

OK. You can just give me your--

All right.

--all over again.

OK. My name is Arthur R. Menke. I was born in Hamburg, Germany of the year 1927, February the 23rd.

Why don't we start off by telling me a little bit about your childhood and your parents?

I had a father, whose age was at that time 55, and my mother at the time was 46. And I had a sister the age of 17.

So you had one sister?

Yes.

And that was the only sibling?

Yes.

And we lived in a very nice neighborhood in Hamburg, Germany. And we had to leave that neighborhood and apartment we lived in because the Jews were no longer allowed in that part of town. It was too good for them.

What time frame are we talking about?

That was, I would say, in about '38.

In '38, OK.

1938. Before that time-- I know this is going to be hard to try to remember, especially because you were that young, but-- do you remember any of the time around the time that Hitler came to power?

Oh, yes. Of course, I was born in '27, but I vividly remember, let's say, around '35. And that's when the Jews were starting to suffer. And it was maybe around '38 where the Jews, like I said, were resettled in another part of town and they were not allowed to shop at the regular stores.

There was stores especially assigned to Jews, with the merchandise was higher. We were also-- of course, there were benches that said, no Jews allowed. And you couldn't go to a movie, and there were severe restrictions.

I am sure you recall Crystal Night. And I don't think we have to get into that. No, I'm quite sure you know that.

Do you remember things? I'm sorry.

At that time-- you know, they arrested for-- when the German official was killed in France, and that was supposedly a punishment, to punish the Jews for that. And that's how the Crystal Night originated.

And at that time, my father was taken to a concentration camp near Berlin for six weeks. They came to the house to arrest my father, and he was at the place of business. And ordered my mother not to contact him. And they went and arrested him. And he came back after six weeks a broken man. He was hardly recognizable.

And at that time, the Nazis taken over all German-owned businesses. And they were government-run. So my father's business-- he had a small factory producing rubber stamps and signs, et cetera. And that business was taken over by the government.

And his bank account was taken. And we were only allowed to draw a small amount of our own money at the time. And my father was forced to work as a laborer, packing shoes in a factory.

Do you remember, when you were a small child about this time, was there a lot of antisemitic overtones? By the children, especially.

The antisemitism, I really-- it was a lot worse in smaller towns first. Small villages. As a matter of fact, they were so bad that the people lived in smaller towns went to the bigger cities because there was less antisemitism.

And now, the German Jew was, if you want to use the term integrated, he was not like the Polish Jew, who was discriminated by the Poles many, many years before the German Jew was. And so the German Jew was a proud German. Like my father fought for Germany in 1914/18 and was discharged as a proud German soldier defending his country.

And the German Jews were dumb enough to believe that what's happened to the Polish Jews-- because the Polish Jews suffered sooner than the German Jews were-- they go, oh, this will never happen to us, we are German first before we are Jewish.

But I recall being taken out of the school. And I was enrolled into a German high school. It was called Talmud Torah, which is still standing today.

Was that a public school or a Jewish school?

That was a Jewish school.

Jewish school, OK.

And they also had a girl's school where my sister went. There was a highly-- a real fine school. And we were well-educated. Of course, that was too good for the Jews again, and the building was taken over by the Germans. And we were all forced into a small school with the girls.

Of course, there was a lot of emigration at the time. And I might add this. My mother saw the handwriting on the wall and wanted to get out of Germany. But I recall saying to my father, you don't have a trade, it'd be difficult to start over again. So they procrastinated until it was too late. And we did apply to leave Germany in the late '30s but I was too late at the time.

Sure. You said something earlier about being moved within Hamburg. Was that a ghetto that was set up in Hamburg?

No, not really. It was a neighborhood where more Jewish people lived, really.

Already?

Already.

Before the Nazis, OK.

Yes. The neighborhood I lived in was on the other side of the river, which was a much nicer neighborhood.

And they moved you into the--

Yes. And I was not welcome at school either anymore. I was going to public school there. Do you remember when you moved what kind of feelings you had at that time? Well, as a child, it didn't bother us at all. But of course, it was a terrible thing for my parents to go through.

