

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HIMMELFARB

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Today is April 12, 1992. I am Anthony DiIorio. I am at the home of Mr. William Himmelfarb in the Bronx, New York. I am here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to interview him about his family's experiences during the Holocaust. Good morning, Mr. Himmelfarb.

Good morning, good morning.

Where were you born?

I was born in a small town called Koprzewnitz which is approximately six kilometers from the Vistula; in Polish they call it Wisla. The Vistula divided Galicia and Poland. Poland became, after World War I, became independent. The other side of the Vistula was belonged to Austria, that's why they call it Galicia.

Were you born in the southern part of the country or the northern part?

I would say if it's near the Vistula, that would be the northern part of the country.

What was your name when you were born?

In Yiddish, they call me Wolzalik (ph)(c.28). In public school, they call me Wolf. Of course, when I came to the United States, my name was changed to William and I kept that name since then.

When were you born?

I was born in 1927, June 19 in Koprzewnitz.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I had a younger brother, Izzy, and I had a younger sister, Hannah. Of course, they're both not here with me. I am the only survivor in the whole family.

You are the oldest of three children?

I am the oldest of three children. Your father, can you tell us about your father?

My father had a small business. A grocery store, he had. His main business, of course, was the store. He was a very religious man, worked five, six days a week. The seventh day was Sabbath and he never had the store opened. This was our income. That was his livelihood, the business. The people who lived in the town, actually lived from one another. You buy from me, I buy from you. Whatever the other person was selling, that's even. You sell shirts or pants, you sort of exchanged it. Most of the time there used to be a market on a Thursday. Every Thursday, the people from the villages or the farms would come into the town which was the biggest day of the week. Everybody was doing business, buying and selling. That's how everybody made a living.

Your father had his own store?

Yes, we had our own grocery store.

His customers were from the town and from outside?

From outside and in the town.

Jewish and non-Jewish?

Jewish and non-Jewish. At that time everything was beautiful, perfect. No problem whatsoever.

How about your mother?

My mother was mostly house. Took care of the children, three children to take care of. But when my father had to go to purchase merchandise, so she covered that particular day. Also, on Thursday which was market day, she stayed in the store with him. _____(c.53)

Did you live in an apartment in the same building as the store or separately?

No. The store was my mother's sister lived in the back of the store. This was originally my grandparents' house. We used the front as a store and the rear was my aunt's apartment. We had our apartment a few minutes away from where the store was located.

You had a large family then?

Yes, so to speak of, yes. My father comes from a family of nine children.

So he was one of nine children?

He was one of nine children. My mother comes of a family of six children.

They had known each other before?

Yes.

I saw a picture of them earlier, when they were engaged.

My father and my mother, I was told, during World War I, was a lot of smuggling going on in Europe. That's the only way you were able to make a living. People were traveling from city to city to buy merchandise and bring it in. I understood that my mother and father met during that traveling period back and forth. Then they got engaged around the time, I think it was either 1920 or 1921. Why not? [Female voice: "You were born on--"] They got engaged that doesn't mean they got married! [Female voice: "They were so young."] It doesn't mean a thing. In those days they believed in the Jewish tradition, you're supposed to get married at the age of eighteen, a girl anyway.

Your mother was married at age 18?

I assume she was, at 18, yes.

You were the first child?

I was the firstborn. Of course, in those days, I was born in 1927 so maybe they got married in 1926, I am not sure.

That was a longer engagement than---?

Yes, in those days, was long engagement.

Both families, would you say both families were religious families?

Very religious families. As a matter of fact, the grandfather I'm named after; he was a rabbi. He was a teacher in the town. I was named after him.

The grandfather on your father's side or your mother's side?

My mother's side.

Your mother's father was a rabbi and you were named after him.

My father's father, he was a merchant. He was actually, what you call, in the dairy business. He was buying cheese, eggs, all sorts of dairy products. He was doing business with bigger cities. That was his profession.

What kind of schooling did your parents have?

My parents had mostly Hebrew education, no Polish education. At that time, when they were born, Jewish people were not allowed to get educated under the Russians.

They were born under Russian rule?

Under Russian rule, right. I think I was the first generation that was able to get a Polish education.

Both of your parents had attended Jewish schools?

Only Jewish, hidden.

Hidden.

Wasn't an open school, was a hidden school in the Sellis(ph)(c.089) where this book is all written all about.

What languages did your parents speak?

Yiddish.

At home?

At home, Yiddish was spoken primarily. The only language I was able to speak Polish was when I attended school. But among my friends, if I came along my Jewish friends, we spoke Yiddish. The gentile friends, Polish.

You were bilingual? Yiddish and Polish.

Yiddish and Polish, yes. And also Hebrew.

And Hebrew. Your father also knew Russian?

Yes, because he was born under the Russian system, so he spoke Russian, Polish and Yiddish.

What kind of school did you attend?

I started the schooling at the age of seven which was 1935. I went to school until the age of, let's see, 1939 the war broke out, five years. Five years of schooling I had in Polish. But in Yiddish I had more than that. My Polish schooling stopped when the war broke out. The law came through, no Jewish child is allowed to go to school.

September, 1939, you did not go back to school?

That was the end of it. The day the Germans came in, I remember it like today is Sunday. I was in the middle of the street and finally, we could hear shooting coming into the city. Houses were burning, everybody was petrified. Everybody was running back and forth; they didn't know what to do with themselves. People were screaming, what's happening? what's going on? The Germans had come. Well, it was about 10, 11 o'clock in the morning, September 1, 1939, the German patrol entered the city. They were all full of dust. I remember there were two jeeps, two motorcycles and a truck. The German officers came in with machine guns and the first thing you could hear is handt holdt (ph)(c.115), raise your hands. We all stood still, we didn't move. We raised our hands. I was trying desperately to get to my parents' house, to the store so they could be warned what's happening, where I was. But I couldn't. I ran across the street to the other side. Meantime, the Germans surrounded the whole circle. The town had a circle, a square. Machines guns pointing to each like towards the houses. I figured this way, if I run to the back of the city, all around the circle, I'll be able to reach my home. That's exactly what I did. But my parents didn't know that I was in the house. They were looking for me, because I was in one area and they were in another area. In the meantime, the Germans went from house to house and get everybody out into the circle. We didn't know what the consequences were going to be but we felt, we don't have a choice. There's nowhere to hide, there's nowhere to run. The war is on, shooting was going on like crazy. The Polish army was around they had no place where to put them anymore. They came in with horses, the infantry came in. There was no artillery, they had no artillery. The Polish army had a very poor artillery, about six horses pulling one anti-aircraft _____, (c. 131) okay. one anti-aircraft was pulled by six horses. That's the strength. I mean they were good military personnel, no question about it, but they had nothing to fight against armored. The Germans were well-armed. In the meantime, more German trucks started to come into the city. They felt the city safe, they will come in. Every house was entered, they entered the house and emptied it. Everybody out in the middle of the street. When it came to my house, where I was

living, the Germans came in; so we all raised our hands. They says, march out. So we marched out and my parents saw me. My mother says, where were you?. I says, I run home when I saw the German trucks coming in, I got panic and I run to the other side of the street and then I run home. Of course, what are you going to do in a situation like that? You don't have parents, yet. They got very panicky too, looking for me. We stood out there in the square for about 45 hours. Then they told the women and the children may go back to their homes. Either they were holding us as hostages in case they find maybe the Polish army resisting, whatever the situation was, I don't understand it. I don't know. All I know is that after a period of time, they let the women go back to their homes with the children and then later on, the men were allowed to go home. This was the first experience with --.

This was the first day?

The first day, I have it written out in a book in the house in Yiddish. Everything in Yiddish but that particular day took place.

This was on the first of September?

On the first day when the Germans came in.

As far as you can tell, there was no real Polish resistance?

How could they resist? They had nothing to resist with. You can't take an infantry fight mechanic. They came with heavy tanks and trucks and airplanes. The first thing that came in, airplanes that start softening up the area there. Where we lived, around this area there, in one particular place is called Merrick (ph)(c.157), where they had ammunition factory, was the first place they catch. On the other side of the Vistula was a factory. We could see that they were so powerful and so strong, we have no way of defeating them. Still and all, the Polish army held out a long time, held out three weeks.

Your town was not bombed?

It was bombed in one area there which was _____(c.163) anything of value. Just dropped a bomb maybe to scare people. That's about it. Nothing of value. There was no particular bridges that had value, they had roads and everything. The bomb didn't do any particular harm at all whatsoever.

Were you frightened?

Of course I was frightened! Who wouldn't be frightened when you see, first of all, we knew the atrocities that happened in Germany in 1938; what happened in Austria. Because a lot of those Jewish people from those countries were pushed back to Poland. Anyone who was Polish born, lived in Germany, had to leave Germany, go back to Poland. Those people came in to our town, we had to allocate them. We had to give them food; we had to give them lodging. This was a must. They told us the atrocities, what happened in those areas where they lived. Of course you get frightened.

Did you recall any specific stories that they told about German?

Yes, they said that they used to come in their houses at night, to take out the women, rape the women. They used to take out the men, cut their beards off, put them to work or drag them alongside, hooked them up to a truck and drag them alongside the streets. I mean they told stories that you were shivering. As a youngster, which I was, my ears were always open to hear, to know what was going on, to see what I can do. You cannot rely 100% on the city, or the people, or your own parents. You are on your own when something like that happens.

Did you know any of the refugees, personally?

No. There were no relatives of ours, was total strange people. Each family that entered the city were assigned to a certain family. You have to give them breakfast, you give them lunch, you give them supper. All were welcome.

Was anyone assigned to your household?

Yes, we had three families who were assigned to us. Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, they would come to our house for breakfast. The other family were assigned Thursday, Friday and Saturday for lunch. Then they keep changing around. Every family cooperated as much as they possibly could. My mother became the breadwinner when the war broke out. She was blond, she looked like a Polish woman. She put on a babushka, like a kerchief, a disguise. She used to go into the towns called Townocheck(ph)(c.190) which is across the Vistula, six kilometers from my town. She used to purchase the merchandise which was necessary for the house. By horse and buggy, the stuff would be brought back into the city. I used to wait for her as a youngster. When she crossed over the Hampton(ph)(c.200) bridge, the Germans built across the Vistula; when I saw my mother, I was delighted to see her. Of course, who wouldn't? She used to make those trips twice a week.

All by herself?

All by herself because the disguise that she was able to go through. They didn't know she was Jewish, they let her cross over the bridge. On the other side of the bridge, as soon as she came off, I sort of approached to her and helped her. If she had to carry something, I helped her carry.

What was your father doing during the months after the occupation?

During the months of the occupation, he had to stay in the store. He couldn't go anyplace. He had to cut off his beard.

He cut it himself or--?

Sure, he had to. There was a rule, right away. You had to cut off. Between 1939, the Germans came in, to 1940, September, was a couple of months, the rules were laid as follows: They had a curfew from six in the evening to six in the morning, nobody's allowed to go out unless you had a specific permission from the German headquarters. Otherwise you go out, you're shot. The German patrol was marching up and down from the top of the city to the end of the city. They had six patrolmen. Not even youngsters were allowed to go out. The store had to be closed at 5:30, no business will _____(c.218). We were fortunate that in the back of each store, where families lived, we had a tremendous yard. We all got together in the evening in the back of the yard and we discussed this. We consoled each other. We knew the consequences, what's happening, what's going on, but what can you do? We were in a situation where you have to do whatever time allows. In 1940, the beginning of 1940, Poland was very fortunate when the winter came along, lots of snow, lots of snow. An order came through from headquarters, everybody at the age of 12 and every man the age of 60 had to assign themselves to work. We all had to sign our names. Every day, I had to go out on the highways and shovel snow so that the German armor can go freely about. We got paid for that, not much, but we got paid for this. As the days and the months went by, we sort of got accustomed to the idea. This is part of life, this is the way we're going to grow up, what else can I do? Right through the 1940's, being it was a small town, the Germans demanded that the town should establish a headquarters, Jewish men and women. They called it a geminda(ph)(c.239), what you call it here is a city hall, a city hall. In German, it's a geminda (c.231). They took the top notch men from the town and they formed a committee. What was the purpose of the committee? If the Germans needed something, assume they needed some boots for the German officer, they would come to the committee and says, I would like you to supply us within two or three weeks, three hundred pair of boots. They gave us the sizes and everything. Of course, the committee paid for them. They needed a certain amount of people to go and clean the headquarters of the German camp. The committee had to assign

a certain amount of people to go there and do the work. This was the purpose of the geminda. Whatever they demanded, they didn't go to individual people, they went to the committee. The committee, more or less, had an idea who has money, who didn't have any money. Believe me, they had to really drag out money from the people. Who wanted to part with money? You work all your life, it's a poor town, this wasn't a rich town, it was a poor town. This was the main purpose of the geminda. The people they call the Yudenrach (ph)(c.250). Yudenrach is a committee who decides, who makes decisions. My father's brother, he was older than my father, he was a member of that Yudenrach. Every time when my father had a chance to talk to him, he says it's no good, it's no good. What's the matter?, my father asked him. He says, they're demanding so many things from us. We don't know where to get it from. We don't know where to get it from. They demanded housing for their officers, demanded shoes, demanded clothing, demanded food, whatever they were able to get, whatever their mind was working on, they came to you, give me, give me and give me. There's a limit to everything, right? This was in 1940 right through that. Everybody from the city had to go to work for the Germans, everybody. Except once a week, thank G__ for that day, on Thursday, which was market day, they allowed the gentile people to come into the city and bring in some merchandise, rice, corn wheat, flour, chicken, eggs and we sort of exchanged it to survive. It was very difficult. Bread was scarce, there was a ration of bread, sugar and flour. People started to become penniless, hate one another, because when you feel in your heart, you're hungry, your liberty is being taken away from you, you sort of become an animal. You hate people because--for no reason whatsoever. But it's there, the hate is there. You shouldn't hate one another because we're all in the same boat but nature works tricks on you. Because he comes over and demands from you things, you have to give it to them. Then you say to me, why do you come to me, why don't you go to them? You understand? That's how we create a war. That's their policy was. This was their idea, to create a revolution among one another. They would gain by that. In the beginning of 1942, new rules and regulations came forth.

