

## Interview with Abe Stine

Series Survivors of the Holocaust—Oral History Project of Dayton, Ohio

Interviewer—Dr. Charles Berry

Date of Interviews: December 9, 1980

Q: I am Charles Berry. This is Tuesday night, December 9, 1980. I am in the home of Mr. Abraham Stine for the first of a series of interviews

Now, Abe, as I indicated to you when I talked to you last week, this first interview is really sort of background material. Let me say first that I normally take notes during an interview, especially on foreign words and places, names and so forth. Sometimes I am operating the tape recorder and sometimes I am taking notes, but I am always listening to what you are saying. Let us start with very basic information.

You told me last week that you were born in 1917.

A: Let us say 1920, because 1920 is set down in all the places.

Q: OK. You don't want?

A: No, because it is not legal.

Q: You told me that you were born in 1917, in the village of Zabkowice [spelled and repeated by Abel]. Could you describe that village for me? For example, was it a mixed village of Jews and gentiles?

A: No!

Q: Was it predominately Jewish?

A: No! There were 70 Jewish families in the village.

Q: Was it an agricultural village?

A: Yes, agricultural. Most of the villages in Poland are agricultural villages.

Q: The reason why I asked that is that it is down in southern Poland near Katowice. That is a very heavily industrialized area.

- A: We had small factories in this village.
- Q: What kind of factories?
- A: Glass tube factories and one which dealt with stones.
- Q: Quarry?
- A: Where they make monuments?
- Q: Monuments?
- A: No, regular stones.
- Q: Like building stones?
- A: Yes!
- Q: Was there coal mining in the region?
- A: No. Coal mining was about seven or eight miles from our village. They used to have the Dumrobad for the coal mines. In our village they had stone mines.
- Q: Did very many people who lived in this village commute into Katowice or other surrounding towns to work?
- A: Yes, they had to commute to other towns, but only by train or by horses.
- Q: Did they do that for work? Did they work in these towns?
- A: No, not too many. Most of them worked right in Zabkowice.
- Q: So the rest of the population then was predominately Catholic?
- A: Yes, 99 percent!
- Q: And there were 70 Jewish families?
- A: Do you know much about your family background? When did your family come to this village?
- A: My family had been there for at least a couple of generations.
- Q: Do you know where they came from?
- A: No, I have no idea.

- Q: When you were a child, growing up in the village, how large was your family? Did your grandparents live with you?
- A: Yes, my mother's parents, they used to live about seven or eight km [kilometers] from us, in Belsinger, when I was born. They went to Israel (then Palestine) in 1936. Those were my mother's parents. They did that because my mother had a sister in Palestine.
- Q: What did your father do?
- A: My father was a butcher.
- Q: He didn't buy cattle?
- A: He went out, about 10 or 15 miles around, buying cattle. He had a small butcher shop, like they have here.
- Q: So I suppose he was rather well known in that immediate region?
- A: Yes, yes.
- Q: Let me stay on the same subject of your family. Were you the first born or...
- A: I was first born in my family.
- Q: You were the oldest child?
- A: I was the oldest son.
- Q: Then you had how many siblings?
- A: I had seven sisters and brothers, three brothers and four sisters.
- Q: So there were eight children as a total in the family?
- A: Yes.
- Q: When was the last one born?
- A: My sister was born in 1938, that is 1937 or 38.
- Q: So that is quite a spread then from 1917 to 1937. That is eight children over a period of 21 years. What was your mother's maiden name?
- A: Sarah.

Q: Her last name?

A: It was Stine, the same spelling.

Q: Were your parents distant cousins?

A: It was somewhat further than that.

Q: Now what did your grandfather do? What did your mother's father do?

A: My mother's father was a shoemaker. I don't remember what my father's father did.

Q: Was he dead before you were born?

A: Yes.

Q: You said that your mother had several sisters or brothers.

A: She had about eight sisters and brothers, but they lived seven or eight miles outside the village. Only one of the sisters survived in Palestine. My father had I think nine sisters and brothers and nobody survived.

Q: Did they live in the immediate region too?

A: No, only one sister and one brother used to live in the same village. The rest of them were spread over about 10 or 15 miles. Not one of them survived.

Q: That indicates that there really was a large family, with lots of aunts and uncles and cousins.

A: Yes, hundreds. In the same village where we used to live there was one uncle who had eleven children. Five of these children went to Palestine before the war. They survived! The rest of them are gone.

Q: Let me pursue this line of thought about going to Palestine. I knew that that was rather common amongst many German Jews in the 1920's and in the 1930's. I really didn't realize that a lot of Polish Jews went.

A: Yes there were a lot of them. [Chaim Weizman, the first President of Israel, was born in Russia in 1874, David Ben Gurion and Menachem Begin were born in Poland, Golda Meir was born in Russia]. Maybe you heard of a man whose name was Jabotinsky. [Vladimir Jabotinsky, 1880-1940, was born in Russia. He was a writer and orator. He worked for Jewish self-defense and the revival of Hebrew].

Q: No.

A: Jabotinsky was a very famous Zionist [that is the movement amongst modern Jews to revive a Jewish homeland in Palestine either for religious or nationalistic purposes]. He foresaw this in the early 1930's. He begged people not to continue living in Poland. Part of the people didn't believe it. First of all, many people didn't believe that this would happen. He told people, "Just get out!" Not everybody, however, had the money.

Q: Do you remember if there was much serious talk in your immediate family, your parents, your brothers and sisters, about going?

A: Only later, in late 1938 and 1939. Oh yes, they were talking about it because people saw the handwriting in the sky. You had to believe that.

Q: Was there much, in this village, interaction between the non-Jews and Jewish population?

A: Always! Always!

Q: In other words, the 70 Jewish families did not live in a cluster.

A: No, no. They were spread all over. However, they did not like Jews.

Q: There was a lot of anti-Semitism?

A: At every move you made. On Christmas Day, we had lots of snow, we cleaned the streets off. They used to take small stones and put them in the snow and torment you since it was believed that Jesus was killed by the Jews. Believe it or not, that was in Poland before 1939. When I came back to Poland, in 1945, after I was liberated, I was in the hospital for three months. I then went back to Poland to see if I had anyone left. First thing that happened, someone asked, "Are you still alive?" That shocked me as if a bomb had been dropped on me. I cannot, today, forget it. I said, "The heck with you, I don't want you!" I was born there, I was raised there. I had all my family there and everything, and then I came back after going through so much and he asked me, "Are you still alive?" My wife has told me about twenty times to go back to Poland just to visit. I have said, "No, no!" I hate what these Polacks [a derogatory term for Polish people] did to the Jews! We could survive, that is a lot of us could have survived in hiding places but they betrayed us for a bottle of whiskey. They gave us up. In different countries that was not done like that.

Q: Was there any exception to this in your village? Were there some righteous Christians?

A: No.

- Q: What I am asking you is, were you aware of any gentiles who were friendly to Jews, who did not practice anti-Semitism?
- A: I wouldn't know because during the war I wasn't there. I cannot say. Before the war, yes, I used to have some friends. All the people, the older generation, were quiet. How long that lasted, I don't know. As long as Pilsudski [1867-1935, Polish Field Marshal and statesman, President 1918 to Dec.1922, Prime Minister 1926-1928 and 1930, power behind the Polish government at all times between the restoration of Poland until his death] was alive anyway. Did you hear about Pilsudski?
- Q: Oh yes!
- A: It was very quiet as long as he was alive. After Pilsudski passed away, Smigly-Rydz [Marshall Edward Smigly-Ridz, Josef Beck, and a group of Pilsudski's colonels retained absolute power until WWII started on Sept 1, 1939]. However, when Smigly-Rydz came to power, it was out in the open. Nobody hid it anymore.
- Q: What kind of education did you receive in this village?
- A: I received little education because I had to help my parents.
- Q: Was it a city public school? Was it a synagogue school?
- A: Yes, yes. A Yeshiva at the synagogue, with teachers.
- Q: In other words, was it operated by the state?
- A: No, no, no.
- Q: So in essence you were segregated from the gentile population. They went to a state run school whereas you went to the Yeshiva.
- A: No, I went to a state-run school also. I entered the state-run public school also. However, I went to separate Talmudic school [this appears to be meaning the same as Yeshiva, which in the U.S. is reserved to mean University level studies, generally for the rabbinate]. The Yeshiva was completely separate from public school. Actually, I did not go to Yeshiva, I went to Talmud school. [The Talmud is the entire body of Jewish civil and canonical law].
- Q: Did you go to Talmud school at the same time you went to public school? That is, part of the day to public school and part of the day to Talmud school?
- A: No, after public school, I went to Talmud school.

Q: Now, how long were you in public school?

A: Five years.

Q: Were you aware of a great deal of anti-Semitism while you were in public school?

A: Oh yes! Always! Always they called us, "You Jews!" in Polish.

Q: You heard that from teachers also?

A: The teachers did not exactly say that, but always they treated us differently. The teachers in Poland were bureaucrats. A teacher was a big person who got respect. When you saw a teacher you had to take your hat off and say, "Hello, Mr. or Mrs. ...", not like we do here. When the teacher came into the classroom, everybody had to get up.

Q: Were there lots of fights in this school because you were a Jew?

A: Not in the class, after school. We had about 10 minutes for what you call a recess. Outside of school there was a lot of fighting, yes! There was that fighting with the snow. The teacher didn't want to know since he was not involved, even when we complained to him about it.

Q: There was no way to complain to the civilian authorities about it?

A: No. If you went to the police to complain, they said, "He didn't kill you! What do you want?" That was the reaction of the police.

Q: Was this the general pattern of education for your other brothers and sisters? Meaning that they only had about five or six years and then dropped out to start to work in the family business, or in other businesses? [That question seems to ignore that the youngest siblings were not yet in school when the Germans invaded].

A: Yes, yes. That is what I would say. Not in the family business, because we didn't have a big business. We did do outside work.

Q: So, how old were you then when you left school to go to work?

A: About 13 years old.

Q: Then you became a butcher?

A: Before I became a butcher, I did everything just to make a dollar. Later, when I was older, I learned to be a butcher.

- Q: Did you work along with your father in his shop?
- A: Yes.
- Q: What you are describing to me implies that your family was not very well off.
- A: No, they were poor. They had a large number of children and mouths to feed.
- Q: Did your mother and father have any formal education?
- A: I don't know. I know that my father could read. He had more Jewish education and he had more Polish education also. He used to speak perfect Polish, perfect, better than I did.
- Q: You told me about speaking languages. I suppose that Yiddish was the language in the home?
- A: In the home we spoke Yiddish. In the big cities, a big percentage of the Jewish people didn't know Polish, however in all the villages you spoke perfect Polish. You wrote and spoke Polish.
- Q: Now, there was a large German population in this area also?
- A: No, not in our area, higher up in Katowice, about 53 miles.
- Q: Around Opeln and Gliwice and Bytom?
- A: Yes, over there, yes. I know that. I used to work there, yes.
- Q: There also was a language which was spoken in that area that was sort of a mixture of Polish and German.
- A: Yes, yes, Polish and German [that was in Upper Silesia, a province which was returned to German rule in 1936, but which, historically, was a part of Germany for a long time]. However that dialect did not exist in our area.
- Q: So you didn't know that dialect?
- A: No, no, no.
- Q: Did you learn any other languages? Did you learn German in this region?
- A: I learned some German. I understood some German because I was a prisoner.
- Q: No, I mean in this period of the twenties and the thirties.



A: No, I didn't.

Q: In the dealings which you had with the farmers, buying cattle, what was the language?

A: It was Polish and Yiddish. These were my languages.

Q: Now, what about the religious practices of your family?

A: My family was very religious. I had to go every Saturday to synagogue. If I wouldn't go I would be punished at home. I had to go every Saturday. That is Friday night and Saturday and on all the Holy Days. We didn't know what it was not to go to synagogue for such a day as Shevout [also spelled Shabuot or Feast of Weeks. That is the festival which celebrates the day when the 10 commandments were revealed on Mount Sinai. It is called Feast of Weeks because it occurs seven weeks, i.e., a week of weeks, after the first day of Passover].

Q: Were you kosher [observing the dietary laws] in the home?

A: Oh, yes, 100 percent.

Q: Your father was a kosher butcher?

A: Oh yes, we didn't know any other way.

Q: Were you and your brothers Bar Mitzvahed ? That is when the Jewish male starts to be counted as a cognizant member of the congregation, usually at the age of 13].

A: Oh yes. It was not a big thing like here, we just went to services.

Q: In the Talmud school, would you mind describing the Talmud school?

A: I went to Talmud school only in the evenings, just to learn to read and to write [Hebrew]. We read the prayer book. I did not get too much education in Talmud school.

Q: What kind of teachers did you have in Talmud school?

A: All the rabbis taught, and special teachers.

Q: Was there a local congregation?

A: Yes.

Q: In the synagogue?

A: Yes, it was only a local congregation.

Q: Otherwise said, the Talmud teachers didn't travel around?

A: Oh no, no.

Q: They lived in the village?

A: Yes, or someplace in the outskirts.

Q: How many students were in the Talmud school, roughly?

A: I would say about 25 or 30, at a time.

Q: Were they approximately the same age as you were?

A: Oh, no, different ages.

Q: Looking back over these long years, do you remember your family and your family life with a great deal of fondness? Was it a closely integrated family with a lot of love?

A: A fully integrated family.

Q: Or was it the kind of family where everyone was going off in a different direction?

A: Oh no, a fully integrated family. Most of the people in Europe had integrated families.

Q: Was your mother a strong figure? Who dominated in the family, the mother or the father?

A: The father had always the decisive opinion, only the father.

Q: Was your father involved in any sort of business association like a small chamber of commerce?

A: No.

Q: Did he play any kind of leadership role amongst the business people?

A: No, because my parents were not rich, they were poor.