Matter of fact, we had a real nice home at that part of town. And at first, we all lived in-- the whole family-- in a rented room, you know. It was a trauma at that time already.

OK. Let's see. You talked a little bit about Kristallnacht. Do you remember anything specific about that night that happened to you or your family?

Well, I know that the all-Jewish businesses were totally destroyed, including huge department stores, like Hecht Company. Karstadt is the name. They're all over Germany today. And they'd taken furs and threw them in the river.

Right.

And you know, the Jewish cars the people owned, the automobiles were destroyed. The strange part is my father's business was not destroyed because people didn't realize that my father was a Jew. So his business was not destroyed.

Is any reason for that they might not think he was a Jew? Or did they not just not know? Is that?

They didn't realize that he was a Jew. And like I said earlier, the Jew, the German Jew, was first German, you know. And I want to show you a little incident where there was a Nazi holiday.

Of course, the Jews would not display their flag. And my sister and I would make a flag out of a sheet and hang out, which my parents naturally reeled back in again. But just to give you a sample, like there was no different at the time.

Right, OK. Do you remember much about any friends in school that you had at that time in your neighborhood? Especially from the children that I'm kind of interested in, about if there were any antisemitic.

Yes, because they were agitated by their parents. And we had to wear a star of David, with the name Jew written in it. And there with the letters were made in such a way that it looked like Hebrew. You know, it says in German Jew in there. And it had to be worn on the outer clothes.

From what time did this?

That started also in the late '30s.

Late '30s.

I would say '38, maybe. And kids would throw stones. You know, kids are cruel. And not being allowed to go many places. It was a hardship on the kids.

Do you remember what the life was like in-- we're not talking about a ghetto here-- but the neighborhood that you spoke of that you were moved to? Was it guarded by the Nazis? Was it free going back and forth?

Oh, yes, yes it was. And even at that time, there were plenty of Germans who were not Nazis. But they were scared not to be Nazis. I remember as a little boy, I worked in a little stall. They were selling health food. And I did the deliveries for him. And beautiful people.

But I also remember taking the packages to the post office, that other kids would tear the labels off, you know, them being Jewish. And you know, causing problems and things.

How long did you work at this store?

Well, it was a little part-time job that after school, I worked there. But there were Germans that my family knew, who befriended us, who were strictly against the system. I'll tell you how bad it was. One child remarked in school-- he overheard his parents the night before saying that some law that Hitler made was ridiculous, or I can't get the detail.

Anyway, this man, this Christian man, Gentile man, was arrested by the German Gestapo. And eight weeks later, his wife received the urn of ashes, you know, where they killed him. So the kids were scared of their parents.

You were not allowed to listen to foreign broadcasts. So like England or America, et cetera. So neighbors would turn other neighbors in that they were listening to foreign broadcasts and they were severely punished. So people who did-- turn this off a minute.

OK, sure.

You inquired of what type of neighborhood it was. Well, the neighborhood was not a bad neighborhood. The living quarters were difficult to find. And we didn't live as nice as we did before. And we didn't starve.

It was just a different type of living. We were under pressure all the time that we were like to the enemy of your own country. And like I said earlier, a lot of people started to deport, they had enough sense to get out of there.

Right. Did a lot of people-- were they able to get out? Was it more restricted as time went on?

Well, there was a point where Hitler wanted the people to get out. Of course, they had to have visas. In order to come to this country, they had to be sponsored. So that sometimes created a problem. So you had to have someone there. Of course, they had Jewish organizations, one was named HIAS, and others that assisted the Jews from leaving.

And then, of course, it came-- you had to have a certain amount of money to leave. And since my own bank account, my father's bank account, was taken over, at that time, it was almost impossible to leave. So when we wanted to leave in the late '30s, we couldn't leave anymore. My father wanted to go to Australia. That's what his hoped to do. But it didn't work out that way.

You talked about freezing your bank accounts. Were you allowed an allowance? Was that how it worked?

Yes. To the best of my knowledge, he was allowed a certain amount.

A certain amount a month or a week?

Yes, but it wasn't enough so my father had to work.

Sure. And you said, you stated before that there was no real-- there was no hunger in this neighborhood that you were in?