From 1940 to '42, the situation was--?

The situation was stable. You were able to get whatever you want and supplied with rationed food and all that. Nothing was restricted except six o'clock in the evening, six o'clock in the morning.

How about wearing armbands or badges?

This came in 1942.

No schools?

No schools, then.

Your brother and sister are really not doing anything?

Nothing, whatsoever. Except at home, we were able to read ourselves books and teach ourselves. Then we had a private tutor coming to the house, in secret. He was able to teach us. Then the rules came through, every Jew, the age of twelve, men and women had to wear armband with the Star of David on the left arm. Everybody had to put it on, there was no way out.

What date, do you remember what date this was?

It was approximately February, I think, 1942. Then we start reading in the papers that they forming ghettos. Mortch (ph)(c.307), Cracow, the main cities of Poland. Then they started to restrict in our town, how far you can travel. We only had a limited amount of area which you could go, no further. That's the end of it. You go any further, you're shot, no questions. People from the villages, from the surrounding towns, were pushed into our town.

They had to be Jews?

Right. They had to leave the village, all their belongings. If they were able to sell it, fine. If not, you had to give it over to your neighbor and come into our town. How much can a town like us absorb? We were population of Jewish people, 150 families. The total population of our town including the gentiles were together over 500 families. When they started to bring in people from the villages, and including we have people already refugees from Austria, from Germany, our town was choking. We couldn't move around any more, food was scarce. It was very bad. 1942 was here and we knew things were happening already in Poland. Elimination of people, sending them out, pushing them to work. Then one day, it was in June, my father's brother came over to my father and said,--.

This is the one who works in the council?

That's right. He says, it doesn't look good. They demanding a _____(c.336) amount of people to be sent to a labor camp, to work for the Germans. It doesn't look good. He said to my father, I would suggest you let your son, Zalek, go to work on the highways. Wherever they have a group of people work on the highways, once you were there, you were safe. During the day, trucks will arrive and pick up the amount of people that we have joined tonight. Who do you take?, the newcomers, right?

People who influxed into our town from different towns so the first ones you take is them. You put them into a holding place until the Germans came with the trucks. They arrived approximately nine, ten o'clock in the morning. We were already on the highways working. Telephones in those days was very scarce. There wasn't like in here; you pick up a telephone and make a telephone call.

Your parents didn't have a telephone?

We didn't have a telephone. We didn't have electricity either. I went to work with another hundred fellows on the highways. Our duty on the highways was to pick up the gravel, straighten out the highway, whatever it was damaged down on there, we did the work.

These are all Jewish guys?

All Jewish people. When the trucks arrived, we received a telephone call from the post office. The post office sent a telephone call to the village where we worked telling them, they are coming to get us. This man who received the telephone call panicked and disappeared. He took off! We didn't know what was going on. Later on, I found out that one guy who was captured at night and held in a pen until the Germans come, came forward. He says if you want more people, you go to this and this highway and you'll find plenty of them. Then the trucks came out to the highways and where you going to go? No place where to go because it's also out of limits. About a hundred of us surrendered. They took us on the trucks and brought us into the town. We came into the town. Was my parents waiting, start to carry on, got hysterical. Says, what do you want me to do? Believe me, this is the honest truth. I'll never forget it, the rest of my life. I was sitting in the truck, numb. Didn't know what was going on, didn't know what's happening, just sat there and stared at my mother. They could have taken her too; they could have taken my father too and shoved him in the truck. She was brave enough to come forward. She says, he's a young boy. He's not a healthy boy. Can I take him off the truck and go home? The German turned around and said to her, he's a good boy, he's a strong boy. We'll make him stronger. He can work for us. Those were the words he said. I listen. What I wore was a shirt, a pair of pants, short pants; it was the clothing of youngsters and a pair of shoes. Within the hour, my mother and father stood there. My brother I didn't see any more, my sister, I didn't see any more.

They were home?

They were home, hidden.

Why were they hidden?

They were afraid they might have taken them too!

Even the very young--?

They didn't care, they need people, able people. They're not going to take somebody that's 60 years of age or 50 years of age. In those days, a 50-year old man looked like 80. My father says goodbye, my mother says goodbye to me. I was able to go down to hug her and go back into the truck. A hundred and five of us, in my hometown, were taken to _____(c.404). This was my first experience riding in a truck for three and a half hours. When we got into the town of _____(c.407), the Jewish committee provided us with a bath. The first thing I do is take a bath. We had to be disinfected--

Deloused.

Deloused, right. That's what they called it, deloused. Disinfected and I didn't know I had a belt on. I left the belt in my clothing. The belt came back, it was only _____(c.414) falling apart. I had to use a cord to hold my pants up. I lost a lot of weight because I didn't eat all day. About midnight, it was later than midnight, I don't know what time it was already, I was so exhausted and dumbfounded and sort of disgusted. Believe me, if somebody would come with an ax and hit my hand, I wouldn't feel it. At that age, at that age!

You were what, ___?

Fifteen.

This was June. This would have been around the time of your birthday.

That's right, yes.

Do you remember the date? Was it just before--?

June 15th.

Just before your birthday.

That's right.

That's the day you were rounded up and taken to _____.(c.424)?

Right, right.

Your parents were left alone. They were not taken?

Thank G__, they were not taken. They could have been taken from us.

They were young?

That's right. They could have been taken too. But they needed a certain amount of people. This was the typical German. If they say to you I need ten, I don't want eleven. Ten is enough for me, that's all I want. If you give them eleven, twelve, I don't want it. I want ten only. We left the town of Skarzysko into their camp. We arrived at night, it was dark. It was a tremendous building, I don't know what that building was consist of. All it was inside of there was hay and straw. They let us out _____ (c.407) inside. _____ Six o'clock in the morning woke us up. Experience in the camp. Everybody out. Lined up, counted everybody. We were so valuable, we more valuable than gold. G__ forbid if one person is missing, we stood there for hours until they found them, either dead or alive. That's the typical German system. Everybody had to be accounted for. After they counted us, they gave us black coffee and a piece of bread. They marched us to the German headquarters which was in the factory already. In there we stood in the line, to be fingerprinted, to be given ID cards and pictures. Everyone of us had an ID card with a picture on it. It took forever. By the time the last person got through, was three o'clock in the afternoon. We stood there and waited, what's going to happen. The night shift begun six o'clock in the evening. They took us to the factory, introducing us to the factory. I had never seen a factory in my life; I'd never seen a machine in my life; I don't know what it's all about. They start giving us the first meal for the evening. It consist of cabbage and horse meat. I didn't know it was horse meat. I was told later on, it was horse meat. Do I have a choice? There's nothing else to eat, I'm hungry. After we finish eating, six o'clock arrived, inside. We went, each lined up in the factory. The assignments were different machine. I was assigned to a machine

that was making the pins that ignites the bullet. When you press the pin, they can hit it and shoot out. It was a tiny, little thing; the machine was a very fast machine. The Polish supervisor took a liking to me. It was very fortunate, he liked me. Vilak (ph)(c.479), he called me, Vilak. He says to me, this is the way you operate this here, this is the way you release it. Remember the electricity. Talk to me, electricity! What do I know about electricity? I light candles, lamps and kerosene, okay? This is electricity. He says, you put the switch on and the machine runs. You run the wheel like this here and bring it over and you see that the pin becomes thin. Then you have a tester over here. You put on the tester, you see that the pin fits. If the pin fits, you continue, if it doesn't, call me over. I says to myself, okay, I guess this is what I have to do. I sat there on the machine, on a high chair, diligently, doing my job so fast. My fingers were bleeding, but I _____(c.494), my hands touched the machine. It was the spinning of the wheel. The wheel had also a stone, a sharp stone. Every time I hit it, my hands was brushing off. I didn't know what to do. What can I do? Who am I going to ask? I might as well continue and learn the hard way until I learn what's going on. Well, it didn't take me long, I learned the procedure. I mastered it so beautifully that every time the German officer passed by, he says beautiful, beautiful. Thank you. I sat there but I didn't realize the hours that went there, twelve hours.

Night shift.

Night shift. This is the worst. I didn't sleep during the day. From six in the evening till six o'clock in the morning. In the meantime, when we got back to the camp, the other shift came back in. Then we saw more Jewish people arriving with trucks in different towns. Oh, how long you been here? Since yesterday. When you longer been here? Three days ago. We actually were the ones who opened up this particular camp. This Skarzysko camp.

So you were the first--?

The first group to be there. After a couple of days, we sort of get acclimated. Right away, as a youngster, I accepted the fact that this is going to be my lifestyle. For how long, I don't know. As a human being, I have to accept the fact, that this is going to be my lifestyle. I have no choice. I have to do the best I can if I want to survive. I wanted it so desperately. In the meantime, during the period of time as you work in the factory, some of my landsleit (c.29), landsmen, acquainted themselves with gentile people. This man who was supervisor said to them, I make a deal with you; you take letters home from us, to my hometown. They'll pay you well and bring us news from my home through the town. This was fair enough. G__ forbid, if this man is caught, no trial. The answer was hanging.

So the Pole could be hanged if he is caught carrying letters?

If he is caught carrying letters or anything that didn't look---. Everybody was searched coming out from the gates. It was fortunate that he wasn't caught, very fortunate. Many times that I have seen with my own eyes, that this gentile man was caught carrying things for people in the factory. Not bringing it in, taking it out. You see that's when they catch you, when you go out from the factory. Very strict. Who were the searchers? Ukrainian soldiers, they were miserable. They were miserable. They beat you up for no reason whatsoever, for no reason, they beat you.

They beat up Jews and Poles?

And Poles. They didn't care. They didn't discriminate. They didn't like the Poles to begin with.

Did they wear German uniforms, these Ukrainian soldiers?

Yes, they wore German uniforms with old-fashioned rifles. Very large ones, World War I rifles.

Russians' old rifles?

Right, exactly. That's the type of weapons they carried. But they wore German uniforms. They spoke German and Ukrainian, both languages. When they called this man, they always had to bring the people to see the result of the consequences. They made a circle, go around it, called this man out, tied his hand, put him in the tree, nothing. They teach everyone a lesson not to do it. As I said, we were very fortunate, we send this man home every Saturday and he brought news for us on Monday morning when he came back from Koprzeunitz.

Was he from your hometown?

No. We gave him directions how to go, paid him well for it. He was very nonchalant. Was he going to make it, obvious. In the meantime, they were building already barracks for us. As the population in the camp was growing, they needed more space. They used army barracks. Each barrack was built with two bunks and a belly stove in the center, in case it gets cold. A number of the barracks. Each barracks was holding approximately, I would say about 50 to 60 people.

Who was doing the building?

They had people from the camp.

Inmates.

Inmates. Everything was done by the inmates. In the meantime, every day when I went to the factory, I felt good. I lived another day. This was my thinking. I survived another day. When I came to the factory, I was more at ease than I was in the camp. This was still in 1942. I finished this project, I was transferred to a different machine. The machine was called a automatic driari (ph)(c.805), they call it in German. It made stutchrigen (ph)(c.605). Stuchrigen is a cover of the 50-caliber bullets. The 50-caliber bullet consist of three parts. I made one of them. Each tray, had on my machine. On my machine, I had two trays which d____(c.618) Each piece approximately had to be tested to make sure that the grooving inside is properly. I was more concerned thqn they were because they could find out that I'm doing damages. This was my project. I make sure the circle's good. If it didn't work good, I call over the supervisor to adjust it. Many times the machine broke down, which happens. By the way, the factory that I was working was called Hasak (ph)(c.621). Hasak was a German company, originally in Germany way back in Germany. They had a few munition factories located in Poland. One was in Skarzysko Kamienna, the other one was in Czestochowa.

They took over Polish buildings, had Polish supervisors, but the ownership was German now?

German, right.

The guards were Ukrainian?

Ukrainian.

The Germans controlled it?

Right.

The German officers, were they Wermacht or were they SS?

Wermacht, wermacht. They lived around the territory of the ammunition factory. They drove away the Polaks, they wouldn't let them live around that area, they settled themselves down.

All the workers were Jewish?

All the workers were Jewish, except the supervisors.

Who were Poles?