- Q: How political was your family? Did you talk about politics at home?
- A: No, no. I was a Zionist [this is a collective name for several associations who favored a return of Jews to Palestine. Zionist organizations exist today to support the state of Israel]. However, my parents were not Zionists. They did not believe in politics at all.
- Q: Did you find that there was any sort of tension or friction between you and your parents due to the Zionism?
- A: No, no. They tolerated it. They knew that I belonged to the organization and I went out of my way not to offend. That is all.
- Q: When did you first take on the ideas of Zionism? When did you first become aware of it?
- A: The Zionist organization [in Abe's area] started in 1935 or 1936, when the leaders such as Jabotinsky and others came in. [Actually, worldwide Zionist organizations had been set up by the newspaperman Theodore Herzl when the virulent anti-Jewish movement centered upon the show trial of French army Captain Alfred Dreyfus took place in the 1890s]. Actually Jabotinsky was a good friend of Menachem Begin, they used to belong to the same organization when both lived in Poland.
- Q: Is Begin from your region also?
- A: No. we had heard about him before the war, but he was also from Poland, we had heard about him before the war because of his Zionism. He belonged to the same party as Jabotinsky, but he was more aggressive. He said, "We have to take guns in our hands!"
- Q: This region of Silesia -- is that right, that you lived in a region of Silesia -- that is the area from which you came?
- A: That is right.
- Q: From Upper Silesia?
- A: Yes, from Upper Silesia. They called it Dumbroskia.
- Q: Was your area around Katowice at one time a part of Germany?
- A: Katowice was, but Zabkowice was not. [prior to the end of WWI there was no Poland at all. During the nineteenth century, Poland had been repeatedly divided between Austria, Russia and Germany. The three areas had a common point near Krakow].

Q: So the border had been right there, in your area.

A: Yes, within 50 miles.

Q: Would you say that Polish culture predominated in your area? Or was it German culture?

A: It was Polish.

Q: Despite the proximity of the border you were still very much under Polish influence.

A: Yes, very much under Polish influence.

Q: Now, how widely had you traveled let us say by 1935; by the time you were 18 or 19 years old?

A: At my age, not too many people in our area traveled like I used to! I used to buy in different cities for different small businesses, to buy merchandise from other stores. Most of the people didn't travel that much. I used to know the area all around our village for about 25 to 30 km [i.e., 15 to 20 miles].

Q: Did you travel outside this immediate Silesian region?

A: No.

Q: Had you gone to Warsaw, for example?

A: No. I went to Katowice and I went to Lodz and I went to Bytom and Beuliz and I went to Gliwice. I used to go to Auschwitz before the war.

Q: What about outside of Poland? Had you been anywhere else To Czechoslovakia?

A: No, no place outside Poland.

Q: Could you describe your synagogue for me?

A: It was a small synagogue. The synagogue was, maybe half the size of this house. In the same village we had two synagogues for 70 Jewish families. One was "ultra-orthodox" and the other one was an "orthodox" one. In the ultra-orthodox, people used to sit in the synagogue day and night, for the Holy Days.

Q: Which did your family belong to?

- A: To the orthodox one. In the ultra-orthodox synagogue, people used to come in the evening and stay all night and pray. You don't see that in the United States.
- Q: What about the rabbis?
- A: We didn't have rabbis. In the village where I used to live we didn't have a rabbi.
- Q: Would a rabbi come from somewhere else?
- A: No, we didn't need any because all the orthodox Jews, they know how to conduct prayer (that is what you learn to do when you are Bar Mitzvah). With a "minyan" [i.e., where there are at least 10 Jewish men present], you can conduct a service. First of all, we didn't have enough money to pay a rabbi.
- Q: Who were the leaders in the Jewish community?
- A: We had leaders!
- Q: Who? For example, were they businessmen or were they farmers?
- A: No, no, they were businessmen. We had some very rich people in town. They also had poor people.
- Q: Now, what sort of position did they hold in the Jewish community and in the synagogue? Would you characterize them as President of the synagogue?
- A: We had a committee, a small organization. The rich people put the money in this organization, without interest, so that loans could be made to small users of money, people who didn't have the money. These people could take out a loan without interest, but they had to have two signatures on it. On the Holy Days they gave to the poor people food. They took partners with them from the synagogue. There were some people who got the help directly from the synagogues.
- Q: Now, may I jump ahead and talk about that organization in your town, that Jewish organization in your town, in the hierarchy, say in the period from Sept. 1939 until the spring of 1940, when there was the round-up. Who assumed leadership amongst the Jewish community in that period?
- A: The same people who had led the congregation and who had the knowledge.
- Q: That is what I was wondering about.
- A: Yes, they were the same people. When the Germans came in, they chose their own people.

Q: So I assume then that the synagogues were then truly the focal point of your community.

A: That is right, the synagogue.

Q: Also of your family life.

A: Yes, the synagogue. Everything was centered there. Everything was in the synagogue. The young people, the younger generation, between themselves arranged for a dance for Saturday night. However, the other people didn't know anything about it. As far as they were concerned everything was at the synagogue. Where we here have the Jewish Center, they had the synagogue.

Q: Did you resent that? Did you come to resent that?

A: No, no. I was brought up this way!

Q: In other words, you accepted it. To you it seemed the normal life.

A: Yes, it seemed the normal life.

Q: You never recall questioning it.

A: As a matter of fact, believe it or not, I am missing it when I go to the synagogue here. I have a son who is 32 years old, who is on the Board of the synagogue. I was brought out this way.

Q: So this activism has transferred itself to the present time.

A: I used to work much more in the organizations ay nights than I am doing now. I used to go out to raise money by selling Israel Bonds [bonds which the State of Israel sold in the U.S. to raise money to do non-military permanent improvements such as housing project for new immigrants. The rates of return were comparable to those of U.S. defense Bonds], work for the Zionist organization, work for the JNF [the Jewish National Fund]. Do you know what the JNF is? I used to go out to raise money. [The JNF was set up to solicit funds as donations to purchase lands in Palestine first and then later in Israel and to reforest the land]. However, several years ago I got disgusted. I went to some people's houses and asked for some money for Israel, and a guy told me, a good friend of mine, told me, "You know I cannot give money everyplace." I said, "Do you know why you cannot give money everyplace? Because you are not giving it anyplace." He didn't know what to answer to that. I got disgusted and I said, "I won't go out and raise more money!"

Q: We have been talking very generally about your childhood and your teenage years; do you recall any specific incidents which stick out in your mind? Any

particular holiday? Holy Day? Any particular event at school? Any particular teacher in the Talmud school? We all come into our adult lives with specific memories. Were your memories generally happy?

A: No, I wasn't happy, because I didn't have much money. I couldn't afford to have my teeth taken care of.

Q: so it was somehow tainted by the poverty.

A: Yes! You know, when I was twenty, that was life. That was the start of my adult life.

Q: After you reached your teenage years, say around the age of 16, were you still largely associating with Jews within the community? Had you developed any contact at all with gentiles of the same age?

A: No, no. My only friends were Jews. There was no contact at all with gentiles. You see, we lived in a circle with Jewish people.

Q: You know what lies behind that question? You often hear the phrase, "Children can be very cruel" and "Children don't understand." However, you expect that when you begin to approach maturity, such as 15, 16, 17, you lose a lot of that. You begin to understand, you become a little more tolerant then. You didn't find the gentiles more receptive?

A: No, not at all. We couldn't. We didn't associate at all with them. You knew that they could put a knife into you behind your back, and that if they could they would.

Q: Would you say that a lot of that anti-Semitism came out of the Catholic Church, there in Zabkowice?

A: Yes, it was taught in the Catholic Church.

Q: That the priest was an anti-Semite?

A: Yes, it was centered in the Catholic Church.

Q: He preached anti-Semitism?

A: Yes. 99 percent of the people were Catholic.

Q: Do you remember 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany? You were 16 years old. Were you aware of those things happening?

- A: Yes, the paper came out with it. That is when really anti-Semitism got started, when Hitler came to power in 1933, 34.
- Q: In other words, the Poles there, in Silesia, felt that they had sort of been given a stamp of approval in their anti-Semitism? It all broke out into the open?
- A: Yes, that is correct.
- Q: So, life became miserable?
- A: Yes, miserable.
- Q: This continued through the thirties?
- A: It continues until today. The later it got, the worse it got! It got worse when it got closer to the war. They knew that Hitler was coming in. They knew it because we had a German whose name was Moshitsky [that's at least what it sounds like], he was Minister of Defense [at that time, generally speaking, there was no single Minister of Defense, but a Minister of the Army and one of the Navy, with the Army at least in continental Europe, being more powerful], I believe. No, it was actually Beck [that was the name of one of the colonels in the Junta which governed Poland at the time]; he was a real German. He took all the other things apart when the war broke out.
- Q: Did he do that so that the Poles couldn't defend themselves? As the war approached, let us say at the time of the Munich agreement of 1938, with the Sudetenland question in Czechoslovakia, did you and your family become really concerned [at the time when the British-Franco caved in at Munich and handed the Sudetenland to Germany in Sept, 1938, they accepted Hitler's solemn pledge that this was the last of his demands for land] that something imminent was going to happen?
- A: No, no! The people didn't believe that at all. You see, all the people had gone through WWI with the Germans [the people of that region were undoubtedly serving in different armies, either the Russian, the Austro-Russian, or the German]. They were a different generation. They didn't believe that war would happen again. They said that it's not true.
- Q: Do you suppose that in your region down there, just north of Czechoslovakia [that country had been carved out of the Austrian, and also some German and Russian, territory at the Treaty of Versailles] in Silesia, that perhaps that one of the reasons that this attitude prevailed amongst the Jews was that part of Silesia was in a protectorate under the League of Nations? [That protectorate ended in 1936].
- A: No, that didn't matter.



Q: That it, maybe, gave people a false sense of security? [The sense of security was derived from the alliance between Poland and France and England, the two “major” military powers in Europe].

A: No. Our sense of security came only from the fact that people didn’t believe it would be bad because they said that during WWI, a lot of Germans helped them [against the virulent anti-Semitism of the Poles which had expressed itself in pogroms].

Q: Zabkowice was not in that protectorate? [Zabkowice was in Poland and the Protectorate was in Germany].

A: Yes.

Q: It was in the League of Nations protectorate? Between WWI and 1937?

A: No, no, no!

Q: However, just west of you, it was in the protectorate?

A: Yes, Katowice was.

Q: Now Katowice was occupied on Sept. 5, 1939.

A: No, Katowice was occupied on Sept. 1, 1939.

Q: OK. So, the day of the invasion.

A: Yes, the day of the invasion they entered Katowice, and Zabkowice too.

Q: On Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>?

A: Yes. On Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>. You see Katowice contained a large percentage of Germans. They let them in, with open arms. There wasn’t any fight.

Q: Had you considered joining the Polish Army?

A: No! You see, the Polish Army took only really strong people. They didn’t take everybody. I was rejected from the Polish Army.

Q: Did you have a physical?

A: I had a sickness, I don’t remember what kind of sickness, and I was rejected.

Q: Were you not a healthy child?

A: No!

Q: Do you recall Sept. 1, 1939? Could you describe what happened? This will be the last question which I will ask you for the evening.

A: Never mind that! I got time.

Q: Well the tape is about to run out.

A: They [the Germans] came in on Sept. 1, 1939. The first thing they did was to take all the Jews out to the street. We had a railroad station in the village. They took all the Jews to the railroad station to clean the toilets. [Then comes a sentence about something else which was done, but it is not intelligible]. They did that the first day they came in just to show their power and that they meant business. They did that right the first day.

Q: How did they get the Jews out to the streets? Did they knock or pound on doors?

A: They just announced it. They came with a loud speaker. First thing was that they came to the committee and said that the committee should bring all the Jewish people out who are able to work.

Q: So you went out?

A: I went out.

Q: All your family went out?

A: No, not the little children who could not work. They came in and said that they need 250 people. Later they formed their own committee. Then they didn't go anyplace else when they needed people; they just went to their committee. They held the President of the committee to be personally responsible. So he had to deliver the people.

Q: So that committee was organized just immediately?

A: Right away! Right away! They knew who the leaders were; they knew because all villages had a committee of leaders. They used them.

Q: Do you remember being frightened?

A: Everybody was frightened because they came in really like storm troopers.

Q: Was there a lot of rough handling?

A: Yes, right on the first day because they wanted to show their power and to scare everybody. They did that everywhere to scare everybody. They shot some people right away.

Q: The first day?

A: Right away in order to scare people.

Q: Whom did they choose to shoot? Not the leaders?

A: No, no. Nobody special. Not then. Later they took the leaders but I was gone. I left right way. After I received mail from my parents I understood that they always took the leaders. I was no longer home. I was in camp by then.

Q: When were you picked up to go to the camp?

A: In 1940.

Q: What I am talking about is that period from September of 1939 on into 1940, before you went to the camp. There were about six or seven months when you lived in Zabkowice before you were picked up to go to the camp.

A: Then I lived about a normal life. Day by day they changed everything. People got used to changes every day.

Q: This is what I want to start talking to you about then next Thursday. Then I want to cover that period from Sept. 1939 to the time when you were shipped out.

Q: This is Thursday, April 28, 1981. I am in the home of Mr. Abraham Stine for the second of a series of interviews.

B: Abe, last time I talked with you, some four months ago, and so far we have only had this one interview, what we had done, in a sense, was to survey the background up to Sept. 1, 1939. You had been describing to me your family, and the village of Zabkowice, your occupation, your education, that type of information. Right at the end of the interview we had gotten to the outbreak of WWII, that is with the invasion of the Germans and the occupation of Zabkowice and Katowice on Sept. 1. You had said that, right from the very beginning, the Germans asserted their anti-Semitism and their authority on the very first day of their occupation. They had forced the Jews to come out into the street and to clean the railway terminal.

A: We had the anti-Semitism before the Germans came in, everywhere in Poland.

Q: The Germans just acted it.

A: Yes!

Q: What I would really like to deal with, as I indicated to you in the letter which I wrote, is that period from Sept. of 1939 down to the spring of 1940, when you were picked up in a round-up and shipped to your first labor camp. This is the process by which the Germans took over the village of Zabkowice. Could you recall, for example, how large an occupation force there was in your village. How many German troops or Gestapo [this stands for Geheime Staats Polizei, meaning Secret State Police] were there in the village?

