialystok? With the large Jewish population, who controlled the city government?
- A: Polacks. Jewish hardly were elected. Doctors, lawyers, yes.
- Q: When the Russians came in was your father able to keep his stores?
- A: No.
- Q: He was in the army, wasn't he?
- A: No, he was 39 he wasn't in the army.
- Q: But they took him away? Why did they take him away?
- A: Three stores.
- Q: Three stores -- bourgeois. And they sent him where?
- A: My father was liberated, he was innocent. When he came in, the same day he came in when my father was arrested, we came into the police station and started asking for my father. So they told us to see _____ one of the big jails there. We used to cut our bread in half and send the other half to my father. After the liberation in 45-46, my father and I got together, my father and I lived together. We slept in one bed and we cried our tears out. He told me he has never seen Brisk (?), he never even knew how it looked. They put him in _____. They sent him six weeks -- sixty days and sixty nights.
- Q: Siberia?
- A: Six weeks, they took him that long. He always used to kid me. If you would be there we used to cut trees, he used to tell me a dozen people could dance a waltz on it such huge trees.
- Q: Did your family get any word from him during that time?
- A: No.
- Q: No one knew what happened to him, no letters, nothing?
- A: Nothing. We didn't expect that. But right when the war ended, he used to write letters. In Bialystok, we used to have a guy used to take care of our accounts. He was an accountant, so my father used to send a letter to him and we used to send

letters from Germany because we were liberated from Germany. Somehow my sister was liberated not far from Poland and we spoke to each other said we going to be liberated we'll all come back to Bialystok. But who knew the circumstances with Germany and Russia with borders and all that, but she made it into Poland. Came to my home town there were maybe ten, twelve people, they all left _____ they couldn't stay there _____. That's how we got together with my father we brought him into Bialystok then to Germany and then to the United States.

Q: You were in Bialystok in September 1939, when the war broke out? What were you doing?

A: My father was there. What was I doing? I was working in the kitchen.

Q: Did the Germans come?

A: The Germans came two years later, 1941. Because Poland, if you look at a map, you see Poland has a river the Bug.

Q: And the Russians took the East and the Germans took the West. So for a year and a half almost two years, you are under the Russians. So what did you and the family do?

A: They sent us to school.

Q: They sent you to school?

A: Their school. They allowed us. After 4 o'clock they sent us to Russian school. I just tried to explain the reason why, they prepared us for the army. A year later or two years later they would probably take us into the service.

Q: How did your family make ends meet? Your father was gone, the meat stores were gone?

A: It's a good question.

Q: It's a good question, it had to have been tough. Your mother had all these kids.

A: Yeah. I'm trying to tell you a story, you wouldn't believe it.

Q: You worked in?

A: I just mentioned a minute ago that there were textile factories and I worked in the textiles. When the Russians came in they used to take like three or four places, they call it _____ and guard them together.

Q: Cooperative?

A: Cooperative. They called them _____. And they made a kitchen there. The textiles run three shifts every day, day and night. We had to prepare twenty-four meals a day for three shifts. One time, they always used to have a lot of dancing, the Russians. In that same factory they built up a place with a platform, they used to go every night dancing. I was a youngster, I was dressed nicely and the director was a Russian guy. He used to come over all the time and ask "where did you get it?" I said, what do you mean where did we get it? We bought it. I was young, I didn't know what to answer. I didn't know their system in Russian. He said, you mean you have money, you go to the store you bought shoes, you bought a suit. One time coming there in October I meet this one, this one and this one. _____. I need sugar. _____ Where am I going to get sugar. Tovarich, you know what Tovarich is?

Q: Comrade.

A: Comrade, director, where am I going to get sugar for you? He said how many pounds of sugar do you put in each shift? Three tanks, each shift we used to put in a tank of coffee. Each shift is a tank of coffee and we used to put in sugar and coffee together. We used to put in five kilo? Because there was 1,800 cups. I'll tell you what to do, put in four kilo from now on. I never know from those things, how could I steal a pound of sugar from it. I gave it to him. But then he opened the door for me. _____.

Q: So then you had help? This job you got when the Russians came in, this was after the Russians came in, the job in the kitchen. This was after the Russians came in?

A: In 1939. The end of '39.

Q: And you worked in this kitchen?

A: I managed it. Because I can explain it. I was a very good comedian. Today I happen to be a good cook. _____. When we supplied the restaurants I used to pick up the orders and get on my bicycle when it wasn't too busy.

Q: When you were working for your father?