Who were Poles. Between June and August, we all got paid for our work. We got 80 zlotys a week. Eighty zlotys a week, I don't know how much it was that time in dollars but we all got paid. Our food supply wasn't bad either. They allowed to come in from Skarzysko, a truck with bread and we were able to purchase it. The nicest part was also we could get permission from the headquarters, inside the camp, to send out, let's see, a group of two or three men, to go near the store which was located in the vicinity. You could buy butter, could buy milk, all the little commodities because we had the money. There was no restrictions at that time. The camp consisted of, at that time already, approximately between four and five hundred inmates already. Because they kept bringing them in each day until the factory had built up the camp. So the camp wasn't too far away from the factory. I would say was about two kilometers from the factory so we marched every day. After they finished building the camp, this building was closed. We went over there. In the meantime, they expected, I assume, more inmates to be brought in. They build it where this tremendous building was all the way in the back, another tremendous camp for about 10,000 inmates.

Were you still wearing your shorts?

Yes

The same clothes that you had on in June?

The same clothes but what I did. Every evening when I come home from work, I was able to get myself from the warehouse, they had a warehouse over there, get me a change of clothes. They gave me the first long pair of pants and some kind of button shirt that I had on and the rest I was able to wash myself. I took home some soap and a piece of paper to put in my pocket and I washed it outside. We had a big washing rack like water___(c.655) and I was able to wash my laundry. What else could I do? When we moved to the other barracks, immediately they build electric fences. Of course, in

German, they wrote down and also in Polish, any one who crosses the fence would be dead. The electric would get hold of you.

Now you know what electricity is?

Now I know electricity, right. Believe me, I have no intention to leave, I have no intention to run. Anyone who would run away at night and thought they not going to be caught, I have bad news for them. They were caught. They were brought back into camp. Make a circle of us, put them in the center. Boom, boom and that's the end of it. They shot so many of them. You think somebody would learn a lesson. There was no place to go. In 1942, there were already ghettos formed all over Europe. There was no more Jewish people in small towns. Everybody has been evacuated, either to ghettos or send away someplace else. In September, 1942, we sent home this gentile to our hometown. It was on a Saturday. He arrived in town, and he saw the whole Jewish community in the center of the city with packages, belongings, leaving town. Those who were sick, those who couldn't move, those who resisted, were shot. The ones who carried out all these atrocities were not the Germans. Ukrainians. They're the ones who did this. I mean they were _____ (c.69), but they were delighted to do it. We all know about that.

Your employment now? This is your supervisor, the one who keeps coming and going with messages?

Right, right. When he came back, he came back to me and he said, sorry I have to tell you this sad story. When I came into town, everybody was already packed in the city.

This was in September--?

September, oh no, it was either before the Jewish holidays or after the Jewish holidays, I'm not sure. I know it was in September.

Around the time of Rosh Hashonah?

Rosh Hashonah, right. In a group of people from my hometown who were police, who were committee, they were all slaughtered out.

Including your uncle?

Including my uncle. For what reason, what crime did they commit? That's their system. If you're too strong with them, they didn't like it. You knew too much. They had to annihilate you. They work the same system in Auschwitz. If you were assigned to the group of people to burn them or to take them out and push them in the gas oven, you were next. There would be no sign, no witnesses. This was their system. A few were able to escape through the woods and able to come into our camp, to a different town, where a town was evacuated that particular day. They sort of dragged themselves along. When they came into our camp, a newcomer you could tell immediately. When they came in, I says, what's happening, what's going on? He says, Koprzewnitz was annihilated. Evacuated on Saturday, so many people were shot, so many people were killed, I didn't even want to ask who survived, who was killed, or what. I don't know. Right there and then, my whole life went like this, shut off from the world. My mother, my father, my brother, my sister, my aunt, my uncles, large families. Everything was cut off from this world for me. I'm all by myself. Nothing to look forward to. It's a dark world coming. The future looks very bleak but I am not going to give up. I'm here to fight it, I want to see the end of this war. I don't care how long it's going to take. I had a tremendous determination, you have no idea. As young as I was, I never gave up. I never volunteered, I did my work the way it should be. I don't care if anybody would criticize me, the way I worked, diligently. I had to do it in order to see the end of the war. I received the last letter from my parents. It says, my father wrote, we don't know where we're going but we know we want you to survive. We____(c.714)

Your father knew that he was going to be deported somewhere?

Somewhere. He knew at least you will survive. I was going to survive. I was just in the same predicament as he was. My life was more valuable than his was? All right, so I was working over here. What happened if I get sick? I cannot work. They going to send me to a hospital, treat me? There was no such a thing. They had an infirmary for people in their hospital over there. As long as you were able to stay there once a week, a truck will come, pick out the people from the hospital, take them away. That's the end of them. If you're sick, you don't need it. As long as you are able to walk, able to work, you were valuable to those people. The Germans didn't care because there was no problem of people. They could bring in more and more and more people to replace you. You had to be alert, _____(c.726) Every week, once a week, either it was on a Wednesday or Thursday, the truck would come, clean out the hospital, send the people away. That's the end of those people. One day, it didn't miss me either, I had typhoid. I was very sick, I run a high fever. I was in the infirmary. You can't go to work, you got to go to the infirmary. I said to my friend, very close friend of mine, he says to me, let me know when the truck is coming. Somehow, he was able to find out when the truck was coming. He came in a day earlier to me, he says get the hell out of here, go to the bathhouse. Once you got out from the infirmary, we were able to go to the bathhouse to wash up. I dragged myself out to walk, my legs and my hands, crawled, hold on to my friend. Together, we walked to the bathhouse. It wasn't far away. I sat there in the water. The water kept pouring on me like crazy.

I says, I have to get better. I can't go on like this. Somehow, a miracle happened. I came out from the bathhouse, all cured. I never had to go back into the hospital. I went right back to my barracks. A few day, I lined myself up to go to work. My machine was empty while I wasn't there. How long do you think they going to keep the machine open? I came into work; my supervisor was awful nice to me. He says to me, Vilak, how do you feel? What can I tell you?, I says. I could eat something, I'll have something to eat. So he brought me over a piece of bread. I was very grateful. My strength came a little bit stronger each day. There was nothing to look forward to except every single day the same thing. Seven days a week. Twelve hours a day, labor, labor and more labor. The end of '42, we had already in the camp, close to ten thousand people. Skarzysko Kamienna with ten thousand. There were three departments. Verk ah (ph) (c.754), verk bay (ph) and verk tzen (ph). That's what they called them, departments. Verk ah (ph) which I was in, did mostly ammunition work, bullets for 50-calibers and what you call those heavy ammunition for anti-aircraft. They worked on levels, very hard working by the way. In verk beh, they mostly make these bombs, was a big factory, they made bombs. Verk teh, everyone who worked over there was yellow from the powder that they used to pour in into the ammunition. Was a liquid powder, I worked on it later on. You couldn't help working it because you had no protection, your face was open. The stuff grew on you. When you saw these people, looked at them, says where you come from, outer space? Completely yellow. They came once a week, to the bathhouse, to take a bath. Their clothing was taken away from them to be cleaned out and all that stuff and you take a bath. The yellow, that stuff doesn't come out so easily. There were three departments and that's Skarzysko area. People were dying like flies. Every single day the truck would leave and there were people taken out from the barracks. Boxes outside, near the camp they had it, boxes lying around, just dump them in there until the middle of the day. Then they take them out and must bury them. Then immigration stopped, all the ghettos, I understand, I don't what's happening, I don't know what is going on but I could listen to the radio. At twelve o'clock, the German radio would give announcement about the war in Polish. It says everything is great, the Germans are winning, the Germans are making progress. They are beating the hell out of the Russians and all this. Use your own imagination. All I know is one thing that the Germans are working 24 hours a day making ammunition like crazy. People are dying like flies for lack of food. Our daily ration consist of, in the morning, a cup of black coffee. You used to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning because 6 o'clock we had to be in the factory. At lunchtime, at 12 o'clock, you got a cup of soup, you were lucky if the supervisor, the Jewish supervisor gave you the soup; otherwise he give you water. We had a choice with it? We had no choice. This had to be your contentment. In the evening when you came home from work, each barrack had to go to a consumer's place where they brought in all the bread and sometimes a little margarine with jello. Each barrack was assigned a certain amount of bread. When they brought in the bread into the barracks, for so many people, everybody stood at the table because we assigned one man to be in charge. Please, you divide the bread. You were hungry, you were ____ (c.794). He took a knife, carefully measuring each slice like this here, like this here. At the end of it, then he measured it and if everybody eyes' were content, then he started to slice it. You write down numbers, we all have numbers we write. Put the numbers on a piece of paper. You throw it into a hat. Which one gets the first slice? which one gets the second slice and so forth and so on. Each group that you belong to, you try to get yourself somebody that you like, somebody who's friendly because _____ (c.800). You're not dealing with human beings any more, you're dealing with vultures. You're hungry, you worked 12 hours a day. You have nothing to eat--your

stomach is empty, your stomach is crawling. After you divide the bread, you ____ a little ____ (c.804) in it, with whatever margarine they give you or a little jelly. You go out into the yard and get yourself a cup of water. This was your supper. Then you sat in your barrack or you sat outside after dark reminiscing in the good olden days. This was your concentration, reminiscing about home, family, what was prepared for supper, what was prepared for the holidays, what you did at home, what kind of business. You talked to each other, you made yourself a little bit homey, make you feel good. We all strive for one purpose, we want to survive. We also gave up, that was the end of it. We had a motto written out in every barrack. Hold onto your skin, brother, hold onto yourself. Don't give up.

In German or Polish or Yiddish?

In Yiddish. Polish and in Yiddish. German?, we don't like German. We had a German supervisor, I don't remember his name. He was a tall, old man. When he came into the camps, whoever he saw in front of him, pfft, just like that, like flies. Like a fly, didn't mean anything to him. For what reason? I mean this guy just came from 24 hours of work. What'd he shoot him for? I came out from the bathhouse in the camp, when I was washing myself, getting myself ready to work. All of a sudden, I see this guy shooting. I took off like the devil! Where I got the energy, I don't know but I run. That day, it didn't happen one day, it happened practically every day--whenever he came into camp. Whenever he saw a person, boom, just like that. Didn't mean a damn thing. After he retired in 1943, we got in another one, worse than he was. Was an old man, he had a hunchback, he walked around with a dog. He considered a human being as an animal. He says to the dog, he says Mensch, Neim din hundert (ph)(c.831), Man, take this dog. You were the dog, he was the man.

The dog was the man?

The dog used to grab hold of you, pulled you down, he'll go and get the gun, just like that. There was no remorse. This particular man, if I ever heard of him, I don't know whether he's alive or dead, he had the rights to decide who should live and who should die. Can you imagine that? This particular old man, walking around with a cane and a hundert (ph)(c.837) and he decided who should live and who should die. One day I was working outside the munition factory, I was transferred to another munition factory. It was also a very nice place there, wasn't too many people, --

You mean out of Verk ah (c.841) A?

It was part of Verk ah (c.842). I didn't work there too long it was just a little while.

You're on the day shift now since the time you were sick, you're on the day shift?

I went on the day shift. Every week we changed around. The day shift changed Sunday morning. If you were on the day shift Sunday morning, you started six o'clock, you go home at 12. Night shift went in at 12, worked till 6. Then you went back at six in the evening, worked a full day until six in the morning.

The horse meat, that was only in the beginning?

Later on, we got it too. Then later on all the meat disappeared. I was standing over there working. All of a sudden I see this woman being brought into camp. A young girl, how nervous she was, she walked around. He yelled out to her, why she was already in the middle of the camp. He yelled out to the dog, mensch nem der hundert (ph)(c.878). He jumped on her and throw her down and then he _____(c.877). There was no trial, no questions asked. You run away, you're caught, you die. No questions asked. In '43, we had different stories. Also the rumors were going around in the camp. That each town in Poland is being evacuated and sent to Auschwitz. Treblinka, Majdanek. Those were the camps, mostly exterminated camps.

You heard of these camps?

Yes, not before, not before.

But in '43?

In '43, how did I hear about it? They needed more labor in Skarzysko, they brought these people from Auschwitz. How did I know they were Auschwitz?

Tatoos.

Had the numbers. When they came in, they told us it was this and this, I couldn't believe it.

You had it bad, but this was worse?

Worse, right. Then an order came, everybody has to pack up and we are going into the main factory. We didn't know we're going into the main factory. We thought we're being evacuated on trains because we saw trains on the rail tracks, empty trains. We believe for us. Believe me, in those days, it didn't mean damn thing. A train was there, the train wasn't there. Whatever fate will take place, will take place. It didn't make any difference any more. We were so acclimated like. I was over there already over a year. Life was to me, it was like; it has to be like that. This is the life I going to lead for how long, I don't know but I want to see the end of it. Everybody packed up, all the camps, went into the main factory. Over there, we hear commotion going on, screaming, yelling and carrying on. If you have any money, gold, silver, anything valuable, toss it out Leave it there and if we catch it, boom. That was the threat what I tell you, shoot. No questions _____. I said to myself, I don't have anything and I have nothing to lose. They want to search me, search me. Papers I got plenty, garbage I got plenty.

You're not getting the 80 zlotys a week any more?

No, that stopped, let's see, about three months later, it stopped.

Three months later.

Three months later. I was getting it, I'm telling you 80 zlotys a month, great. I was able to buy food, I thought it was a paradise comparing with what was at home.

