

Interview with Dr. Murray Weisman

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

Interviewer – Dr. Allan Spetter

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Q: My name is Dr. Allan Spetter and I am a member of the History Dept. at WSU in Dayton, Ohio. As part of the Oral History Project on the Survivors of the Holocaust who live in Dayton and the surrounding area I am beginning this interview on Monday evening, Jan. 28, 1980 at 7:30 P.M. at the home of Dr. Murray Weisman.

OK! What is your age?

A: 50.

Q: And exactly where were you born?

A: In Lodz, Poland.

Q: Where exactly is that?

A: That is about central Poland.

Q: I have a particular question I want to ask: is that the area which was under Russian control or under German control when the country was divided in 1939?

A: Under German control.

Q: It was under German control from the beginning on. How would you describe the town where you grew up then, as far as cities, small town, rural or urban areas.

A: It is the second largest city in Poland, also second to Manchester in industrial production, in clothes and textiles.

Q: Do you know how large the population was?

A: I would say about one million people.

Q: Do you know when your family came to that city? Do you know how far back your family lived in that area?

- A: No. I know that my father came from Solzman.
- Q: He was born in Poland. You don't know how many generations back you go?
- A: No. No! I don't know much about my ancestors.
- Q: OK, neither he, nor your mother were born in the same city you were born in?
- A: Right! Probably.
- Q: How many brothers or sisters did you have?
- A: Two brothers and two sisters.
- Q: Any other family members who lived in your house?
- A: Just all of us. No aunts or uncles or anything.
- Q: In case this does not come up again. Have any of them survived?
- A: I have one sister who survived.
- Q: And she is where?
- A: She lives now in Minneapolis.
- Q: OK, she is also in the U.S. then. When did you come to the U.S.?
- A: In 1950.
- Q: When did you actually leave Poland?
- A: In Dec. 1939.
- Q: Where did you go from there?
- A: To Kadrup, with a train full of people. We went to Gleiwitz that was a camp in Germany.
- Q: Oh, you were actually in Germany in 1939?
- A: Yes.
- Q: And did you go back to Poland again?

A: No.

Q: You stayed in Germany throughout the war?

A: Yes, oh yes!

Q: OK, we will get back to that part again. How would you describe your parents' occupation?

A: My father was a teacher.

Q: Was he a Hebrew teacher? At what level?

A: For adults. In a Yeshivah.

Q: Did your mother work outside the house?

A: No, just at home.

Q: What was his education? Did he have a formal education?

A: Yes, he had a formal education but I don't know at what level.

Q: I mean beyond H.S. level?

A: Well in the Jewish town you did not measure this in H.S. You measured it in general such as "Gelehrter Mensch."

Q: Did your mother have any (special) education?

A: Similar, just in general terms, as was customary at that time, not formal but public schooling, and not much.

Q: How would you describe their religious life practices? Were they observant?

A: Orthodox.

Q: Did they attend Synagogue regularly?

A: Oh sure.

Q: Did they keep kosher?

A: Yes! Absolutely.

Q: And they celebrated the Sabbath and all the holidays?

A: Yes!

Q: Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

A: No, but at the time for that I was in a concentration camp.

Q: That is right, after all you were born in 1930. So you have never been Bar Mitzvahed?

A: No! I was Bar Mitzvahed here, together with my daughter.

Q: When was that?

A: A couple of years ago.

Q: Oh really! Do you recall the exact year that that was?

A: In 1978, in Dec. '78. My daughter is now 16.

Q: She was Bat Mitzvahed...and you were Bar Mitzvahed at the same time?

A: Yes, at the same time, at Temple Israel.

Q: At Temple Israel by Rabbi Bloom?

A: Yes.

Q: Very good! What was the principal language spoken in your home?

A: Yiddish and Polish.

Q: No Hebrew?

A: No. We spoke Hebrew on special occasions like the prayer table or such.

Q: Yiddish was your primary language? Yiddish more than Polish?

A: Yes. Yiddish more than Polish.

Q: You grew up knowing Yiddish then, and Polish?

A: Yes.

Q: Did your parents speak any other language?

- A: My father spoke a little German.
- Q: Did you know German?
- A: Yes, I could speak German.
- Q: Any other language which you could speak at all? At that time, before the war?
- A: No, a little Hebrew.
- Q: How would you classify yourselves in the community? It says here rich or poor but basically your economic status is what is meant. Do you remember?
- A: We were not rich. We just made a modest living, by European standard, we were average.
- Q: Your father was the sole source of income?
- A: Correct.
- Q: But you still had what you think was a decent standard of living?
- A: By the standards of the time. We didn't have any refrigeration any luxuries.
- Q: No indoors plumbing?
- A: We had no radio! Yes, we had water.
- Q: But no bathrooms?
- A: Yes. We had electricity but we cooked on coal. This was the average standard of living.
- Q: You said that you lived in a major city? Would you classify it as having been a ghetto, within the city -- that is, before the Germans came and the war. Was it an all Jewish neighborhood you lived in?
- A: It was a section where you could say it was mixed: Polish and Jewish. It was not an exclusive ghetto.
- Q: Since it wasn't, did your parents relate to non-Jews?
- A: No!
- Q: Not at all?

- A: No, basically just within the Jewish community. We had Polish neighbors right next door but we associated very little.
- Q: Did you say that you were from Lodz?
- A: Lodz. "LODZ"
- Q: Is it a different name today?
- A: No. The Germans did (give it another name) during the occupation. It was called Lismonstadt.
- Q: But it is known as Lodz today?
- A: Yes.
- Q: To what extent was the synagogue important in your life? Your life as a child?
- A: Of course, it was the focus of our lives.
- Q: Did you attend regularly?
- A: Regularly, no question about that, we had to. My brothers and sisters went to the Zionist organization instead of the school, when I was small. But when my father was there we went to school.
- Q: How about the Jewish community? Did you take part in the Jewish community as a child?
- A: No -- there were not the kind of organized activities we have here. That was not there.
- Q: Was your family involved in any other Jewish organizations or religious associations aside from the synagogue? Was there anything, such as other institutions within the Jewish community they were involved with?
- A: No. There were several traditional ones and some Zionist organizations.
- Q: Were they active in Zionist organizations?
- A: Yes, my father and my older brother were active in Zionist organizations.
- Q: What about other institutions such as I believe there were in Poland, the Yiddish theater. Were they involved with that at all?
- A: No.

Q: Cultural events?

A: No. We went to plays. I went to some with my parents but not participating.

Q: Were your parents involved in politics at all?

A: No.

Q: Let's now go to another area. You might want to make extensive comments on this, or brief comments. How would you describe your childhood to sum it up? I mean as a very young child?

A: you have to understand the standards which prevailed at that time. We had a comfortable existence within the environment prevailing at that time. You know the focus was on education -- we went to public school and we went to Cheder, there was very little time for play, but those were the cultural mores. The family life was very satisfying because of the family.

Q: Were you the youngest child?

A: Yes, I was the youngest.

Q: And you had a close relationship with your two brothers and two sisters?

A: Yes, I did. There were five of us.

Q: Is there anything which stands out particularly in your childhood. Any special events or event that stands out?

A: Not one event, but a lot of them, for instance: Friday nights, being together as a family -- that was always a very pleasant experience, Shabbos -- the whole family had to be there we stayed together, even if we did not have lots to eat during the week, but Shabbos was a very pleasant moment -- we sat at the table and we sang the songs, we discussed a lot of things. Friends used to come in, friends of my brothers and sisters. Our home used to be full of social and cultural discussions. I learned a lot of things through osmosis, even if I was small, but I learned a lot of things by those discussions. This was something I enjoyed very much.

Q: Now about you. I know that you attended school -- what kind of school?

A: I attended public school up to I think the third grade. You see in Poland you start attending public school at seven years.

Q: Did you go to a secular school or to a religious school?

A: Both. Public school started at seven, but religious school, Cheder, started at three.

Q: Was there any problem for Jewish kids going to the regular schools?

A: No, it was mandatory.

Q: Otherwise said, there were Jewish and non-Jewish children in the same school?

A: In the same school.

Q: But you also went to Cheder separately?

A: Yes, correct.

Q: That was after school?

A: After school or before school or both.

Q: How far did you get in school?

A: In public school I finished three and a half grades from seven to nine.

Q: And then your education was interrupted, of course.

A: And in Hebrew, of course, I went to Cheder.

Q: What language was spoken in school by the majority of the pupils?

A: Polish, at school, of course.

Q: Did the Jewish children speak Polish?

A: Yes.

Q: And not Yiddish?

A: Among ourselves we spoke Yiddish but the prevailing and only language was Polish.

Q: Now what language do you speak today? How many languages do you speak?

A: I speak Polish and French and German.

Q: Where did you learn French?

A: I lived in France for five years after the war?



Q: Oh, that is where you lived after the war. All right what languages can you read?

A: The same and I understand them also, but not as fluently as I used to because it has been years since I used them except for some correspondence which I have to take care of.

Q: To what extent did you associate with non-Jewish boys and girls in school?

A: Very little. We sat together, but very little interaction after school.

Q: Was there animosity? Did you sense that in the non-Jewish kids?

A: Definitely. Oh there has always been in Poland.

Q: Even at that age?

A: Oh yes they castigated us Jews. Almost fights continuously.

Q: Even at that age? That was inside school and outside?

A: Yes, inside the school.

Q: All right. Now here is another category; we are getting into the more important areas. Prior to the war and the Nazi occupation, to what extent were you aware of anti-Semitism in Poland? You are very young at the time -- what were you aware of?

A: We were aware of it because there was a great deal of animosity between the Polish and the Jewish kids. Almost fights! Usually avoiding fights! Running away from fights.

Q: Did you have to stick together, so to speak?

A: Yes, going to school several kids always walked together. And going home we planned to go together. Going into an exclusively non-Jewish neighborhood, we were afraid to go. We wouldn't go there alone.

Q: Was there an understanding that you really should not come into those neighborhoods?

A: Well, if you went in it was a risk, as it is when you go to Harlem today.

Q: Let me ask you something; were you easily identified as Jews? You weren't Orthodox and wear payas and yamulkas?

- A: Yes, but most of the European Jews were identified by how they dressed. Particularly the boys.
- Q: You did dress differently from the other kids? In what respect?
- A: First of all, we had to wear a hat all the time.
- Q: Oh you did? That is Orthodox!
- A: Orthodox, yes. We wore a long coat, nearly a dress. But in later years, we gradually discarded this and took these things off.
- Q: Are you talking about the late 1930's, but you still dressed similarly to what we know as the Hassidim dress today. Is that the right kind of style you were wearing?
- A: There are gradation the extreme Hassids with the wide hats.
- Q: But it made identification easy. Were these black for instance?
- A: Yes, always black, but later we wore suits. But there were still features you could recognize. Distinguishing features between Jewish and non-Jewish kids. As a matter of fact, when I was small, I had blond hair, and I used to be embarrassed by people because they told me I am the gentile. I had a neighbor who was mute - - she identified me as being a gentile from the church who was ringing the bell. That was very embarrassing.
- Q: Do you recall specific incidents of anti-Semitism? Is there something particular which stood out in your mind?
- A: Yes, I remember in our immediate neighborhood, we lived in a big house as tenants.
- Q: In an apartment house?
- A: Yes, in an apartment house.
- Q: You did not own your own home?
- A: Right, in a big city we did not. We lived in the center of the city. There were always neighbors. Some gentile kids who used to fight with me. One time I carried a pan -- maybe I should not put this on a record -- but anyway he challenged me and insulted me. I lost control and hit him over the head with the pan.
- Q: Did you say a pen? (That is what the two references sounded like).

- A: A pan, a baking pan or something like that.
- Q: Oh, a pan like you cook in. All right! You hit him over the head with it?
- A: Over his head, or over his back. Later on his mother came into our house with an axe and wanted to kill me. My mother was barely able to protect me, she just stood in front of me.
- Q: Were there others, similar incidents at that time?
- A: Yes, for instance, another similar situation was the churches. You know after people come out of the churches we were ordered by our parents not to go outside, to stay off the streets because there were always a lot of beatings going on against Jews.
- Q: Did you have the impression that the clergy was stirring the people up?
- A: Definitely, definitely.
- Q: You knew what was going on?
- A: Definitely! The clergy was very anti-Semitic.
- Q: So this is within the community. Tell me did you read regular secular daily newspapers?
- A: Yes. Of course we had a rather good Jewish newspaper; but we read secular ones too.
- Q: In the press were you aware of things of an anti-Semitic nature?
- A: Absolutely, yes.
- Q: On a regular basis?
- A: Yes, anti-Semitic on a regular basis.
- Q: Was the press, as far as you know, controlled by the government? Was it censored?
- A: I don't know that...I cannot say that.
- Q: I am wondering whether these articles were instigated by the government?