A: Yeah, I would get on my bicycle, it was a distance. If it wasn't too much. Otherwise I had to take the bus. That's how I knew about cooking, I used to come around, sometimes the Polacks they used to stay in the kitchen they used to call me over and show me how to do this and how to do this. _____. So this way that's how I made sure my family had food.

Q: The job in the kitchen, how long did you work there?

- A: Maybe a year and a half.
- Q: Until the Germans came?
- A: Until the Germans came. At that time they all escaped. We came back that was on Saturday night, I'll never forget. We came back from a dance Saturday night, it must have been two or three o'clock in the morning. Two, three o'clock summertime, the sun is already out in June. So I go home and I see all the Soviets barefooted, one shoe on, one shoe off. They are running like crazy, like _____. I kept asking what's happening? They said the Germans are back. They were at that time also drunk and they came from dancing places or entertainment places and they came after midnight and they came to the barracks. Where we used to live near the army barracks.
- Q: So the Russian army barracks were near your home?
- A: Not too far, maybe a couple of miles, a couple of kilometers. _____ That's how we had enough food.
- Q: Your mother cooked it all?
- A: I was always a good supplier. Even when I worked in the concentration camp, what do you think, how do I survive. I was three and one half years in Auschwitz. How many survived? I also worked in the kitchen. When we came up in the transport at Auschwitz so they started announcing they needed "mescher" (spelling) So you know what a "mescher" is?
- Q: Yes, a butcher.
- A: That's it. A "mescher" so everybody is raising their hands. Give them a knife and a skin and check out how he cuts it. So help me God when I came over as soon as I took the skin and the knife, he said "du bist gut."
- Q: Let's back up just a little bit, when the Germans came in in June 1941, after the dance, you came home and the Germans are coming in what happens in Bialystok? How did things change? Do you lose your job?
- A: You mean when the Germans came in?
- Q: Yes, when the Germans come in in 1941, what happens?
- A: First of all as soon as they came in they start grabbing Jews and throwing them into the synagogues and burning up.
- Q: Immediately?

A: Immediately. Shooting and killing. People were afraid to go out they didn't know what was going on because some of the Jewish people from Warsaw, from Waltz? They crossed _____ they already told us the horror. And some of them tried to skip out and go into Russia, and some of them survived this way.

Q: So you weren't surprised that the Germans were killing people?

A: No we were not. You couldn't imagine that people would kill people. You couldn't imagine that kind of horror.

Q: You knew who Hitler was then?

A: Sure, we used to hear him talking. He used to come on the radio, he was like a dog you couldn't stop him. He would go three hours.

Q: So when the Germans come in they grabbed and they killed Jews. What else did they do?

A: What else did they do? One Saturday, they took over two thousand Jews and put them in the main synagogue and put some fire bombs in and the city was burning for three days and three nights. The whole city _____

Q: No one in your family, though?

A: We lived a little bit out of the center.

Q: What else happened under the Germans? Was there a ghetto?

A: Oh yes. Then they came after a few days and gave everybody a star. Then they formed the ghetto. My father remained home, we were not bombed out.

Q: Did you have to move?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: So your mother and everybody

A: Our house was not in the ghetto section, our house. Our house had no choice to save their _____. But we had to move. Every little thing in life is lucky. That guy I mentioned before used to take care on feeding the animals, the cows and the pigs, we used to call him not exactly a maintenance man. He used to take down all the things from the stables, feeding the cows, milking the cows. His house wasn't far from the ghetto.

Q: The whole family stayed together? What did your mother take?

A: Soft things. We schlepped.

Q: I mean, how much time did you have to prepare for this move?

A: They gave us, I don't know exactly, but they gave a short time, maybe a day or two. We were young guys. We made a big pack and we were walking with it. Whatever we could take we schlepped. We couldn't take too much because this house we lived in in the ghetto, they organized the Jewish Judenrat. Judenrat means a house. So many narrows (?) per person. That house, what do you think they did, they took in my brother's girlfriend's family, my girlfriend's parents, we were three families.

Q: Quite a crowd. Three families in one apartment. Any other changes under the Germans? Did you have any job?

A: No. They used to take us out _____. After awhile the ghetto got so filled up it wasn't enough room for the people. So they came to the conclusion they're going to evacuate some of the people from the ghetto to a little town called Pruzany not far from Greece. So they first came out that the Judenrat they go by the ABC. The second day was our next. So they loaded us up on trucks to take us to Pruzany. We had to go through a control, a German control _____ very difficult to hear.