You're not with this Polish supervisor any more?

No more, no more.

Are any people in your group from your hometown?

Yes, with them I _____.

You still have some friends from _____.

Yes, but a lot of them died out already. They're still here, a few of these still here.

They're still with you when you go to this big factory, in '43?

Yes, they're still there. Ten of my hometown boys have decided to disappear. They took off.

Escaped?

Escaped. I kept warning. I says please don't run. There's nobody at home. If you going to go back to town, they're going to catch you. You're going to be outstanding like anything. Where you going to go? But he wouldn't listen. Only wants to run. That was my problem. That's what I felt. I have decided right there and then. I'm not going to run away. I'm not going to do anything drastic. It's not in my power any more. I'm in somebody else's hands, somebody else's fate. Whatever will happen, will happen. G__ wants to give me life, I'll survive. If not, what else can I do? We all got into the big factory. They start going one by one searching. Do you have anything of value? I says, I have nothing. Open up your bag. Don't _____. Bag it up, get it out of here. I had nothing, so what do you want me to do? I'm a youngster. Those who they found, they found a ring, they found valuables, they took them out. They beat the living daylight out of them. Whoever they found anything on them. They didn't declare it or give it back to the Germans. They collected gold, silver, jewelry, anything, any kind of jewelry, watches, anything that was valuable, you had to turn it in, money. I don't have anything, I don't give you anything. Enough that we got out, we sort of felt a relief because we thought that we're going on the trains. Back to the barracks, we spent a whole day in the camp, went back to the barracks, that same day, back to work again in the factory. Back to the factory. We worked those systems and then we knew already 100%, that 99% of the Jewish people in Poland have been evacuated, either to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek or to labor camps. No other news came forward. There was no other news we get from. Anyone who run away and he was caught, he couldn't tell us anything because he was killed immediately. Immediately, no question there. We had Jewish supervisors too, policemen. They just as lousy as the Germans. Whether it was their fault, they had to do a thing, so they did it. I don't know. I'm not going to put my self in their situation. They had it good. They didn't have to do what they did. Point out that this man tried to run away, this man tried to do this here. They pointed fingers which wasn't the proper thing to do. In 1943, December, before Christmas, it was very bad. We didn't have much food. They didn't supply anything for us. No work, no food. You had one day off, one lousy day off, Christmas. We looked forward to the day we go back to work. At least we get something to drink, something to eat. Water, we had plenty, there was no question about it. People were swelling from malnutrition. If you were overage, you didn't make it. Younger age, you have a chance. Then the fateful day came, 1944. I don't remember when it was in June or July, I was assigned to a project, to evacuate machines onto the trains. We knew the war was coming closer, we heard shooting at night, we could see lighting up at night. By the way, in the camp itself, we had the security guards, right in the smack of the camp, in the middle of the camp. A post very high up there, he could see anybody walking out at night or whatever. It didn't mean a damn thing anyway.

Was your camp ever bombed?

No, not in Poland.

Even though it was a munitions factory, it was not bombed by American or Russian --?

Russia could have bombed it if they wanted. I guess they wanted to prevent it. Then the Germans cleaned out the whole factory. They took out all the machineries and sent it to Germany. ["When did they have the _____?"] The extortion was in Germany, in Schleden (ph)(c.983).

The factory, even though you guys were amateurs, you were making shells and ammunition, there were no accidental explosions?

No, no. As I said.....

You guys were pretty good.

Everybody had to watch out for themselves. As I said, you could not do sabotage. Every ammo that went through your system, your number was marked on it.

Someone could make a mistake. I know in this country, there were some big explosions in ammunition factories where it wasn't a question of sabotage, it was just a question of someone making a mistake, carelessness.

You couldn't make mistakes in here because they watched you. The watchers are very careful. Believe me, every ammo that came out from the machine, the water was pouring on it. I used to pick it up right away, test it immediately, put it in the tray. When the German supervisor came around and he picked up and checked it, goes like this here, okay. How can you do damage? You can't do any damages. He watched me many times, the way I worked so diligently. He called over the Jewish supervisor. He says to him, he's better than youga, gaden, dri sumpn (ph)(c.001), I want you to give this young man three soups a day. I says, oh boy, I did something good, he's going to give me extra soup. You think he gave it to me? He didn't give it to me. ["Who, the Rottenberg? (ph)"] Yeah, he didn't give it to me. ["The relative of..."] Forget about it. He didn't give it to me. I went over to

him, I said, you stood there by the machine when this German supervisor said to you distinctly, I heard you and you heard me; give him extra. Why didn't you give me? Why don't you give it to me? Go away. How can I forget these things? It lies in your mind. Food is your main object, right through the camp. Food, number one, that's all that was on your mind. Forget about relatives, forget about your parents, forget about your brothers and sisters, forget about your property, education, nothing existed from this world except food. That's the only thing was on your mind. Food, you were hungry! You had worked on empty stomach, you were hungry. As I was saying, I was transferred to this ammunition factory to move machinery on trains. All the time I see the whole camp from a distance. I was this side, they were camped over there. The whole camp was lined up, one line. This German officer, a crippled guy, with the dog, deciding your fate for the day. This way, this way, this way, this way. The minute you went to the left, you were right on the truck. You had no mercy to say anything, right on the truck. They kept saying, where we're going, he says you're going to another camp. Everybody knew what it was. Within two hours, the camp was selected. Those who were on the trucks, a half an hour later, you could have moved the whole selection away. That was the end of those people. The remainder, they brought them into the factory to unhook all the wires. The trains came in, we loaded them up on the trains and they sent us back to camp. As I said, if I was in camp, I would have been in the line too. Would be they say left, I would go right. Faith was with me. I had a strong faith; I knew I had to make it. I wouldn't give up. This was in '44. Enough to be finished loading up the freights. They brought in empty cattle wagons and loaded us up.

Loading you into

Into cattle trains.

Cattle trains, open or closed?

Open. There must have been a tremendous train load, either 50 or 60 cars, I didn't count them. Going around, I was trying to see how many trains--to me everything was a novelty. I never seen a train in my life. This was the first time I see trains. I see ammunitions, I see factories, I see machinery, I see electricity. I was a youngster, I was growing up. My life here, my youthhood was take away from me. I'm learning something which I have no choice to control, which I'm forced to do it, beyond control. What else can I say? Once we are aboard the train, they didn't count where we're going, just we go. As long as we stood on the station, we were going crazy. Warm, open train, nothing. We had to go. _____ (c.068) What can you do? You were lying in a cattle train with a hundred men or so. They said we have to go, what are you going to do? Had no choice. We were riding fro Skarzysko Kamienna either two or three days, all around to Czestochowa. When we arrived at Czestochowa, we recognized the area from history, Matka Boska, the Madonna. Recognize that period. It was also a coal area there. When we arrived, we saw the same factory, Hasak. The war's going on over there. This is, let's see, 60 kilometers from the German border. Kratersberg (ph)(c.081)

was the first German town from Czestochowa. We got off there, they sent us into the camp. We got our first meal in three days. I couldn't walk, I was so weak. I held on to my friend, he held on to me, the two of us went together. We stayed in Czestochowa a couple of days, not too...then line up again. We lined up and in the meantime, the people who lived in there before, they worked in that factory. A munition factory same as we had in Skarzysko Kamienna. From there we boarded trains again and we kept riding and riding. For one week, it took us more than a week; we stopped in a place called Leipzig. In Leipzig, they took off the women from the train. I think they had a factory there someplace in Leipzig. They took the women off the train and then they moved to Buchenwald. We continued to Buchenwald. Buchenwald is located very deep in the woods. Buchenwald, itself, in German, is forest. When we arrived in Buchenwald, the train stopped, everybody, outsteinen (ph) (c.104), off the train. We got off the train, we held on to each other. The first notice we saw, Kasette Lagen (ph)(c.107). _____ Work makes life sweet. How these skeleton figures on the top of the gate when we walked in. We thought that this is the end of us. We start mumbling to each other. Says okay, so what can we do? We're here, we don't go any place else, what do you want to do? We go into this big, tremendous ground and they said everybody sit down. We sat down and they took fifty people at a time. They march you in the room. In the room there and you don't see them any more. They take another group, and another group and another group. You don't see these people coming out again. We assume that this is the end of us all. We turn around to each other, whoever was remaining here and says, look, wait and see, nice to know you. Maybe we'll see each other in Heaven. In the meantime, whatever you have left over in your food, let's share it and eat before we die. Once you get on the other side you don't see anybody anymore. This is the assumption we took. When you go into a room and nobody comes out again, what do you assume, right? My turn came with 50 others. The first thing when you walk into this big room, all your clothes you take off. Every belonging that you have, you just leave behind. Don't even touch anything. Open your mouth, open your rear, they looked inside to see if you're carrying any gold or silver, jewelry or anything like that. I don't have anything. They always yelling, screaming, you know, to make you be afraid. There's nothing to hide. Leave everything behind you. That's when I have pictures of my parents, my brother and sister. I had to leave everything behind. After we got through the yelling and the screaming, we go into another room. When you come into the other room, you get unlousy. They clean you up. Barber standing there with electric machines and clean you up all the way, top to bottom. Then you go into a bathroom and they give you a piece of soap. On the soap, was written down, rif, r-i-f, rein yiddish fat (c.154). Pure Jewish fat. That was written down on the piece of soap. We translated that way because what else could the rif stand for, okay? We assumed that maybe that's what it means. Everyone got a piece of soap. Believe me, the twenty-five people who were with me in the shower room, we looked up there to see whether water's coming down or something else is coming down. We never saw anybody else except our own little group. Once inside, the doors closed. Could be only one thing coming down, either water or gas. Water came. What a relief. Ah, vasser!, what a relief. You know, your mind works on you with such tremendous tricks. You're so confused, you go around in circles, why you standing anticipating, what is going to come out of this hole. water or gas? Everybody stands there, anticipating, holding each other's hands. I've never before you--the best friends in the world. Everybody held a hand when they stood inside waiting for the water to come. The water finally came, what a relief. We could hear, everybody saying, uhhh, that's the relief it was. We took the soap and start washing our hands like this. When we got through, they give you a

uniform, like pajama stripes and they give you a number. One number _____ you sew up in here, one number you sew up in your clothes.

One number on your chest near your breast pocket and the other on your thigh?

On your thigh, yes. This is...

Your number was 68,548.

Right. That number, I can't forget. This goes with me for the rest of my life. It's embedded in my head. That number, you wrote down it here, they all stamped it already, but you have to sew it on. So later on, you sew it on, one over here, over here. The pajamas you got like, you know, striped clothing and you walked out on the other side, then you see the other groups. What a relief. Came back to life. This was Buchenwald... They send us into a area with a tremendous camp. They had Russians, French, Poles, Yugoslavians, Czechs, they had practically from all European people in that particular camp. G__ knows how many thousands were there. The Russians were treated terribly. They were terribly treated. It was a gas chamber in Buchenwald. They used it in '41', '42, '43. They stopped using it in '44.

Do you remember when you arrived there?

Yes. What year it was?

The date.

The date was July 18.

Nineteen forty-four.

Nineteen forty-four. July 18, 1944 was a hot day very hot, very hot. We were allocated in that particular area. It was called the tent camp. Others had barracks. We had tents. There were supervisors over there who were, quite a long time ago, were communists, communists. Polish people, Jewish, they believe in communism. When we...

(Tape 2)

You were describing your new communist supervisors?

Right. He asked us to point out to him the Jewish supervisors who were with us in Skarzysko Kamienna. They _____ they performed over there. He says, from here on, they not going to go anyplace with you any more. We pointed them out. They took them out at night and took care of them. The Germans didn't care, as long as they were counted, 500 people, one dead. That doesn't matter. How he died is nobody's business.

These were killed?

Yes.

The new supervisors killed the old supervisors.

Oh, yes. That was the whole idea. What revenge could I take on this man, what he did in the camp and what I saw with my own eyes? What revenge could I take possibly?

Which supervisors did they kill? These are the kapos?

The kapos, yes. Jewish kapos, policemen. They were policemen, they were dressed up they think G_ sent from this world, that they could walk around with a cane in his hand saying, here this is no good this man, get rid of him. What the hell is this here? Why turning people in?

The Polish supervisor you talked about before, he's not with you?

No. That was the end. Once the camp was evacuated, all the machinery was taken out; the Polish workers stopped. They went back to their homes. That's it. They had no work any more. That was the end of it. They waited for the Russians to come in. If I would have remained in Czestachowa two extra weeks, I would have been liberated by the Russians. This case, in reverse, I had to suffer another year. We are in Buchenwald.

Since July 18th, you're there.