A: Well, I don't know whether they were or not. I can only go by what I could observe. I couldn't go behind the scenes. I was nine years old at the time. I remember, for instance, if there was a special anti-Semitic article, we discussed it at the table, at home. For example there was a Father Chechaek, I remember, who wanted to outlaw shicke.

Q: That is the ritual killing of the beef?

A: Yes, but most people didn't know how it was done. He wrote a lot of articles about it and I remember a caricature in the paper. That caricature said, "Maybe we should go on four legs so that they have pity on us and wouldn't kill us. They kill Jews but here they are afraid to kill an animal." You know they are cartoonists and he drew a Jew with a bow going on all four, and the other asked him: "Why do you go on all four (legs)?" So that is the answer he gave. So this is the type of thing that was in the paper!

Q: How did your family react to these things? Did they get worked up about it?

A: Oh, bitter! Really there is no way we can fight (against their public rabble rousing). Another instance I remember was: my older brother, one day came home from school, or whatever, and a gentile attacked him. He ran after him and he beat him on a street corner, and he fought back. Then the police came and they arrested the guy and they arrested my brother for beating a Pole. We had to pay a fine.

Q: Yes, he was fined?

A: Yes, another cartoon was that in Gallostor, during a pogrom. You know pogroms occurred (so MW said that the locale wasn't important) -- where a big gentile, you have a huge fellow, is complaining to the judge that the little, the small Jew attacked him. The Jew was sent to prison. This is the type of thing that was in the paper.

Q: In other words, it was almost a daily occurrence and you were aware of these things. Let us go on now, into the particularly relevant things. Do you recall when your city was occupied by the Nazis?

A: I think that it was a few days after the invasion of Poland.

Q: Very soon after September 1, 1939?

A: Yes, a few days.

Q: You were in central Poland?

A: Yes.

- Q: So they were in the middle of the country within a few days?
- A: Yes, two or three days.
- Q: What was the general reaction amongst the non-Jews? Are you aware of it in your town? How the Nazis were received? How the Poles felt about the German invasion?
- A: They said: "It's good for us! They are going to kill all the Jews! It's good for us! That was their reaction.
- Q: But did the Poles themselves fear what may happen to them? After all the Nazis were determined to destroy them also!
- A: No, they did not. They just had the kind of vengeful feeling that the Jews are going to get a tough deal.
- Q: They did not fear the Germans?
- A: No, no!
- Q: At least not initially? That was your impression.
- A: Well, initially you know the first couple of days, they, the Poles themselves, they robbed the stores. You know there were a lot of Jewish stores. And for days they took packages from the stores because most of the Jews ran away.
- Q: Which way did they go? Did they go east?
- A: Yes, toward Warsaw and east.
- Q: So Warsaw was east.
- A: Yes, it must be (actually Warsaw is nearly straight NE of Lodz).
- Q: Was there still a Polish army resisting at that time?
- A: No.
- Q: The resistance had ended?
- A: After a few days it had ended. Maybe there were some pockets of resistance.
- Q: I think that the war went on for about a month; but Warsaw, itself?

- A: No, it did not, about eight days at most.
- Q: But some people thought that they might be safer in Warsaw?
- A: Or in the Russian zone.
- Q: OK! That is what they were heading for?
- A: Yes, many people headed that way.
- Q: Did many of the Jews leave as far as you know?
- A: Oh yes. Many Jews.
- Q: Would you describe most of them as having left?
- A: No, not most of them. As a matter of fact, my father and myself were running, you know, and my older brothers, also.
- Q: Your family did leave?
- A: No, just the males, we left.
- Q: OK. That is interesting, because -- I heard this described before, but that was in Western Europe, that the men left and tried to relocate, then sent for the women...was that the idea?
- A: Yes.
- Q: But, what did you think might happen to the women left behind?
- A: We didn't know. We thought that, maybe they wouldn't bother them.
- Q: That is an important point. You thought that they were more after the men than after the women?
- A: Yes. Military, fighting and such.
- Q: In other words, they thought that they would take you in the army and that in some way, that would be it. Otherwise said: although you were Jewish you didn't really know what awaited you?
- A: No, we didn't know.
- Q: You thought that they might force you in the army?

- A: That is right --or they would take us to work, that they might take us to work camps.
- Q: It was obvious in, let us say in Sept. -- Oct., that no one knew what their plans were in the long run, for the Jews?
- A: There were wild rumors. Yes, they were. We started worrying about it because immediately when they came they killed here and there.
- Q: Some of them did already?
- A: Yes. Some of them were killed already.
- Q: But you and your older brothers and your father went east?
- A: We all went east, yes.
- Q: Did you get to Warsaw?
- A: No, we got close to Warsaw and there were signs on our road, you see we had no transportation.
- Q: Were you walking?
- A: We were on foot.
- Q: How far is Warsaw from Lodz?
- A: I have no idea. (Actually the straight line is about 60-70 miles or about 100 km, which is the guess Murray made later). But on the way, masses of people were walking. They were attacked and killed. So we went into hiding and eventually we went back.
- Q: So you never made it to Warsaw? And you went back to your own cities? How long a period was this?
- A: We were about one week on the road.
- Q: When you got back, was your family still there?
- A: Still there.
- Q: So, I had the conception of many of the Jews and of your family being taken. At that point, would say there were wild rumors? When you came back to Lodz you had no idea what fate awaited you?

- A: Well, we figured instead of being killed there, we might as well be killed at home. That was the reasoning. To be together as a family.
- Q: So, this says now: "how did this affect your life?" I think that this category is unique for you because I want to get, if it is possible, the blow by blow account of what happened to you personally, chronologically. But this says: "what happened to your family and to you after the occupation?" That is where I would like to get into chronological order. There are a lot of other questions; but some of them relate to family, but I want to know what camp you ended up in and it is your story so I will just let you talk about what happened to you and relate what happened to your family, also.
- A: We went back to the city. At that time we already had orders that you couldn't go out after 5 P.M., that you had to stay home at night. You couldn't congregate. Foods staples were getting scarce. You had to fight for a piece of bread. You immediately had to wear the yellow star and life was steadily getting more gruesome.
- Q: Did they create a ghetto immediately?
- A: No, no. Then they started building the ghetto. It didn't grow overnight. During the period from the beginning of the occupation to about Dec. 1939, they did a lot of preliminary. They built the ghetto and confined a lot of people into other areas. We stayed in our place. The place where we lived was part of the ghetto. So once the ghetto was started, the food was limited. Fear was constant. Everyday they came to the houses and pulled people out. They took them to work and killed them in the process. So we tried to go out as little as possible. Commerce and activities like that came to a complete stop.
- Q: You say that people disappeared regularly every day. They never came back?
- A: That is right. That is right.
- Q: Well did you know that they were being eliminated?
- A: We heard from neighbors. We did not know where they went.
- Q: I mean they could have been somewhere else? Right? You are not sure?
- A: Yes. They could have been somewhere else. But we also heard that when they came back some had been beaten and mutilated, beaten with heads open.
- Q: You saw some?
- A: Oh yes sure. They came back mutilated and that created, of course, fear and we didn't want to go out and minimize (our exposure). But of course, we had to eat -



- we had to go to the bakeries to stand in line to get a piece of bread. Of course, then there was the question of money. Then they started rationing. So there were all the things that went into effect. Until Dec, and I don't remember what date it was, one of the mornings I went to Cheder -- the public school was out -- but Cheder was still being maintained, probably the 5th, if I remember, I don't remember how many blocks that were to Cheder (here Murray seems to have utilized a detailed map to indicate locations to Allan, since the actual locations did appear to matter). We lived here, and here was the Cheder and as soon as I walked out there was here, in the street trucks -- and everyone who came out they put on a truck.

Q: Otherwise said, if you went into the street you ran an additional risk to be picked up. Randomly on the street?

A: At this particular time.

Q: Oh, you are talking about just this one time?

A: Yes, they put me on the truck and they put others on it, until it was filled up. So here I went. That is the end of my family. That is the end of everything.

Q: Oh, that is the way it happened?

A: Yes!

Q: You just disappeared one day? And so your family never did know what happened to you after that afternoon?

A: No, no, nor did I know what happened to my family.

Q: And you never heard from them again?

A: Well, I heard from the other side from different people who went through similar experiences and who were captured later what happened to my family.

Q: But you never saw them again? Not one member of the family?

A: No, never again except for the one sister who survived.

Q: And this sister you located only after the war?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you find her through authorities?

A: What happened is that I wrote to the city from where I was captured. A postcard and she picked up the postcard there. She was there.

Q: She was still in Poland?

A: No, she was in a concentration camp and went home. She went home...I didn't.

Q: She went back to the city she was from?

A: Yes.

Q: So she was in Poland then?

A: She was back in Poland because she wanted to see some family and that is how she thought she would go about it.

Q: Was she married at the time?

A: No, she tried to find the rest of the family.

Q: That is how you found her?

A: Yes, I didn't want to go back to Poland.

Q: That will come up later. So we will talk about that. Now, how did you know what happened to each of your other family members?

A: Well, I gathered some history and came to some conclusions from talking to other people. No direct proof about anyone.

Q: But you just know that they did not survive?

A: Yes.

Q: So that is about December 1939.

A: In December 1939 the truck was full. Here was the street where we lived and here was the truck with S.S. men around it. And here the S.S. men blocked every door and went into the houses.

Q: It was S.S. men who took you into the truck?

A: Well, I could not recognize the uniform at the time. I actually still don't know. But they came with their guns.

Q: And picked you up just at random? To fill their quota?

- A: Yes, the truck was full of people and all kind of people, old, young, all men, no women.
- Q: Now that is an interesting point you brought up. They treat the women and the men differently and you had thought they would.
- Q: Yes, yes, I never thought about it.
- Q: They were looking for workers?
- A: That is what the men said: "Apparently they are taking us to work," that is all the men who captured were not very old. "They will feed us and you have to go to work." Some people even knew what they did in WWI, they related this to us.
- Q: They were trying to reassure you, you then? Were you very much afraid?
- A: Yes, in the beginning I found more excitement, than fear -- more thrill than fear.
- Q: Really, you were not aware of what was happening?
- A: Not fully. As a young boy I thought, "what the hell, I will have a new experience."
- Q: You were only nine years old and they took you off in the truck.
- A: It was more excitement than fear, you know. First time away from house without father, but after a little while I realized that it's not a joke and I started crying. I started hollering. The men started reassuring me. So it was December and they took us out in the truck to an area where a train was waiting. They took us to a railroad line, it was not a station, but just the rails on an embankment. A long train was standing and they chased off from the truck and they made us run, like exercise, back and forth. There was heavy snow, and then on the train.
- Q: Now you are on the train?
- A: Yes, and at that time I was hungry and fearful and I didn't even know what had happened. Apparently I fell asleep when I woke up the next day we were in a camp. They pulled us off, hundreds of people and showed us a pile of straw and they gave us sacks to fill and places where we can sleep. In that process, if someone did not move fast enough they shot him.
- Q: You saw people that had been shot?
- A: Oh yes, they shot people right and left like nothing!

Q: And did it begin to dawn on you what was happening?

A: Oh yes.

Q: I have to keep reminding myself that you were very young, nine years old.

A: Oh yes, then I stopped to think: "it is hell, that is what is happening. It's no joke."  
So they put us in a barracks.

Q: Did you know where you were at this time?

A: It was Gleiwitz, I think.

Q: Did you ever find out to be sure?

A: I know the name.

A: Yes, that was in Germany (it is in the part of Germany which Poland annexed immediately after WWII to compensate for areas it ceded to Russia) between Poland and Frankfurt a/Oder. We were located there. Three miles from there they had a camp with several thousand people. There we worked on a road. Then they shifted us from one thing to another. They moved us around. Finally, in 1942 they sent us to Auschwitz (Auschwitz is located near Krakow).

Q: Now, all this time, from let us say the end of 1939 to 1942 you were working as a ten year-old boy. What did you do?