A: I would say one dozen or fifteen altogether. They, right away, got the former Polish police to work together with them. I understand that later on they gave the Polish police their guns and everything, but at first they took these guns etc., away. All the time, however, they worked together with the Polish police. This police helped them when they needed something. They organized right away a Jewish Committee. When they needed somebody to work, to clean up or something else, they called the Jewish Committee and this committee was responsible.

Q: Do you remember how large that Jewish Committee was?

A: There were altogether 70 Jewish families in our village, there were maybe five or six people on the committee.

Q: Do you remember who the committee members were? At least at first?

A: I remember one man. His name was Siegreich.

Q: What did that man do? What occupation had he had?

A: They used to own a stone quarry. That was the biggest stone quarry in the area of about 30 or 40 miles.

Q: So he was apparently quite wealthy.

A: Yes, the whole town knew about the family.

Q: I would assume that, even before then, before the Germans came in, he would have played a leadership role.

A: Yes, he was in a leadership role on the Jewish Committee.

Q: What kind of man was he?

A: He was a very nice man before the war. Now, what happened later on? People change in a time like this! You don't recognize your own brother. You don't

recognize your own father in a time like this. The circumstances exert force on you. I saw that happen in the concentration camp. There are unbelievable stories about what was done with people. They diminished people so that they became inhuman! You would be surprised how people could be so inhuman. We saw it! I saw it.

Q: Are you saying that this man Siegreich, became very authoritarian and domineering?

A: I didn't really know because I was only a youngster at the time. You see, I left right at the beginning, in 1940. What happened later is something else. My parents stayed there until 1942. By 1942 all the Jews were together, in one place. They took all of them to the concentration camp of Auschwitz. In 1942, after it was all done, I got a letter from my parents through the camp authorities saying, "They are taking us away. We don't know where to. I doubt that we will be able to write to you." This was the last letter which I received. Afterwards, I found out that everybody went to Auschwitz. They liquidated the committee and everybody. Everything was liquidated. There is nobody left from our village. I have been to different countries and nobody!

Q: You have never run into anyone from there?

A: No, nobody! Because whoever was able to work they took them right away to a concentration camp, and they disposed of the rest of them.

Q: They took them to an extermination camp?

A: Yes.

Q: During this period, right after the invasion, how frequently were you called on to work?

A: Oh, every day! Every day they worked they called on me, whether it was to clean the toilets or whatever. At the beginning it was to clean the toilets on the railroad. You know in small towns like in our village, 75% of Jewish men had beards. [ Orthodox Jews refrain from shaving because of some passage either found in the Talmud or read into it against using a razor. The orthodox Jews who do not want a beard are supposed to pluck the hair out]. They cut the beards right off. For some of them they cut them off, for some of them they ripped them out. That was right at the beginning. They showed their power right away. They wanted that the people would be afraid. Just like that! Believe me, this was a big influence.

Q: Oh, I am sure! When you were called out on these work jobs, were you supervised by German guards?

A: By Polish people.

- Q: Who were apparently just as mean as Germans?
- A: Some of them were meaner. Because the Polish authorities, after Pilsudski had died, from day to day the anti-Semitism raced along. You could see signs out in the streets: "Death to the Jews!" The government didn't do anything against it. You know, in Poland about 10% of the population was Jewish. That means that there were three and a half million Jewish people and 35 million Polish people.
- Q: Looking back, can you say now that there was a gradual intensification of the terror? In other words, did it start bad and grow worse after Sept. 1939? Or did it start out suddenly and gradually gather momentum/
- A: Oh no! They came in and right away showed their toughness, but later, if I am not mistaken, let it a little bit down. Later they started to get tough with everything. They took away the Jewish stores and the people couldn't walk anywhere at night. There was a curfew.
- Q: You are talking about the Jewish people?
- A: Yes, the Jewish people. The people had to wear the Mogen David [the six pointed star of David] on armbands.
- Q: You didn't have to wear the Star of David on your chest?
- A: No, wait! We really started with the white band. Right in 1939, we started with the white band. Later they replaced that with a band with the star on it, the Star of David.
- Q: Did the Germans force you to move within the village of Zabkowice?
- A: No, not when I was living there. Not yet. They started that later. You see, we had no ghetto, because you see we didn't have too many Jews, only 70 families. They did this in the big cities, in 1940, 41, so I understand.
- Q: There wasn't any movement of Jews from other surrounding smaller communities?
- A: Not to our village. In the cities, yes.
- Q: Later on?
- A: Yes, from our village to the big cities; but not to our village because our village was too small. They took the people from our village and from all the different small communities to the big cities.

- Q: Was your father allowed to continue as a butcher?
- A: No, I don't believe so, but again, I left early.
- Q: I mean in 1939 and early 1940.
- A: No. I don't know, because at this time they started to give out rations. Everything was rationed. Everything including meat, was on coupons. You no longer could have your own business.
- Q: But how did you live? In that period from 1939 on?
- A: On rations, they gave us coupons.
- Q: How did you have the money to buy if you could no longer be in business and earn an income?
- A: In the community people had money. They had gold, they had a business! They had savings! Little by little they liquidated this. They sold things to the Polish people. Some people had gold, some people had dollars, some people had diamonds or clothes. Everything which was of value they sold it out for food. Food was the most important thing. Nothing else counted, just the food. Food is the most precious thing you can own. Food and water! Water is in first place, in second place is the food. You cannot survive without water. People who don't understand this, they don't know. You can survive for a week or two on water, but you must have water. I saw people survive on water.
- Q: I have heard of that.
- A: I saw it and I was transported from Gross-Rosen to Buchenwald [two concentration camps. Buchenwald is directly west of Gross-Rosen] in trains. We had no food. Water is the most important thing. You can take a little snow. Believe me: thirst is one of the worst things. People kill people for water; just plain like that, for a piece of bread and a little bit of water. People are ready to kill for it. I saw it with my own eyes. This is not a story. I saw it with my own eyes. You don't have that on the tape!
- Q: Yes, I hope that this is on the tape.
- A: I hope not!
- Q: No, this is fine. I mean that fifty years from now when this is really past history, children ought to hear this! People ought to know!
- A: Yes.

- Q: People ought to know that these conditions existed.
- A: Yes, this is war and war stinks. Without water people just cannot survive. It just doesn't matter what kind of liquid it is; human beings need to have liquid. Without liquid you cannot survive! Now we had good opportunity, right in this country, 1973-74, and I am still mad at it today. Why did we give the Russians the food without getting anything back? This time we had an opportunity to lay down conditions, such as, "You want food, we want to get back something from you!" That is, because food is a precious thing. You can have as much ammunition as you want, but without food you cannot go, with all your ammunition. You can exist without ammunition but you cannot exist without food.
- Q: What great general was it, was it Napoleon, who said that an army travels on its stomach?
- A: You have to have food, food. However, even more important than food is liquid.
- Q: Were the synagogues allowed to remain open? In 1939 and early 1940?
- A: Yes, yes. Early in 1940, yes, but no later. They were not allowed to get 10 men together to make a minyan. Do you know what a minyan is? [That is the group of 10 people who have been Bar Mitzvahed who are required in Orthodox Judaism to recite certain prayers].
- Q: Yes, yes.
- A: An assemblage of 10 people was no longer allowed.
- Q: Was anyone leaving, in this period after Sept. of 1939? To go to Israel?
- A: No. You couldn't go to Israel [or rather Palestine as it remained until 1948. Actually Palestine was British territory, therefore they were fighting the Germans]. It was impossible to go there legally. Some people, a handful of people from our village, left to go to Russia. [Russia and Germany were allies at the time].
- Q: Did you consider that?
- A: No, I was too young, first, and then, secondly, I was the oldest child at home. You know that in Europe, a family looks out for each other, they are not selfish, as you are here.
- Q: Do you recall that there were frequent family discussions about what to do?



A: No, we did not discuss it, because all families, especially our family, my close family, we didn't have the money and the places to go. That is just like it was. Most of the people who went away, they had money. You know that you have to have something to survive with in a foreign land. No, we didn't go anywhere. There was no discussion in our house. There really wasn't much time. There were only a few months, a really short time, before I went away to camp. Later on I got letters from my parents, and in a letter, you couldn't say too much.

Q: It was in May of 1940 when you went to the first camp?

A: Yes, I believe that it was May 1940. [The so-called phony war in Europe ended with the Germans invading Denmark and Norway on April 9, 1940 and Holland and Belgium on May 10, 1940].

Q: Were you in the first group from your village to go to a camp? Had there been earlier groups?

A: Yes, I was really in the first group.

Q: Of your village?

A: No, in the group there were people from our village and from other villages.

Q: From the entire region?

A: Yes. I believe that I went with two other guys from our village

Q: Was this selection in any way voluntary?

A: No way! No way! No choice!

Q: I am asking this because in some areas, so the story would go, that the Germans would say, "We want a working detail! Who will volunteer?" Then people thought that maybe the conditions would be better if they went.

A: No way! I never heard any such thing.

Q: In other words, you were ordered to go.

A: I was forced, not ordered. They called the committee up and told them that the committee should furnish them with so and so many people.

Q: They set a quota?

A: Yes, a quota from the committee. At the beginning, I was working on an Autobahn. Do you know what an Autobahn is?

Q: Yes.

A: An intercity highway. Until 1942 I was working on highways.

Q: The first camp you went to was Niederkild.

A: Yes, Niederkild.

Q: That was in Germany?

A: Yes, in Germany. I was the whole time in Germany from the first day.

Q: That is not a camp which is well known.

A: That is a small camp. It really was not a concentration camp, they used to say that it was an Arbeitslager (a "Work Camp"). Concentration camps really started in 1942, [some concentration camps such as Dachau, near Munich, and Oranienburg, near Berlin, were started in 1932 or 1933. Concentration camps were started in Poland, Holland, and France, insofar as the transcriber could ascertain, as soon as 1940. Buchenwald was operating before 1939, and, and Auschwitz was in operation, although not yet used as a death camp, by 1940], actually at the end of 1942. That is when they really called them concentration camps. [Actually, such concentration camps were in use during previous wars, notably the Boer War in South Africa and Natal].

Q: Does it take its name, Niederkild, from the town where it was located?

A: Yes, from a small town which wasn't far away.

Q: Where was that in Germany?

A: That was not far from Breslau [today called Wroclaw].

Q: So that was still in that region, Silesia, from where you came.

A: No, no. This was deeper in [i.e., considerably farther west than Katowice] Germany. [That was the part of Silesia which had remained German after WWI]. This was really in Germany.

Q: Maybe 150 miles [that distance seems exaggerated, probably closer to 150 km].

A: Something like this. My region was really at the German border, before WWII.

Q: Were all of the prisoners or workers in that camp Jews, or were there others?

A: Only Jews, only Jews1

Q: How many would you say were there?

A: About 300.

Q: So it was rather small?

A: Yes, it was. Yes, it was a small camp. We only worked on the Autobahn. We built the Autobahn. That was Hitler's pride. This was a good Autobahn. [Autobahns were built under Hitler's orders for strategic purposes so that truck convoys could move from location to location readily. Thus they were pushed east right up to the border with Russia, after the dismemberment of Poland]. It compares today to the Interstate system in the U.S.

Q: What were things like at Niederkild?

A: It was like a typical concentration camp, only worse because we had to work harder. We worked like slaves. We pushed the compactors. They went behind us and if we didn't work hard enough to suit them we were whipped. The Arbeitslagers were worse than concentration camps.

Q: Would you mind going into some details about the routine?

A: No, not at all.

Q: What time did you get up?

A: We got up at 5:30 a.m.

Q: What did you have for breakfast?

A: Coffee. [Coffee, in Germany, was made with other things than coffee beans, which had been unavailable by then; it was "Ersatz coffee" all over Germany and its possessions].

Q: That's it?

A: Early in the morning we had only coffee, and that was it.

Q: Was that ersatz coffee or the real thing?

A: Ersatz coffee, and we also got a little bit of soup. That was in the morning.

Q: Cabbage soup?

- A: Any kind of soup, a little of it. This was Arbeitsfutter [food for work]! Then we went out to work at 6:30. We started to work at 7 a.m. We then worked 7 a.m. to 12 noon. Then it was lunch time, at least it was lunch time for the Germans, because we got nothing. Some people could divide a piece of bread. I saw it -- some people had the will power and they had a small amount of bread at the lunch hour. 95% of the people, when they got back to Niederkild and got dinner, ate it right away. That was the way it was for years and years. We lived on one meal, because it was very hard to divide the bread. Those who did had two or three meals, but the majority of the people did the work -- and we worked twelve hours a day, six days a week -- with only one meal a day.
- Q: So you had no lunch?
- A: Yes. We had lunch time but no food!
- Q: No food?
- A: No food. No food at all. Nothing!
- Q: Then you would quit work about 7 p.m.?
- A: We quit work at seven and we got to camp by 7:30. They gave us the supper.
- Q: What was that supper?
- A: A piece of bread and some soup and, sometimes, I think two or three times a week, we had a small piece of butter. On Sundays we received a small piece of sausage, maybe that was Saturdays. I am not sure. I found it. We worked six days a week. Some people took a bath on Saturdays, some people didn't take any bath because the bathing conditions were very bad. You had to stay in line to take a bath. Actually, it was not a bath but a shower. This was the routine. Sunday mornings we didn't have to go to work, we had inspection in the camp. They looked you over to see if you had shaved, whether you had washed, they looked at the beds. You had to clean and clean. In the afternoon they took us out into the camp and just to find something for us to do, believe it or not, they had a pile of sand, so they took the pile from one pile to another and then back again to the first pile. That was just so that we would do something.
- Q: There were no balls to pitch, no recreation of any kind? [This type of activity would be available in U.S. camps].
- A: No, that kind of thing didn't exist in any camp, in no concentration camp. This did not exist! [After all, the inmates of such camps, whether Jewish, Polish or other, were not humans by the definitions used by Hitler and his people]. There were no books to read. This did not exist! There was no newspaper to read. This did not exist!

Q: How many Germans were guarding you, would you estimate? In that camp?