Right. Buchenwald, we started to go out to work immediately the following day in a quarry. There was a tremendous quarry located in Buchenwald. We picked up stones, loaded them on wagons and automatically the wagons went up the hill all the way to the top and unloaded with trucks, whatever they needed. This was going on, not 24 hours a day, 8 hours a day, which wasn't so bad. Buchenwald, we thought, comparing to the other camps, was sort of a paradise. It didn't have the Ukrainian supervisors, was an SS Kommando there, headquarters who took charge of the whole camp. Each camp was located with an area which was bordered off. You couldn't get in from one camp to the other one, with a border guard. You had your own board of supervisors, camp inmates rather. They were gentle. They weren't as brutal as the ones we had in Skarzysko Kamienna, where other camp inmates had. This is comparison to the ones I went through. Was already so to speak, much easier. I was working there for about two weeks. Then they needed--a new camp opened up in Schleebeben (ph)(c.41). It's a village in the woods, 60 kilometers from Leipzig and 60 kilometers from Berlin, something like that. That's what they told us, I don't know. I didn't measure it, that's what they told us when we were going there. They lined us up, they says they need, 500 people. Okay, so loaded up train load of 500 people, with guards and they send us to Schleebeben (c.46). We arrive at the station in Schleebeben. We marched for two miles into the camp.

You went by train?

By train, yes.

Open cars?

Yes, open cars. When we arrived to Schleebeben, they unloaded the train, counted the people again. You see how important we were? Never stopped counting. Morning, noon and night, they counted us. We arrived at Schleebeben into the camp. Barracks were existed over there already. They had barracks all around, had a kitchen. They lined us up and they assigned each group to a barrack. I was assigned to barrack number 20 with another 35 men. They told us that tonight we're going to stay here, tomorrow morning we start arbeiten, work. The factory from the camp was approximately between two and two and a half kilometers which was very deep into the woods. The factories consist of mostly anti-tank grenades. They call them in German, panzer faus (ph)(c.58). Was an oblong shape, a head with a long pipe. I think the Americans...

Like the bazooka.

The bazooka, exactly. Just like a bazooka. I was assigned to a factory where we poured the liquid into the head of the anti-tank grenade. The person sat downstairs, we have to turn about and let it pour in one after the other. Then you put it in the water, standing in the water so you can cool off. In the other side, transport begin the powder in sacks. That's where the people got yellow, from that powder. I was fortunate, I wasn't working inside; I got some of it, I still have it, I have a mark on me, that powder. I was on the outside but I used to bring in the sack, hand it over to the man upstairs. He had to pour in, into a kettle, was an aluminum two kettles, aluminum, a certain amount of this type of ingredients, a certain amount of that ingredients. It goes into a certain degree of temperature before you're able to release it into those heads. Once you go into the heads, you line it up. Then you have another group of people picking it up, putting it further, cleaning it, grinding it off and everything. There were seven factories. Each factory had a different department of jobs to do. There was one factory over there where they bored a hole in the head, where they could put in the pin. The pipe and the pin went together. Once you put this compartment--in other words, if you put the pipe and the pin together and twist it in together, you put it on your shoulder, you're able to fire it. Each bomb that was produced, your number went on it. Understand? That's why sabotage was prevented. It was no incidents while we were working there. Then there was transportation. Transport people had to unload and load this ammunition. They worked very hard, very very hard. Everything was heavy, with me, I was a youngster, I could squeeze myself in with somebody else. I was very fortunate. I worked on the outside bringing in the sacks with the powder, hand it over to the other man upstairs. He in return, had to pour it into kettles, aluminum kettles, constantly under the supervision of a German officer, constantly. Your eyes never went off of him. The work was from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening, 12 hours a day, 24 hours a day. I worked in this factory, everything was fine. We came home in the barracks in the evening. We got our ration, like every place else. A quarter pound of bread, a little margarine and a cup of water, that was your supper. Each day was the same there. I don't remember exactly, it was in November, October, 1944; it was on a Sunday. I worked the day shift, 6 in the morning, 6 at night, I went home. By the way, Germany, there was no changing shifts. Only on Sunday, change of shifts. Czestochowa, you worked from 6 to 12, you go home and come back at 6. You work the night shift. In Germany, you worked from 6 in the evening to 12, then you change the shift the following day. I went home that evening with my friend when all of a sudden, it was two o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the morning, hear a tremendous blow out. Like a bomb would fall right in front of your nose. It shattered all the windows. I got hit with the glass in the forehead. There was bleeding. I didn't know what happened. I run under the table, start to hide. Everybody run out of their beds because you couldn't run anyplace else. You look out the window, facing the factories, you could see blowups and blowups, one after the other. Explosions going like crazy. You couldn't imagine, right away you knew it was the factory. What was the first thing that came into your mind? Your friends are working the night shift is killed. That's the first thing that came into your mind. The Germans were afraid that something is going to happen here because the explosion is so terrible. They took us all out from the camp. They pushed us into a field, away from the camp. They needed help to dig ditches so the fire wouldn't spread. They came around and they grabbed whoever is able to walk. Whoever was able to crawl, he gave them shovels. There was a very small fire department, a village like that would have a big fire department? A small fire department. We kept digging ditches, all around the factory. This explosion could go in, this was

ammunition. Ammunition there, live ammunition! Powder! How many tons of powder were lying in those sacks that blew up to smithereens? The train tracks, crushed like this here. Trains were turned over, the cars were turned all upside down. And we got after--this was during the night. When we got there during the daylight, everything was just flattened as a We lost at that time over a hundred people, they just disappeared. Just disappeared! I said to my friend, you see G__ would be with us. We worked the day shift. We would have gone tonight, the night shift, we would have been the ones. So they were able to find all these people after they opened up the halls. They knew where each factory was located. And they took out and buried them in a massive grave. There were over a hundred people. The ones you lived with, the ones you stayed in the barracks with, the ones that went through with you the whole camp, 1942. And then we had two days of peace because we all enjoyed inside, what happened. Nobody knew what happened. There was no air raid, there was no alarms, no airplanes coming along, was it sabotage? Nobody knew what happened. We still don't know, I still don't today, I don't know what happened.

Either sabotage or an accident?

We don't know. We can assume a lot of things but we have no valuable evidence to say that a plane came along and dropped a bomb. Nobody knew it was a factory over there, it was so deep in the woods.

And you didn't hear any noises in the air?

No, we listen to places. During the day you could see planes flying over. But I'm sure they didn't know there was a factory there. Was hidden so deeply in the woods. So two days, we were fortunate, nothing happened. The third day, they brought train loads, Hitlerjuden, (ph)(c.143), youth, seventeen, sixteen, fifteen years of age, eighteen years of age. They brought along to camp. And they took us to work. They beat the living daylights out of us. They were screaming and yelling and hitting you for no reason whatsoever. We were trying to get all the gravel, all the rocks, all the bricks that were lying there, into a location, into one area. They lined us up like snakes, one after the other. One hands over the other, hands over the other. How fast can you hand over one thing to the other one? They were standing with whips and kept going and going and going. At last we can't do it any more, impossible. How much can you do? No mercy. After we finished off cleaning up all the gravel, we found more bodies. Then they started to lay the railroad tracks again. Those railroad tracks are heavy. When you get four people like this, weak as hell, you expect these people to pick up a track? They kept beating the hell out of us for no reason. We kept saying, we cannot pick it up, it's too heavy, need a machine to pick this up. Nein, you must pick it up. Okay. We finished laying the tracks. Took us a week or something like that. We laid the tracks. Then they started bringing in prefabricated factories, prefabricated factories. If I tell you, within four weeks, between three and four weeks you build up seven new factories, the way it was before, you wouldn't believe it, would

you? That's exactly what we did. Seven new factories with a railroad track to bring in fresh stuff back in again to continue making ammunition.

So you basically rebuilt the factory that had been destroyed?

Destroyed from scratch, from scratch. Took us four weeks, we had the whole, because of these youngsters, went in..

They didn't work though?

No, they kept pushing us. The only time they gave us a break was 12 o'clock. Twelve o'clock, they gave us a break, we had our lunch. What did the lunch consist of? Some vegetable soup and that's it. Then you continued working till six o'clock in the evening, go home. I have no shoes, my shoes wore out. I couldn't get any new shoes. I kept begging these kids, something to wrap around. So I find myself some rags. Something in the back. I made the rags wrapped around like shoes, around and around, here and there with strings attached to it so I can walk. Because the weather was getting cold already, the winter was approaching. So when the winter season came along, it got worse. 'Cause we could hear more airplanes approaching the area. If they had to come this way, how do we know which direction they were traveling? Whether they were going to Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, ____ (c.180), I don't know. How am I supposed to know? But the planes were coming from every direction. This was in the winter time already, January, February. We kept going to the factories every single day. They were so short of food, they gave us potato, what do you call that?, flour like, you know potato flour, what do you call that, Rosie? ["Potato starch?"] Something like that. If you put it in water, it melts right away so you're able to eat that. We made a soup but then you get heartburn out of it. So they gave us that to eat because they had no food for themselves. In Germany, they had no food. One thing for sure, though, if you weren't killed in the factory, the Germans weren't going to kill you. You were safe there. In 1945, the beginning of '45, you felt in you, if you don't die from starvation, the Germans are not going to kill you because they needed you. They needed every labor they could possibly get. Because the demand for ammunition was so much. They used to go out with the Germans on the firing range. Used to take those panzer faus (c.195), the anti-tank grenades. They tested them before they shipped them out. Those panzer faus, anti-tank grenades were able to penetrate four inches of steel. Can you imagine how powerful that was? Had one German sitting in the ground. We were surrounded by him, helping him out. He just put it in his shoulder, tapped him in its head, boom. Four inches of steel, a dent, not a hole completely, but a tremendous dent. So we tested it for about two or three days. Not continuously a full day. Let's see, we go out, let' see, two o'clock in the afternoon till about four o'clock testing the ammunition. Then they tested different types of ammunition. Tremendous firing range there. This episode went on until about April, 1945. We were almost finished. There was very little food. We were fed once a day because they didn't have food for themselves. The commanding officer took us out in the middle of the camp and he said

we are going to leave this camp soon. What day I don't know but you'll be notified. Around this time of the year,

April.

April, we knew at least a holiday, trains arriving. This time we have closed cattle trains, closed. We see them on the train, _____ lined up. We were in that camp approximately between five and six hundred people. Small ammunition factory. They loaded us up on this train, they gave us food, the Germans and he was awfully nice, the commander. He says, I thank you for what you did. Maybe we'll meet again. And whom do they send along with us on the trains? Old men, retired, 60, 70 years of age, with a pigeon rifle. Where you shoot down pigeons. They didn't even have rifles to handle anymore. But who was going to run anyplace? Who was going to do anything to them? You had no energy. you had no place where to go. You're in a strange land. So the train was going with these---, he was sitting with us, inside the train.

So inside the cattle car, you had guards?

Yes, inside the cattle car. Every third cattle car had a guard with us. An old man, he was sitting with them, talking to him in German. He was telling about his family, he says he had a wife, he has grown children. He has a son in the army, whether he is alive, he doesn't know. He has grandchildren who go to school, hopefully, the war is over soon. I says, I hope you don't take revenge on me. I says, I have nothing against you. You haven't done anything to me. It's not your fault, I'm here. You have to obey orders, you're in the army. I mean everybody was talking with him and everything. When we arrived at the first station after we left the camp, the commanding officer went out and took a group of men from the trains and went into the town bakery. And says I have approximately 500 and 600 people. I need bread. He says, where am I going to get bread for you? He says, you make it, your business. You have to give them bread. So they gave us black bread which consisted of 60% potatoes and 40% flour. Because when you eat the bread, you could feel, it's so soft. It taste very, you know, soft inside. So they told us, this is made from potatoes and flour. Some of the guys who were in the camp were bakers, too. They could tell the difference. So this black bread tasted terrific. No problem. Each one of us received a nice big slice of bread and we stayed on the station for about two or three hours and we continued. Then at night, I fell asleep on the camp and every morning they took us the bodies and put it... There were two trains, two cattle trains especially for that purpose.

Two trains or two cars? Two wagons?

Two cars, two cars especially for that purpose. The pictures are here.

In other words they take out people who died during the night ...?

Died during the night.

And they put them in wagons of the dead?

Yes. Then we reached Tereza (ph)(c.253), that's when they took them out to bury them. So then the second stop was Dresden. We stopped behind the station and we heard tremendous alarms going on. The bombing was going unbelievable. So we ask the guard, we says, what town is this here? He says, that's east Dresden. Dresden, yeah. They were bombing it like crazy. I says, ve canish gain forward, (ph)(c.259), we can't go forward because they have to pick up the trains, or the tracks until they able to move. In the meantime, we were hungry, no food. G__ sent down a miracle. A train, a cattle train came along with all sorts of vegetables, carrots, beets, kileron (ph)(c.264), carrobi (ph)(c.264) and cabbage. You name it, it was all full of vegetables, open trains. So the supervisor, the commanding officer of the train, he says, each train, car tather, were allowed to send out three men to go out and pick up whatever they can and bring it into the car. And what they did. They brought it in. Of course, wherever we go, wherever we travel, we always assign one person, you are in charge because we are animals. We have to have somebody to supervise us, somebody who is able to control us. So when this man brought in all these fruits, vegetables rather, he right away put a blanket around it. The guard was sitting there eating carrots. And everybody got his piece of share of vegetable. It was delicious.

Which guy did you pick?