A: Well, I did a variety of activities. In the first couple of days we had to go into the woods in the snow. We had to stomp out the snow we didn't know why. I guess they stomped out the snow to measure the roads. They had a purpose we didn't know anything about. I didn't understand why we did this. Then we chopped the woods and pulled out the stumps.

Q: You were building a road, in other words.

A: Yes, that is essentially what it was.

Q: It is hard for me to understand how much labor a ten year-old boy can do.

A: Well you get surprised about what you can do under those circumstances. I didn't do as much as they wanted me to do but I still did work. Well, you have to move in order to stay alive, so you do -- and to keep warm. So you do with the shovel even if you take it from one side and move it to the other side.

Q: Would you describe this as a work camp then?

- A: That was a concentration camp, but we worked.
- Q: Otherwise said; there was no intention of exterminating the people who were there at that time?
- A: You see, it had the same characteristics. What they did is that every Friday they had a "Aufstellung" -- where you had to stand straight.
- Q: So the weak ones they did do that (they killed them)?
- A: Oh yes.
- Q: That means that there were people being killed all along.
- A: Oh yes.
- Q: A very large number would you say?
- A: A very large number. Every couple of weeks there were people who got sick, couldn't work. The food was rather mediocre. We had a slice of bread in the morning and a bowl of soup in the evening. That was it. It was very difficult to keep going. Well, people fell who couldn't work. So there was a barracks where we could go for medical advice. They let you stay in the barracks during the day. Two weeks to the day we arrived they made a Aufstellung. You know they had a square where they counted us, when we realized that they allowed us to stay longer than necessary, just in the middle of the square. Then an extra group of soldiers came and saluted. So they picked up 27 people and we had to watch. There were two lines of S.S. men -- military people with axes. Literally everybody who was going up on the truck and a fellow with an axe hit him wherever it pleased him. 27 people -- all of those who had said they were sick.
- Q: Good "G-d"! That is after they had already been treated by the medical unit.
- A: They had not been treated! They were left to stay in the barracks, instead of working.
- Q: Oh! In other words, they let them stay in the barracks and then they killed them since they said they couldn't work.
- A: And they said everybody who will refuse to work will have this happen to him.
- Q: You remember specifically that it was 27 people?
- A: Yes.

Q: Do you know when this occurred? Time? I asked you before about the time but it is hard to tell exactly.

A: Not the exact date. We counted the weekdays.

Q: But what month and year this was?

A: No.

Q: But you were in this particular camp through '40 and '41.

A: No, they shipped us. We were about six months to one year, you see when a group cleared out their job they were sent to another place.

Q: But you were in the same general area of Gleiwitz, in 1940 and 1941?

A: Yes, in the general area. To all the 27 people with blood flowing -- streaming surrounded by machine guns on both sides. They took the truck to a hole which we had already dug. They dumped the bodies out. Then they came back with the empty truck and said, "any one else who is sick?"

Q: I thought that you said that there was medical barracks?

A: There was one medical barracks where anybody could go and complain if they had a problem.

Q: But then you learned that you better not do that or else you were through.

A: That's right.

Q: So you had to work under any condition, no matter how bad you felt.

A: We were afraid to go even if we got injured. Now the shoes were torn with the snow and the water of the winter, so we got wooden shoes to replace those. For instance, I had an injury here at the back of the foot and I was afraid to go there. As a matter of fact, I had a wooden shoe and when we went back and forth to work in uniforms, a Pole or Russian who was with us stepped on my feet and hurt me, so I started crying. So the Kopo or the S.S. man asked what was happening -- then he went and beat up the Pole or Russian for stepping on my feet.

Q: Do you think that because you were a young boy, that some people treated you better.

A: I am sure of it. Particularly, the Jewish people, with whom I worked. In another area, also in a similar camp they assigned me to work inside in a wood factory repairing the materials such as toilets and bowls which they needed. There was a

lot of machinery which I was afraid to touch. So another prisoner, a man from Vienna, an older person, maybe in his 60's -- his name was something like Wago, he said "young fellow, be careful" and he always protected me and helped me. He showed me a lot.

Q: Were there other boys your age?

A: Yes, there were three other boys of similar age in my particular group.

Q: But it was not common to have boys that young. You were the exception?

A: There were not too many of us. These were maybe 10% younger kids.

Q: So you learned very early that you had to learn under any circumstances. You had to keep yourself working and yet with the amount of food you were getting, I imagine that it was extremely difficult.

A: Very much so! Very much so! Very painful.

Q: Especially since you were growing?

A: Our main occupation was hunger, not so much fear of death, but hunger. But the hunger, continuous hunger, that was hard.

Q: Did you get the impression, let us say in 1940 and '41, that as long as you kept working, you would stay alive?

A: Well, somehow I had an innate faith that I would survive those horrible times. One of the things is that in spite of the tragedy and pain we were suffering we joked and I contend that I have a sense of humor. I joke with the boys and relax. While using a shovel we told each other stories. We even used to sing to each other. There was a young boy who was with me who was in the choir of the Temple. I like cantorial music. He was maybe a couple of feet from me. So we used to sing to each other.

Side two of Tape one.

Q: As long as you kept working and I think that you gave some indication that.....

A: Well, it is not so much the ability to work as the ability to maintain yourself, to maintain your faith, to maintain human dignity as a person you are not going to succumb to their pressures.

Q: But you gave me the impression before that you thought you were doomed anyways but that you had to make the best of it day by day. Is that really what you felt?

- A: I said that the majority felt this way.
- Q: Not necessarily yourself?
- A: No, not necessarily myself. One indication of this is because they gave themselves up. They resigned themselves. That manifested itself in a number of ways. We look clean, keep ourselves clean, stay as well as possible and many people just couldn't do it. They lost the stamina.
- Q: At that point, they would kill them, is that what you are saying? They eliminate them?
- A: Not always, they would kill them or the people would die naturally.
- Q: They did? So some did die on the work and they couldn't take the conditions?
- A: They couldn't take the conditions. Either they committed suicide by running into the fence.
- Q: Oh, it was electrified. So you saw some walking into the fence just to end it.
- A: Yes. Or when we went to work in the morning there were people still hanging on or who had fallen off. Or they had a slow death, they just laid down and refused to go to work. Refused to move. One said: "I want to die. I don't want to die in the field." Another manifestation of this was, for instance, many people were habitual smokers -- they exchanged a piece of bread for a cigarette.
- Q: Otherwise said; they gave up their food?
- A: They gave up the piece of bread or a bowl of soup for a cigarette. This was just the first sign that it was the end.
- Q: Do you think that it was a sign of a mental breakdown or just of the conscious willingness to die?
- A: Both. Many had mentally broken down -- lost their balance -- lost control and some did the active part of it, to speed their death.
- Q: Now, I think that you said on the other side that at a certain point you were shipped out to Auschwitz. This must be a particularly difficult part of it. Is there some particular reason why you were shipped at that point?
- A: The whole camp was shipped.
- Q: Was the camp closed down?



- A: Yes, it was closed down because we were on a stretch of land and the job was done.
- Q: So you went to Auschwitz. Do you know exactly when?
- A: I know that it was the summer then.
- Q: But was it in 1941 or '42?
- A: In '41, late -- it must have been August or September.
- Q: Did you stay in Auschwitz for the rest of the war?
- A: No, I was in Auschwitz, then I went to Buna from there to Buchenwald, from there I went to Dura, and then I went back to Buchenwald where I was liberated. (Buchenwald was located near to Weimar. In eastern Germany today).
- Q: When were you liberated?
- A: On April 11, 1945.
- Q: OK, do you think that you will be able to remember many of the details of each of these camps? Of what happened to you in these periods of time?
- A: Some, not everything. Some of the more striking points.
- Q: How long were you actually in Auschwitz? Would you say from the (late) summer of '41 until when?
- A: I would say approximately a year. I can tell by the seasons, approximately a little less than a year.
- Q: And were you also working there?
- A: Yes, there we were working the first couple of months at unloading trains of coal. This was an extremely painful miserable job. Most of it was outside work. They utilized part of this coal, just coal, to make briquettes for burning houses. This used to burn my eyes. It was extremely painful. I lost one eye because of it.
- Q: You lost your sight completely in one eye?
- A: Yes, what happened was that the eyes were tearing so that you couldn't open them; so I couldn't work because I couldn't see.

- Q: Let me ask you this. I thought that we could have gotten to this earlier. You heard of a place like Auschwitz where many people died and you survived. You said that you believed in your fate and that you were fated to survive. Do you think this may not be relevant. That you almost had to be lucky to survive?
- A: Well absolutely! Absolutely! In terms of explanation of my survival there is no other way in which I can explain it. I cannot explain it by divine province or intelligence because a lot of people who are smarter than I am, more educated than I was and yet they died like flies.
- Q: Is it almost like having to be at the right place at the right time to survive?
- A: There is a whole set of circumstances. I couldn't fully explain it. Maybe I tolerate hunger and pain in my body better than most.
- Q: Maybe your youth was in favor of you rather than the other way.
- A: Yes, maybe that is probably so. For example, when we get the piece of bread in the morning.
- Q: This was always the same diet, wherever you were?
- A: Yes, the piece of bread in the morning and the bowl of soup in the evening.
- Q: What kind of soup was it?
- A: Most of it vegetable with a lot of water. It was water but it warmed you up.
- Q: But it was real food? It was edible?
- A: Yes, sometimes it was not edible. Sometimes, even in those conditions when you had some small rotten potatoes and they stank, if you could not bear to smell it you couldn't eat it.
- Q: Even if you could eat it you would get sick from it.
- A: But we ate grass, we ate anything we could. But to explain my survival in any logical terms, that is not possible.
- Q: I see. I almost get the impression that you have to be at the right place at the right time.
- A: Not only that, but people right along side of me got killed. I give you an example: when I was in Dura, in that concentration camp, there they built the U1's and U2's

Q: Is this in Poland?

A: No, in Germany.

Q: So you went back to Germany again (after Auschwitz)?

A: Yes, there they produced the rockets. I was outside working at clearing the access to it. That was in 1944. The Americans came down, flying down, and bombing the place. There were mountains of rocks which it would do no good to hit. So they hit the access. All right! So I was working with a group of people. The Nazis were there also, and everybody started running. One of the Nazis was in a locomotive which was used to maneuver the freight cars -- so I wanted to climb aboard the locomotive. He said, "You damn Jew, get away from here, you only work." So I had no place to go. I was afraid to look up, so I just stood by a telephone pole and bent down like this. This locomotive and the Nazi was smashed to pieces, and I was watching this.

Q: So whatever it is, fate or not, it just happened. What is meant to be will be.

Q: And that is not the only circumstances. There were other instances where again I was injured. I didn't work too well. You know I limped because of the injury to my feet -- so I was assigned one Friday morning to go to the crematory. I was assigned. He pointed at me and said, "You go here" and "You go there." And I was pushed to a side, so I was between the people. You know I was small and I just ran away. Later on I heard from other inmates that they said, "Oh, we will catch him next time! Let's forget about him."

Q: But they never came back for you.

A: No. It didn't mean anything. They just got people off their hands, would they worry about one guy.

Q: It's almost impossible to comprehend. They knew everyone who was in the camp, I presume, at any given time.

A: They know who was in the camp? The individual names? Of course not! They accounted for numbers.

Q: All right, numbers of people. Otherwise you could almost hide?

A: Of course, of course. You could for a little while. They all looked alike, in the same uniform, maybe a little smaller.

Q: Otherwise said, they did not care if they killed 10,000 people.

A: One more or less --it didn't really matter.

- Q: That is the closest you ever came (to the crematory)?
- A: Yes, there were a couple of other situations.
- Q: But some people were able to do that and most were not to manage to get away. When they were doomed they went marching off.
- A: Yes! Another time I jumped from a truck, a similar situation. I took chances.
- Q: I think that it would take forever if we itemized all the incidents.
- A: There were other incidents like this and again, to explain it that is beyond me. It is not that I am smarter or better I just cannot explain it in human terms.
- Q: Where was this, the truck incident?
- A: The truck incident was in Buna.
- Q: Were you back in Germany again?
- A: No. Buna is a part of Auschwitz. Yes, Auschwitz is the main camp, then there were surrounding camps; Buna, Birkenau, Gleiwitz. They have little satellite camps and that was one of the satellites.
- Q: Wasn't Gleiwitz the first camp you were at?
- A: Yes, yes.
- Q: So you were always near Auschwitz?
- A: That's right.
- Q: When you kept moving, you were always in the same area? Always in...
- A: That is what I said earlier, from Poznan, Poland to Frankfurt on the Oder, this is the area where they built the road not far from Auschwitz.
- Q: I am trying to get it straight. First you went to Gleiwitz then you went to Auschwitz -- specifically into Auschwitz -- then to Buna. Then how long were you there?
- A: I was in Buna for about a year.
- Q: That was also a work camp, primarily a work camp?