A: I would say, maybe two percent of the population. There were 300 of us, maybe there were 30 people guarding us [that would make it ten percent]. They didn't need anymore because nobody would escape, people were afraid. We had no guns, we had nothing. [They were also on such a starvation diet that they literally lacked the strength needed to escape; also, they were in Germany].

Q: Were you behind barbed wire?

A: Yes, always! The whole time, we were behind barbed wire. You couldn't go anyplace.

Q: Was it electrified?

A: Not in that camp. Not in the small camps. That came later, in the actual concentration camps. Again, you couldn't escape because you had a special uniform.

Q: Grey stripes?

A: Yes. You couldn't go anyplace. They took all your civilian clothes away.

Q: Did you just have the one internment uniform?

A: Yes, always the one uniform.

Q: Never a change of clothing?

A: No, never a change of clothing.

Q: Would people wash their clothes on Sundays?

A: Yes, you had to because you couldn't do it any other time.

Q: Were there the roll calls in the morning?

A: Roll calls in the mornings, at noon, and in the evening. This took place every day, roll calls when you went to work and they counted the people and when you came back from work. Before we went into the barracks, after we finished work, there was a roll call right away at the worksite. When we came back to camp we had another roll call. This was every single day.

Q: Were these ever prolonged, as a means of torture, to keep you standing there hour after hour?

A: I don't know what the meaning was of the roll calls. The Germans, that is the Kapos, counted the people. Do you know what the Kapos were? They were the foremen. They counted the people all the time; if you didn't have the people, the numbers wouldn't be there. People stayed behind; people tried to escape. If some escaped, we had to wait until they found them. That happened many, many times. People just went and got killed, because they couldn't escape. It was in Germany!

Q: Who were the Kapos?

A: They were Jewish people. They were tough. They were tough because they had enough food and they did not work. They always got double ration of food and they could have more if they wanted it. In Buchenwald, where I was later, I was liberated while I was in Buchenwald, we had what the Germans called prisoners, we had people from all nations, including from the U.S. Now there, the Kapos were Germans, because there were German people also in the concentration camps. There were English and American and different Kapos from all the nations. A small percentage of the Jews were Kapos in Buchenwald.

Q: But in the Arbeitslager, there were only Jews?

A: Only Jewish people and Jewish Kapos! No German was allowed inside the camp. No Germans, only the Kapos. There were Blockoberst. Do you know that the Blockoberst were responsible for the blocks, that means the building? The Kapos were Jewish, yes.

Q: Was any Kapo from your hometown?

A: No.

Q: How about from your region?

A: No, that means from our region, yes! There were some Kapos from my region. At one time it really happened that one Kapo gave one guy a good beating. Later he came in and apologized. That happened one time. Believe it or not, he took his own life later. This is the one time I remember! He was a tailor and he took his own life. He came in and apologized and a couple or three days later he took his own life. You had to be tough to be a Kapo.

Q: Would you say that the Kapos in Niederkild were of the criminal element?

A: No.

Q: Because that did happen sometimes.

- A: Yes, sometimes, but most of the time, they just selected a tough looking guy, that's all. There were a good percentage of them who were criminals, yes; however, that is not what they were looking for. Of course, once selected, the Kapos became automatically tough people.
- Q: You already indicated that the sort of standard camp organization which prevailed in these smaller camps, the Kapos, the Blockoberst,
- A: Yes, the Block is like a big building, and the Blockoberst was responsible for everyone in the building, for everything.
- Q: Were the buildings crowded?
- A: Oh yes!
- Q: For example, inside the building where you slept?
- A: Yes, they were crowded, and Buchenwald was the most crowded. In Buchenwald, we had a place, like this place here, where 15 to 18 people lived. For example, you couldn't turn if the other fellow didn't turn.
- Q: However, in Niederkild, how was it?
- A: In Niederkild, we were less crowded, but again there was one bed behind another one and one bed on top of another one.
- Q: They were tiered bunks?
- A: Yes, that is it, tiered bunks.
- Q: Was there one person per bed?
- A: Yes, one person per bed.
- Q: Or more?
- A: No, no. In the tiered beds there was one person per bed. In bigger concentration camps it was terrible.
- Q: Did you have a blanket in Niederkild?
- A: Yes, we had a blanket because it was cold. You had to have a blanket. We had one blanket.
- Q: Did you get a coat in the wintertime; again I am talking about Niederkild?

A: Yes. Again, a coat with the stripes. You know, the prisoner stripes! We also got wooden shoes.

Q: Of the five camps where you were, in that long, long period, would you say that Niederkild was one of the better ones, or worst ones?

A: Conditions for work were worse, conditions inside the camp were much better than elsewhere. One of the worst camps where I was, was Gross-Rosen. This was one of those which they call in German “Vernichtungskamp” [i.e., “Extermination camp”]. Do you know what “Vernichtung” is? It is, as they say, “death camp.”

Q: Well, we will talk about Gross-Rosen later on. I would like to keep them distinguished. I would like for us to talk about one at a time.

A: We had hard work at Niederkild; however, inside, compared to other camps, was already much better. At least we had much more space inside.

Q: As bad as they were, the living conditions were somewhat better.

A: Yes, we had more space. However work was much harder. This was the hardest work which we had to do, was on the Autobahn. This was the beginning, it was very hard work.

Q: What did that work consist of?

A: It was mainly on the Autobahn, to build it.

Q: To grade it? To bring the stones?

A: Yes, to grade it and to bring the stones. To bring the highway up to grade. We went miles and miles every day.

Q: Did you have any machinery at all? Was it all done by hand?

A: No. The only thing we had was a cement mixer. Other than that, everything was done by hand.

Q: Were the overseers of the work detail constantly harassing you/

A: Oh yes! Constantly! That included that by our own Kapos! That was particularly intense.

Q: But outside?



- A: Yes, outside. You had to go in the line. You couldn't go where it was easier to walk, you had to remain in line. Everybody had to be together. They looked that you would be in the line.
- Q: How was punishment measured out? What kind of punishment would there be?
- A: In Niederkild, the punishment wasn't so bad as it was in other camps. However, the Germans had always some clubs and would always beat you. However, inside the camp it was not so much as it was in other camps. There was not so much harassment inside.
- Q: As far as you knew there never were any executions?
- A: No, not in Niederkild.
- Q: How long were you at Niederkild?
- A: From May 1940 to August 1942.
- Q: That was about two years and three months.
- A: Yes, then I went to Markstadt.
- Q: How far from Niederkild was Markstadt?
- A: I really don't know. I would say a couple of hundred miles for sure. [200 miles seems to be excessive for the distances in Europe, when the airline distances from Berlin to Warsaw is 320 miles and all the camps where Abe was were within Germany, but that is not crucial].
- Q: How did you get from Niederkild to Markstadt?
- A: By train.
- Q: In cattle cars?
- A: Yes. Those were the trains they had. We didn't know any others.
- Q: Did you have any choice when you went from Niederkild to Markstadt?
- A: It was not a matter of choice. They liquidated Niederkild, that is all. Then I went to Markstadt, they liquidated Niederkild because they no longer needed it. The Autobahn was finished. In Markstadt, we started to work for Krupp [the big German steel and weapons consortium] and Spaer. They made ammunition.
- Q: Did everyone from Niederkild go to Markstadt?

A: Everybody. They liquidated Niederkild and they went to Markstadt because they needed ammunition.

Q: Were your three friends from your village who went with you still alive?

A: Yes! They went to Markstadt when I did.

Q: How big was Markstadt?

A: It contained about 6,000 people.

Q: That was considerably larger!

A: Yes, much, much larger.

Q: About twenty times larger.

A: That was a big, big place. You see, Markstadt, they already had people from different cities. They had only Jews in the camp. No Germans came into the camp. There were only Jewish Kapos, Jewish Blockoberst, and Jewish [another level of supervision but the transcriber could not understand it]. The supervision was all by Jews. These Jewish supervisors were mean. I am sorry to have to tell you, but they were mean. In Markstadt I was working. Luckily I started to work nights. What was so lucky about working nighttime? It was because at night you could go out in the fields and steal some potatoes. These few potatoes meant the whole life. Now if a German would catch you at it, you would get a bullet right in your back! Just like that. During the day, even before I started to work nights, on my way home I picked a little bit of grass. I put the grass in the soup and ate it. One time people got killed when they picked the grass to take it with them. Before we came into the camp, everybody had to take everything out of their pockets and everybody was searched. Anyway, people still managed to hide things. If they caught somebody already inside the camp he could get 50 or 100 lashes on his back. They searched everybody. If I am not mistaken, I believe that in the beginning of '43 they needed some people to work the nightshift. The operations were taking place 24 hours a day. So I started to work nightshift. This helped me to survive! I went out in the fields and stole potatoes. What did we do with the potatoes? We cooked them. That was the key for survival.

Q: Was the Krupp ammunition factory located within the camp?

A: Nothing was in the camp! We had to go out to work every day, about seven or eight miles.

Q: Walking?

- A: Yes, walking. It didn't matter whether it was rain or snow, we had to go. They knew that we couldn't work outside, but we still had to go out to work. It didn't matter whether the weather was rainy or snowy, we had to get up at 5 a.m. for the dayshift. About 5:45 a.m., they counted us and then we left the camp. We arrived at the plant at 8 a.m. It took us one and a half hours just to walk. It was the same thing with the food. They fed you once every twelve hours.
- Q: What did you manufacture? Was it gunpowder? Was it bullets?
- A: Over there, they built everything. They built tanks. I was working with cement, we were building the factories.
- Q: Oh?
- A: I was employed building the factories where they produced the ammunition.
- Q: But you never worked on any actual armament?
- A: No! No, I was always on the building of buildings. We built one factory after the other. Even in 1944, they still built factories. Now I want to talk about these Kapos. In Buchenwald [maybe this should read Markstadt? See below], this happened to one Kapo that I knew really from before the war.
- Q: Was he from your village?
- A: No, he was from about 12 miles away from my village, from Benchen. He found under one guy's bed a little bit of dirt.
- Q: How could you avoid dirt in Buchenwald?
- A: I am not talking about Buchenwald but about Markstadt! We didn't go anywhere. That was back when I was working nighttime. We came back from work and we had to clean every day behind the beds and in the rooms and everything. So the Kapo found a little bit of dirt. So he took this guy -- and this guy knew this Kapo from home, by first name -- and beat him so much that this guy passed out. So the Kapo urinated on the guy's face. This was a guy whom he knew from home!
- Q: Yes. Do you know if that Kapo...?
- A: No, they killed him. After the war he got killed. They found that Kapo and they killed him. The people from the camp who survived did it. I even remember the name!
- Q: Who was it?

- A: His name was Morris Martinburger. I remember the name! He was from Benchen.
- Q: Did he ever attack you?
- A: No. I don't know why. He beat several guys so badly that it was unbelievable.
- Q: Was he a big man?
- A: He was a big man. He was a tough guy! He wasn't tough before the war. I know because I knew him before the war. He was a Kapo in camp. He was not a Kapo outside -- before the war. This was the leader. They selected big people. The Kapos got enough food and everything which they wanted, everything from the German people -- even from the German girls. [That is probably only hearsay, because relations with Jews, specifically carnal relations with Jews for non-Jews were capital offences for Aryans].
- Q: Now, were conditions within the camp of Markstadt more crowded than they had been in Niederkild?
- A: More! Much more!
- Q: How many persons were assigned to a bed, for instance?
- A: Two people to a bed. It was much better than Buchenwald. The worst camp was Buchenwald. From Markstadt we went to Funfteichen [transcriber is not positive about this, but the name, which means "five pounds," makes more sense than the "Finfthlen" which CB jotted down in his notes]. You see, they still called Markstadt an Arbeitslager. I was there until 1944. In 1944, they changed from Arbeitslager to Concentration Camp. At that time we went to different concentration camps. The first concentration camp was Funfteichen.
- Q: I just want to get the chronology here on my notes, so that I won't forget it. Please give it to me.
- A: May of 1940 to August of 1942 was in Niederkild. August of 1942 to the end of 1943, let us say December of 1943, I was in Markstadt. Beginning 1944, let us say January 1944, for about one year to December of 1944, I was in Funfteichen. December of 1944 I went to Gross-Rosen. I was there for four weeks, so until January 1945. January 1945 to April 11, 1945, at 11 a.m. I was in Buchenwald.

[Some further story was inserted here which is being repeated below so that the chronology of events can stand out by itself. From the list submitted by CB with the tape, not only Finfthlen was corrected, but also the name of the "Grosse-

Rosen” camp which could be checked against a printed list available to the transcriber].

Q: How long did you stay in Funfteichen?

A: About one year.

Q: Let us say December of 1944.

A: December of '44 we went to Gross-Rosen.

Q: How long were you there?

A: About four weeks. I don't know whether three or four weeks. Over there, it was just starvation. If you went to take a bath, they beat you and pushed you back. Over there, you got a little bit of food only in the night, at 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. There people ate people. Human beings eat human beings. I saw it with my own eyes.

Q: You were liberated in?

A: Buchenwald.

Q: In May or April?

A: No, April 11, 1945, at 11 o'clock.

Q: That is engraved in your memory.

A: Oh yes! Believe it or not, I remember who my doctor was after the liberation. I even remember who the chaplain was

Q: This is Charles Berry and I am in the home of Mr. Abraham Stine for the third of a series of interviews about his experiences in five camps during WWII and his liberation. It is January 28, 1982.

Abe, there are a few points which I would like to cover about Niederkild, which as I listened to the previous tapes I realized that I hadn't asked you questions about, as I should have done.

One question was about the contact with the outside, while you were in Niederkild.

A: There was no contact! The only contact which I got was once a month a letter from my parents. I could receive one letter. That correspondence could only be from my parents.

Q: Was the letter censored? Could you tell whether it had been opened, or sentences dropped out or anything like that?

A: I really don't remember.

Q: Was it a postcard or was it sealed?

A: It was a letter. Once a month!

Q: Could you write to your parents?

A: Also one letter a month.

Q: Was that a postcard or a letter?

A: A letter.

Q: Where did you get postage?