No. No, I don't think so. Food and everything was available. And there was food on the table. And there was no real hardship. Like I said earlier, there was only certain stores that the Jews could do their shopping.

Right. They did it.

They were state-operated, excuse me.

All stores they could go to or just certain stores at certain hours?

Certain stores at certain hours.

Certain hours they could shop.

They were operated by the state.

Why don't we move on here to your deportation? And tell me a little bit about that. You know, how it happened.

It happened-- you received a letter through the mail. Matter of fact, the postman knew of these letters, and he normally would ring the doorbell when he had mail for us. He didn't do it at the time because he was a decent guy.

And the contents of a letter would give us an order to vacate our apartment within so many hours. And we were allowed so many pounds per person to take with us. And then we were told in that same letter that we had to take our own key to our apartment to the local police station. Also may want to add this-- the gold and furs and other things, we had to turn in earlier already. Anything of value.

They seized your valuables.

See, and of course some people didn't give it all up. But there was a drive for that. So when we received our notice, we bought warm socks you could get. And I think we were allowed 100 pounds per person.

What did you bring, do you remember?

There was, you know, the backpack at the time, with sweaters, warm underwear, clothing. Extra shoes. And we had to report to a Masonic temple. Now, might want to add that the Masonic temple was also against the law to exist. And my father was a Mason. And he went to secret meetings, even.

A Freemason?

Yes. And we went to this temple, which the inside was all marble and completely destroyed on the inside. And they laid on the floor for the night. And the Germans ordered us any cash money, we had to turn in. Any rings and so on. They made the last little pitch to get the stuff off.

And that was the first time we were guarded. We were loaded on open trucks, and taken to the railroad station, and loaded into a regular railroad cars. Not cattle cars, railroad cars.

They had seats and everything?

They had seats and everything in it. And they were old cars, but most had seats. Some of them had to lay on the floor. And we traveled, I believe it was three days and three nights, to Russia.

To Russia. OK, let me backtrack just a little bit. When the letter came, did they give you any indication as to where you might be going? What you would be doing?

I think they were told we were going to the east to work.

To work.

Yeah.

OK, go ahead.

Now, I may have mentioned earlier that many transports that arrived in Minsk were killed right on the spot.

And that's where you arrived, in Minsk?

Yeah, Minsk, this was White Russia, German occupation of Russia. Most people don't understand that.

What time frame, what kind of, what are we talking about here? What year?

'40, 1940.

This is 1940. And that's when you were deported?

Yes.

OK. OK, back to Minks, sorry.

And in Minsk, we were marched. It was very cold. We were marched into an area, which appeared to be-- which was at one time a Russian school. Now, we were a transport of 1,000 people. That Russian school was, at that time, occupied by Russian Jews. And they had to vacate that building to put us into that building.

It appeared at one time it was a fairly modern school. Had running water. Of course, this didn't work. The toilets didn't work. But you could tell it was like a regular high school, like we almost had in this country. And we already saw a lot of dead people on the ground at that time, Russian Jews that were killed by the Germans that didn't evacuate the building fast enough.

They were in the building or around the grounds?

They were in the building, they occupied the building. It was part of a ghetto then.

And this is in the wintertime, right?

It was in the wintertime. And we then gathered old mattresses and stuff. And all 1,000 of us, I believe, stayed in that building and there was another building or other small outbuildings. That's where we were housed at the time.

Did you go out and work from there? Is that what they did? The first couple of days, I don't think we did. But then we were put to work. Matter of fact, we had to build our own fences to go around there.

You said at the beginning, when you arrived in Minsk, some people were shot immediately. Was there a rationale for that? I mean did they have?

No.

They just picked certain people out of the crowd.

No. Now, at the time-- now, we didn't even know that. I found out later because there were hundreds and hundreds of suitcases that were taken to what used to be an office building in Minsk, which we had to sort out. And the goodies were sent back to Germany. And the people who did the sorting found pictures of their own loved ones in there that never made it. But I think I'm getting off track a little bit.

No, no, that's fine. I mean, you know, I just was trying to figure out if you knew at the time that people were being killed immediately. Or if it's, like you said, there was something that came later.