Q: So your family moved to Pruzany? Do you remember when?

A: No. _____. We were there a little while after Bialystok. From Pruzany, then they took us out.

Q: So you had to move twice. You had to move into the ghetto, and how long were you in the ghetto?

A: Close to a year, less than a year. We got into the ghetto in eight or nine months.

Q: Then the following summer you had to go to Pruzany?

A: Right.

Q: And how long were you in Pruzany?

A: Until January 1943.

Q: And the family is still together?

A: No. Just myself, my sister and my two younger brothers.

Q: Your two youngest brothers and your mother? Now when you were in the ghetto and you had to do clean up work for the Germans, did Boruch have to do that too?

A: Oh yes,_____

Q: Do you remember when that happened?

A: That happened during the winter months. I don't know exactly, I know it was cold weather. In the summertime you couldn't face the night because you are lightly dressed so you can notice it. Wintertime you had a better chance, you had a heavier coat, heavier pair of pants, whatever. You had a better chance _____.

Q: How about your youngest brothers, did they have to do any work for the Germans?

A: _____ They used to take them out for chopping wood, sweeping out_____.

Q: How about Izrael? He had to work in Pruzany? But not Iszmuel? How about your mother? Did they leave her alone?

A: _____.

Q: In Pruzany you were working?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you have to do there?

A: The same garbage. Cutting wood, _____ it was wintertime, they needed wood to heat their houses. Everything, whatever they told me to do. If it was snowing I had to clean up the snow around.

Q: And your sister and Izrael had to do work too?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did your family get enough food to eat in Pruzany?

A: There was rations. If you go outside you had a chance sometimes you could find something valuable. You could change for something. _____.

Q: And you were able to smuggle some food in?

A: Oh yes. Believe me the Germans, some of them were a little bit more liberal, they wouldn't raise their head, they didn't want to look at you. Some of them used to smuggle in. I used to smuggle in a lot of food from the Germans. In the wintertime while they slept _____. It was nice and quiet I used to go out and take out some valuables and change it _____. We used to make like double bags and schlep cornmeal, beans, anything edible. Whatever came along. Corn flour we used to bake bread _____.

Q: Now you're in Pruzany between August 1942 and January 1943. What happened in January?

A: It was liquidation of the ghetto.

Q: Liquidation of Pruzany?

A: We went to Auschwitz.

Q: Do you remember when that was?

A: This much I can tell you _____ From Pruzany we had to go to a train station called Linowa.

Q: So there was no train station in Pruzany?

A: No. The train station was a little small town about eight kilometers outside of the old walk (?)_____. And finally they loaded us up on the train and the train started to move already. I wanted to jump. I couldn't do it. (Very sad, tears).

Q: You couldn't jump?

_____(reverse side)
SIDE B

Q: And you were all together in the railroad car? This was a cattle car.

A: Cattle car. Some people jumped _____.

Q: What did your mother say? She was the head of the family? What was she saying?

A: Well, the same thing.

Q: Stay together?

- A: My mother stayed together when they took us off the train, in Auschwitz. She thought maybe we would survive _____.
- Q: The train left _____ mid January and you traveled straight to Auschwitz. How many days did it take?
- A: Three days.
- Q: _____
- Q: Did your family have any food?
- A: Nothing.
- Q: Nothing to eat?
- A: No. Whatever we took we had _____.
- Q: What were people doing and saying when they were in the train for three days? It was cold, I imagine.
- A: It was cold, people were afraid, all kinds of people were thinking all kinds of things. _____. People were praying.
- Q: When you arrived, your family is split?
- A: Right _____.
- Q: So you're separated from your brothers?
- A: No, we walked in together. _____
- Q? Delousing.
- A: Delousing and washing yourself and I walked out from there. My brothers and I and I didn't recognize them. _____. A short while later we got a warm jacket.
- Q: So one of your brothers is with you?
- A: One of them. The one in Florida. We both have the same numbers. He's got 99243 and I have 99241.
- Q: So one brother is with you through the selection, you're 99241?
- A: And he's 99243.