We picked three out to go. One of the men whom we knew he's a nice guy to talk to, you can tell, you know you get to know each other; he's the one who's reliable who's able to take control. He had a little more energy, more energetic, okay? And he took over everything and he divided everything accordingly. So each car, how many people were in the car, most probably I would say about between 35 and 40 men in each car, okay? So you divided this at least we had for the day, we had a nice lunch, vegetable. We stood on the train and they allowed us to get out of the car to sit around on the car. The guard was standing around to see what's happening. They didn't bother. Believe me, none of us had any intention to take a ride anyplace or to go anywheres. There was no place to go, we had no energy to run anyway. So we sat over there, it was a little group over there with water. So they allowed us to go over there so we washed up a little bit and deloused ourselves. we were filthy dirty. Okay, plenty of that was running around on us. Then we stood on that station one night and another air raid came along. When that air raid came, they locked the doors and they run into the woods. They left us standing there.

The guards left you?

Yeah. So we said to each other. G__ almighty, if you wish us to live, protect us. I was the youngest, the youngest from the whole bunch of people. That boy kept saying the same thing, he says G__ almighty, if you wish us to live, protect us. He protected us. The bombing, the falling in every direction, any where which way except our train. Then there were plenty of trains with people from different camps going the same direction. They were lined up on tracks as far as the eye could see. The fifth day, they were able to let us go through. Either they fixed the railroad tracks or whatever happened and we started to move. When we started to move, we felt good. Once you move, your system is different. When you stand still, you feel lousy. We drove in that trains for about two days and two nights and we arrived to a place, was Sudetline (ph)(c.311). That's already Czechoslovakia. It was a big sign, so that you couldn't miss it. We were able to look through the holes, you know, so I said to the guard, I said it myself because I was sitting right next to him, I says, why can't ;you leave the door open? I says, nobody's going to run away. Nein, nein. He had orders to keep the door closed. We could have taken him and choke him, take his rifle, hit him over the head, right? Simple as ABC. But who has the guts to do it? You know, we had a feeling this is coming close to the end of the war. Because we saw so many air raids, so many planes coming around that area. When he mentioned the word Dresden, then I knew it was problems over there. Then Kaminitz (ph)(c.320) was next, bombing like crazy. Anyway, we arrived in Sudetenland (c.322). The train stopped, the Czechoslovakia border guards came and took over. The Germans went out, the SS auf Wiedersehen to us. Auf Wiedersehen. So they went in one direction and the Czech police took over the train and we drove on the train. We didn't know where we going. All of a sudden, we arrive in a place. We see people lounging, walking here, there. You felt like G__ almighty, is this the end of the war? Is this...because everybody is so free. There's no factories, there's no work or anything. Then I ask somebody, when they open up the door, where are we? He says, das iz Theresienstadt, das is Theresienstadt. I didn't know what the Theresienstadt, I never heard of it. So the German border, the Czechs made us all get out.

They had Czech police?

Czech police, right. They were also armed but not severely. And we all got off the trains and I collapsed. I collapsed, simply collapsed, I couldn't move. I tried to get up, fell back. I tried to get up, I fell back. Three times I tried to get out in the area. So this one person who lived in, who was in Theresienstadt came over to me and he gave me some sugar. He gave me a piece of sugar, you know the square pieces of sugar? Took a piece of sugar and started to chew on it. It felt so good. He calls over a nurse. Because the first thing they did, when they came into Theresienstadt, they took care of the two cars, where they have the bodies and they took care of the people who collapsed. I was one of them. So he called over this nurse and somebody come over with a stretcher and they took me up to the hospital. So they took me up to the hospital; it had about four floors. It wasn't a hospital, it was

just a place, when I looked at the hospital, I says, oh my G___, this is backed into Skarzysko Kamienna. I hope it's not the same situation. That's the first thing that registered in my mind. So I said to the nurse, I says, where are we? where am I? what is happening here? He says, in here, she says, you're in good hands. This is Theresienstadt, the _____ (c.356) ghetto, big ghetto. And in here people come and people go. But I didn't know the atrocities that they had in the Theresienstadt, previous, prior because we came towards the end of the war in April. Immediately a doctor came over to me, he looked at me and examined, he says malnutrition. That was the answer, right? _____ the essen.(c.362). So they gave me some soup, a little warm water to drink. I was lying over there, I fell asleep from exhaustion. I must have slept at least two days. Because I didn't eat for two days. I was lying in that hospital there and then I hear commotions going on outside. I looked out through the window, I see people are marching in the street. I says, what kind of a country is this? what is this going on in here? I am only used to see tragedy and this is people a different story altogether. So I ask the nurse again who came around to check on me, she says to me, this is Theresienstadt. It's better in here than in any other place, now, she says. I says, what is the story with the war? She says, ah, the war is almost finished, she says, the war is almost finished. This was April 28.

That's the day you arrived?

The day I arrived to Theresienstadt. So I stayed in that hospital for one week. Then I said to myself I feel a little better, I'm not going to stay around here because I kept seeing pictures of Skarzysko Kamienna. I kept seeing pictures of them coming in and taking you out and put them on the trucks. I said, I don't want that picture. I couldn't get it out of my eyes. Every time, I looked at the ceiling on the top there, I see Skarzysko Kamienna. Because that's the type of environment that hospital was. So I got up in the afternoon and I sneaked out. I looked around for the concerns (?) (c.386), the concerns that we lived in and I meet one of the boys who came from my camp. I says, where are you located? He says, right over there. All you have to do is go to the gate over there, register yourself and you go inside. So I went in there, registered myself, and they gave me a bunk to sleep on in the barracks. And that's it. Nobody missed me in the hospital, they didn't even know who I was. They didn't take my name down, my number, nothing. You're a number that's all. If you're there, you're there; you're not there, you're not there. So I stayed at the concern. I was assigned to food, I was able to get..they give you a nice bowl of soup and a piece of bread, lunchtime. And I was able to sneak out, being a youngster at that time, I sneaked out, run to the kitchen and was able to pick up some scrap to get myself a little more energy. But one thing I was thinking of is, don't eat too much, slowly. Because your system was so strained, so dried out, you can't eat too much. Can you imagine at that age, with so little education that I had, my mind was able to sustain and to think what might happen to me if I eat too much? You understand? You can't stretch something like that all of a sudden, got to do it slowly. I have decided there and then, little by little, I ate such little bread. The soup when I was eating it, it took me two hours to finish it because I took my time. Then typhoid was out there, broke out. Tremendous. People were dying without end. Every minute of the day, they were carrying people out. _____ _____ (c.415) I had it too. I controlled it myself. Then the good day came. V-E day. May 8, 11 o'clock in the morning, we hear shooting. Shooting like crazy. They

were trying to kill us yet. Can you imagine, the Russians were right outside the gates and here the Germans were shooting in with machine guns! Into the Theresienstadt. They had gas camps ["I thought they were going to gas you there."] That's right but they never succeeded because the Russians came with such an impact. They came in so fast that they left the Germans standing with their pants down. They called them, the whole families. Can you imagine? The German army were fighting with their families together. Their wives and the children were sitting in the wagon, a horse and buggy, and he had a machine gun on himself. But they could not succeed what they were trying to do. The Russians came in about noontime with their tanks. You should have seen the joy. But where are the energy, what energy? I took a group of friends of mine, went into the main highway where the German army was surrendering to the Russians. The Russians says to us, Vre___(c.437), children, do what you want. Believe me, I didn't lay a hand on them. But I took whatever they have, all their possessions, whatever they have. We grabbed whatever they have. What is it mostly we taking then? Food! Everything else we throw away. We left the villages to pick it up. They have beautiful clothing, underwear, shirts, pants, socks, you name it, they have it. They were so loaded up to the brim with everything. We didn't take nothing from them except food. They have so much food in their wagons, you have no idea. Let them go empty. Out, out. They kept begging us, they says, give me at least my tobacco. Nothing. Some of them grabbed sticks and brooms and they beat the living daylight of them to let them go to camp because the Russians were lined up on both sides the highways. We brought back a lot of food to the camp. As I said before, I held myself back. I had my little corner in the bunk, where I slept below. I put a little blanket around it, tied it down with a rope and left my food in there. Whenever I felt myself hungry, I kept eating but I never overate myself. I watched myself very carefully because I saw what happened to the others. Then two days later, they formed a committee in the Theresienstadt already, among the people in the camp, and they said we have to save the youngsters. And they went from barracks to barracks, from concern to concern, how old are you? this way, how old are you? this way, how old are you? this way. And they took us out by hand. They took us over to a separate unit near the Russian headquarters where the Red Cross was there waiting for us. And examined us, checked us out. Of course, everybody had the same problem, malnutrition. They gave us dry milk to drink, they gave us cereal, they gave us nutritious food. Chocolate. While we were there, we looked around at each other and then we started to reminiscing. What happened in the camps, what happened towards the end of the camp, what happened, this and that. You know, everybody had a story this big. And we felt like one family, like one family. You are my brother now, you are my brother now, I have nobody else. They were able to scrape together 270 boys from the age of 15 to the age of 19, 20 and thirty girls who survived the war. This was only in the Theresienstadt. The girls came from different parts of Europe also. One from here, one from there. The boys also. Very few came from the same hometown. Those were all the survivors. They allocated us into one area where they took very good care of us, medically, physically and mentally.

This is the Red Cross?

That was the Red Cross. They wanted to save the children. The least we can do. If we don't save them, he says, there's nothing to save. And the Russians were very grateful to us. They were so nice to us. They kept giving us food. We couldn't believe it because we had rumors that the Russians were so bad and everything else. That's not true! They were nice, they're human beings. They treated people just as well as anybody else did. Americans didn't come in because the Russians...that was their territory to take over. They sacrificed a lot of lives to save the Theresienstadt, the Russians did. ["They heard there was a camp, they went..."] They knew there was an extermination area there and they were afraid something would happen. ["They went out of their way to get to it."] So then, May, June, it was a paradise. We had everything we wanted. We mingled with the other people. Everything was beautiful. Was dancing, was happiness going on. Nobody...till it hits you. You know, one day it hits you. You says, oh my G__, my family. That was the worst part of your life. Until then, your stomach was empty, you thought of food. But when you filled up, you got everything, then you start thinking about what you have lost, what's missing. Something is missing in your life, you don't have everything. Although your friends are your brothers now and your sisters, but something else is missing. Then you have to work your system...your mind has to start going around in a different way to look upon life. Maybe, this is the fate that we have to accept. Have to start anew. Right there and then, I have decided never to go back to Poland. Right there and then, I have decided, I don't want to see that country, I don't want to hear of it, I have no proof of it. No use for it. I blame the country what happened to my folks. Maybe I'm wrong but that's the way I feel. Then each country send a representative to the Theresienstadt to take its people home. Hungarians, there were Czechs, Polaks, Italians. There were Germans, there were Austrian Jews there. Every country sent a trainload to take its people home. Except us. After they left, a committee from England arrived to Theresienstadt and had a meeting with us. With us children, we have two choices. Either come with us to England or you go to Russia. I know you don't want to back to your country. Without hesitation, I decide to go to England although I didn't know anything about England. I didn't know anything about the United States. Forget about that. But I knew about Russia. Why didn't I choose to go to Russia? Instinct told me go to England. Although the Russians were very nice to me, I was very friendly with them; I made a lot of friends with the Russians. And so when we made the decision to go to England, he says it'll take a couple of days and you'll be all traveling. Fine. July, the end of July, we were told we have to go to the Russian headquarters to receive passports. I still have it, right? I have the passport. It says... We had to go to Russian headquarters to give us passports to leave the country. So one of the Russian officers came out and started talking with us. He always called us Raybeeacha (ph)(c.572). Raybeeacha means children. And he says, I know it's your choice where you want to go. We're not going to stop you but if you choose to go with us, the Russians, we will be happy to accept you. But if you choose to go there, it's up to you. We already made up our minds, everybody made up their minds where they going. So the fateful day came in August. We packed our belongings, whatever we had, not much. We boarded a comfortable train on Theresienstadt and we drove with the train to Prague. Prague is the capital of Czechoslovakia. In Prague, we stayed with the Czech underground. Remember I told you about this officers...with them, we stayed in their headquarters. They fed us, they clothed us, and they gave us lodging and waited for the planes to arrive from England. In the meantime, while we were waiting, the weather wasn't so pleasant so they decided to give us a grand tour of Prague. The president of Prague just arrived two days ago from England. He was in England during World War II.

The president of Czechoslovakia?

Czechoslovakia, yes. Jan Masaryk, his name was Jan Masaryk. So they gave us a tour with the trolley cars. They boarded four trolley cars. We each boarded the trains, it was enough for three hundred kids, three cars would be accommodated. They took us to the circus from there. Then we visited, there was one Jewish synagogue left and they made us visit that too. We were very delighted, everybody was beautiful. Everything was good. The day was over, exhausted. We were exhausted, believe me. We came back, we took our sleep, _____(c.604) things were there. Took us by bus... Okay?

Yeah.

We drove to the airport in Prague and we boarded a plane and we flew into England. We arrived in a place in England called Carlisle, that must be Scotland. Right?