Yes. People lost their lives almost immediately, some of them. But no mass killing at that time.

OK in this, I guess we could call it a camp.

That was a ghetto, really.

OK. You started to say something about working and building your own fences. Was that how it was guarded? The fences were then set up and then the Nazis guarded it?

That's right.

OK. Did you go out after that and work?

Yes.

What kind of work did you do?

Various things. I was detailed to work at one of the sources of heating their homes, they used turf, like peat moss. And we loaded the railroad cars with peat moss to go to some other places. And shoveled snow. You know, it snows a lot in Russia.

And I was detailed to an army base like we have here, like Fort [? Meade ?], and small. And I was detailed to cut wood-- everything was fiber-- wood for the kitchen and cleanup. Now, these were not the SS, these were the regular army.

Regular troops.

The regular troops, which did not mistreat us that terribly.

Did you have basically enough food to eat at this time? How was that worked out?

Food was very scarce already. And whenever you had a chance to steal something, you would. You steal a potato here and a little piece of bread. So yeah, food was already very much rationed. And you started to feel hungry most all the time.

So the troops seemed to treat you a little bit better.

Yes.

The army, the straight army troops, not the SS.

Yes. I recall a little incident. The first thing I had to do when I got there in that army camp was bring water for washing to a sergeant who worked there. And I recall him closing the shades, and whispering, and saying to me that things are being done to the Jewish people. God will punish them. But he whispered that because he would have been overheard by his colleague, his career would have been over.

Sure. Was there a lot of that, do you think? Did you encounter very much of that kind of feeling in the army?

Not a lot, but some.

Some people reacted that way. OK.

Turn this off a while. Oh, sure.

There was another little interesting little story I want to tell you. After I was transported from Minsk to other camps, I worked temporarily in an airplane factory. And they were trying to build the Henkel airplane, which by the way, is in the Smithsonian.

And the people that were trying to teach us were German civilians who had their uniforms and rifles in the lockers at the factory. And they were really decent fellows.

For instance, at that time, I was really not a human anymore. I was very dirty. I had lice. And these men would try to get close to us. In my instance, trying to teach me how to weld. And I would talk to him freely sometime, would tell him about this, I look like an animal now, but didn't always. I mean, they were-- some of the people were human beings.

And on one Sunday when it snowed heavy, we were detailed to clear the streets where these people lived. And one of

those German instructors, if you want to call them that, called two of us in. There was another young kid and I.

And they actually fed us. And I'll never forget this in my life, even to this day, yes. One of them said us, says, you've been here all this time and not once have you tried to clean yourself. So it just tells you what an animal you became.

But there were a few instances where there were some Germans who were against this. But not too many, unfortunately.

Sure. This was in Russia, you said?

Now, this was in Poland now.

This is in Poland. You know, after the Russian advanced, you know, they pulled back. Well, of course, every pull back, they pulled back fewer and fewer. They only pulled back the people they were young and healthy, forced labor they could make use of.

Right. Was this job or workforce in the plane factory-- was that a-- I don't want to say privileged-- but was it a more, did younger people work there?

Well, yes. At that camp, we were detailed in the morning from the camp to the factory. And that was very terrible times because we were guarded by the Ukrainians and Latvians, who enjoyed killing people. And they carried whips. And while we were marching from the concentration camp, labor camp, to the factories, it was a terrible ordeal. Maybe people were killed.

For instance, Polish civilians would come by on a bicycle. Hundreds of us had to jump into a water-filled ditch to make room for that civilian to arrive. But once we were in the factories, we were in a-- building was heated. And the treatment was not the best in the world, but it was tolerable. So that was a privilege of, at least then, maybe 10 hours a day under a condition that was half-humane.

Right. When I said pro-- I didn't really mean privileged or whatever. But I guess what I meant was were you chosen in some way to do this over other people? Or was it just a regular detail?

No, I tell you, they made a selection in the mornings. Every morning, you had to fall out to be counted. And that happened maybe two or three times a day, we were counted. And every time when they make a selection, they usually meant a selection for death. You know, when they pulled you out, that means, well, your number's up.