A: Yes.

Q: And then from Buna you went to Buchenwald?

A: Yes, from Buna I went to Buchenwald and then to Dura and then to Buchenwald again.

Q: Well, is Buchenwald near Auschwitz?

A: No, it is far away.

Q: Then you were shipped out?

A: It is a couple of days, but we traveled for two weeks on the train from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. That was in 1944.

Q: Now, why were you relocated then, do you know? Was there a particular reason?

A: They gave us no explanation for the move, but they took us to Buchenwald because the Russians were approaching.

Q: Oh! Buchenwald was further west?

A: Yes, further in Germany. The whole camp was vacated. That was in 1944.

Q: So you were in Auschwitz for how long?

A: Wait a minute. At the end of '41 I went to Auschwitz -- then I was about '42 to '43 in Buna; in '43 I went to Buchenwald.

Q: That is when you were moved west, because the Russians were advancing?

A: Yes, then we went to Dura and from Dura back to Buchenwald.

Q: Was Dura also in Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: Then you went back to Buchenwald and that is where you were liberated?

A: Yes.

Q: What army -- was it an American army?

A: Yes, it was the American army, as a matter of fact, it was a Jewish fellow.

- Q: Is that right! What an experience that must have been for him.
- A: Yes, I have him on a picture.
- Q: I'd like to get more of the details on this, but maybe we should do this on another session. Now that I have chronologically where you were, I would like to get into some more of the details. If you can recall them. You know whatever you feel like telling me at another session.
- A: OK. Call me.
- Q: You mentioned a couple of important events and I would like to hear about them. I think that we have been longer than we should have for the first session anyways, although it is going well.
- A: I hope that the taping is coming through well in terms of understanding what I said.
- Q: But let us continue this at another session. We should get some of the details and then we will talk about whatever you want to talk about and other aspects as well as the camp life. Then, of course we want to deal with what happened after that and right to the present day as much as you want to talk about it. Let's break off. I think we should continue this at another session.
- 
- Q: OK, this is Allan Spetter and we will be beginning this second session at the home of Dr. Murray Weisman on Monday evening, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1980 at 8:15 P.M.
- A: Well, following the first session I tried to reconstruct and recollect dates and specific terms of what happened when I was in Camp (in WWII). Here I came up with these dates: Approximately late November or early December 1939, I was apprehended and shipped to Gleiwitz, that was on the border between Germany and Poland, near the Auschwitz complex of camps. I think, if I remember correctly, I was about one year in Gleiwitz, one year in Buna and ultimately ended up in Auschwitz (proper) till about Jan. 1944. I cannot tell with certainty how long I was in each of these camps.
- Q: But from the beginning of the time you were taken prisoner, until Jan. of '44 you were in Gleiwitz, Buna, and Auschwitz and then you were moved from Auschwitz in Jan. '44 because the Russian troops were advancing?
- A: To Buchenwald.
- Q: Right.

A: In Buchenwald I was I believe for about three to four months, then I went to Dura. In about the last three months, that must be starting in Feb. or Mar. 1945, I was back in Buchenwald where I was liberated. This was the approximate sequence and the dates. Again, the specifics, individual dates are approximate. The only major thing which I remember is the mass transportation from Auschwitz to Buchenwald.

Q: OK, you mentioned that to me and you said that the trip took about two weeks.

A: Yes, two weeks.

Q: Do you want to describe some of the details?

A: Yes, but first of all I want to make a couple of comments about the first day I came to a concentration camp. Right at the very beginning, I was young, inexperienced. The people around me tried to quiet me down and they supported and helped me, but still I did not quiet down, I was hungry, frightened, but still it was more thrill than fear because I had never been away from my parents. Now I was away from my parents for the first time and riding on a truck and a train which I had never done in Poland since we didn't have any transportation. So it was a little exciting...but as soon as I arrived in Gleiwitz and we got off the train, and we saw the camp from a distance and noticed they were wearing uniforms with shaved heads and wooden shoes and marching in formation of five, then appeared the huge tents, you know there were no barracks, the barracks were just being built, it appeared to me that it was a huge circus with thousands of clowns all over the place. This was my first reaction. I didn't know anything else.

Q: You were only nine years old. I don't know how you could comprehend?

A: And until people started talking to us. When we were dressed they started talking to us and went through the procedure with the shaving and putting on the numbers and pushing us around, taking away our things.

Q: Did you get a number that early, in Gleiwitz?

A: Oh yes, the same number, yes!

Q: So this is the number which you had from the very beginning. In Dec. of '39?

A: No, at other times we changed numbers. When we came to different camps. Not in the Auschwitz complex. This (showing his arm) was the Auschwitz number. When we came to Buna, I got a different number.

Q: You were not tattooed yet?

A: No.

Q: You were tattooed when you got to Auschwitz?

A: Yes, that is right. So this was essentially my first impression until we began to realize, even at that time, at the beginning, either it was hysteria, or it was I don't know what, when they took away our clothes and gave us the uniforms. They didn't measure out sizes. You went through or they pushed you through the line and put it in your arms. I was short so I got a shirt like this and one pair of pants. And a guy who was tall got a jacket that was so short you couldn't help but think that that was funny.

Q: Did you exchange clothes?

A: Of course, we did, as long as we could. So now let us consider the transportation from Auschwitz to Buchenwald.

Q: If you wanted to take this in some kind of order you could describe each camp.

A: All right!

Q: So you are at Gleiwitz. Now you have had the chance to think over some of the details, since last week. You were in Gleiwitz for about one year.

A: Yes, indeed. In Gleiwitz that was a very difficult, frightening experience. First of all, they were brutal!

Q: What was particularly brutal?

A: They brutally beat and killed at will. They killed 27 people just to make an example. It was a new exposure for us. It was hard to get used to it. The human mind has difficulties getting used to this type of brutality. It was indeed very difficult to adjust to this type of brutality -- besides that, you didn't know when it was going to be your fate. The first three months were particularly difficult because of the hunger and the hard labor and the beating. A lot of people died. Many were killed. Many were butchered. As I described when I did talk about the 27 on the second or the third week. So this was very difficult.

Q: Let me ask you before you go on. Is there anything which stands out specially in your mind during that first year in the first camp. You did mention a few of the details, but I am thinking about anything else you might have thought about since your first interview.

A: Yes. The fear and apprehension which we felt. Of course, we saw our friends being killed and die. We couldn't communicate. You know it really was a difficult and extreme psychological adjustment, not only physical. Completely different rules than we used to live by.



- Q: After about one year, you moved to Buna. Is this still in the Auschwitz complex?
- A: Yes, in the same complex. Over there, the first couple of weeks I am talking about individuals, it was very difficult because the newcomers got the worst work. Then we had to unload cement, loose cement, that's difficult. In Gleiwitz I had unloaded coal, some of it was old, that's how my eyes got injured there. I had unloaded coal for two weeks. Then he (S.S. in charge) came one morning and asked who is a "Zimmerman" (carpenter)? I was small so I said that I was a "Zimmerman". So he said, "You are small now where did you learn to be a carpenter?" I said, "My parents are carpenters. I worked with them." He said, "All right." I figured that I had nothing to lose. I was afraid that after a couple of more weeks at the cement detail I will be gone because I was going down. The energy went down, so! In other words: I took a chance...so he took me out and another S.S. man explained to me what was wanted. He told me that he wanted a cage for rabbits. He showed me how big he wanted it. So I built it and then it was ok. They gave me lighter work. They took me away from the cement group and sent me out with a group that went to work at the I.G. Farben Industry Works where they made synthetic rubber. There were a lot of pipes. My job, my group's, was to build the facilities where people can go up and stand to insulate the pipes. It was way up high where you had to climb on pipes. You know to take the bolts out and it was of course difficult. Here you were afraid of the wind, the cold wind in the winter could in Eastern Europe, make you fall. I did actually fall but an older Jew helped me out. He was from Limburg. A large, good-sized man and he protected me. He hid me, didn't let me go up there high. He just held me to the lower pipe jobs and to hand the things up. At least in the evening when I came back from work I had extra potatoes. Things I could share with the other prisoners.
- Q: When you were working for I.G. Farben, did you get a little more to eat?
- A: No, no, no. The same standard of the evening: a bowl of soup.
- Q: So where did you get this extra food (the extra potatoes)?
- A: Because I had to feed the rabbits.
- Q: Oh, you did that project too while you were working on the pipes?
- A: Oh yes. In the evenings and in the morning before I went to work I had to feed the rabbits.
- Q: Is this where you met the French prisoners that you mentioned (it does appear that this was a reference to a conversation which was not on tape)...do you want to talk about that now?

- A: Yes. We had very little contact. They were there only for a short period of time. I suppose that it was a transition until they could accommodate them somewhere else. The only contact which I had was to explain to them what I had to do and they gave me some tools. From what we could see, occasionally was that they were working on the outside.
- Q: They were kept strictly separated? They were in a regular concentration camp?
- A: Oh yes. They had nothing to do with us. That was a completely separate world.
- Q: You said to me that you spent about a year in Buna?
- A: Yes.
- Q: And that of all the time (in concentration camp) that may have been the best time?
- A: Yes, the best time. I mean the work was better. This is the time where they had to cut the bolts in the factory, on the big machines and they had to be done inside and outside. Except for occasionally the beatings and the hunger pains, you know, it was not as bad as it was in Buchenwald or it was in Dura and Gleiwitz and so on.
- Q: You gave the impression that Buna was not necessarily an extermination camp?
- A: No. it was primarily a working camp because most of the people worked for I.G. Farben.
- Q: That is primarily why you were there --- while most of you stayed there?
- A: Yes, we worked in some capacity for the I.G. Farben Industries.
- Q: And you have no idea why they moved you then to Auschwitz?
- A: No. I know of no reason. What happened is that they picked up a block out of two blocks and said: "this block goes to Auschwitz" and so forth.
- Q: When you look back on it now you would think that if you are being sent to Auschwitz, they meant to exterminate you at some point?
- A: Yes, I would tend to think along that line, but the main extermination was in Birkenau. That is also part of the Auschwitz camps. Birkenau was only specializing in extermination and in gas chambers. The mass -- gas chambers. They had some in Auschwitz proper on a smaller scale. They had them in Buna on a smaller scale.

- Q: Going to Auschwitz, (proper) did not mean automatically that you would die at that point.
- A: We always had this in the back of our minds.
- Q: I mean you might not have known anything about it at the time?
- A: The thing is that first of all they did not tell you where you were going to go. We did not know, but we always had a premonition, that this was going to happen to us.
- Q: Did word ever reach around amongst the prisoners as to what each location meant?
- A: Oh yes! We knew this. We knew this, because there always had been people shoved back and forth -- transported back and forth. The S.S. men talked about themselves and we could overhear them. So we had some information about what was going on and also we could, for instance, smell when we were in Auschwitz - -the charred smell of the dead people.
- Q: Do you think then that you may have been in Auschwitz for as much as two years? I am still trying to (establish a time frame). If you were one year in Gleiwitz, a year in Buna, you may have been two years in Auschwitz proper. Because if you go out (to Buchenwald) in Jan. '44, that is four years after you were trucked away. Can you remember anything specific, I mean did anything stand out in your mind during these two years? What kind of work were you doing in Auschwitz?
- A: In Auschwitz we worked at building roads, around the camp and different facilities. That is the type of work we did. There and in Buna the situation with Chaim took place. That is another thing.
- Q: You wanted to mention him...these are the kind of incidents I wanted you to get to. You want to talk about Chaim now?
- A: So, in Buna there was kind of a group of people where the prisoners were very cohesive and supportive of each other. At least a Jewish group. Some of the Jewish people were in top positions there, like Chaim, for instance. He was a good example.
- Q: Now he was in a sort of management position?
- A: Yes, in a management position.
- Q: What was his background, do you know?