Near Lockerbie? (C.621)

Right, right. Carlisle. We got off the planes, we had something to eat on the plane. You know, we're sitting bomber planes. It wasn't very comfortable, no seats there. Who cares, youngsters don't care. We had some supervisors coming along but not much of them. We landed, we were examined by the British security, ask you questions, they all spoke German too. Because they figured that's the only language they'll be able to respond with us, in Yiddish or German. We all received a glass of milk and a piece of cake. Then the supervisors that we had; they put such a tremendous fear in us, knowing we were wild. We were very wild, food was the main object in our life at that time. So if you see food, you grab it, you know, you don't ask questions. He kept saying, he says, the people in England are very particular. They watch you continuously. If you don't behave yourself, they kick you out of the country. So please behave yourself, even if you see something that you want, don't touch. So after we arrive, we're checked out, passports and everything, we boarded a plane to go to Windermere.(ph)(c.634). Windermere is a beautiful lake, it's a countryside..it's not far much Manchester. At each bus, had in the middle of the bus, a big basket of fruit. Can you imagine that, a big basket of fruit? You cannot touch it because they told us, don't touch anything which you see. This is a test. I said to myself, what in the world is all this about? It's there for you to eat, not to look at, right? The trip took about approximately between two and three hours from the airport to Windermere. Windermere was a camp, prior to World War II, where the British children, while they were bombing London, they send the children to this camp. So this camp was already well-established with all the accommodations for us. So why we were riding the bus, the supervisor says, everybody can get up and take one apple. The basket was empty in two seconds. Each bus had a

basket of fruit. Each bus, there were three buses. After we arrived in the camp, we were greeted in the camp by Rabbi Weiss. He had a beautiful staff with him. A few doctors, nurses and we went right away to the infirmary. We were checked out, examined, given a blanket and assigned to a cabin. Each barrack had accommodation for about 50 children. Each child had his own little room, had a bed, a cabinet where you can put your clothes in, and was a piece of cake, food and juice after you went inside. This was late at night already, we arrived it was about ten o'clock at night. The following day, we hear the war is over in Japan. The Japanese war was August 14, right? The end of the war. We didn't know what the joyous was all about. The British knew what it was all about, we didn't know. I didn't know there was a war going on between the United States and

You didn't even know where Japan was?

Exactly. Okay, never mind the United States. So everybody was dancing in the streets, you know, the people in the vicinity, what was the joys? We couldn't correspond to these people because we couldn't talk their language. Our leaders told us that it was the end of World War with the Japanese. Okay, fine, no problem with that. So we stayed in this camp. We were checked out very thoroughly. Every day, different doctors would arrive. The media, of course, comes right away. Then they started to teach us basics. How to behave, how to pick up a fork and a knife, how to eat with a spoon, how to take a piece of bread and put a little jam or margarine on it. Who knew those things? I wasn't used to those things. I was a child when I left home. Manners, how to sit at a table and eat. That took a lot of courage from our leaders to undertake--because you're dealing with youngsters, not babies. These are youngsters, grown up, 15 up to 20 years of age. Try to regulate these people, wasn't so easy. But somehow, they succeeded, they succeeded. For the first two days, was a little bit strange. Camps was always a different feeling. A camp was a camp. Whether it's this camp or another camp, it's a camp. But somehow you felt that you are among people which you can trust. People who care for you, people who are willing to help you, so you have to sort of bend a little bit. Be there. I think most of the boys and the girls sort of acclimated themselves in the first three days. So they became a little humanized. Sat at the table and eat like a human being. Didn't grab the food like _____. Now we're given breakfast in the morning, porridge--that's the British breakfast--porridge or what's that herring they have, kipper, kipper, that's a British meal. Then we have lunch, nice meal, then at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we had white bread with jam and milk. That time in Britain, food was rationed. They had to share the food with the children that came in, 300 of us. Then a rabbi came from London and he said to us, if you know that you have any relatives anywhere in the United States or South America, give me the name and we'll let them know that you are alive. So I remembered that my father had two brothers who immigrated to Argentina in the thirties. Whether it was '35 or '36, I don't remember but I know they emigrated in the thirties.

From your hometown?

From my hometown. So I told this rabbi that I have two uncles live in Argentina. I don't know their addresses, I don't know their names. Of course, after the rabbi finishes with all these people getting information, if anyone of those children had anything, they gave information. Within two months, I received a letter from my uncle in Argentina. He is my father's brother and he is asking me what happened to his family. What could I tell him? Same thing that happened to my family, right? Maybe he felt guilty, he didn't take them down there. He could have taken them down to Argentina after he left there. He could have taken them down. So I found this uncle in Argentina but I didn't know how to _____ in the United States.(c. 697) Okay? So after being in Windermere, for about six months, we went through thorough checkup by doctors in hospitals, x-ray and everything. They found out that a yellow blemish, in my lungs? ["where"], that spot, ["you didn't find out until you were here."]. I know, what did I have? {"well, calcification, it showed. He didn't find out til.."} No, no, no, no, I knew I had it in Theresienstadt, I mean in Windermere but I didn't mention it when I was here. ["Oh"] Anyway, they put me in a special diet, I don't know if the diet helped me or what, it doesn't make no difference. Then they send in from each town in England, Manchester, Liverpool, London, Glasgow, all big cities that have large Jewish populations. And they selected groups of kids, a group of 15, a group of 20, a group of 30, whatever the amount of people. They come over to you separately and say to you, what kind of a home would you like, a kosher home? you want a religious home? and all these questions were asked and we was able to analyze which one would be compatible. They were compatible with me, _____. In my group, we were able to get together 15 young boys. And this rabbi, came to this town, Manchester, picked us up and took us by train to Winchester into a home. A home made for 15 boys, no girls. Fifteen boys, it was orthodox,_____ and in their home, we started to recuperate. Started to get to know everything, we started to learn a language, and we started to get classes. Every single day we had classes. Morning, started at 10 o'clock, finished 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We learned the basic, English, math, history, geography' whatever you want to learn. There we started to go to English schools at that age because we didn't, it didn't at any of the classes of the English we're going because we were already aged. So I was able to go at night to school. I picked up English in six weeks, six months, rather, I'm sorry. In six months, I was able to speak English. I went to meetings, I listened to people talk, I read a lot of papers. I bought myself an Oxford dictionary and taught myself the language I hear while I was going to school. In the meantime, while we are having some lessons in our home and took care of us, we lived together as one family, 15 boys. And then we had once a year, we had a reunion. We all get together, we all, 300 of us who came with this transport, we met in London. We had a tremendous reunion. In the meantime, more youngsters were arriving to England from different parts of Europe. But in our group, we stuck together. We're just like one big, large family. In the meantime, I received a letter from a friend of mine who happens to look for his brothers. He went to search for his brothers in Europe. He found out that his brothers survived and live in France. So he went there and he found his two brothers. And he read in the paper that in America, New York, is a committee in my hometown, looking for survivors. And he responded. Then this man send him another letter, telling him if you know anybody else who survived, please let us know. He notified me in England. He knew I went to England, he didn't want to go because he says, I'm going to look for my family. You go to England, he says, I have an opportunity, I'm not going to miss it. I took the opportunity for him. So he sent me this letter from this man and I knew this man very well because his parents, his brothers lived nearby us, were neighbors. So I wrote him a letter in Yiddish, who I was, my grandfather's name, my father's name

and so on and so forth. And told him where we lived approximately and he knew the area so he knew I'm authentic. Within a month I get a letter from him, with three addresses. My father's brother, my father's two sisters resided in New York City.

And that's when you discovered that you had aunts and uncles in America?

Right, right, right. I immediately answered this _____(c.751) wrote each a letter, telling them who I was and I send a picture of myself. And immediately my uncle over here said, we bring you over to the United States. Would you like to come? Of course! Although I could have come on my own, too, because I was a stateless person. I had no country. I only went to England via Israel. It was a stopover like they say. The committee was able to get permission from the British government to rescue these 300 children to bring them to England till they recuperate, then they'll be able to go further.

So the intention was that you guys would be sent to Israel?

Right.

But you never did go?

No, I didn't go. I didn't go. Instead, when I found my relatives over here, I was able to correspond with them and told them who I was and everything. So they found it realistic. It took them a long time to get me there. Okay? In the meantime, I went to school in England, started off from the beginning, from scratch what I left over in Poland. I was actually a dummy. I was an idiot. I mean, how much could I have learned in five years in Polish schools? I had to start over from scratch, one and one is two, 2 and 2 is four. Geography, history, in reading and writing. I had to learn new types of millimeters, you know there was no centimeters for me any more. Was no kilometers, was miles, so all things had to be converted. It was pounds or shillings and those things had to be converted too. So I had to start from scratch, from ABC. At my age, I was able to achieve it. I thought, well, I made friends, I made a lot of friends in England, a lot of friends. I was very, very happy in England. People were awfully nice. British people were awfully nice. I can never forget, awfully nice. And then after four years in England, I think it was four years, 1945, I got to England, I left 1950.

It was five years.

Five years in England, five years in England, my passport came through to go to the United States. So, I say farewell to everybody, goodbye to everyone, I came to the United States. It was February 9, 1950, a windy day, a cold day...

By plane or..?

No, by boat.

So you arrived on the 9th in February in New York City?

In New York City, yes. It took me two weeks to go by boat because it was so rough. The sea was really rough. And of course, when I came...

Were you seasick?

Yes, I was seasick, yes. When I arrived in New York, the committee was over here already and asked me when they came aboard the ship, would I recognize my relatives? I says, I never met them, I never seen them before but I have pictures of them and they have pictures of me. So she took me by hand and took me to the relatives. They recognized me and I recognized them. And that was it. From then on, I was here. My relatives welcomed me. I was very happy with them. A year later, I was in the United States army, can you imagine that?

Drafted?

Of course. Was the Korean War was on. And every alien who came to the United States in 1950, if you were the age at that time, I was 24, I had to register for the United States Army. I was drafted immediately. Thank G__, I didn't go to Korea. I was trained in Ft. Dennis, Massachusetts. I had my training also in Camp Edwards, upstate Camp Drumn (ph)(c.795) upstate New York. Camp Drumn is near the Canadian border. I was also in Camp Edwards in Massachusetts, that's in Cape Cod. I finished my service in 1953. And married her in 1951. ["end of '51"] End of '51.

When you were a soldier?

I was a soldier, yeah. I had nine months to go yet in the army. So since then, everything was going for me up. The reason, I believe, because I have faith, I never gave it up. I believed very strongly that life has to go on, you can't just push it in a side. The living has to go on. I cannot bring back my family as much as I keep thinking of them. As little as I can start looking at it and trying to remember them, it's far away from me. I can't remember them so much. But that's what kept me going. I am very grateful that I met my wife who has been part of my life for forty years, made my life very happy. We have two children, now a grandson. I'm very grateful to this country for giving me the opportunity to be an American citizen, serve faithfully in the United States army, got honorably discharged. I can't complain, I'm very happy.

So although you were sad to leave England, are you happy here?

I found my happiness in your country. Of course, I've always a person who finds relief no matter where I go. If I determine that I want to make this my permanent home, I will do it. I always have a strong determination, no matter what I did, I never gave up. Once you give up, life is worthless. Many times when I think back, when I meet my friends, I say to him, remember when we went to work in Schleebeben? how did we work? You remember how you walked to work? He says no. I says, I will remind you. What happened to the stick you had in your hand? Took a branch, a stick off the branch from a tree. He had one in his hand and I had one in my hand. We walked together to the factory 'cause once I got into the factory in Schleebeben, I was able to sit on a bench and let the work go through me. So those things you keep remembering. And you keep telling yourself, that gives you an uplift. Life has to go on.

You never returned?

Never returned to Poland. As I said before, in the beginning, I gave my word of honor that I shall never, never go back to this country. I never pursued to find out what happened to my family. The reason because my father had two brothers, he had a brother and two sisters in America. Was he alive, he would have contacted them. If my mother was alive, she would have done the same thing, she has some relatives in here too. Therefore, I believe nobody survived.

So that letter that your Polish supervisor carried to you from your father, that was the last...?

That was the last letter from my parents.

And that was from September, 1942?

Forty-two. That was the last letter.

So you think that your parents were among those who were transported in September of '42?

Right. There was an eyewitness.

And your brother and your sister...?

Went with them. My father thought while I was in camp, maybe we should send my brother with them, to my camp. I says what do you want to send him here for? I should look at his problems, he'll look at my problems? At least, when I am by myself, I eat my heart out by myself.

He was very young then?

One year younger.

Obviously, you have bad memories of growing up in Poland?

Yes.

I remember you said that you hold Poland partially responsible for what happened?

Right, yes.

Do you have any particular memories either when you were going to school in Poland that would cause you to ...?

Yes, yes. In Poland, the schools were very anti-semitic. I am sorry to say that but this is the true fact. When I first attended school, my first grade wasn't so bad. The second grade wasn't so bad, either. The third grade, we were isolated in the schools. We didn't have individual seats. We had those long

benches, we were sitting. All the Jewish boys and girls had separate benches. So in the back of you was sitting Gentile children, Jewish children, Gentile children, Jewish children. You couldn't sit with them together. You were sort of indirectly isolated.

So Jewish children all sat together?

Yes, yes.

To the left?

Not necessarily left because the benches were from this side of the window to here. So we had a long bench here, could accommodate, let's see, twenty children. Okay? So if you have the 18 Jewish girls, the 18 were sitting there, nobody else could be sitting with them. The same thing with the Jewish boys. So I have very bad memories. And then when we left school, I was once hit with a rock right here on my forehead here and I went to the principal with my father, took me to the principal. And my father says, look what the boy did and he pointed out to the boy. Yes, Zhazeewish (ph)(c.871)...