And I was trying to hide behind someone else. And this guy who did the selection got his whip, and smacked me one, and called me out. And I assumed that my number was up.

But they made up a detail of young men, young boys, teenagers, to try to teach them to work in an airplane factory. Which turned out-- I think it didn't, it was a big flop. But there were times where you were treated a little better than other times, yes.

OK. How about let's move back a little bit to Minsk so we can come back circle back around to the factory. You're in Minsk now and you're in this ghetto, as we've established. What happens to you? Where do you move to? Why do you move? Do you know? When do you move?

From camp to camp?

Well, actually, how long are you in Minsk?

Two years.

You're in Minsk for two years.



Now, they had a mass killings of thousands of people, of us. Actually, an order would come down from Berlin to destroy so many Jews. And that was done. I think in June of '42, that's when I lost my father.

The way he was killed was that after I think 5,000 people got killed on one other section of that ghetto, which was divided by highway, they wanted to get these bodies off the ground. And he was-- they would install the armband on them not to kill those. And they put these bodies in mass graves by horse carts. Of course, they had no horses.

And you see, for days, you would see these bodies being hauled to the graves. And sometimes, the little kids sitting, it looked like they were alive, you know, the way they threw them on the wagons. And the third night, I overheard my father telling my mother that he has been through quite a bit in World War I. But what he went through he was just horrible.

And that day-- they were put in those gas vans and killed. That's how my father was killed.

These were the mobile vans that they brought around?

Yes, yes.

Into the Russians, OK.

And the strange part is that I had no feeling whatsoever. My father's death didn't affect me at all.

Not at all?

No, I was already not normal anymore, if you want to use that term. And I recall the incident where my mother was killed. She was killed in a hospital that was emptied while we were at work. So the ones that could walk were put in gas vans. And the ones that couldn't walk were shot right in the bed.

And my mother's body was put out by friends, former friends, friends wrapped her in paper, was taken to the cemetery, it was with a mass grave. I forced myself to cry because I had no feeling whatsoever. I don't know why I threw that in there. But it tells you what this type of life did to a human being. And that's how I lost my mother.

Now, my sister was killed at the age of 17. A handful of us were taken from Minsk into Poland when the Germans were retreating. And the people remaining were all killed. I don't know what method they used, but probably gassed. And that's how I lost my father, my mother, and sister. I think I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit.

That's OK. What I was going to ask you is if you could tell me, you know, while you're in this ghetto here, what the daily routine might be. Like a day in the life would be for you in the ghetto, due to the work detail and everything that you might do.

Well, like I said earlier, everybody wanted to work. If you did not get out of the camp to work, you never knew when you were going to be killed. So naturally, everybody volunteered to be slave labor just to get out. And most of us who did go to work benefited to some extent. Stealing a little bit of wood for the fire or stealing, like I said earlier, some potatoes, or anything.

But if you were stealing these things, were people caught doing that?

Oh, yes. If you were caught, you were severely punished. But you'd take that chance. I recall the incident I was picked up by a German soldier. Not a Nazi. He was a farmer who was drafted. And I used to-- while he was guarding us, taking us to work, I used to push his bicycle.

And one day, he locked me in the potato cellar, and I stole potatoes for him, and he let me steal potatoes from myself. You know, and a lot of times I would transport these things on his bicycle. Because at the gates going to the camp, his bicycle was not searched. And so that's how we survived, you know?

Yeah, these things happen. What kind of-- you stayed a little bit about the peat moss and things. Were there any other actual work details while you were in Minsk that you were assigned to other than digging peat moss, or the peat, or whatever?

Well it's labor. You know, common labor. But a lot of my time was spent on the military base, working there.

Just cleaning up. OK.

Yeah.

So we move-- you say you're there two years. And so we get up to about 1942.

Yes.

1942, OK. What happens to you in 1942 when you leave this camp?

In 1942, we were-- a handful of us were transported to a Polish-- we were loaded on cattle cars. And they were about 80 people per cattle car with no water, no food, no toilet facilities. And when people died, which a lot of them did, we would sit on them for more room. And I was-- you couldn't go relieve yourself. It was severe conditions.