A: They gave us the stamps to mail a letter. One letter a month.

Q: Did you have to buy the postage?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Also I didn't ask you anything about the health conditions at Niederkild. First was there any widespread sickness such as an epidemic of dysentery or typhus?

A: No. People who died there did because of overwork or hunger. That was because we received food one time a day. Some people kept food but I ate my food all at one time.

Q: Did they have an infirmary or a clinic?

A: There was a first aid man. He would give you a bandage, or something, if you cut yourself. We had no clinic, no hospital at all. The reason for that was that first of all, it was a small camp.

Q: Well, on the whole, would you say that the health of the inmates of the camp was pretty good? Was there any severe sickness there?

A: No, no, because people just came in. For us, it was the first camp, they maintained their health from home. I didn't catch any sickness there myself. But then when we went from Niederkild to Markstadt, that was a different story.

- Q: Well, were you aware of what happened if anyone needed surgery? Such things as an abscessed tooth or such, maybe appendicitis.
- A: I don't remember what happened. At least I don't remember in Niederkild, but in Markstadt something happened and I remember it. We had a doctor over there, a Jewish doctor, who was always in the camp. He couldn't do much to help. If someone was really sick, he just had to die and that was it, he didn't take him anyplace. If someone was very sick he had to suffer until he died.
- Q: Do you remember the name of the commander or commandant of the camp at Niederkild?
- A: No, I can't remember.
- Q: Was he brutal or sadistic?
- A: All of them were. It just didn't exist that they weren't. Later on I found another camp where one guy was a Blockoberst who was not sadistic. He couldn't survive.
- Q: Now, there is a term which is frequently used to apply to the camps, at least to the concentration camps, I don't know about the Arbeitslager -- are you familiar with the term "Canada" or "Kanader," meaning the place where all the luggage was put, where all the valuables were taken?
- A: We didn't have anything like that, not there or in the following camps.
- Q: Things had already been taken away from you.
- A: That was so, because if they took it in one camp you didn't have anything to be taken away.
- Q: You are not familiar with that term, in so far as it applies to Buchenwald either?
- A: Oh, Buchenwald! They had something, but nothing from us. I know because I was in Buchenwald. You see, I had nothing left with me. My things had already been lost between camps. There was such a thing for the newcomers who came to Buchenwald, yes! They used to call it a Entlausungslager. Do you know what Lausung is?
- Q: Yes, that had something to do with your clothes to be laundered?
- A: No, Entlausung (i.e., removing lice)!
- Q: Oh no!

- A: Entlausung is as if you went through a shower and they put some different things on your body, everything like that because most of the people had lice.
- Q: That was delousing.
- A: That was a delousing parlor. That is what we had. We had to wait for a couple or three days before we went into the showers, because in Buchenwald, you see it was 1945 when we arrived in Buchenwald and all camps had their prisoners transferred to Buchenwald. You know, all the Russian and American camps. They transferred all the people from one camp to another one. However we had nothing left.
- Q: Well this word I am thinking about is spelled like the country, Canada. I don't know how you pronounce it and I don't know where it came from. However the work detail which worked in this, I don't know what you call it, Canada, or whatever...
- A: Maybe Canadat?
- Q: No. The work detail was always looked upon as the best work detail because you worked at sorting out clothes, shoes and such. You could at times find something for yourself.
- A: I wouldn't know that.
- Q: There is also another term, and I tried to think of it all the way over here, the term which a lot of camp inmates used to describe someone who had given up. Who had kind of surrendered.
- A: Oh yes, people did sink to that point.
- Q: There was a term. It was not Zombie, but it is something like that.
- A: Yes, the people who had given up all hope.
- Q: They stopped eating and just somehow disintegrated..
- A: You see, in Niederkild and Markstadt, we didn't have electrified fences because they still were Arbeitslager, but later on in Funfteichen and Buchenwald the people just ran into the electric wire. Oh yes, a lot of people did that.
- Q: To commit suicide.
- A: Yes, because they gave up and they felt that they had nothing to go on for.



- Q: Well, there was a word which was used to describe that kind of attitude. Personally, I cannot think of it. What I was interested in was that word which was applied. Did you see that process taking place already at Niederkild? Were you aware of people who had just given up?
- A: No, no, no. Not in Niederkild. That was because then we still did believe, everyone did believe. First of all, we all still had families at home, parents and such [and they got one letter a month]. That was still just the beginning. The crematoriums began to appear in 1942. Then they took all the Jews from the small cities to Auschwitz or to Treblinka [both of these extermination camps were located in what had been Poland proper, not Germany] into the crematoriums. Up to then we had hope! We thought that we would work here for one year, or two years, then we get freed and we go home. After this I received a letter, we all received letters, and we knew that people were being deported.
- Q: Now, at Markstadt, conditions were so much worse that you did see people give up there. Were there executions there?
- A: Not really executions, but people were beaten to death. Executions were when they hanged somebody. In Markstadt we never had any actual hangings.
- Q: Did you see people being beaten to death in Markstadt?
- A: Yes, this is what I told you about!
- Q: However, that was within the barracks. That was more or less a private thing between the Kapo and this prisoner.
- A: That happened on the job also. People were being beaten to death.
- Q: Did you ever see anything like that in the Appell [the place where the roll call was being taken], such as to make an example?
- A: Yes; if someone came in a minute late, or if he didn't stand straight, they beat him. Maybe they gave him 25 lashes. Often 25 lashes meant death. People couldn't survive that because they really beat him.
- Q: Were you ever punished like that? I mean at Markstadt?
- A: No! I tried always to avoid this.
- Q: To stay anonymous?
- A: I had no other choice. I thought that I could never survive a beating.
- Q: Was it easy to stay anonymous?

A: It was very hard. I was just plain lucky in Markstadt, later when they made the two shifts. One shift worked days, the other worked nights. I was already almost ready to collapse when they divided the work and I started to go on the night shift. When we were done with night shift we went into the fields and dug up some potatoes. We stole those potatoes. We cooked them on the fire since we made a fire at night. So we had potatoes to bring back to the barracks, and we had something to eat. I worked one year at night shift. If they had caught me I would have gotten shot.

Q: Was that what you were doing pretty widespread? Were a lot of people providing for themselves by stealing potatoes?

A: Oh yes, the entire night shift. All the people who worked with me did that. We had to do this.

Q: I believe that you told me before that you were constructing buildings for an ammunition factory.

A: Yes. A factory which belonged to Krupp.

Q: How did you have the opportunity to get out in the field? The field where the potatoes were.

A: You see, where we built the buildings was right in the field, right behind the potato fields. When we finished one building we started another building. Everything was part of Krupp. Everything was built up for war manufacturing.

Q: You may think that I am asking silly questions, but were you able to get the potatoes every night/

A: No! No! No! However we got them, and we hid them right on the job for the next day, if we couldn't take them with us. However, people stole one from the other. The only thing we could get like that were potatoes. A potato was gold, it was better than gold.

Q: I remember earlier when you talked about how important food and water was, in order to survive.

A: When I was working on the day shift, and we went back to the barracks from work, people dug out grass. They took grass with them to the barracks. They put the grass in the soup. If a guard caught you at this, he shot you right away.

Q: Did you ever do that?

A: No! [Earlier he had said that he had].

Q: Did you ever see anyone get caught stealing potatoes?

A: Every night people were caught.

Q: They were shot right on the spot?

A: Yes, right on the spot!

Q: These work details at Markstadt, I realize that it would vary from job to job, would they be 200 people under one German guard, or what?

A: No, no, no. We had about 25 or 30 people under one German guard. At night time, it was easy, because at nighttime they took naps and we watched them. One guard watched another guard. In the daytime we couldn't go away. At nighttime they took naps.

Q: So a favored detail to get in was the night detail?

A: It was surprising that no one got killed while doing the work. People just died from lack of food. Nobody died from hard work.

Q: You were at Markstadt for about a year and four months, August of 1942 to December 1943.

A: Yes, something like that.

Q: That brings up a point; being cut off from newspapers and radio, how were you able to keep up with the world?

A: The radio didn't exist. We only heard things through people who came in to work from the outside. People came from Poland to work. They were not in concentration camps like we were. We met them on the job. We got news from these people.

Q: I wasn't really asking about news. I meant just a matter of keeping time. How did you know from one day to the next? I mean every day was like the next. How did you know whether it was November 23 or November 24?

A: We knew because every hour was like a month, every hour was like a year.

Q: Did you keep any sort of calendar? Did you construct a calendar on the wall?

A: We didn't exist for such things. We didn't know about such things!

- Q: I find that really intriguing. When every day begins to be the same and total misery, how can you tell, how do you know when one month was over?
- A: We knew it. When the Jewish Holy Days came around, we got the most punishment. That is what we got in the camps on the High Holy Days. They picked special times such as the High Holy Days [that would be Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and possibly also Passover] to give us real punishment. We didn't know what was behind these punishments, but this was always the case.
- Q: That brings up another question which I had intended to ask, in terms of Niederkild and Markstadt. Were there any religious observances?
- A: No, not at all! I only remember one man who was with me in Markstadt. He was not eating anything which had been cooked at all -- he only ate a piece of bread [this appears to be so as not to eat anything other than Kosher foods] and a potato. Everything else which he received he traded with other people. Another man wouldn't touch a piece of bread, only potatoes [which potatoes could not possibly be anything except Kosher, by definition of unearthing them and then cooking them over fire without any fat or other addition]. That was only one person out of all the prisoners who did that. He ate only potatoes, no bread, and he certainly wouldn't touch meat. Finally he died anyway.
- Q: However, at night, after the doors to the barracks were closed, there were no prayer groups that you were aware of?
- A: No. It may be hard to believe in prayer, after all there were mainly people who had lost the comfort which they had. After we received the severe punishment for the Holidays, I myself, and I am talking about myself, and my parents used to be really orthodox Jew, I lost everything of my religion. I no longer believed in God.
- Q: You are saying that that was pretty widespread?
- A: Yes, it was pretty widespread! Pretty widespread. We didn't believe because we saw what happened to all people, what kind of punishment we got on the High Holy Days. What was all that? Why did we receive that? As to how I got back to the religion, I don't know; I am really not a religious person as much as I am a traditionalist.
- Q: That is another story and I will get to that after the liberation. That is an important line of questions which I would like to pursue. What about rabbis? Were there any rabbis in the work group?
- A: No!
- Q: I don't mean men serving as rabbis.

- A: No, just this one person who was like a rabbi.
- Q: The one who would only eat potatoes?
- A: Yes, he was really orthodox. He performed services every morning and every evening by himself. He was the only person I remember who prayed each morning and each evening.
- Q: You said that when you went to Niederkild there were three other young men from your hometown with you and that they were also transferred to Markstadt.
- A: In Markstadt they disappeared and I don't know what happened to them.
- Q: You don't know whether they were executed or what?
- A: No, because later we went away from Markstadt to another concentration camp. After Markstadt I had no contact with any of them.
- Q: Again, I am asking you a very broad question, which you can generalize from, was it a general rule that close friendships were formed?
- A: Everybody was touched [affected?], everybody would become involved for himself, we couldn't have any friendships. Everybody had to look out for himself in order to survive. I am sorry to admit it, but that is how it was. Everybody was touched. Everybody tried to survive. In order to survive, a little bit of food was needed. People waited for someone to die to take away their shoes and his clothes and his piece of bread. There were no friendships.
- Q: OK, Abe, this sounds as if I am arguing with you, and I don't mean to do that, but you are painting a rather dismal picture of human nature. I can understand how it could be that way, the way you are describing. I am not disputing your word, but are you saying that you never saw, never ever saw, in any of the camps, any act of humanitarianism, of someone giving up something to someone who was worse off?
- A: Nobody was better off! I saw people in Markstadt who received packages from Poland, still, from their families. When they received these packages, people were selfish and cut themselves off from others because they felt that it was their package.
- Q: Just like gold?
- A: Just like diamonds rather than gold. At that time, I did blame them for their attitudes, but today look; I survived and many of the others did not survive.
- Q: Yes. I understand exactly what happened.

- A: You became very, very selfish. It is hard to be like this, but it had to be if you were to survive.
- Q: Yes, the survival instinct was extremely strong amongst a large group of people.
- A: Yes, in order to survive you had to be very selfish!
- Q: Was Markstadt a mixed camp, I mean by that were there both men and women?
- A: In Markstadt we had I believe only 50 women working in the kitchen.
- Q: Were they Jewish?
- A: Yes, Jewish. Markstadt was only a Jewish camp!
- Q: You also said, I believe, that there were about six thousand people in Markstadt.
- A: That is correct.
- Q: Now, was Markstadt all closed down, all at once, like Niederkild?
- A: Yes, closed down, all of it.
- Q: And everyone, at the same time, were taken away?
- A: From Markstadt people went to three different camps. I went from Markstadt to Funfteichen [again the transcriber used the quasiphonetic spelling rather than that in CB's notes]. We arrived in Funfteichen in 1943 [Abe had previously agreed with CB that he got to this camp in January 1944]. Funfteichen was already a concentration camp.
- Q: When Markstadt was liquidated, what were the other two camps to which people went?
- A: I don't remember the other two camps.
- Q: Could you say approximately how many people were sent from Markstadt to Funfteichen?
- A: I think that they divided them equally, at least that is what I think.
- Q: About two thousand to each?
- A: Yes.

- Q: Again by cattle car on the railway?
- A: Oh yes! That was the only transportation, the railroad.
- Q: Well, I thought that if they were in the same area, there would be other ways.
- A: No, no. We marched from Funfteichen to Gross-Rosen [this would put it pretty much in the area of Upper Silesia, south of Breslau, today this city is Wroclaw, Poland], but not there.
- Q: How big was Funfteichen?
- A: It was a camp of about four thousand people.
- Q: So it was a little bit smaller than Markstadt?
- A: Yes.
- Q: It was not a work camp at all? There were no factories attached to it?
- A: Again, they manufactured war material.
- Q: War manufacturing.
- A: Yes, ammunition, tanks, and everything. That was under Krupp and Spaer [transcriber is not certain about the spelling of the latter name, but believes that under Hitler there was an Alfred Spaer who was a minister of armament or such] about which we talked earlier.
- Q: Now, was everyone at Funfteichen Jewish, or were they mixed with political prisoners and gypsies and such?
- A: At Funfteichen it was already different. There were Czechs and Poles and Jews.
- Q: However, in Markstadt there were still Polish, was that right?
- A: At Markstadt there were only Jewish people.
- Q: But Polish Jews?
- A: No, no! But toward, I believe, the middle of 1943 we received transports from Romania, from Hungary, from France, and from Holland. Those people had a hard time to survive. So they came into the camps and two or three months later they had disappeared. They had a hard time.
- Q: How do you account for that?