- Q: You and your brother are separated from your other two brothers.
- A: My other two brothers they took them on the truck.
- Q: From the train station?
- A: Right on the truck, that was the gas chamber.
- Q: They were taken to the gas chamber by truck?
- A: Right.
- Q: And your mother went with them?
- A: Right. She walked. They made her walk _____.
- Q: And your sister, meanwhile, is separated from you because she is a woman and she
- A: She always kept herself very close _____
- Q: So you volunteered to be a butcher?
- A: Well, they called out who is a carpenter, who is a tailor, who is a shoemaker? They needed them _____. Barracks so and so is a shoemaker, Barracks so and so is, like they had a washing commander who washed clothes. Every Sunday we used to change our jackets and pants.
- Q: So you were in Auschwitz for two years? You got there in January 1943 and in January 1945 the Russians came.
- A: Yeah, but you see, they evacuated, but I was liberated 3rd of May 1945. In Germany I got liberated. _____
- Q: You were moved from Auschwitz before the Russians arrived?
- A: We heard a shooting. Artillery was shooting. And they took us 4:00, 5:00 in the evening, January 18 and we all start marching to Gipwitz _____. We were traveling 12 days and 12 nights on trains, coal trains. _____. We stayed there 'till April ____.
- Q: You were put into a forced labor camp?
- A: Yes, it had barracks _____ but we didn't do much because the Americans _____

Q: What was the name of the camp?

A: _____ I don't really remember, I don't even know if the camp had a name, it was just several barracks. They didn't took us out from it, they just broke us out into groups _____.

Q: Every night -- twelve days and twelve nights. Every night -- twelve days and twelve nights.

Q: No food?

A: You guessed it.

Q: Snow to drink?

A: Snow to drink and they throw sometimes little pieces of liver (?). People were killing for it. Whoever was strongest would jump. If you could make it.

Q: You didn't think about jumping?

A: No, who could jump, you couldn't even life your head. By the time you walked out from the train to the out houses there were half of them dead. _____.

Q: So mid April you moved from _____. Did they take you somewhere else? West?

A: On a ship? Up the Elbe, down the Elbe? Down the Elbe on a ship?

Q: The name of the ship was Capricorn?

A: Capricorn.

Q: Where did they take you?

A: They took us to a little town called Noishta(?)

Q: Noishta?

A: The ship was standing there and the Jews, whoever was Jewish, not everybody had a star. _____. They did cook some food. They let down the food by a rope. By the time it got there _____ Whatever. I never, I can't even describe it. The people wouldn't believe it. Then when the British came in.

- Q: They let you off at Noishta?
- A: They didn't let us off.
- Q: You're still on the boat?
- A: On the boat till May 3, 1945 at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. I will never forget it, because the British _____. We had a Jewish mayor at that time, who came in to talk to us spoke in Yiddish.
- Q: This was near which town? This was near which town, this was near Hamburg?
- A: This was near Noishta-Limbeck (?) Hamburg.
- Q: So you were near Noishta when the British liberated you?
- A: Liberated us. What do you think they did, the Germans before they did? They take the boats, there must have been six, seven thousand, not only from our camp, they brought them from around the camp. They must have brought 20 to 25 thousand people on the boat. They brought people from the Polish court, what do they call it, Dansk and other places. They all brought them down there. They kept them in six, seven boats_____.
- Q: How did you survive? You were on the boat?
- A: (Laughter) I don't remember.
- Q: You don't know?
- A: Then they took us into the barracks. There was a German agent. The barracks were nice. And when they took me into the barracks the barracks were full of mirrors. I looked at myself, I looked like a devil.
- Q: You wouldn't have danced with yourself?
- A: (Laughter) At that time, in the middle of the camp they dugged out a big hole and they buried thousands and thousands of people. _____. Five, six weeks later everybody got -----because the united relief organizations _____.
- Q: What was it like working in the kitchens in Auschwitz? We kind of skipped over that.
- A: It wasn't bad.
- Q: That's why you survived Auschwitz?

- A: I survived Auschwitz and I helped out people too. _____. I lost one of my eyes.
- Q: You lost any eye?
- A: _____ My body was like an animal. I looked like a devil.
- Q: Why did they do this to you, what was your crime?
- A: I gave out a couple of potatoes.
- Q: Extra potato?
- A: I gave a couple of potatoes to a guy, and that guy is still alive. He comes from the same region, Morristown. _____. That's how my brother survived.
- Q: And who reported you, a kapo, the SS? _____.
- A: Ah, if I would sit with you two months we couldn't write all _____ believe me.
- Q: I believe you. A book wouldn't do it.
- A: But working in the kitchen you were able to help other people with food?
- A: Should I tell a story?
- Q: Yes.
- A: We had a guy _____ he used to live in Chester, Pennsylvania. He was together with my brother on the same _____. They liquidated the whole little town of _____ and they liquidated _____ and they liquidated the Jewish population from my own town. Every Jew whoever was there was never the same.
- Q: In January 1943.
- A: _____ The man was deaf, completely deaf. He couldn't _____ and I got after him and smuggled out food. I smuggled out in three years a lot.
- Q: They only caught you once?
- A: I smuggled out a lot of food and I gave to him, to myself, I gave to my brother. When we came to Auschwitz in '43, they send him away to a little town outside of Auschwitz in the coal mines. And in six or seven weeks they came down like death. I got after them ----- He survived, my brother survived. _____ Before he died _____.