And we came to a camp that was called Lublin. It was in Poland. And that was a selection camp. At that time, I was with my brother-in-law, who was married to my sister very briefly.

And they called out people who had trades. Electricians, or brush makers, or mechanics, and some thought that everybody wanted to save their life, so they run for a trade in order to save their life already. So I followed him and we were selected as workers that could perhaps show some benefit to the Germans.

Do you remember what actual-- what profession you told them you were?

I think it was electrician, I believe it was.

Electrician.

But he was one, so I followed around with him. But at that particular camp, my brother-in-law was saying, I says, it looks like you're not going to see your sister again. That he had the feeling we were going to get killed. And the first thing I did-- Tony had a little piece of bread left. So I ate that. You know?

You think different. But from there, the so-called laborers who had no profession were eliminated in that camp. And then we were loaded again on another cattle car and went through the same ordeal again. And we arrived at another labor camp. I think it was-- you know, I can't recall the name right now of the camp. Mielec, I think it was.

This is in Poland, by the way.

In Poland. But I have that recorded. I think we can pick that out later.

Sure.

And again, that was a camp where we worked every day. And that's where the camp I was assigned, they were trying to teach us to build airplanes. I mentioned that earlier. After the Russian advanced further, we were transported to another camp. And that camp was also an airplane factory. And again, I was recognized by some of the Germans. And I was picked out to work in the factory.

You were recognized by some of the--

The Germans.

--soldiers?

Yeah, the soldiers. They act as instructors, you know.

And they knew you had worked in the factory before.

Yes. And I was picked out. And that was what really kept me alive, really.

What kind of-- well, let's stop a little bit in the factory, the plane factory. And how were you different, let's say, than the rest of the prisoners in the camp? Was the camp divided between people who may have worked in the factory and others? Or were you all in the same kind of deal?

No, not all of us worked in our camp. Other worked, did labor work, building roads and so on. Did you have a sense that you were better off than them?

Oh, yes.

OK.

Yes.

Why don't you describe a little bit about that? Like how you may have been different.

At that particular camp, we were assigned to a barrack with specialized workers. In that particular barrack, we had a blanket, which was unheard of. And we had straw to sleep on. And while the others were driven out of the barracks during the night for special counting and whatnot, there were times they didn't bother us. And the treatment was a little bit better there at the time.

Did you get-- did they feed you better also? Or could you tell?

Well, yes, we did. Our main diet was bread. I think it was five men a loaf of bread, sliced maybe two, 2 and 1/2 inches thick. Which by the way, had some sawdust in it. It was really horrible bread. But it was tasty like cake to us.

And soup that was made out of water and potatoes with peelings. You know, real garbage. I think when they ran out of soup, they stuck the hose in it to replenish the meal.

But I did welding, aluminum welding for this particular airplane. And the fumes are quite harmful. Now, they do with [INAUDIBLE], but at the time, they didn't. And the Poles, the Polish civilians who worked right alongside, received milk.

And I remember, I would receive a cup of bouillon that was, you know, like in a cube bouillon with water. And that's the extra treatment, extra food I got.

That was the extra food. What other-- you said that there were basically just laborers, manual laborers, who were in the rest of the camp. How big was this camp? What are we talking about here?

Oh, I would say maybe a couple thousand.

And do you have a sense of where in Poland you may have been?

Well, I was in Mielec. I have to actually look at my notes now. There were around four or five different camps I was in.

I was shifted around several times in Poland.

Sure. And then you said that you moved to another camp that also had the plane factory.

Right, right.

Was that camp any different? Or basically the same?

Well, that camp already was called a concentration camp. And we were tattooed on our right front arm above the wrist by the letter of KL. In the event we escaped, they have a way of identifying us.

What did KL stand for?

K stands for our concentration. Spelled with a K instead of C. And L counts for Lager. L-A-G-E-R, like lager beer, you know, Lager is a camp. Konzentrationslager. And there are very few of us who have this. Most of them are dead today. I think there are, out of about 2,000 or 3,000, maybe today, maybe seven, eight of us are alive today, maybe nine.