- A: No, I don't.
- Q: You don't even know where he was from?
- A: I know that he was from Eastern Europe. Not from Poland but from another part of Eastern Europe that we knew.
- Q: But you don't know his name?
- A: No.
- Q: But he was a very big man, I understand.
- A: Yes, of a very large size, even by American standards. He was in charge of distribution of the clothes. You know, they got clothes, they accumulated clothes, shoes and uniforms. If in wintertime you wanted to have a heavy coat, you saw him because he was the one who would have them.
- Q: So he had some influence?
- A: Yes, that was run by civilians essentially, in opposition to the S.S. running things. So one time he gave me a pair of shoes. You know my wooden shoes fell to pieces. I appealed to him and he gave me a pair, so he was a good man. So at one point we heard that we have an "Anstellung"...you know, in the evening. We heard the rumor spread that Chaim ran away.
- Q: He escaped?
- A: He escaped. So, after a while, we find out that Chaim and two other prominent prisoners plus two Polish prisoners ran away. What I do understand is that they were in charge of the clothes and the shoes. That one of the people had hidden in them something valuable, like diamonds or gold and they were able to dig it out and bribe somebody and then they were able to run away. Somehow, they went outside the camp. Here is about what happened... You see this is the camp and here is the work area, the I. G. Farben Industry, here were some other facilities...whatever they were...I don't know exactly, storehouses, warehouses, whatever. So, apparently while the two Poles who were also prominent prisoners, who worked in the kitchen...they also had access to a lot of stuff because people who had diamonds had been able to bribe and get something.
- Q: We are actually talking about people trading diamonds for food?
- A: Yes, if they could smuggle them in. So what happened was that the two Poles and the three Jews got together. Apparently they arranged by influence that they went out to pick up some stuff, or whatever, from the supply place and disappeared.

Q: They probably bribed the guard, didn't they?

A: That is the understanding. Either they bribed the guard or bribed some civilians from the surroundings. Then they got some civilian clothes, because there in that area civilians had also been working. Although we could not communicate with them because of the watching guards, in some instances, in some situations, they could not guard everyone every minute. After these fellows escaped and after about two weeks one guy was brought back to the camp.

Q: One of the five?

A: Yes. One of the five, that is one of the three Jews. The youngest one. We couldn't understand why...I was close to this guy so I asked him what had happened. How did you get outside? He didn't want to talk. He used to say, "Hair will grow on me if the others come back!" Apparently what happened was, every time when they were in the woods waiting to make connections with the partisans, while he was on guard -- they always took turns on being on guard...the two Poles killed the two Jews. When he came back and didn't see the two Jews, he began to ask questions such as, "Where are they?" "Why are they not here?" So they went after the runaways and ultimately they caught them and he told the S.S. where they were. They were apprehended. This is a running situation where the German S.S. hanged the two Poles publicly in the camp for killing the two Jews.

Q: Do you know of any specific reason (for this)? What were they trying to demonstrate (by doing that)? Just killing them because they were criminals? Because they had killed two people?

A: They did not explain their verdict! They did not explain anything. They just called everybody together and hung the two Poles.

Q: It seems to me almost like some cynical way to boost your morale, by showing you that there was justice. (In other camps from where people escaped it was standard operating policy of the S.S. to hang any recaptured escapee, whether the escapees were Jewish or not, summarily with all the other prisoners as witnesses. It is possible that the one who returned voluntarily was spared the fate he would have had if discovered).

A: It actually boosted our morale.

Q: I am certain that it did.

A: When you saw the two of them killing their best friends...we were happy to see this. To me it was rather cynical and this is a story I would like to elaborate and write about because of the perverted sense of justice. Another thing is they didn't

want anybody else to have the privilege of killing Jews. They wanted to keep that privilege for themselves.

Q: I get the impression though from various things I have read and seen that they were very strict on justice. I think that for actual crimes, they were committed. I mean outside the camps as well as in the camps. So these two men had committed murder and therefore, they should be killed and punished for it.

A: Yes, yes. Another tragic event which took place and stood out in my mind which hurts me badly. There was one guy who was an electrician. There were two brothers, two young German boys...one was my age, a young chap like myself...the other was maybe a couple of years older. One was working as an electrician, fixing electrical things...seeing that the wires are operating at all times. We had frequent attacks from the Russians, bombing attacks.

Q: Was that in Auschwitz?

A: No, in Buna.

Q: Oh, you are still in Buna...ok.

A: Frequent attacks from Russian bombs.

Q: So the Russians did bomb?

A: Yes, small bombs. Small strings of bombs.

Q: They dropped these actually into the camps?

A: No, in the work areas.

Q: You know that is really one of the big arguments that goes on now. "Why didn't the U.S. and the British bomb the camps? But you are saying that the Russians did?"

A: The surroundings, not the camp proper, the work area you see, this area around the camps.

Q: I mean...they were bombing in the area?

A: Yes. Not the camp itself -- maybe they wanted to save the camps. In this camp. Of course, he communicated with his friends, the apparent leaders amongst the prisoners. We had some leaders, a couple of doctors who were in the A.B., that means the dispensary, where you could get a bandage or something like that. There were Jewish doctors. They were nice people. They all know -- and they told me -- because I was close to those people. I was friendly with them. They

had pity on me because I was so small -- that a Pole who was the co-worker of this electrician reported him to the S.S. and they hanged him.

Q: For what, what did they report him for?

A: Because he wanted to cut the wires during an airplane alarm.

Q: To let some people escape?

A: Right! He was ready to make an announcement, when the cutting was done, such an announcement as "Let's go! Flee!" They hanged this young man and I remember that he said in German, "Brothers, we are the last. Yes, we are the last they won't kill any more."

Q: You are saying that there really were attempts at mass escape?

A: Oh sure! Sure! There were plans but it was almost impossible to carry them out.

Q: Even other than the Germans would turn you in, if they knew about them?

A: And the major tragedy was that they took the young boy, the brother, they took him away, they put him in the health service barracks, so that he would not have to witness the hanging. They didn't tell him what it was all about or why they removed him. He didn't know anything about it. They forced him to be in the dispensary and a couple of days later he found out that his brother had been hanged...so he killed himself. That was a young boy, my age.

Q: He committed suicide?

A: Yes. He committed suicide. I was chummy with him. This was a very heartfelt incident which deeply affected the foundation of my own being.

Q: This was someone you could relate to?

A: So these are some of the outstanding events I can remember. In Auschwitz we had the constant fear -- fear became dominant in the concentration camp because they made murder selections.

Q: I want to clarify something. If you were going to be killed, would you have been sent to Birkenau first or would they do it right in Auschwitz?

A: They could do it in Auschwitz, but Birkenau was the major killing point for prisoners from outside.

Q: They brought them right in?

A: Yes.

Q: You see, there is one thing I can't quite understand...that there are categories like you, who were working all these years and yet there are categories of people who come right in and who are killed right away. Now what is the difference? Do you know anything about that or do you understand that?

A: No!

Q: People were brought in to be killed immediately.

A: I will tell you. You see the German government had an agreement with I.G. Farben and other industrial complexes or enterprises, such as those building the roads, to supply them a steady source of labor. That is what they did. In the concentration camps they continuously brought fresh people. Let's say, in a month, there was 10% or 20% or 50% attrition so they brought in new people from all over to fill the positions.

Q: What it boiled down to was that healthy young men probably had the best chance of survival because they could work.

A: That's right! No, the people whom they brought to Birkenau were those whom they considered useless.

Q: So they went directly to the crematory to be killed.

A: Let me give you an example. In Lodz there was, even when I was there, one German leader, his name was Biver. Ye mach shemol; you know what "ye mach shemol" means don't you? It is "His name should be erased." The opposite of the "Blessed Memory."

Q: Ah, you used that once before.

A: He spoke Yiddish like any Jew. Maybe he was an S.S. man, but he was a civilian. He went around to make speeches all the time, in Yiddish. He said: "We need you; you are our force, our backbone, we need you! We are not going to do anything against you but give me your children. We don't want the children, they are useless." He gave an order to have people give their children after two years. All right! That is how it started out. That was a major tragedy. We did not want to give them to him. He then sent the Jewish leader Rumkofski, who said in support: "We have a choice, either we give them voluntarily or they will come and take anybody they want."

Q: And this was where?



A: This was in Lodz, in the ghetto. I give you an example of how he went about it, that way of course while I was still there. So we were told to be there to listen to a speech. Whenever he wanted to give a speech he ordered the Jews to come to a market place where the farmers brought vegetables in the normal courser of business. It was a big, huge place...surrounded by buildings. Buildings formed a fence. One time he asked all the Jews to come out, that he had something important to say. This is the way he communicated since there were no radios and no other form of communications. So he said, "Listen, let's face it, you are the backbone of our military, you are our force. You produce the textiles, you make the uniforms, and other things in Lodz. We need you! We want you to come to Germany, deep into Germany. We need you there more than we need you here. Besides that, it is not safe here. The Russians are close. We know that you like us better than you like the Russians...and more important (we will be able to protect you and help you).

Note, that the tapes cut part of the conversation of one on both sides, and that the words within the brackets on both sides of this parenthesis are the transcriber's best guess as to what was omitted).

Q: (You were all gathered in a big place like) a market square?

A: Yes, our square was too small, but most towns had one. They said,, "you bring along your dishes because we do not have any."

Q: I want to clarify something here - this was an S.S. man who was speaking Yiddish to you?

A: He was dressed as a civilian.

Q: He was dressed as a civilian but you know that he was a civilian?

A: Yes, he was an S.S. man. He said: "Bring along whatever clothes you have and bring along your dishes because we don't have any dishes." Foolish people took him up on this. People were hungry, starved for months and they said, "Is he fooling or is he telling the truth?" It was an argument. Thousands of the people lined up to take the train. Thousands! And those who didn't go, they invaded all the homes and picked up the children.

Q: But you don't know where those people went though?

A: No, they never came back.

Q: But specifically, you are saying (that they were hoodwinked) but what I am getting to is that you were saying that some people were marked for extermination. Remember what I was saying that luck was such a big factor.

- Some people, when they got off the train, they were already bound for extermination.
- A: Yes, most of the people who came from the ghetto, where they selected various groups, had been destined for extermination. You see they kept hauling people continuously and collecting people. If they filled their quota, they didn't need people for the work groups, they sent them to Birkenau or to Maidanek.
- Q: In other words, if they had enough workers on any day that was the alternative they used.
- A: Yes, that was my understanding.
- Q: So you are there until Jan. '44, then they decided to move you and you are pretty certain that it was because of the Russians were closing in
- A: The Russians, yes. The whole camp was evacuated. So were we, and I don't know but about 20,000 people. They were all alarmed and evacuated in blocks. You know they were searching with dogs and flashlights for all the people who were out very early in the morning. Trains were standing behind the camp and everyone was rushing to them. There were open wagons which they packed (with people) and they shot those who could not climb in them quickly. People were falling like flies...people were running away and were being chased by the guards.
- Q: At this point you think that you are being sent for possible extermination. You truly don't know what your destination is to be. They are cleaning out the entire camp.
- A: Yes, we were not sure that we would survive. Then they took us on the open trains for days on end. Sometimes we stayed for three or four nights on the train (in the same location) because the military were using the railroads.
- Q: What do you mean when you say "open train"? You were not even in enclosed cars?
- A: No, in each corner there was an S.S. man sitting, but we were standing in the middle.
- Q: I had the image of boxcars which were closed in.
- A: No, these are wide open. Wide open trains, at least the train on which I was, was wide open. We were traveling for 14 days and 14 nights. Many times we stayed for a complete day in one spot or a night in one spot. We never understood why or what was happening. Imagine you couldn't go to the toilet -- you had to relieve yourself in your pants.