- Q: Before he died.
- A: His family's got another brother who's got a huge American family who came down with him when he made a special visit _____.
- Q: If you hadn't worked in the kitchen, how long do you think you would have lived in Auschwitz?
- A: You can figure out how long the duration in camp. It was figured out six months the longest, six weeks, that's it. If you last more than six weeks, you're lucky. Because you know if you only stay there, three, four or five months, you get acquainted. It's -- you organize yourself _____. If you survive the first six, seven weeks, two months, you get friends, this _____.
- Q: You had friends in the camp? Did you have friends that you worked with?
- A: Sure.
- Q: Was there an underground organization?
- A: _____.
- Q: Yeah, what was it called? Did it have a name?
- A: Donderkommando. (?)
- Q: Donderkommando.
- A: Donder did the burn ____.
- Q: They did the burning, yeah. And they were part of the underground? What did they do?
- A: What did they do? They got organized. They made an uprising in Auschwitz too, the last few months.
- Q: Right. Yeah, the crematorium.
- A: In fact, I even know the names. I have it right --- I have everything marked down. Lately I -- my eyes are _____ but I got everything marked down. _____ last year was 50 years Auschwitz. I wrote them out for 50 years Auschwitz. It was in 1941 when the Germans attacked the Russians' they made Auschwitz the army camp.

- Q: Actually it was before. Then they made it into a concentration camp. It was a Polish army camp.
- A: They used to -- you know it. It was a Polish army camp. In Auschwitz direct, in Auschwitz, it wasn't so bad. Everybody had his own bed. There were three high but you had your sleeping --- In Birkenau, in _____.
- Q: That's the new camp.
- A: The new camp, you were sleeping six in one, six in the other and six in the third. Eighteen people like sardines back and forth. In Auschwitz, it was not so bad. You had the barrack, I was _____, I took _____. Made a beautiful museum out of it. Children's glasses and suitcases _____. You know Auschwitz when we came here, there was no mud _____. Sometimes they used to count three or four times a day. Used to stay there for the rain, your feet got in so over the top of your tukus if you got in too deep. _____ soil was so soggy. Auschwitz was all stone, wasn't so bad.
- Q: Brick?
- A: Brick, yeah.
- Q: That's where you stayed? You stayed in Auschwitz?
- A: Yeah. Barracks 6A. I even took up all my friends ----- some of the other people. We were eight people, four couples. I took them up and I showed them. We had a guide; I told the guide, I showed him where sometimes where we hide a little when they don't want them to see anything, give us a little _____ --. _____ The _____, the place where I sit is still there. They made museum out of those main barracks. They made a museum. Tons of cyclamate. (?) tons. Tons of suitcases, shoes, hair, women's hair, tons.
- Q: The resistance? Which prisoners were involved in the resistance? Auschwitz had Jews, they had Russians, they had whole -- they had everybody. Who was involved ---?
- A: You're telling me whole nationalities! In Auschwitz, in '41 when the war started in Russia, they made it in a _____. In Auschwitz were the signs, Arbeit Macht Freiden and another sign ---. You only come out alive through the chimney.
- Q: That's the unwritten sign. You got out of there, through the kitchen.
- A: I should tell you stories but let me tell you one thing. I was saved due to a friend. If it wouldn't be for the other guy, I wouldn't have survived. The last few months _____ before I got in from _____, they did me out, they took me away from the kitchen. They put me in another commando that carried cement. I was there five,

six weeks. Kommando 63, as I recall. They build a billet. They would build a billet in the middle of building. As I got thrown out from Auschwitz, I got me into that commando and after five, six weeks, I got terrible _____. For five, six weeks, I couldn't walk. My fingers were _____, I couldn't walk. I was dead almost and I was _____. I couldn't go back and forth 100 kilos of cement back and forth. One time, there was a little _____.

Q: Prisoner or guard?

A: A guard!

Q: Guard.

A: Yeah. You know what in the kitchen, I used to _____.

Q: Bottle of wine.

A: (Indecipherable) Right? _____ we used to call him the _____. His coat was longer than his feet.