You're a Jew?

No, Zhazeewish means you're still living, so everything is okay. He says, I'm sure the boy didn't mean it. But these particular boys were agitating me, they were bothering me. There was an isolation, definitely, an isolation among the Gentiles, Jews; the Gentiles and the Jews.

How about your grades?

My grades, as far as I can remember, up to the fourth grade, the grades were good. In the fifth grade, my grades were not good enough because the war broke out so I couldn't continue any more. I always wanted to learn, I always wanted to learn. My heart was in it, the knowledge..["Sometimes they marked you less because you were Jewish"]. Yes, that's right, they did, they did!

Yes, that sometimes happened.

They did. They never give you a top-notch rating. Even though you did well; I was reading so beautifully, not only--I'm a very good reader in any language when I learn. Because I love to read, I love to read and write. But I never got top grading from my marks. So I have this feeling left in my memory because I didn't get the backing from the teachers. You know, you are a child, you don't know the difference whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, you came to school to learn. Why should you be isolated? why should you be different than somebody else?

None of your teachers were Jewish?

No, there was no Jewish teachers, no.

How about your brother and sister?

My brother, I was held back one year so I can have my brother with me in the same class so we could share the books.

So your brother was in your class?

My brother was in the class, sitting next to me.

He had the same experience as you?

The same experience. We all had the same experience.

Were there any particular experiences that, you know, he had or that you had that ..?

Well, if I had an experience, my brother would always come over to the rescue. He was my protector. My brother was my protector. A friend of mine, David Greenberg, my wife knows him, ["That's how I met him"], he was the organizer. He's a little older than I am. He was in the same class as I was. Many times we boycotted the school because we felt that the teacher is not doing enough to let us children learn the way the other children are learning. So we boycotted the school. We didn't go to classes. The principal came in and find out the following day says, how come didn't you didn't attend class yesterday. So we told the principal, I says, look we being discriminated. We jabbed in the back,

you know, pushed in there and this and that. When we arrive, the guy hits you in your elbow and you scribble differently. I mean, who wants this here? And if you're not doing anything about it, why going to school. But evidently, nothing was done about it.

How about your sister, was she..?

My sister was in a different category altogether. She came in a later time. She didn't have much of an education to begin with because the war broke out. I was older than her, three or four years older. So she went to maybe the third grade but she had a good Jewish education. Jewish education starts at the age of three.

At home?

Right, the age of three. So she had a good education. But sorry to say, that I don't remember my sister too well. Many times I keep saying to my wife, when I look at my daughter, I see my sister in it. But not 100% because my sister and I were very, very close.

As a girl, though, did she have the same kind of experiences that you and your brother...?

No, no.

Wasn't as bad?

No, wasn't as bad.

Did she have problems with the non-Jewish kids?

No, no, she had no problems. Maybe it was different for girls, I don't know.

Some of your uncles and aunts emigrated to America and Argentina. Did your parents ever consider leaving?

Not to my knowledge. I was wondering many times while I was here. My parents had relatives here, why didn't they emigrate. Why didn't they come to the United States? I assume that in those days when my relatives came here, things weren't so great either. So why bringing more over?

So they may have come before the quotas were introduced?

Yes, because one of my aunts came over here just buying a ticket. You didn't need a passport..

It was easy before the war?

That's right, that's right. ["They were still married here in 1920"].

That's before the quotas, right.

["My parents both were here and they went back. Then we got the quotas."]

So by the time your parents had met and married, it was too late to come here, other than through the quota?

Right, right. ["Because even when we came in, in 1934, we had to wait five years for the quota, the Germany quota."] This is a typical Hebrew school in my time. This is before my time, one generation before my time.

Before your time?

Yes, one generation. Notice how they lead us and the teachers.

How about Israel? Was that an option?

I could have gone to Israel if I wanted to.

I mean, I'm talking now about your parents?

To go to Israel?

Yeah.

No, there were no Zionists in my parents...

So, there weren't many Zionists in your town?

No, they were very religious people content with their religion and environment, very fanatic to speak of. They didn't have a goal. The children of my father's generation, they already knew that life in a small town cannot be profitable. They sort of moved to larger cities, joined organizations. Those organizations had pioneers. The pioneers had camps that prepared them for Israel, kibbutzim, communal life. So they went and pursued those things. A lot of them emigrated to Israel, settled in a communal life and were happy.

Your father had nothing to do with politics?

No, no, nothing with politics whatsoever. He was a religious person, himself, my mother, the same way. Orthodox, they believed G__ will bring you everything. The Messiah will come and that's what they believed in.

And although they weren't making very much money, they didn't need much?

No, they didn't need much. They were content what they had. They brought up three children, we had food. We weren't rich people but enough to buy us every possible, to buy us new suit, new shoes, a new shirt. This was the ritual, everything single year.

Were they matched or did they find each other?

They found each other.

So they knew each other..?

They knew each other well.

Perhaps from school?

Right. But it's unfortunate, I didn't know about it until when I started to go to Polish schools, that my father and mother couldn't write Polish. You see, everything was written, when they were figuring out numbers, the way they would figure it out in regular numbers. But when it came to writing, they didn't. They wrote it in Yiddish.

So they could only read and write Yiddish and Hebrew?

Yiddish and Hebrew. Unfortunately. And when I came over here, I had two aunts in this country who didn't know how to read and write either.

So you would have been the bookkeeper in business..?

Well, let me tell you the truth. If I would have been around in Poland, I would have never stayed in put. I would have taken off.

You would have taken off?

There's no future there. Was no future in a small town like that. You had 150 Jewish families and 500, generally speaking, you lived through each other. How can you make a living? It's very rough.

Did you have any dreams before the war of what you were going to be?

No.

You had no idea?

No, had no idea because at that age already, I knew there was a war going on in Austria and in Germany against people. That put a fear here in my system. I couldn't visualize what the future is going to bring.

So you thought short term?

Short term. We can't go far.

And when the Germans came into your town, you weren't surprised?

No, I was not surprised.

The war was not a surprise to you?

I had a fear, a tremendous fear when they came in because of the atrocities that they were doing. Which in many cases, in many towns, when they came in, they shoot people.

In your town, they didn't?

They didn't. Very fortunate, they didn't kill anybody. Just rounded up the people, put them in the square. Collected all the Polish prisoners of war, with the horses. Can you imagine a cavalry fighting tanks, can you visualize that? That's what the Polish did. They fought a war with horses. When they rounded them up and they were content, the Germans were content; they let everybody go back into the houses.

So you must have felt somewhat relieved after the first few months of the German occupation? After all the stories you had heard and then they come in and nothing happened?

I got acclimated. Nothing happened I was acclimated to it. It was sort of, I knew I have to go to work every day; which was a must. You know after they came out with the new laws, had to wear a band,

have to go to work each day, whether it's winter, summer, you have to go work. So there, that's it. So many times I covered for my father. If his day came to go to work, I went for him too. Every day people were assigned to go to work.

No one was being shot?

Nobody's been shot. You did your job. As I said before, they came to town because they had a Yudenrite (ph)(c.014), a committee to demand what they want. As long as those items were fulfilled to their contentment, nothing happened.

And very few German soldiers were in your town?

No. As a matter of fact, we had a large German contingent. They took over all the public schools and made their homes.

So you're talking about civilians, yeah?

Not civilians.

Soldiers.

Military.

Military?

No school was in existence at that time. They took over all the churches, took over all the synagogues. Put the horses in there.

So no more synagogues?

No more synagogues, church, yes. Only one church was in existence. The other ones they confiscated. They used the churches around for their entertainment. The people are sort of content. They have no choice in the matter. They are in enemies' hands and they are the boss and they are the rulers. You try to do the best you can.

The bad period begins in '42?

The bad period begins in '42.

This is when all the stories that you had heard become real?

Become reality, become reality, yes. That was the worst part of it. Where you lose complete sense of reality, self-sense, to be a human being. Because we being exploited, being taken advantage of. I was a youngster, innocent, in every respect. Haven't seen life as yet. Cannot continue going. Life has been cut short. You don't know where it's going to wind up. But on the second hand, I had hope, never give up what the future might be. Looking forward to make sure that the end of the war, I was alive. And I did.

What was the worst moment for you? You had many bad moments, I'm sure, but...?

The worst part was during the holidays in the winter season. When I was working in the factory, empty stomach. I had nothing to eat, just drunk a lot of water. When I saw other people going _____(c.051) just drinking water alone__. Sort of grasping for air, I was grasping for air. When you know--who knows what's going to happen? That was in 1944. But as long as I was working, getting something to eat, I would survive. Then after the war was over, I was hoping that I would have sense enough to control my diet. So I wouldn't be a _____(c.063) like the other ones.

The camps that you were in, which was the worst for you?

Which one was the worst?

Yeah.

Skarzysko Kamienna. That was the worst.

Yet, it wasn't as bad as the stories you had heard about Auschwitz?

That's right. It wasn't as bad. The only bad--the work wasn't as bad; I didn't mind the 12 hours. Why am the Jew surrounded? As you walk to camp, to work, or back from work, you never know where the bullet will hit you. I mean a man comes out and discriminately..

The man, the hunchback?

The hunchback and just shoots people for nothing.

Were any of the people that were with you, were they from Majdanek? I know you mentioned some...

Yes, some of them, they were born in Lotch (ph)(c.075). Some of them come from Warsaw. They were shipped to Auschwitz or Majdanek It wasn't far away from each other. And then when they needed laborers in Skarzysko Kamienna as the factories were growing, they needed more manpower. They didn't have any manpower. The Polaks could say I don't want to work for you, what are you going to do to me. They could run away, they could hide if they wanted to. So they brought these youngsters in. Then when these numbers there and they have uniforms already, they already look like they're half dead to begin with... Then I found out, what they were doing in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek.

Were there any specific stories or individuals from Majdanek?

Nobody talked too much about it. Everybody has its own little problem, what they were doing in the barracks. Everybody had their own dreams, food, food. When you dream of food you don't dream of anything else. Nobody is going to tell you a story what happened that they saw a lot of people being dressed and send them into the camp, into the gas chamber. I don't think anybody saw it because everything was so isolated. If you hear what the barracks maybe a mile away from here was the other situation going on.

I have one more question. When you were in hometown and you were working, shoveling snow and doing all kinds of work from '40 to '42, how were the Germans treating the Poles, that is the non-Jews? Were they also being forced to work?

No, no.

So only the Jews were forced to work?

Only the Jews were forced to work.

So when the Germans took over parts of the town, they just took over Jewish property, not Polish?

No Polish property. You see, some of the--you'll find in every situation, you'll find somebody who is going to try to be a little bit friendly towards, you know. There were some Polaks who were trying to be friendly to the Germans and point fingers. Okay, so they can get something extra. It was some of them, I don't say all of them but there were plenty of them like that. Pointed their fingers so they could get something for themselves. Maybe it's nature that provides it with it, but the Germans were your enemy, right? To go with your country, to give _____ away and everything, no. Those things, I look away already. As a youngster, I looked at life in a different prospect way. The courage I had was for myself is one thing, try to survive. This what kept me going. I kept consoling myself, every single day: It's sin o'clock now, I have to go to work. The day will go by. The days went by fast 'cause when you work on a machine, your mind is occupied 100%. It is an automatic machine, machine doesn't work for you, you got to work for the machine. The minute the machine retracted, you have to bring out the two pieces, we send two pieces back again. Because I saw an incident happen.____ So those were the ____ (c.153)___.

You survived.

I survived, that's important.

Have we forgotten anything?

I don't know.

We covered...

I think I covered practically everything from A to Z. As far as my memory recollects, I think I have recovered everything in all the camps that I have spent. And the friends that I have in the camps, some of them were good, some of them were bad. I'm not going to look for them. Life is a bowl of cherries. If life is good, we have a lot of friends. If life is bad, we have a lot of enemies. When you feel good, someone will come along and help you along. When you feel lousy, you feel lousy yourself, no one will help you. In those situations, in those situations. Everybody had the same attitude towards life, the same feeling, hunger. Hunger is a painful thing. I don't wish it in my worst enemy in this world, to be hungry. So painful, it is very difficult to describe. Just imagine in the morning, take yourself once in the morning. Get up, wash yourself up and take a walk. Don't eat till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Your heart will tell you how you feel. Sometimes I said to myself, let me try it. I do it. I get up in the morning, I don't eat anything. I go for a walk. I come back to my house, starts feeling pain. As I said, it's very hard to describe it. Everybody was in the same boat.

Not for one day, but for three years?

For three years and it was a lot of stealing going on. A lot of them got beaten up 'cause of that. If you were caught stealing, they take you inside a room over there and beat the living daylight out of you. Why, you stole because you wanted to?

No.

I don't think you go to any of these guys, they give you stories precise. Because I have it so deeply imbedded in me, every movement, every step that I make, all the work that I did for the Germans, I didn't get paid for that.

No compensation?

No compensation. ["_____water?"] No, it's okay.

I think we've just finished. Well, thank you, Mr. Himmelfarb, for your story.

My pleasure. See this is the group of youngsters who came to England. There you see the supervisors and the youngsters. I don't know if you're going to find me over there but I'm always in the front, with the white shirt. ["That's in Theresienstadt, right?"] Theresienstadt, that's me.