- Q: There was no chance to go anywhere?
- A: Oh no chance at all. The only thing was I remember that we had a can which we attached to a string or belt to lift up a little snow while the train was moving to have something to wet our lips with as our only nourishment.
- Q: Oh they gave you no food for the 14 days?
- A: No, no food...nothing.
- Q: For 14 days how did people survive that?
- A: A great many, I don't have the count, but at least half of us died. Every so often they stopped and we had to clear the train of the dead people.
- Q: They didn't even give you water for 14 days?
- A: No. Oh no! We didn't feel any hunger at that time we were so dehydrated. We just felt thirsty, at least I didn't. Fortunately it was not hot and we periodically could get a little snow to wet our lips. So in our group we shared that little snow. You were stiff from all that when finally we got to our destination, then you got off and they pushed you into a shower. All you wanted to do was stay and drink the water. That was the most horrible horrible experience of the entire time.
- Q: I remember that you had mentioned it just was in passing last week and I thought that we should elaborate a little...and amplify.
- A: It's indescribable because when people fell down there was no place. You stepped virtually on people who were half dead half alive. Because you didn't want to throw them out -- you were hoping that maybe they will revive but at the same time you couldn't stand and you couldn't sit because of them. Laying down they occupied more space because we were crushed together.
- Q: Now you would conclude from this that only the strongest people could survive?
- A: Probably...what I remember is that I was in this corner...we were about a couple of people here like this in the corner. We bend down and we stood up and we changed positions and rolls. Then we had the string and I assume that others had and did the same thing -- we had an empty can for the snow. But thousands upon thousands died. The reason we know is that every time our train and the other trains stopped the physically healthier people had to take the dead ones out and throw them from the train.
- Q: I can't figure out why they were bothering to move you? I can't figure it out, it is almost impossible to comprehend.

- A: This is the German mentality...everything has to be precise. You know I will give you an example.
- Q: They did not want you to be liberated by the Russians apparently...ok!
- A: Yes. To take us away from the Russians.
- Q: But to bother to move you, using railroad stock to do it (when their need for railroad stock elsewhere and for military purposes was most urgent) and yet you are all dying along the way.
- A: Yes. The example is: when they undressed us -- you know, took away the watches, the clothes, etc., you had to have every piece of clothing in a separate container. It had to be precise. They had a bag for watches, they had a bag for teeth, they had a bag for glasses, for rings, etc. Everything was marked for filing. That was their mentality.
- Q: Unbelievable.
- A: For instance, for the dead people -- for the big volume of people whom they exterminated, which was brought out at the Nuremberg trials, they all were listed alphabetically. And the judge asked, "How come that they all died alphabetically? The As one day, the Bs another day?" this was the Nazis mentality.
- Q: OK...so you survived. You got to Buchenwald, we figured that was early 1944. You were in Buchenwald only for a few months, you said.
- A: Yes...a few months and we did work on some bricks. Sorting bricks so that they could be taken from one place to another...cleaning them. that really wasn't very useful work...just to keep us busy and as torture. The food was coarse. In Buchenwald they did have a crematorium, a big sized crematorium and every time they (used it) the fear was a little less, otherwise we did not know who was next. As long as you avoided being kicked, or being hit or being shot, you knew that you survived another day. So Buchenwald does not have this (repeated use crematorium), see. Much of the brutality that had appeared in the early years of Buchenwald, subsided. In the last year or two at least the people who had been in Buchenwald earlier used to tell us...those who were in Buchenwald in 1939 and '40 -- told us that it was much more brutal.
- Q: Yes, I asked you about that whether you thought that it varied with who was actually running the camp...or whatever. But you have no way of knowing.
- A: That could be. I have no idea.

Q: That is only speculation but if they realized that they were going to lose the war, then they might have changed their attitude. But by 1944, the Normandy invasion had not taken place, but I am certain that they must have known what was happening.

A: There was a lot of brutality in Dura. In Dura there was another phase of brutality.

Q: You went from Buchenwald to Dura?

A: Yes, from Buchenwald to Dura. There was another extreme situation of brutality. Even though they didn't have a crematorium, they were continuously digging huge holes...like ½ block wide and long. Digging and digging deep and pile them up with people half alive and half dead. Put wood with gasoline on top of the people and burn them. That was a stinking and frightening situation.

Q: There is no way to comprehend it. In a way now I would say that they are trying to accelerate the process which we know they were doing to the very end. People like Eichman were saying -- "Keep killing them and do it as fast as you can."

A: You could not explain it. In Dura the beating was much more brutal. The treatment was harsh. You know that I was punctured with a bayonet.

Q: What was the cause of it...the immediate cause?

A: Here is the scar...it was a deep cut.

Q: Yes...I see the scar. How did the incident develop?

A: Every morning when we were walking around...you see here was the facility...their underground working place. We were working here, and here was a railroad that leads in and out (of the underground places) where they loaded the machines that they shipped to Antwerp (the V2 launchers)...so we were working here and every morning about eight o'clock when it started to get light an S.S. man came out and he grabs whatever he had in a bag and he say in German, "Oh my God, I can't eat breakfast until I kill someone." So, whatever, he did and one day I fell to be the victim. I fell and we tried to shrink (the wound) and whatever we could to get back to work. So he stabbed me a couple of times with his bayonet, or maybe three times. I fell down and he thought I was dead. Right after he went away, the guys put some clay on it in order to stop the blood and then they did all they could for first aid.

Q: I meant to ask you in all this...did you ever have a serious disease or anything like that that you know of? Anything you remember?

A: No...I think I had appendicitis, but apparently it went away (without complications).

- Q: But you never came down with typhus or dysentery?
- A: Not to my knowledge. Colds of course, you got many of...no coughing blood.
- Q: But no contagious diseases?
- A: Not to my knowledge. Well, many times I had fever.
- Q: Were there epidemics that you knew of in the camps?
- A: Dysentery was quite prevalent and we all had it. But when you had a fever you took the chance. Once you went to the first aid barracks, you were afraid that they send you away (as they had done to the 27 in Gleiwitz). You didn't want to take the smallest chance unless you knew the doctor there...so he would give you a couple of pills or something before you went back to work. In any case, you wanted to minimize this.
- Q: So after Dura you went back to Buchenwald. It is already 1945. Now what was the last phase like in Buchenwald?
- A: In the last phase in Buchenwald they had collected all the young people and put us in one block. We kids were in one block separated from anyone else and they planned to teach us a trade to be masons...you know, mixing cements and all.
- Q: You say that now they were making an attempt to save the rest of you. There was no brutality anymore...not at all?
- A: No, but it was cut down a great deal. They didn't come into our block and shoot people and with dogs. This was no longer done but still for example, when we had to line up for the assembly and someone was out from the line...he got hit and kicked. They did not deliberately go around like they did in the earlier stages...killing like they did in Gleiwitz or like they did in Dura. Those were the two worst situations which I had in my experience.
- Q: Gleiwitz and Dura they were the worst! I don't think that we ever could answer the question as to whether individual people were responsible for better or worse treatment in any given camp. It is almost impossible to determine that. You don't come into contact with the people who are running the camps or anything like that?
- A: No, No! You were occupied with your own survival. It has been a continuous preoccupation to survive...to get by today and get something in your mouth to eat.

Q: If we could only find out. Let's say, if in any particular camp somebody was powerful enough, some of the Germans running the camps were powerful enough to be more lenient in a particular situation? If they didn't want to be cruel and they didn't want to do mass killing so on could they do it? But we have no evidence of such a thing.

A: I don't know whether the specific brutality came from the top or came from the individual. I don't know...for instance, with this S.S. man (the one who bayoneted me) he was a unique animal who acted out with the others...as long as you stayed within bounds and worked they didn't really bother you particularly.

Q: Is there S.S. in every camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Camps were never run by the regular military were they? Or some other organization?

A: Not to my knowledge. I could not distinguish (between the uniforms).

Q: In other words, some could have been regular German soldiers and not necessarily specifically S.S. men? You are not completely sure?

A: They had some other uniformed people who were occasionally assistants to help but by and large the S.S. were running the camps. They had the supervision and the responsibility for the camps.

Q: OK, now, before the American Army came to Buchenwald, did the Germans all leave? Did they abandon you?

A: No. A couple of days before the Americans came to Buchenwald, we had already heard through the grapevine that the Russians are advancing on one side and the Americans on the other. In the meantime, they tried to clear the camps. Everybody had to go to an "Anstellung" in the morning (assembly lineup as they regularly had), of course, there were more people than they could in one day. When it came to the "Anstellung" in my block, they were taking it by blocks, so when it came to that I figured I was at that time already injured, unable to move -- unable to walk, unable to dress...this is the end. I cannot go. So I laid down in a place where there was a shallow hole -- crawled in there and laid there. There was another fellow with me. We lay there for a day and a half. We went there in the morning and in the afternoon of the next day we started hearing different voices. Different language. That is when we crawled out.

Q: We knew that it wasn't German?

A: it was no longer German.

- Q: And what happened to the rest of the people in the camp...you don't know? Or were there still people there?
- A: Most of them had been evacuated and killed in the woods.
- Q: Really?
- A: They were killed in the woods, they were shot. The youngsters whom you see and hear about they did not go to that "Anstellung" and therefore, were saved.
- Q: This is one of the biggest impressions which I get is that there is no way to explain any specific incident in any of this or the actions of the S.S.
- A: No, not in a rational way. It seemed to me as if most of them had been trained, inculcated, conditioned to behave in a certain way over a long period of time to do exactly what they did...and they performed as robots.
- Q: Well, I imagine that if they were brought up in things like Hitlerjugend (Hitler-Youth) and brainwashed since they were children it became a way of life for them.
- A: This is true to a great extent, even though I feel that every person the S.S. as well as the (other) Nazis that every person, every individual at all times, in the most crucial circumstances, is left with a choice to set a price for his behavior. If they want to avoid pain, they have to be willing to do anything to submit. If they want to gain some benefits, they again have to be willing to pay a price...it is going to be without considering their conscience. This is the tragedy of human...fragility...that is unfortunate.
- Q: I don't imagine that we ever will be able to get the real answer to the questions.
- A: It is interesting to know. Maybe you are familiar with the study; it was reported several years ago in "Psychology Today" where a group of Minnesota psychiatrists took the profiles of the Nazi criminals, who were convicted. They took the same profiles and gave them to an independent group of psychiatrists to evaluate and tell us what kind of person (these Nazi criminals) were. They stated that they were "average American business people". This is again not to dismiss it lightly or to condemn but just to recognize human frailty...that we all can be subject to.
- Q: Well, some of them indicated that they were sometimes just bureaucrats really carrying out orders.
- A: Yes, the Eichman syndrome...where he just obeyed orders. This is a tragedy which we can see again in the people of Viet Nam, or in WWII...in Japan. It is



- unfortunate and that is why I feel that good conscious people have to be in doubt all the time.
- Q: That is what they tell us all the time. are there other individual incidents which you want to talk about at all?
- A: Another extremely bad incident about which I am somewhat frightened to talk about because I don't believe in it -- even though I watched it.
- Q: What don't you believe happened?
- A: There was one time where a train came fully loaded with small children and there was a group of S.S. men standing on each side of the cars and a couple of S.S. in the middle of the train. They threw the children off the train in a pile and a shovel with a buggy came and picked them up. They picked them up as you do with gravel or ground.
- Q: They buried them in the ground?
- A: No, no, no...they had a machine to pick them up like you pick up gravel or ground.
- Q: Yes, an earthmover.
- A: And picked them up and put them on small little wagons and shipped them to the (gas chambers).
- Q: They were still alive?
- A: Yes, still alive.
- Q: Were these infants?
- A: Infants and small children. Must have been up to two or three years old. Children!!!
- Q: You saw this...you saw this?
- A: That is a terrible scene. As a matter of fact, when my children were small...every time I held a small child...that scene came to me and haunted me.
- Q: I am sure! Where did that take place?
- A: In Auschwitz.
- Q: In Auschwitz?

A: In Auschwitz.

Q: You saw it happen? You just happened to see it happen...to be there when they arrived?

A: Yes! I happened to be there. Yes, yes, I was not the only one. We held on to each other, we didn't know what to do. It was, you see in Auschwitz...here was the camp and here they had a pre-camp -- camp where the transports arrived. So you had rather a mess. I am not talking about individuals. Should an individual fall, stepping on him was the normal course of business. But the mass scene...that is something else!

Q: I don't know if you made any other notes...that you wanted to refer to?

A: Well, did you want me to talk about the potatoes? I think that we talked about the potatoes and that you got it.

Q: Which one was that? Which story was that?

A: When we stole the potatoes and they made us stand in line because we didn't want to tell who did it.

Q: I don't know if we ever got that down on the tape. I don't recall it.

A: Do you want it?

A: Go ahead and mention it.