Q: He looked pretty bad, yeah.

A: I didn't know who it was, who I'm talking to, I didn't _____

Q: Yeah, you can't eat cement.

A: (Cannot decipher)

Q: Transferred to the second commando?

A: Second commando. What do you think it could mean? The kapo was cleaning, the kapo was criminal with a red mark.

Q: Yeah triangle.

A: He was screaming like he still was very exciting but real as he is in his uniform. He put me in a commando unloading food.

Q: Unloading food?

A: At the warehouse. In the warehouse you fight with about half a million people for food. _____ the first thing, I'll never forget, you ask my wife. The first thing I walk out there and as soon as I walked in there, what do you think. I noticed? The sweet condensed milk. I grabbed it and I don't know how I ever _____ but I got it in the camp and I still _____ that milk. I was _____ and all kinds of fruit. _____ So they put me up in _____ and

they throw things like army shoes, leather shoes. Everybody was walking around in those wooden shoes, a hole in the shoe. When you walked _____. Drivers, always I don't know. Sometimes you believe in God or you don't want to believe in God./ Just for the spite, it's starting to snow, starts coming down and you walk in your wooden shoes, the snow sticks. _____ on a motorcycle.

Q: You had the nice shoes?

A: Nice shoes.

Q: So he saved you twice? Shoes and food.

A: Civilian.

Q: Another guy gave you shoes?

A: Civilian. I gave him _____ and he brought me the shoes. That should save me all kinds of change because I had something under my coat also. I was with _____. Warehouses was there for seven or eight weeks and I got back in shape. This way I was able to survive in the train.

Q: In the resistance at Auschwitz, did the different categories of prisoners did they cooperate against ...?

A: Oh, yeah. There were a lot involved with people that we didn't know. They didn't even know; they didn't want us to know each other, some of them in Auschwitz _____. In fact, I have one of my friends who survived. I didn't know he was _____. He was from a small little town in _____. He survived, he helped a woman survive too. The woman is _____.

Q: The prisoners in the resistance, what nationality were they?

A: Lot of Polack.

Q: Polack? Were others included in the resistance?

A: Not as many -- well, Jewish people, of course. Russians, not as much.

Q: So Jews, Polish Jews and also Jews from other countries?

A: Lot of Frenchmen too.

Q: French Jews? So French Jews, Polish Jews and Polish gentiles -- and they all worked together?

A: Most likely. I was involved in _____.

- Q: What's the worst, could possibly be any worse than the stories you've already told me. What was the worst thing that you remember about Auschwitz?
- A: _____. The smoke _____ it smelled like _____. We used to lay in bed _____ every day_____.
- Q: How many --how soon after you arrived in Auschwitz did you realize what was happening in the crematorium, in the camp?
- A: As soon as we were on the ramp.
- Q: The very first day you knew --.
- A: The first day they unloaded it already. They unloaded us and they were most of them the sonderkommando must have been a Jewish guy and they told us.
- Q: So they told you? Whisper? So you knew the worst on the first day?
- A: But they also told us as soon as they said they put _____ going to go marching, they knew already that we are going into this work. _____ sometimes when the crematoriums are still, they used to put them in the truck and put the gas pipe inside the truck and they got _____ in the truck.
- Q: You have anything to add to your story?
- A: No, I feel sometimes, I break down, I cannot _____.
- Q: When did you come to America? You were in a DP camp?
- A: No. I was in a private _____ under the _____. I remember the _____. It start to rain. The ladies, a young lady, every morning, like a clock. _____, Herr Bass?
- Q: _____, Herr Bass? Did you sleep well, Herr Bass?
- A: Yeah, yeah. She's making like a _____ lady, what a nice little lady. That was when I had my place was right across from his, the _____. _____ I worked for the Board of Education in Germany. I still have all my papers. _____ along the piano, not the piano, the accordion. I'm very good in Yiddish, Polish and Russian.
- Q: One more question to ask and the answer, I think, is going to be self-evident. Will you ever forget what happened?

A: How can I forget? How can I? This is my wife _____. Many times, I'm sick, many times I'm dreaming this, like _____. I look at myself. I was a capable boy, I grew upside down, the living in _____. I'm capable because of the, how do I feel? The tragedy. I was very fortunate that when we were in the warehouses, the kitchen _____. But the best thing is _____.

Q: Condensed milk?

A: I'll never forget. I'm a big nosh even today sometimes. We invite _____. Every _____ has something _____. I love sweet things.

Q: That's a nice note to end. Thank you very much.