OK. After you've worked in the plane factory for a while-- and you started to talk about a little bit earlier about the Russians coming in-- what happens at this period when you're starting to move back? Do you do you have a sense, do the people in the camp have a sense that the war may be going south for the Germans?

Oh, yes. We had feelings that things were going bad for the Germans, yes.

How did you know these things? How did you?

Well, we didn't know anything for a true fact. But it was common knowledge that the war is going bad for the Germans.

OK. What was going on when you're-- did you move to any more camps after this? What happens here? We moved to another camp called Wieliczka. I think you've heard of that camp. And of course, that was a death camp. Interested about the camp was the Germans were trying to produce airplanes in the salt mines, I think, which didn't work for them. We were three days. After a terrible, terrible railroad trip, we were dumped out in that camp.

Can you describe to the railroad trip a little bit?

Well, you were just worse than cattle. You were forced in these cars. You sat one inside the other. And you couldn't, like I said earlier, couldn't relieve yourself, had nothing to eat, and no water. And you'd be in these cattle cars for days. And a lot of us didn't survive the trip.

And each time you unloaded, you know, you had to run. And it was just hard, really hard for me to give you all the detail. It was just horrible. We went to Wieliczka, and for some reason, a few of us were loaded up again.

And I arrived in the very last camp, which was Flossenbürg, it was in Bavaria. I know you've heard of it. And that was a camp that had criminals, German criminals, queers, political prisoners, and a handful of Jews, which were identified differently on the uniform with their little marker than the rest of them.

The food was a little better in that camp. Our immediate bosses were the German criminals. They had the right to-- they carried a club.

So they differentiated e

Yes.

--the groups--

Yes.

--in the camp. What was interesting about that camp is that we had facilities we could wash ourself. And I wanted to clean myself again. And in fact, I took my clothes off and I lay it on them and all of it so they'd be straight. So I became a human being, if you want to call it, a little bit human again. And the food was a little bit better.

But they had the ovens there, too, you know, where the people got hung and cooked, and so on. And from that camp came the death march. But before the death march, the Germans didn't want to give up the Jews. And the handful of Jews who were in that Flossenbürg had a report and were moved by the railroad further into Germany.

And I was hidden by a German man who's been in the concentration for years. He was a communist. And he looked out for me. And he was a large man. And he more or less took care of me. And I stayed in that camp. He hid you in a train. No, behind. I stayed behind him at roll call.

Oh, I see.

You know, when they called us out.

Oh, and he hid you, OK.

Yeah.

For calling out.

How long did this go on that he was kind of protecting you?

About three days or so.

Three days. I may I want to add-- something interesting happened to us. A lot of the Germans retreated further back into Germany not to be captured by the Russians. And they were a little scared of us already in this camp.

And they'd taken all the German criminals now, and gave them German uniforms and rifles, and they were in the guard towers to watch us. And they quickly forgot that they were prisoners an hour ago. And they themselves did a lot of killing.

So the troops kind of disappeared, the real troops.

Well, they kept a skeleton crew on hand. That's-- we were put on death march for three days and three nights. And anybody who couldn't walk anymore was killed right on the spot.

Did you know where you're going? Did they tell you?

No, we didn't know. It turned out later, we were on the way to Dachau. But we marched. A few of us escaped during the death march. But it was difficult.

What time of year was this, the death march?

That was in the fall, I believe it was.

Fall of what year are we talking about?

'44.

'44.

'44, close to '45, maybe.

You said a couple of people escaped. Did they catch anyone who had escaped? Or did you see these people fleeing? Or did you know they were leaving?

They were not there the next time you-- you know, they were gone. You know, the reason so many people got killed on the death marches-- they'd transport us in increments of 1,000. And if you don't march in step, the rear end always has to run and catch up. And they're the ones that died the quickest.

So when we did stop for a rest, no one wanted to be on the rear end. So several people had to get killed in order just to get us lined up. And on the third day, we woke up at night-- in the morning-- and we noticed that the Germans ran into the woods.

Just left.

They left and left us behind.

Did you ever think about during those three days trying to escape?

The thought was there but there was just too many guards.

Too many people around, yeah. OK. What did you do, what did you think when they left?