A: This was in Auschwitz. One day we were marching to work outside and in the surrounding area they had places where they kept potatoes covered with straw. While we were marching S.S. were on both sides and we were marching here. So one fellow or two fell flat when we marched by. The young fellow went to the potato pile and tried to fill his pockets full of potatoes. So the potato patch was disturbed. All the S.S. men were watching and shouting, "catch the thief" So while the youngster stood there to get the potatoes out, he got to his feet and he was able to tear himself away from the S.S. men and came running back to our group, without a shoe and without a hat. So we were able to patch up -- you know we always had rags with ourselves (from the uniforms). We formed a shoe and a hat and then the S.S. man came and looked to see who was missing one shoe and a hat. That was it; no one was missing anything, so he started "Austellen" everybody and they made us stand for about eight or nine hours. It was cold by then. We were cold, we had pieces of ice on our hands. He wanted us to tell him who was the one who stole the potatoes. But ultimately we did not break down. We did not tell him and they got tired of waiting so they took us back to work.

Q: And you could eat the potatoes?

A: No, we didn't have any potatoes.

Q: So you didn't get them?

A: Of course, the youngster ran away without them...sure

Q: So you didn't have to pay for them?

A: Not that time. That was another time you are thinking about. So this time that was the end of it.

Q: I thought that if you had any other specific thing you wanted to talk about...we could go on.

A: I cannot recall any other specific event that needs to be talked about now.

Q: The one thing which I still want to get in with you...that we talked about is the "hierarchy" in the camps about which you talked yourself. I wanted you to talk about it in some detail...and then I think that unless you think of anything else you want to talk about between now and the next time we meet and talk, we go on to the postwar period after 1945, but, I think that's enough for tonight. Let's take it up again. We have been over one hour and so we rest.

(It appears that then Allan Spetter and Murray Weisman decided to add something to the session).

A: Usually you lived in groups. Within the camp you formed a group as you would with a family. We tried to assist each other and provide support for each other, to protect each other from the dangers of hard work or if we had an extra bit of food (we shared) so usually you did it with a fellow you bunked with, that is...he was next to you in his bunk. I was with another fellow, a Polish fellow, we bunked together and we really lived like brothers. We shared whatever we could...we helped each other, however, after a while something bothered him, in his mind, and he asked me, "Motek" that was my name in camp, "tell me you are such a nice boy, why in the world did the Jews kill gentile kids for blood at Passover?"

Q: He really believed that?

A: Yes.

Q: Well, that is the kind of thing you said that before the war you really believed that people were being taught these kind of things. And he honestly believed it!

- A: Yes. Yes. And I was shocked! I was shocked! Such an intelligent fellow.
- Q: Did you try to explain it to him?. Well, you were such a youngster at the time.
- A: Look...I think that I said, "Listen", I had matured well beyond my age...I tried to explain it but you see you can't explain away a feeling, an attitude. You just cannot!!! It takes a lot of reconditioning...reorientation.
- Q: If you can think of anything else like that, I would like to get to it. So you again might jot some of that down.
- A: Maybe as we talk it might come up.
- Q: Good. Well that is enough for this evening. Thank you!

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- Q: I am here for the third session. This is Allan Spetter, at the home of Dr. Murray Weisman, on Thursday, February 28, 1980 at 7:30 P.M.

Okay...let's go on.

- A: Another incident I recalled which happened in Auschwitz. I suspect that it was in 1944, during the early part. Probably in March because it wasn't too cold. While we stood in line to go to work, it was on a Friday, suddenly a group of S.S. men cut through the middle of our formation. They took us to a truck that was there. They were pushing from both sides with their guns. I was on the truck already, then I looked around and jumped off the truck and ran amongst the people. There were several shots fired but again I disappeared and went back to the group.
- Q: So, you survived again!
- A: Yes. People again congratulated me. You know another lifespan, another couple of days or weeks. That is essentially what I wanted to elaborate (on the earlier reference to escaping from the crematorium when the S.S. man said, "we will get them next time")
- Q: I know that you jotted down some incidents like this. You always say that you think of things in between sessions.
- A: Also, another guy from our group, who was a Jew from Vienna. He was a musician. He was on a train and he had some written musical notes with him. He had thrown it to us and he said, "please save this." Some people picked it up. It was a song, a legacy which he gave.
- Q: It has survived?

- A: Yes, it has survived. I know it.
- Q: Where was that...where was that train?
- A: It was also in Auschwitz, during the same period.
- Q: On the way to Auschwitz?
- A: Yes. He threw that out from the truck. You know all the possessions he had. This was somewhere in the lining of his jacket. That in a sense was a legacy which he addressed to the Jewish people of the world. It was in Yiddish (and therefore, its knowledge was limited).
- Q: Yes. More and more of these things have been discovered in the years since then. People have discovered these things which various individuals have left. Many of them have great meaning. Just a minute, before we proceed, we have spent an awful lot of time on this, but I just want to get this on record again. And you tell me if you think that there is anything incorrect here. But as a historian, I am preoccupied with trying to go down the chronology and I know how difficult it is for you to pin down exactly but let me state this once and for all. And if there are any major corrections, you go ahead and tell me. As far as I can tell you were first in Gleiwitz, which is basically between Germany and Poland. You were there from late 1939 for about one year, to late 1940. Then, you were a year in Buna, which I would figure late 1940 to late 1941. Then two years in Auschwitz until about Jan. 1944 when the Russians were advancing (note that the entire Auschwitz complex was located near today's Polish city of Krakov) then Buchenwald (note that is close to the city of Weimar which is today in east Germany) for three to four months. Then to Dura until early 1945, when they sent you back to Buchenwald where you were liberated. I believe that this is it generally. Now, there is one major topic I would like to deal with. Is there anything, anything you may want to add before we go to the postwar situation? That is, is the relationships within the camps. You deal with that briefly and I hope that you will just go on with it and tell us basically as much as you are aware of.
- A: Generally speaking, the general relationship in camp between prisoners was just like a hierarchical social stratification as it is in modern society. It was a microcosm of society. There were people who were very low. The low people were essentially the latecomers. They were usually assigned the dirtiest, heaviest jobs.
- Q: In a way, those who survived longest had seniority.
- A: Sure! They also had survived already. They were the heroes. They (latecomers) often were the dirtiest because the way you kept yourself depended on the job. If you worked in a coal mine you didn't have any clothes to change into. So you

were dirty all the way along. You took it off and you shook it out. Again, we had no facility to wash. They were dirty. They were the lowest class. They also were lowest on physical health...they were not far from death. They barely survived. For instance, they ran around unattended. They didn't wipe their noses. Noses were dripping...just like that of a helpless person. Then, there were those who had the better jobs. Who worked inside like in machine shops, in woodwork. Their clothes were a little better. They were protected a little from the elements. They looked nicer and were not as exhausted as those who worked outside. Then, there was a third group who worked inside the camp. While we were outside the camp, they were inside...such as attendants

Q: They were not doing heavy labor the way you were, in other words.

A: They were the privileged ones who had connections and ties and they were there. So, that is it in terms of function, classifications. The higher, more prestigious group also worked in services like the kitchens. They had prisoners who worked in the kitchen peeling potatoes or washing or cooking. They also had plenty to eat. Then there were those who were in the distribution of the clothing, jackets, etc. Ultimately, if it was torn, they had to give you another jacket, it depended if you were in a better class, you got a better jacket, and if you were in a lower class you didn't. This is the type of classification which existed within the groups. Connections and ties were important and usually the newcomers had the worst deal. The lower the number, the better class you were. You were recognized. They respected you more.

Q: Yes, you indicated that the number on your arm could actually indicate when you came to the camp.

A: Yes. Which group you came from and so forth. That was all known. Then there were classifications in nationalities. The Jews were at the bottom of that, of course. In most camps the Jews were the majority. Somebody said that they had half as many Poles in the camps. That is not what I experienced. Maybe 10% at the most. The majority of the camps were Jews.

Q: And they were always the lowest group (hierarchically speaking)?

A: Always the lowest group. Without change of that anywhere. Then of course, there were individual Jews of the upper class who were on the top. Like the guy Chaim, whom I told you about. He was from the upper class. He was respected by the high command. He must have been one of the first prisoners who survived from the first.

Q: Do you think that he may have been a political prisoner to start rather than just Jewish?

- A: I don't know. Maybe, he might have been, however, he had the same sign we had. All the Jews were in one category across the board. Then, there were the Poles...then there were the other minorities such as gypsies, French, whatever. The third and the highest category were the "B.S." the professional criminals. They had the most supervisory positions like the "Kapos", that were the police.
- Q: The B.S. served as Kapos?
- A: Yes. Most of them. They were the commanders and the supervisors. These were actual criminals from Germany...not political prisoners. You could identify those who had green were the criminals, red triangles were the political prisoners. The Jews were the only ones who had the Mogen David (Star of David).
- Q: Oh, their's was the Mogen David, all the others had triangles of different colors.
- A: Correct. The colors identified them. the homosexuals were black. They didn't like homosexuals either.
- Q: Where were they? What I really am trying to find out...did the nationalities basically affect where you worked? For example, if the homosexual was a German would he be better than a Polish homosexual?
- A: Yes, yes! Absolutely. The national origin was the most important.
- Q: And the Germans always got the best treatment?
- A: Yes. The Germans were after all blood-related. They were picked for the high positions, for the easier work for respectability, for more food, etc. For example, they had a bordello in the camp only the German prisoners could go into the bordello.
- Q: Now, let me ask you something else. Was there any differentiation made between German Jews and Polish Jews?
- A: Yes. In the hierarchy, they were looked down just like everywhere.
- Q: But may they have a better opportunity at a better job or something like that?
- A: Yes. The German Jew yes. You see, the German Jews were earlier in the concentration camp than we were. So most of the German Jews had the 69,000 on their arms. I was an early Polish prisoner and I had 145,000.
- Q: Oh I see. So obviously it was the German whom the Nazis had the first chance to round up. As early as 1933, they were being rounded up.

- A: When we came, they were already in privileged positions and jobs. The majority I found, thank G-d, to be good persons.
- Q: The Jews did stick together basically?
- A: The majority did but there were exceptions...very few exceptions. Another point which I like to make is in spite of all the trials and tribulations, we lived under, we still had the same psychological hang-ups that we see today's. Society has not changed all that much. One says that the German Jews were better than the Polish Jews, another that the Polish Jews were better than the German Jews, another that the Polish Jews were better than the Hungarian Jews. Actually the criticism was not based on the majority from here or there...it was on those who kept themselves better...who are better able to survive. The Polish Jews generally kept themselves better than both of them...at least, that was our feeling. That they had greater tolerance (of hardships)...they had greater endurance and they could endure much more hardship and pain than the other Jews.
- Q: Well, Hungarian Jews came in very late in the war, didn't they? So I guess there was some kind of animosity over that...I don't know.
- A: No, No! Not animosity but they were not prepared for it or they couldn't get used to it or they never had a chance to get used to it because they died like flies...virtually like flies. Their group disintegrated rapidly. That is what you mean when you talk about supporting each other.
- Q: Yes, I wanted to back into that again. You said Jews...there were Jews who helped you to survive.
- A: Yes, and by and large most of the Jewish people supported one another. There were individual, isolated incidents, where someone was brutal who joined the Nazis and assumed their function. Perhaps, they thought that it was for their own survival. The majority, however, at least that was in my experience, helped each other. I find myself more during the war and even after war like Elisha, in Brothers Karamazov. The greatest tragedy that I found myself in I always found somebody who helped me out. You are familiar with Elisha, I presume. Elisha figures in the Brothers Karamazov. He was a little monk who although he minded his own business, always got into trouble. Everybody pushed him and kicked him. Whenever he was down he found someone to pick him up. I found myself in a similar situation all the time. Whenever I was down, I always found someone particularly a Jewish fellow to pick me back up.
- Q: You had started to explain that there was almost a family structure of two or four people.
- A: Yes. Almost a family structure of two or four people depending on the situation.