A: OK, the Polish Jewish people were used to having a hard life before the war. The other people, the French, the Hungarians, and the Romanians, they had led an easy life. Because of that they had a harder time to survive.

Q: That is interesting.

A: They disappeared during the night. They didn't know how to work. They didn't know how to take a shovel in their hands. They couldn't survive! There were all different people; the Eastern people from what they used to call the Western people. We in Poland were Eastern people. The difference was like between day and night.

Q: Now Funfteichen -- I have great difficulties pronouncing that -- was that a mixed camp? Men, women and children?

A: No children!

Q: Just men and women?

A: No, there were only men. No, only men! Now in Markstadt they had a few women.

Q: Not even women working in the kitchen?

A: No, not at all. In Markstadt and Niederkild they had women working in the kitchen, but not in Funfteichen, nor in Gross-Rosen or Buchenwald either.

Q: Now was Funfteichen markedly worse than Markstadt or just a little bit worse?

A: It was much worse.

Q: What made it worse?

A: In camp, in the barracks, after the work on Sunday, when we had the day off they made us work within the camp and just made us do anything. We had a big pile of stone or sand. We had to take this from one place to another [this seemed to have also been the practice in Niederkild, as Abe told earlier] and once they were on the other place to put them back again. They just wanted to keep us busy.

Q: Was food in shorter supply than before?

A: The same food that we had had all along. Like in Markstadt, they fed us once a day.

Q: Was it more crowded in Funfteichen than it had been?



- A: No, I would say no. It was about the same as it had been in Markstadt, but the difference was that in Markstadt every barracks had a Blockeldester [a so-called senior for the block]. Do you know what that is?
- Q: I know what it is but I can't translate it right now.
- A: You know what it is, it is like one person who is chief of the block or barracks. He saw to it that there was enough food.
- Q: Were they all Jews?
- A: They were people from all nations.
- Q: Were they pretty brutal?
- A: The Blockeldester? Very much so. But there was one Blockeldester, he was Jewish, but he was good. He couldn't survive.
- Q: What happened to him?
- A: After three months they took his job.
- Q: He was not mean enough?
- A: He was not mean. He was a good man! He was like a friend. After three months, he went back to work like everybody. You had to be brutal to fulfill that position.
- Q: Were there executions at Funfteichen?
- A: Yes. Some people tried to escape; they hung them. Some people tried to steal something; they hung them. They did that the first time. They did not do that in Niederkild or Markstadt. They did that right at the assembly and they let them hang for 24 hours. Everybody had to go since they made an Appell [German word meaning roll-call]. So everybody had to be there and everybody had to watch how they hung them and they let them hang for 24 hours. They were better off! Beatings were nothing unusual, however hanging was.
- Q: Did you ever get beaten in Funfteichen?
- A: No! I was never beaten anywhere! If I had gotten beaten I wouldn't survive. People who received beatings could not survive.
- Q: Were people shot?
- A: No.

Q: At Funfteichen?

A: No. They only shot people on the outside, when we were at work, not inside the camp. Nobody could come inside the camp. That was true in Funfteichen and in Buchenwald; no German could come into the camp. I don't know why, whether they were afraid or something, they never came into the camp. In Markstadt, they were allowed to go into the camp.

Q: Would you say that there were degrees of being sadistic? For example, I have read accounts that in some camps like Auschwitz, where you had the German guards who, just for the pure fun of it, would walk down between the barracks and just shoot people right and left. Did you encounter that kind of German sadism?

A: That was true outside, yes, because they could not come into the camp.

Q: The Germans were not allowed inside the camp?

A: No, they were not allowed to come inside the camp. Either in Funfteichen or Gross-Rosen or Buchenwald. Outside they could do anything. For example, they told you to pick up a cigarette butt and when you did, they kicked you right away.

Q: Nothing like that ever happened to you?

A: No. But I can tell you again that whoever got a beating did not survive.

Q: At the roll calls, were there good positions to be in?

A: No.

Q: Was it bad to be in the first row?

A: No, no.

Q: Were you more likely to get beaten?

A: No, not especially. They went around all over. You know, at roll calls we had to wait. We had roll calls in the morning and we got a roll call when we got back from work. On Sundays we had a roll call four times a day. On Sundays we got the food at noon. On Sunday we got a roll call in the morning, a roll call before we ate and one after we ate and one before night. Then everybody had to be counted. If someone was missing we had to stand until he was found. If the person showed up five minutes later he got his punishment.

- Q: Was there any widespread epidemic of typhus or diphtheria or dysentery at Funfteichen?
- A: No, not that I recall.
- Q: I know that people were not in good condition but still they had been weakened.
- A: No dysentery, no.
- Q: You said that there was a Jewish doctor in Funfteichen.
- A: Yes, in Funfteichen.
- Q: He could help a little bit but not a whole lot.
- A: Yes, that is right.
- Q: Did you do the same thing in Funfteichen as you had in Markstadt, that is, building factory buildings?
- A: Yes, because Funfteichen was not too far away from Markstadt, however Markstadt was an Arbeitslager and Funfteichen was a concentration camp. They constantly moved people from the Arbeitslager to the concentration camps. In 1943 I know that an order came out that all [Jewish] people have to go in a concentration camp.
- Q: However, there was no crematorium in Funfteichen, at that time
- A: No, no. No crematorium. The first crematorium which I saw was in Buchenwald.
- Q: Can you recall when you first learned about the crematorium? What was happening in Auschwitz and Buchenwald? Did you know about that before you got there?
- A: No, no!
- Q: You had no news of that?
- A: No, we didn't know that. Auschwitz was not until 1942. They just built Auschwitz in 1942.
- Q: Do you remember when you were first aware of what the fate of many Jews was?
- A: You see, when I received a letter from my parents in April 1942, but at that time we knew it already. The letter said, "We are going away -- we don't know where

it is because we didn't ask." At that time we got the information about Auschwitz and what Auschwitz meant.

Q: The gas ovens?

A: Yes, everything. That was in 1942!

Q: Did you make any friendships at Funfteichen? Have you kept up with any people that you were with at Funfteichen?

A: You mean after liberation?

Q: Yes, after liberation.

A: Yes. I got in touch with a lot of people from Funfteichen, yes.

Q: Do you still have contact with them?

A: No. Little by little that stopped. Who knows where they are!

Q: Do you have any idea what brought about your move from Funfteichen to Gross-Rosen in December of 1944, or in January of 1945, whenever it occurred?

A: Yes, the Russian front came closer. When the Russians came closer, they moved us closer west, closer to Germany. [Actually it appears that all the camps Abe was in were in pre-WWII Germany]. That was the only reason. [It appears that throughout that period, Germany was willing to use up some of its dwindling resources to hold onto the concentration camp inmates].

Q: You were moving ever further into the heartland of Germany?

A: Yes. In Gross-Rosen, we did not work! We were only a couple of weeks there. However, Gross-Rosen was one of the worst camps which I ever heard about.

Q: You marched from Funfteichen to Gross-Rosen? How long did it take you, do you remember?

A: About two or three weeks.

Q: What were the conditions along the march? It was in the wintertime?

A: Snow and everything. It was bad. Those who couldn't make it got shot right in the back.

Q: Were you ever sick?

- A: I was sick after the liberation but, no, I was never sick during my stay in the camps. Because of this I was lucky to survive. When I was sick, I was careful not to tell anybody. You couldn't survive if you got sick. That's it! That is the end of it.
- Q: Now at Gross-Rosen, that was just people locked up and starved.
- A: Gross-Rosen was only a concentration camp. Only that!
- Q: How many people were in Gross-Rosen, do you have any idea how many people were at Gross-Rosen?
- A: No, because they came in from all over. So I got to Gross-Rosen and from Gross-Rosen we went to Buchenwald. Gross-Rosen was a transit camp. You went to the washroom and they beat you when you wanted to take a bath. It was terrible.
- Q: You received no food, or just very little food?
- A: We hardly had any food at all. You got one tiny bit, and the next day you got hardly anything at all, because it was a transit camp.
- Q: So the food was highly irregular?
- A: No, we performed no work and we got no regular food. It was only a transit camp.
- Q: The food which you got, what was it? mainly bread? bread and soup? or what?
- A: I believe that it was just soup.
- Q: There was no work!
- A: Yes, and no food.
- Q: Were you still largely associated with Polish people?
- A: No!
- Q: Did you stay with a Polish group in Gross-Rosen?
- A: No!
- Q: An international group?
- A: An international group. There were a lot of gypsies, a lot of gypsies! At times the gypsies were worse off than Jews.

- Q: Were the gypsies in the same barracks as you?
- A: Yes, the same mix. Yes, everything was mixed!
- Q: In that month you were at Gross-Rosen, does anything stand out?
- A: We were there for two weeks! People just died!
- Q: Largely from hunger?
- A: From hunger! From beatings! They beat you day and night over there. That is all which they had to do.
- Q: Then, from some time in January of 1945, you were sent to Buchenwald?
- A: Yes, by train. We went by train to Weimar. [The atlas used by the transcriber shows two cities in Germany with the name of Weimar, one in East and one in West Germany. Obviously this reference is to the Weimar located in East Germany or the GDR, i.e., relatively close to Buchenwald].
- Q: How long did it take, do you recall?
- A: I think it was a three or four day trip.
- Q: Was there any food on the trip?
- A: No. No food at all on the train.
- Q: How about water?
- A: No, no water! The water was precious. Believe it or not, this was wintertime, so we ate snow.
- Q: I believe that you told me that you saw people drinking urine in order to survive?
- A: Yes. You see water is more precious than food! You can survive without food for a long time, but not without water. To be without water is the worst thing.
- Q: The train, the cattle car which took you to Buchenwald, was hard.
- A: We went out from Gross-Rosen. I would say about seven or eight thousand people. 600 or 700 died right on the train.
- Q: Were the cattle cars packed full of people?

A: Oh yes! They were so full that you couldn't sit [These cattle cars which had been used all over Europe in WWI and WWII were stamped to transport seven horses or 40 men each; when the U.S. Army used them they never put more than 32 men in each car. As far as concentration camp inmates, a quantity of 70 or 80 was not considered excessive in each car].

Q: Before you went to Buchenwald, did you know anything about Buchenwald?

A: No.

Q: Did you know that it was a Death Camp?

A: No.

Q: That there was a crematorium there?

A: No, we didn't know it. There was no way in which anyone could know anything.

Q: Can you close your eyes now and picture your arrival at Buchenwald?

A: I don't even have to close my eyes.

Q: Can you describe it? Was it at night or in the morning?

A: We arrived in Buchenwald about 11 o'clock. I was there for about four weeks. It took us about three days to get in. We had to wait three days to take a shower. Before you took a shower you could not go in the barracks. So three days we waited outside. Then we got a shower because people came from all the camps to Buchenwald. Some people went from Buchenwald to other places. Finally we got a shower in another block. The blocks were piled one right against another because they didn't want to lose so much space. There were no mattresses! You slept on straw. If you wanted to turn on your straw mattress the guy next to you had to turn. There was no more space! That was the case at night and during the day.

Q: When you got off that train in Buchenwald?

A: No, we went to Weimar! We walked from Weimar. That was not too far. It was about six or seven miles.

Q: Were there Germans along the way watching you?

A: Yes.

Q: What sort of expressions did they have on their faces?

- A: I tell you what expressions they had on their faces! Don't ask me! After my liberation I went back to Weimar and you couldn't find one German who knew about Buchenwald.
- Q: Nobody would admit anything?
- A: They knew nothing about Buchenwald. You could smell the crematoriums from Weimar, actually not only from Weimar but also from 25 miles away. They said, "Wier haben da garnichts gewusst!" which translates into, "We didn't know a thing!" We prisoners went to Weimar every day to go to work. They didn't know anything! You couldn't find one guilty German. Do you know who the best Germans were? The dead Germans were! That was so because after they said that they knew nothing about Buchenwald I had no sympathy for them. [After such repeated denials of the local population, the U.S. Army troops forced the German civilians to march the few miles from Weimar to see what was to be seen. Similar "Excursions" took place from Munich to Dachau and elsewhere].
- Q: As you walked from Weimar to Buchenwald there were Germans along the way?
- A: Oh, sure.
- Q: Did you see any expressions of sympathy?
- A: When we walked from Weimar to Buchenwald that first time, people could hardly walk after that train ride. One fellow took his coat off and he sat down. He knew that he would be shot! That is all, but nobody knew anything. Maybe they were afraid, or they weren't, but who knows.
- Q: OK, but when you walked into that camp of Buchenwald, you know that we knew a lot about Auschwitz and I suppose that other people knew a lot about Buchenwald, but I haven't read anything particular about Buchenwald. Was there a sign above the gate reading, "Arbeit macht frei" [translating into "Labor makes you free"]?
- A: First of all, Buchenwald was an international camp. There were people from all nations there. The first thing they did when we came to Buchenwald was that they asked, "Who is a Kapo?"
- Q: Meaning, who was a Kapo at the previous camp?
- A: Yes. You know who was a Kapo?
- Q: Yes.
- A: A criminal! So when someone said that they had been a Kapo, they took them right away and they finished him right in Buchenwald!



Q:” They killed him?

A: Right away!

Q: Why?

A: Because in Buchenwald the Kapos were inside Buchenwald, not outside. No German could come inside Buchenwald! They didn't like Kapos! They finished them. They gave them a cold shower and finish them. If somebody could deny it, they denied it, but whoever did not deny it and they knew that he was a Kapo, they finished him in Buchenwald.