Well, we were totally confused. And we would hear the cannon power. You know, we would hear that someone was coming. We didn't know who. And the first night spent in the barn at the farmers. And we would just run from house to house. We were going which we thought was talk to the Americans.

And I recall on the highways, we saw Germans who were at that time waiting to be captured. And they were armed. Of course, we didn't know if they were going to kill us or not.

Sure. How did the people in the countryside, the farmers-- how did they react to you?

Some farmers would ask us in and fed us. And others didn't. But there were a handful were trying to help us. And at that time, you see a lot of farmers with the horses and wagons picking up bodies with pitchforks so the Americans would not see them, and there were so many of them.

Sure. Go ahead.

And that was when I walked towards the American line.

Did you have people with you? Or was it just you by yourself?

No, there were maybe a group of 10 of us.

And you stuck together?

Yes.

What happened when you finally ran into-- or how did you get liberated?

Well, we went into a small city called Champ, C-H-A-M-P. The Second Army. They took care of us, and we--

The Second American Army?

Yeah. I recall the one building, the mayor's building, they threw the mayors out, and there, they gave us a building to stay in.

Now, this is, again, the fall of '44?

'45.

'45.

No, that's spring of '45.

Spring of '45.

Because I was liberated in April of '45.

So you were roaming around in Germany from I think-- I may have gotten this wrong. You said you were on the death march in the fall of '44.

It was spring.

OK.

It was spring.

It was spring, my fault. I got it wrong.

You know, I was also shot in the back, which-- while we were all starting to run after we were liberated, after the Germans left, I was shot in the back by a German officer with a small caliber at my back.

To try to stop you from running?

Yeah.

And so you had this wound when you were--

Yes.

--going around? That's awful. So in the spring of '45, you were liberated. OK. How did the Americans react to you all?

Oh, they were wonderful to us.

Describe a little bit about what they did for you.

Well, they fed us, clothed us, and you know, they treated us like we're children.

Did they have facilities and things to take care of-- were there a lot of around, you know, people who had been liberated?

You know, people from all around. There were probably maybe 20, 30 of us in that little city, you know, who were then free. Matter of fact, I worked in the mess hall. And they wanted-- as the troops were leaving, they wanted us to-- wanted me to go with them.

To go with them.

Yeah. And they took me to the headquarters. But the officer in charge wouldn't go for it, you know.

They liked your cooking so much.

Well, I wasn't, no, I was just a laborer there washing pots and pans or something like that.

How, then-- to pick up the story a little bit more. What did you do after that when the Americans leave? What did you?

We stayed there in order to gain our strength, really. And then people went back to their hometowns. And I traveled by bicycle back to Hamburg some time on top of railroad cars.

What was that like going back through, you know, a country that was obviously hostile to you as a Jew before? How was it? Was it different?

Well, yes, it was different. You know, freedom after four years was different, of course. And we were skeptical of people.

How long did you stay in Hamburg?

Stayed in Hamburg about six months or so. Then I found out that my grandmother was alive. She survived Theresienstadt. And I went to-- she was there. She, at the time, lived in Marburg, Germany, and I stayed with her. And I worked for the American-- for the GIs at that time.

How did you get to the US? When did you emigrate?

I came here in '46. Labor Day, '46.

Labor Day.

Yeah.

And you've been here ever since?

Right.

OK. Let me get back a little bit to-- you talked about, I think it was, when you laid down when the first time you got to wash. I think it was in Flossenbürg.

Yes. Yeah.

Am I right there?

Yes.

Was that the first time that you'd been able to wash since you'd been in the camps.

Yes, that's where we had running water, you know, and we were able to clean ourselves.

So this was unusual for the camps. This was running water and things like that. Was this camp different than most of the ones you'd been in?

Yes, this was not a slave labor camp or a ghetto. That was a concentration camp.



Is there any reason that you can think of that it might have-- why this was? That they had water and running water and things like that?

Well, they had very few prisoners when they were Jews. That was a concentration camp for their own Germans and all nationalities you can think about.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Sure there is, but I can't think of it right now.

OK. All right, that's great. I think we're done. I've asked most of the questions I have.

Take this off.

Sure.

Now.