Q: I am going to have to stop here, Abe. This tape is finished and I have kept you talking long enough. I have a lot more questions to ask at the next session.

A: OK.

Q: This is Charles Berry. It is February 11, 1982, and I am in the breakfast room in the home of Mr. Abraham Stine. This is the fourth of a series of interviews with Mr. Stine.

A: I forgot to mention to you something about Gross-Rosen. Gross-Rosen was a transit concentration camp. People from all nations were there. Sometimes we received a little bit of food at night and some days we did not receive any at all. People suffered so much from hunger, they were starving to death, that they ate people. People ate people.

Q: Did you see that frequently or was this an isolated incident?

A: This was not an isolated incident. There were people from the Ukraine. They just went to the meat and boiled the meat.

Q: They cooked it?

A: Yes. That was in Gross-Rosen.

Q: I assume that the people who were eaten were already dead.

A: Yes, I mean yes, sure. Many people died, you could see everywhere you would go piles of dead people.

Q: Did this have to be done in the middle of the night or did the authorities not care?

A: On the inside of the camp the only authorities were the Kapos, and of course people from camp.

Q: Did this happen in your barracks?

A: No, outside! We had no fire or anything like that in the barracks, no stoves, no heat, nothing. Of course there were no beds, nothing, people lay down on the floors.

Q: How do you attribute this only to the Ukrainians?

A: Because we saw it. We saw the people, we knew the people!

Q: Were they Jewish?

A: No. All Jewish people had to wear the Magen David [the Star of David, i.e., the six-cornered star which Jews were required to wear on the outer garments -- breast, left sleeve, and back]. So we knew that they were not wearing it.

Q: Did anyone try to stop them from doing this?

A: No. It wasn't any more than stopping them from eating grass. There was starvation over there. Gross-Rosen was a starvation place; this was the worst concentration camp. I heard that, it wasn't of only which I saw. I heard it from several people that this was the worst camp.

Q: You must have thought that truly you were in hell at that point!

A: I didn't think nothing, because we really didn't have the time to think.

Q: Yes.

A: We were concentrating on how to survive.

Q: Look, Abe, if you didn't want to work in Gross-Rosen, if it wasn't a work camp, how did you pass the day? Did they have some sort of routines that they put you through?

A: They sent you from the block, in this case the block was the barracks, to the washroom, from there back to the barracks, all day long. We didn't do anything because this was just a transit camp.

Q: You also said that what food there was came in highly irregular intervals.

A: There was no regulation. Whoever was stronger got hold of whatever little food there was! There was no regulation.

Q: Did you form any friendships at all at Gross-Rosen?

A: No!

Q: Is there somebody at all whom you remember from there?

A: No! I don't remember. I don't know how anybody should survive.

Q: Did you mainly stay with Polish Jews in Gross-Rosen?

A: No.

Q: Or was it all mixed together?

A: No, in the blocks, we were only together with Polish Jews.

Q: Now, on the last tape, you described your trip to Buchenwald, in the midst of winter, from Gross-Rosen, by train. You said that it took two to three weeks, if I remember correctly. I may be wrong about that, but that is what I think.

A: No, no, no! From Gross-Rosen it took about one week to Buchenwald.

Q: About a week?

A: Yes, about a week.

Q: You had no food on the train?

A: No. When we got on the train we got what I believe to be one pound of bread.

Q: You had to stand up the entire way?

A: Yes! We were packed tightly, one against the other. There was no place to sit. People just drank urine.

Q: And melted snow?

A: Yes, melted snow, if we got it. That was nothing unusual.

Q: Did people die in the car you were in?

A: I would say that about six percent or seven percent of the people died.

Q: There wasn't any place to lay them down?

A: No. Who ever fell down was laying down with the dead.

- Q: Now, at Buchenwald, as I remember what you said, when the train pulled in there was -- no, it didn't pull in there, it pulled into Weimar, and then you marched into Buchenwald. However, when you arrived at Buchenwald, there was no separation immediately to the crematoria or immediately to the barracks?
- A: No, there was no separation. Some people went to the crematoria to die, that what you heard was in Auschwitz. [Auschwitz was by then far to the east, it was east of Gross-Rosen and they had traveled due west from Gross-Rosen to Buchenwald]. The separation was in Auschwitz. My wife was in Auschwitz. Separation also occurred in Majdanek.
- Q: So, everyone who was alive was marched to the barracks?
- A: Yes, everybody, but first of all they had to go through the wash barracks.
- Q: The delousing?
- A: Yes, the delousing! For some people that took a day, for some people that took up to three days. After this they had some young people, that means 13, 14, or 15 year old kids, in a special barrack. That was Block 66! That was the killer block. The rest of them they divided between the other blocks, or barracks.
- Q: Why did they separate the children?
- A: This I didn't know. I really didn't know. I heard, after the liberation, that there was a block which they called Children Block, that was Block 66.
- Q: Do you remember the number of the block you went to?
- A: It was 49!
- Q: Was that a mixture of everyone? Every nationality?
- A: No, only Poles.
- Q: Only Polish Jews?
- A: I will tell you now why I remember, and I will never forget it in my life. I remember that several days before Christmas, there were the Red Cross. I believe that I told you about it.
- Q: They gave you packages?
- A: Yes, they gave us packages. Directly delivered packages. Everybody received a package for Christmas, but not the Jews. Until today I will never give a penny to the Red Cross because that was not right. The Red Cross was a foundation, a

national foundation, and they are supposed to give to everybody, and if they can't do that they shouldn't give to anybody. A piece of bread or a piece of butter meant death or life. Here the people were receiving these packages and other people did not receive them. That was not right and if they didn't know about it, they should know it!

Q: Now that is interesting! I had never heard that before. I mean that I had never heard that there was that kind of discrimination.

A: I am not the only one, but all the people who managed to survive will tell you about it.

Q: Did the Red Cross official come in and distribute the packages?

A: No! They were not allowed inside the camp. Only the prisoners were allowed inside, that was the order. At the time when I was in Buchenwald, I didn't know too much about the Red Cross. After the liberation, we found out that the Red Cross was an international organization and everybody is donating to the Red Cross, including the Jewish people. I did not like this. That disturbs me very much to this day.

Q: If you were mixed up with everyone, from every nationality, were there any gypsies in Buchenwald?

A: Yes! Actually, not too many gypsies, because they killed the gypsies faster than the Jews.

Q: Were you ever associated with any gypsies in the five camps where you were?

A: Yes! Oh, yes! Most of that association took place in Gross-Rosen, next in Buchenwald. There they were concentrated with Jewish people. Other than they, there were only Jewish people there.

Q: Were there any political prisoners at Buchenwald?

A: There were lots of Germans, a lot of Germans, also French, American, and English people.

Q: Not Jewish? Not English-Jewish, not American-Jewish?

A: No, no, no! They were Jews and non-Jews.

Q: How do you suppose that would be? Did you know any Englishmen personally, or any Americans personally?

A: No, we didn't know any of them personally.

Q: Were they in your barracks, by chance?

A: I don't really recall. It was so long ago. However, we knew that there were Germans because when the real Germans [contrasting with Jewish-Germans], when they were in the camps had jobs inside. They worked in the kitchen, like blockobersters and that kind of thing, you know, politician type of job.

Q: Another persecuted group about which you don't read very much were the homosexuals. Did you ever see any homosexuals?

A: Yes, German homosexuals.

Q: In Buchenwald also?

A: Yes! At least I heard they were. I didn't actually see them.

Q: Would you say that. Other than the gypsies, there were any one particular group, besides the Jews, who might have received harsher treatment?

A: No, only the Jews and the gypsies!

Q: Was there any work detail at Buchenwald? Was it a work camp?

A: Yes, we went to Weimar every day to work.

Q: Every day?

A: Yes, every day.

Q: Marching?

A: Yes, marching!

Q: How many miles would you say that was?

A: Six miles!

Q: So it was a 12 mile round trip?

A: Yes!

Q: Morning and night.

A: Yes, we went to work.

- Q: What kind of work did you do?
- A: Any kind of work. Actually I personally did not go to Weimar. I was working not too far away from Buchenwald. They had a stone quarry. I worked there.
- Q: That was hard work.
- A: What was not hard work? Everything was hard work!
- Q: I thought that stone quarries were particularly hard work, particularly brutal.
- A: No, everything was hard.
- Q: So, what were you doing? Breaking stones up? Cutting stones from the cliffs, or what?
- A: I was helping to dig the stones, and loading them.
- Q: How big were the stones?
- A: They were different sizes. They were big enough so that someone had to help you.
- Q: What do you suppose they did with these stones? Were they using them for building?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: Did you ever have to pull the carts on which the stones were?
- A: No! Everybody had a different job.
- Q: So you stayed on the same job?
- A: Yes. I was doing the same job, that was digging and loading.
- Q: Who was supervising, a German or a Kapo?
- A: A Kapo! Only Kapos, they provided the supervision.
- Q: Did they have whips?
- A: In Buchenwald they didn't. There the punishment being administered in camp was not so severe.
- Q: I didn't know that!

- A: That is right, the punishment being administered in Buchenwald was not so severe, because they had people there from all the nations.
- Q: What punishment was meted out was given by the Kapos, or by the Germans?
- A: Only by the Kapos. No SS man [the SS or Schutzstaffel were the black uniformed elite guards which provided special security for high level party functionaries as well as supplying concentration camp guards and even several specially picked army units] could go into any camp [at least that was in the camps Abe knows about]. They had picked their people and they worked for the Germans.
- Q: About the Kapos in Buchenwald, were they any different from Kapos in other camps? Did you find any more brutality or less brutality?
- A: Less brutality. I don't know for what reason, but definitely less brutality. You see, it was international. They had international Kapos. International people. That was a good possibility that it was getting towards the end of the war.
- Q: So you think that perhaps a mixture of people softened the brutality against the Jews at least somewhat?
- A: Not against the Jews, against all the people!
- Q: Or maybe the approach of the end of the war may have had something to do with it.
- A: Maybe it was the approach of the end of the war, I think so, because they were afraid for their own skins.
- Q: Now these are crucial months, January, February, and March of 1945, as far as the war is concerned. The invasion of Germany had begun. [Auschwitz is liberated by Russian army on Jan. 27, 1945. Soviet army breaches the outer defenses of Berlin on Jan. 31. American troops cross the Rhine River at Remagen on March 23, 1945. Buchenwald was freed on April 12].
- A: That was so on the Russian front. They were coming close to Germany.
- Q: Did you get war news? Were you aware of movements on the outside of camp? The battles?
- A: No, nothing! Only of what was happening in Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, a week before the liberation, they issued an order that all Jews should come out, that they were going to transfer the Jews from Buchenwald to other camps. I knew about it earlier. We had already heard some rumors about it. They took all



the Jews outside the camp into the forest to dig a big hole, and they shot all the Jews who went out. This was about three days before the liberation. So I was laying in a pile of dead people when I was liberated.

Q: Did you suspect that that would be the fate of the people?

A: We suspected that they would kill all the Jews because they took out only the Jews. They had asked all the Jewish people should go out. They said that they would transfer the Jewish people into other camps! So I was liberated in between a pile of dead people. There were such piles in Buchenwald at the liberation, as you see here in junk dealers lots, big piles of dead people.

Q: So there was a lot of starvation in Buchenwald also?

A: Yes, we were starving in Buchenwald!

Q: I asked that because a lot of the pictures which we have are pictures of walking skeletons, and most of these pictures come from Buchenwald.

A: Yes! I think that I still have some pictures. Pictures of skeletons! That was because we did not receive food regularly. We were walking skeletons.

Q: Were these two piles of corpses that you crawled in between or was it a pile of corpses which you crawled under?

A: I was laying on top of corpses for three days before the liberation.

Q: Do you know if other people did that also?

A: I don't know. I wasn't aware.

Q: What gave you the idea to do that?

A: Because I had nothing to lose. I couldn't walk! I weighed 85 pounds when I was liberated.

Q: Did that idea come to you all of a sudden or had you planned it?

A: The idea came because I had nothing to lose. I had nowhere to go. I couldn't go anywhere. I thought that, "If I am going to die, I might as well die here." That was enough of an idea.

Q: You had no Idea that liberation would come so quickly?

A: No, we didn't know it. You see, the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Division, I think, we were actually in territory between the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. [At that time, the

transcriber knows from personal experience, the advance of U.S. troops was so swift since everyone had been ordered to move ahead as opportunity presented itself, that units were constantly reassigned between armies as they moved from one administrative area to another. This free assignment made was not believed to go to Divisional level, but it may have in some cases; however, because of where Buchenwald is located, it is believed that Abe was talking about the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Armies rather than divisions]. About 24 hours before the liberation they put gas and oil next to us. They were already putting tape on the doors in preparation of putting gas in the barracks, they were already putting tape on all windows also. So they wanted to gas all the people. The U.S. troops were about 20 or 40 miles from Buchenwald. In Buchenwald they had underground radios. So what happened is that the troops bypassed the cities and liberated Buchenwald three days before they had been expected, or at least a day before. If they hadn't done that, all the prisoners would have been killed by gas, that is what their plan had been, to put gas in all the barracks.

Q: Were there a lot of underground radios in Buchenwald?

A: I don't know that, but I know that they had radios, because when the U.S. Army came in, they captured a lot of SS men still on the outside, behind the fence, getting the gas ready. Our wish was, in all the concentration camps, that we should be able to be liberated and receive enough food and to kill the Germans. Now we couldn't do this because the Americans protected them and they let us out. The food which they gave us! More than half the people died from the food after the liberation.

Q: From overeating?

A: Yes, from overeating and from eating too fast. Maybe not so much from overeating but eating too fast and too rich foods.

Q: Margarine and such things?

A: No, it was ham and everything like that. Rice was cooked with pork and everything. There was too much fat. We couldn't take it. I was by myself, after the liberation, in a hospital.

Q: I want to ask you about liberation in some detail in just a minute. However, I want to ask you a few questions for the period before liberation. Did you ever, ever, have any contact with anyone who was planning escape or resisting/

A: No!

Q: Or an uprising?

A: No, no! You couldn't escape anyplace. We were in Germany. Where could you escape to?

Q: I realize that it would be difficult.

A: No, no! I was not involved! No one that I know of was! [Escape would also not have been possible because of the absolute weakness of the prisoners]. No, no! At no time!

Q: Were there any Russian prisoners of war in Buchenwald?

A: Yes.

Q: I am asking that because a lot of the research now reveals that many of these Russian prisoners of war planned escapes and uprisings.

A: But not in Buchenwald.

Q: Not in Buchenwald?

A: There were only two camps where I was with prisoners of other nations. They were Gross-Rosen and Buchenwald.

Q: Was there a lot of epidemic at Buchenwald, such things as typhus and such?

A: I suffered from it after the liberation. I believe that this may have been caused by the food. I was in a hospital for three months after the liberation.

Q: Please describe to me, in as much vivid detail as you can possibly recall, the day of liberation. You were there, with those corpses. What did you hear? What did you see?

A: At one time an announcement came over the loudspeaker that "Buchenwald is liberated."

Q: In what language was that? Was it in German? In a lot of languages?

A: In Polish and French. Yes, I believe that it was in Polish and Yiddish and German. We also saw that the Americans took the SS with them. That is all we saw.

Q: Now, when did you come out from the pile of corpses? When you heard those announcements?

A: No, no! I was still afraid then! I still lay still the whole afternoon. This was Tuesday morning, April 11, and I still laid there a whole day.

Q: Did you come out that night?

A: Yes, I came out at night, when I saw that everything was quiet. I saw already the American Army coming.

Q: OK. I am trying to put myself in the place of one of these U.S. soldiers coming into the camp and one of the prisoners, there really must have developed rather quickly some sort of organization to get people fed.

A: The first thing which happened is that the Red Cross came by. That was the American Red Cross! They had kitchens with food. This food was poison to us.

Q: Yes, because you had been starved for so long.

A: The people had no knowledge how to look after us. The American Army had no knowledge how to react, how to feed these people. What we really needed was a piece of bread.

Q: The first American whom you saw was passing through a line to get food?

A: The first thing was the Americans coming with the kitchens and passing food out.

Q: Were there a number of doctors there? American M.D.s?

A: I guess so. We really didn't know. I remember that there was one German doctor. He had also been in camp. Later on he was working with the American Red Cross. They had an ambulance (Abe is groping for the word, calling it a "hospital on a truck").

Q: Did they organize the liberated inmates for questioning?

A: No.

Q: Did they want to talk to each of you individually?

A: No, I was taken to the hospital right away, one day or two days after liberation, because I was very sick.

Q: With food poisoning or with typhus?

A: From the food! I know that because I was laying there for several days without food.

Q: Now the hospital you were taken to, was that one of these truck hospitals in the camp?

- A: They built a major hospital right away in the camp, I was there for three months.
- Q: Right there in the camp?
- A: Right in Buchenwald, yes!
- Q: Were you conscious all that time or were you in and out of consciousness?
- A: I was conscious all the time. I couldn't walk.
- Q: You said that you weighed 85 pounds then?
- A: Yes, 85 pounds. At that time I was 25 years old.
- Q: Did you go on a special diet to gradually regain your weight?
- A: Yes.
- Q: I mean, did they quickly realize that they had done wrong with the food? [in the beginning, there had been no knowledgeable medical staff there, only soldiers who believed that if you saw hungry people, you fed them].
- A: Oh yes, later on they gave us all different kinds of food. The worst thing, I believe, was this pork with the rice, they certainly did give us enough!
- Q: Yes, that is very greasy food.
- A: You know, people couldn't fill up their stomachs.
- Q: Now, in this three month period that you were in the hospital, did you also have typhus?
- A: No, no, no!
- Q: That was even later?
- A: No, this was after the liberation.
- Q: So you had typhus and the food problem, all at the same time?
- A: Yes, at the same time.
- Q: Did the Americans talk a lot to you? Did they question you about your experiences? Was there a team of investigators who were trying to trace families?

- A: No, there just was a Jewish chaplain. He came in. He gave us food, special food because this was, by then, just before Passover [the Jewish major Holy Day celebrating the anniversary of the exodus from Egypt, under Moses when Jews eat unleavened bread, i.e., matzo, and other special foods]. He gave us matzo and other kosher foods. He brought those into the hospital for us. He didn't ask many questions at all, really no questions at all.
- Q: Do you remember his name?
- A: Sheckter, Captain Sheckter! [this spelling is only approximate].
- Q: Have you ever had any contact with him since?
- A: Yes. He was here the last time when we had a Speaker for Holocaust Day. He spoke about the chaplain's function. Do you recall?
- Q: Yes, I do remember!
- A: Yes, he told about visiting people from Buchenwald and other camps.
- Q: How rapidly after the liberation did you gain weight? After three months, how much did you weigh?
- A: I don't know. I don't remember. Later, in August, after I had been discharged from the hospital, actually a month after my discharge from the hospital, I went to Poland.
- Q: That quickly?
- A: Yes.
- Q: In these three months during which you were in the hospital, were you trying to make plans about what to do in your future?
- A: I didn't make any plans because I knew that I had nobody, no family. We were living on a day- to- day basis.
- Q: Yes, that is what I am trying to get at, how things changed from day- to- day.
- A: No, we still didn't know nobody, we didn't have any basis to make plans.
- Q: So your mentality was to live on a day- to-day basis?
- A: Yes, that's it. So first I went to Poland, as soon as I regained my health.
- Q: Wait a minute! What did you do in the four weeks after you left the hospital?

- A: I went to Weimar. I was living in Weimar.
- Q: Who with?
- A: With friends.
- Q: In an apartment?
- A: Yes, in an apartment. However, the American Army made an exchange with the Russian army. You know that the American Army liberated Buchenwald. However, later they exchanged territory. So the Russians took over! At that time, I was already living in a private place. About four weeks later we went back to Poland to look for relatives. First I came to my home city Zabkowice, and I couldn't find anybody. That is where I met the fellow who asked me, "Are you still alive?" he didn't ask me where I had been, he could think of nothing else but to ask me that question! That was asked by a friend whom I had left behind, in the place where I was born and raised. After I heard this question, I took the train, on the same day, and went back to Germany.
- Q: To Weimar?
- A: No, to Germany. To the American Sector. Weimar, by then, was already in the Russian Zone.
- Q: When you went back to Zabkowice, you did see people whom you had known?
- A: Oh yes! Not Jewish people!
- Q: Not Jewish but gentile people. They didn't know you?
- A: They didn't want to have anything to do with me! They claimed that they didn't know me. Some of them had been neighbors.
- Q: On that one day, did you run into any other Jews who had come back?
- A: No. You see, that was such a small town.
- Q: Yes, there were 70 families?
- A: Yes, there were 70 families. On the day on which I was there, I walked into the house of my neighbors.
- Q: Did you feel any difference in the attitude or treatment of the Russians toward you, as a liberated prisoner, one who had suffered greatly, and of the Americans toward you?

A: They were hard in principle.

Q: Well how, for instance?

A: The first thing, the Americans gave us enough to eat. We got nothing from the Russians. I preferred going to the Americans. After this, I was in Weimar, and they were rough. Their roughness was like day and night as compared to the Americans. For example, you couldn't go everywhere you wanted to. You had to get permission for everything. I was with them for only four weeks.

Q: What contact did you have with Germans during those four weeks in Weimar?

A: Lots of it! 99 percent of my contacts were with Germans.

Q: Did you talk to them a lot?

A: Yes, I talked to them, but nobody knew about Buchenwald!

Q: No?

A: Nobody knew.

Q: Nobody would admit it?

A: Yes! They really made the statement, "Nobody knew!" You could smell the crematoriums 25 miles away. We went to work in Weimar, but they didn't know that Buchenwald existed. "Wier sind nicht schuldig," i.e., we are not guilty; "Wier haben garnichts gewusst," i.e., we didn't know anything! These were the expressions they used often.

Q: Were you angry at these Germans? Were you full of resentment and still wanting to kill them?

A: You couldn't.

Q: I know that you personally couldn't, but did you find yourself wanting to?

A: The answer is yes, very much so!

Q: How could you feel otherwise? Did that feeling stay with you for a long time?

A: Yes. Still until today. I will not go back to Germany, I will not go back to Poland. I will not go back because of the hatred! I won't go to Poland because of the people. I hate Poles! The same applies to Germany. Lots of Jewish people could survive in Poland and I know it because I went to Poland and I heard from



many people who went to Poland that a lot of Jewish people were hiding during WWII, and couldn't survive among the Polish people because they snitched on them.

Q: That is right! They turned them in, killed them.

A: Poland used to have a Jewish population of 10%, that means three and a half million out of a population of 35 million, before the war. When I went back to Poland, there are very few.

Q: I think that the population is about six thousand today, that is Jews in Poland.

A: Yes, today there are about five to six thousand. That is all. They are all older people. And they still blame the Jews about what is happening in Poland today. The Jews have no power, nothing at all to say, but they still blame the Jews! This is how Poland was

Q: It hasn't changed!

A: It hasn't changed and it will never change.

Q: They haven't learned any lesson.

A: All of the punishment which they are getting today is not enough, at least not in my book. I don't know about you or the other people, but in my book, they deserve much more!

Q: That day then, in Zabkowice, where you were treated so rudely, inhumanely by neighbors, was so bad that you couldn't wait to get out so that you left right now.

A: I waited the same day for a train to get out.

Q: However, what options were open to you? What made you decide to go to the American zone rather than to stay in Weimar where your friends were?

A: Because we heard that there wasn't much, because America was very popular in the forties and even before. After the liberation it was very popular. America was known to be the best country, and in my book, it is still the best country in the world.

Q: Where exactly did you go when you went to the American Zone?

A: I was living in Regensburg.

Q: Now what took you there? Why that and not some other town?

A: Because Regensburg was not too far from the Polish border, and from the border with Czechoslovakia. It was about 25 to 30 miles from the Russian-Polish border.

Q: Did you fall in with a group of other people who became your friends?

A: I connected up with people who were in different concentration camps.

Q: However, you were not in what was called a displaced persons camp?

A: No! Where I was in Regensburg, that was not a camp.

Q: You were living in an apartment.

A: Yes, in an apartment.

Q: With friends?

A: Yes, with friends. There was a DP (displaced persons) camp about 10 to 15 miles away.

Q: Where did you get the money to pay the rent or to buy food?

A: I started to do business. Black market selling [that was not legal]! I did anything I could.

Q: But to sell anything you had to start with some stock. You had to start with something to sell.

A: We started by getting a little bit of food [in the late spring of 1945 everything was scarce in Germany, particularly food] and we sold it. It was like a trading place, and it went on from there.

Q: Were most of these people doing the same thing?

A: Yes, most of them were doing the same thing, because we had no resources to get money from anywhere. It was just like small children. We were just like small children.

Q: Now what intrigues me about this process is that your past had been totally erased. When did you begin to plan for the future? When did you begin to make some sort of plan, instead of just living from day to day?

A: I really wouldn't know. We just took things from a day- to- day basis, as a matter of fact we still were.

Q: However that changes somewhere along the line.

A: No, maybe it changes, but slowly. Sure, it had to be changing, but the beginning was on a day- to- day basis because for the years where we had been in these camps it brought us to it. We just lived day by day. When I was liberated, I was 25 years old and I had no place to go. I was all alone. My wife was 20 when she was liberated.

Q: Where did you meet Judy? [That obviously is Abe's wife].

A: In Regensburg.

Q: In this period immediately after returning from Poland?

A: A few months later. She had nobody and I had nobody! We wanted children. We got married, and that's it.

Q: What did you decide to do?

A: We decided not to stay in Germany. As soon as we had a door open to go away from Germany, we wanted to leave all that behind. America was the first place where we could go.

Q: You never considered Palestine? [Palestine was closed to legal immigration of Jews until the Jewish state of Israel was established in 1948].

A: No, we didn't.

Q: Why? Do you remember discussing it or thinking about it?

A: I don't remember, but it would have been a hardship again. We felt that we had had plenty of hardship.

Q: Did any Zionists come through to try to recruit you?

A: Yes, they tried. It was like the religion which we had lost. I used to be very religious as a boy, but we lost everything during the war because we saw what happened to the Jewish people. We just remembered the tradition, the Jewish tradition, and not the religion, because we saw what happened. In the atmosphere of the Holy Days I didn't really believe in it, in the religion. I thought that we didn't have a God. Believe that or not.

Q: Yes, I believe it. I think that that is easy to feel after you have been through what you have been through.

A: We didn't believe it! And I had been raised orthodox in the religion [i.e., practicing all the laws and edicts]. In the war I lost everything, all belief.

- Q: When you and Judy were married, were you married by a rabbi?
- A: Oh yes!
- Q: In Regensburg?
- A: Yes, in Regensburg.
- Q: How long did you stay there after you were married, before you came to the U.S.?
- A: We got married in 1946 and we came to the U.S. in 1950.
- Q: Oh, so you lived in Regensburg for four years? You were not still living by dealing in the black market?
- A: Oh no! In 1946, I got a license from the U.S. government to drive a taxi. I bought my car and ran a taxi service for the U.S. Army. I did that until 1950. I sold the taxi before I left
- Q: Well, that is a remarkable comeback, from 85 pounds on April 11, 1945, and a long period of illness, and not finding any family, and then, within five years, supporting a wife.
- A: And a child.
- Q: And a child. Your son was born in Regensburg? When was he born?
- A: In 1947. Then we came to America. We came to Cincinnati.
- Q: Let me ask you a question about those four years in Regensburg. Did you completely regain your health? You were never sick?
- A: No, I completely regained my health!
- Q: I am not going to put anything on this tape about coming to the U.S., because that is another entire story. There is no use beginning on this now, since I have only got about five minutes left to talk to you on this tape. So let us quit here and pick it up with coming to Cincinnati next time.

To the best knowledge of the transcriber, the follow-up interviews never took place, so the story of Abe Stine ends in Regensburg.

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