- Q: You said that those who worked together slept together.
- A: Yes, because they kept the same people in the same barracks to work in the same location. So we did stick together. We shared whatever we could steal, whatever we could organize, whatever we could find.
- Q: Organize is another word for stealing, wasn't it?
- A: Correct!
- Q: You didn't fight over it necessarily?
- A: Most groups did share but there were instances and I watched particularly where fathers and sons stole each other's bread. They were giving blows to each other when they saw it. That was a tragic scene to watch. You know, there was a father and a son fighting over a piece of bread. I saw such a scene twice with my own eyes.
- Q: Well, in your case, you are saying that what probably helped sustain you was the groups you were in...where you helped each other as much as you could.
- A: Most of them were young people such as I was myself. We developed some kind of solidarity where we stuck together, under all circumstances. We shared together.
- Q: You mentioned something like beyond food you shared blankets.
- A: Yes. We shared blankets and clothes, a piece of wire, or a piece of string.
- Q: Anything to help each other.
- A: Yes. Particularly clothes or so on. We didn't have a means of sewing them but we did what we could to repair a tear because you are supposed to be neat all the time. That is what the piece of wire or string were used for.
- Q: One other thing, in case we missed it. Somewhere you said that you knew that you were actually in the same camp with Leon Blum at one time? In line with the previous questions about prisoners of war, etc. you never saw him but you know that he was there and he was one of those kept in a separate location. (Leon Blum was a former French Prime Minister).
- A: Yes, that is true...I never saw him.

Begin Side Two, Tape Two.

- Q: This affected your beliefs and practices? You came from a very Orthodox background and how did this affect your beliefs?
- A: Really here I can only talk about myself. There were Jews who risked their lives daily to say the “Sh’ma Israel”. The Nazis didn’t like that. If they caught anybody they would shoot them on the spot.
- Q: For praying?
- A: Yes, for praying. There were people who in the morning when you “davened” (prayed) you always found people who had been shot while saying their prayers.
- Q: They wouldn’t even attempt to hide the fact that they were praying...because after all, they could have prayed to themselves, right?
- A: No. There was no privacy, it was open on all the sides.
- Q: But you could have prayed in your mind?
- A: Yes, of course...but that is not the way the Orthodox do it.
- Q: Right.
- A: You hold your hand like that.
- Q: Right.
- A: So this fellow stood in a corner and he had some people protect him, cover him up. And they did, in the morning before going to work or when coming home. They found a moment and they stood and prayed. Personally I was very bitter. Very disappointed. Being religious, I told myself that I was too young to sin. Well, I have done nothing bad to anybody why should I suffer? On the other hand, I felt that it is a world of madness, the whole world was mad. In my judgment, my assessment of the situation was, I looked at it from inside out and I gathered that the world is divided into two groups of people -- the direct killers and those who directly acquiesce and quietly allow this to happen without interfering. My belief was completely shaken and I have never been able to recover.
- Q: You belong to a Reform (Congregation)?
- A: I belong to Reform.
- Q: That is a world apart from (Orthodoxy). From the origin in Poland.

- A: Essentially I have an affinity for the Jewish people. I want to be with the Jewish people and this is not for Jewish reasons.
- Q: Oh, you mean that you really consider yourself almost a non-believer now?
- A: Well, I maintain tradition. I feel that I have a good basis in Jewish literature, people and lore...almost by osmosis.
- Q: Well, you went to Cheder didn't you? You did go until the age of nine...you had a Hebrew education there.
- A: Yes. A Jewish education. We learned about the Talmud and the Midrash. I still remember a lot of things. I can read the Torah in the actual Aramaic. I can read the Megilla.
- Q: But you mentioned, for instance, almost at the very beginning that you were never Bar Mitzvahed at the time because you were in the camps. That could have destroyed your faith as well.
- A: But I maintained it and I have close ties with the Jewish people. I feel comfortable with them. I feel at home with them...but in terms of religious beliefs, I don't have any.
- Q: Now here in Dayton is this the first time you actually affiliated with a Temple?
- A: Yes. Well, I have been affiliated on and off. I was not a member in Minneapolis. I was teaching Sunday school there under Rabbi Prowd.
- Q: That was the first place you came to in the U.S.?
- A: No. I was in New York for six months.
- Q: Well, we will get into that later.
- A: Now again, I cannot justify in my own mind that there is a Benevolent "G-d" who allows this type of massacre of innocent people, young children, adults. It is kind of sick.
- Q: I am sure you at least have to question it?
- A: I cannot understand it. I have questioned it and I have asked the same question of many people I came in contact with. I am still puzzled by it. I cannot understand it. It is a procedure we have to do in order to justify whatever is going on.
- Q: OK. There is one other aspect I want to get to which we may have touched on but which should be clarified before we go on to the post camp period. What did you

- know specifically about what was going on on the outside at the time of the war, specifically if anything and what was your method of obtaining that information?
- A: Of course, we had no contact with the outside world. We had no newspapers, no radio, no information from any reliable source. The only thing which we could hear is the Nazis talking amongst themselves, while watching us. We deliberately (tried) to overhear what they were talking about. So we picked up (news about) some major events such as we knew when the war broke out between the Germans and the Russians. We also knew from their reactions to us if they had victories, successful military accomplishment, they were good to us; on the other hand, if they suffered a defeat they were brutally mad and took it out on us.
- Q: Did you think that the Russian army would someday get to you?
- A: We were hoping. When we were in Auschwitz we were hoping because it was on the Polish border.
- Q: Did you have any idea how badly the Russians had been beaten in the early months of the war?
- A: Yes, yes, because we knew when Hitler made a speech. After Stalingrad or Leningrad.
- Q: Stalingrad was in early 1943.
- A: Yes. Again we heard conversation about it and again, he was saying that he was not going to spare another nation.
- Q: You didn't get to hear any direct broadcast at all. They didn't pipe it into the camp even when Hitler was speaking?
- A: No, no. We were not privileged to receive any information.
- Q: So, you knew that the war was beginning to turn after Stalingrad?
- A: Yes. After Stalingrad we knew it was turning and we started hoping. And this is why we were full of hope.
- Q: You knew that the United States was in the war?
- A: We knew that the U.S. and England were planning an invasion. We knew about this in broad terms. We didn't know the specific details. So broadly speaking, we had some idea about what was going on. Also, we didn't know specifically when it went into effect, but there were a couple of people who were in the medical barracks, doctors. So either they had some better contacts with the Germans or (otherwise) got more information. They always fed us a lot of information.

Through contacts with them they actually shared information. So we had a little knowledge of what was happening. Although because our lack of patience, getting the information seemed to take an eternity. We were impatient but we couldn't really visualize that they would reach us.

Q: While you were still living?

A: This in itself was beyond our comprehension.

Q: You did not know specifically about the Normandy invasion?

A: No.

Q: You knew that they were planning something like that?

A: No. We knew about an invasion somewhere.

Q: OK Murray, if there is nothing right now that you can think of, why don't we move on to the post WWII period. We know that you hid at the end and that you were rescued by American troops. You even said that a Jewish major freed you. Was he the first man you spoke to?

A: Yes and he spoke a broken Yiddish.

Q: I can't imagine what his reaction was?

A: Well, my reaction was that I was numb. Really...I cried! With the pain of hunger, I didn't feel a thing anymore.

Q: What did they do first to you?

A: At first, they gave me something to eat. They opened a can of food and gave me some of its content...then, they gave me something to drink. Then, I sat down and I think that I fell asleep. He woke me up after one hour and I was bleeding.

Q: You were still bleeding from the wound?

A: It was full of pus...so he took me to a military place and they worked on it and I stayed for a couple of days in the hospital.

Q: And then what?

A: And then they arranged to take that picture and then they took us to a hospital in Paris.

Q: You went right to Paris within a few days?

A: Yes, right to France where I joined a group.

Q: That is specifically the group called “The Orphans of Buchenwald”?

A: Yes.

Q: Now was this an enterprise launched by French Jews perhaps?

A: Well, in conjunction with the French government on the initiative of the French Jews because the French officers, or whatever, gave us a home, a country, citizenship papers...but we were under the auspices of a French Jewish organization called OSAI...a society for orphans.

Q: That was mainly set up to get children who survived, was that the idea?

A: Apparently yes, they picked up all the children. They got us to stay for four or five days at the Hotel Lutetia (or a name very much like this. Later it is called the “Lutestia” which is known as one of the biggest hotels in Paris). They were fully equipped with diapers and cribs.

Q: Oh, they thought that there were really going to be children?

A: Yes, they expected really little children.

Q: So, how did they adjust to you? How did they react when they found out that they were receiving teenagers? Was it a different approach?

A: Well the government knew that we were there and the Jewish people took care of us. We were in a hotel that was fitted out like a hospital with nurses. They were taking care of us, so they had to change their preparations a little bit and their orientation. Maybe they were disappointed. I don't know.

Q: I am sure that they were not!

A: Then people came to look at us and after we recuperated in the hospital for a while (that point is not clear on the tape, whether it is a hospital or a hotel outfitted like a hospital), we went to Aigues. This is a camp about 200 miles from Paris with houses like a school with numbers.

Q: You were about 15 by this time, right?

A: Yes, and we were housed there. Everything was taken care of, just so that we could recuperate. We didn't do anything except eat, sleep and play around.

Q: Did you have any idea then what they were trying to do with you in the bargain?

A: No.

Q: Did you think that you were going to stay in France or go elsewhere?

A: We knew that we were with Jewish people and they tried to accommodate us the best they could. They gave us all kinds of medical care and of course, most of the youngsters were very bitter and showed it in a very distinctive way. They broke the furniture, they cried a lot at night, they were screaming because they wanted their parents.

Q: But, they didn't see them during the whole war, let's say, but now they wanted them back again. It's as if they had a completely different personality while they were in the camps. Now that is over they came back to reality.

A: That's right! They came up with -- where are my parents? Absolutely, that is what I came up with. I asked the American doctor who operated on me... "Where are my parents?" That is what I was asking.

Q: Really! How did he react?

A: He was sitting watching me trying to give me something more to eat.

Q: Was that your major concern, to try to locate your family?

A: Yes, Yes!!!

Q: How long was it until you contacted your sister?

A: It was about one year or a year and a half.

Q: And that was just by accident?

A: Yes, by accident. But I wrote and it took a while until an answer came back.

Q: Did you ever have definite confirmation as to what happened to your parents and the rest of your family?

A: Yes. My sister...of course, she was in the Lodz ghetto until Jan. 1945, she knew when they took my parents away.

Q: Oh, they were there also that late? Not until early 1945?

A: Yes, when they evacuated the ghetto, when the Russians were coming. She knew what happened.

Q: But she never saw them again?

A: No! You see that is what happens when they took the transport. Afterwards, they found out where the transport went.

Q: Right! But your sister never left the ghetto?

A: Not until '45. In '45 she went also to Auschwitz.

Q: But she survived also?

A: She survived also.

Q: Now, you were in France?

A: In France...we were about three months in Aigues.

Q: And they were feeding you and getting you back to health, I presume...and education too, I presume.

A: Not in Aigues. Afterwards, they gave us different tests. In Aigues, we didn't have any education...they let us loose. We didn't do anything. After the three months, we went to Paris then they started testing us (probably the tests in Aigues were medical). First, they asked us what we wanted to pursue, I remember that. They gave us different types of tests. They taught us French so that we could catch up with high school.

Q: Did they have any idea where you might want to go? Or where they could send you...for instance, there was never any thought about going back to Poland on your part?

A: No no.

Q: Because there was nothing left?

A: There were plans made to stay there in France. The French government offered us citizenship papers.

Q: Yes, they would take you in as refugees.

A: They took us in and offered us permanent residence in Paris. The Jewish organizations with American dollars -- the Americans started shipping in a lot of money and supplies. So they started providing everything for us. We were very comfortable from the material point of view, that is. The people over there were extremely nice to us. Very good to us. After that, of course, they sent psychologists to us. I was the only one who talked to the psychologists. Most of



them didn't want to talk to him. They didn't want to be thought crazy. It was not in the Polish pattern to talk to a psychologist.

Q: Right! Especially amongst the Jews I would think, back then.

A: They said, "Only crazy people go to the psychologist". So, they gave this up. Actually they said that they wanted to study this reaction to a psychologist.

Q: Exactly! But did you resent it or did they make an object of curiosity out of you?

A: No, I personally objected. I was...I think I wanted to see him. Not boastfully. I was the only fellow who did not agree with the majority of the kids. They were very destructive. They gave them coats, for example, and they protested that they did not want the coats...they wanted different ones. The coats were made of gray blankets. The kids threw them away. They didn't want them. They wanted blue coats or something like that. They protested. They went on strike and all that. You know, real kid stuff. In some sense they tried to understand it. But!

Q: Well, they were all orphans too!

A: Well, they took us in and they didn't want to blame the French people for this. So it all blew over. Afterwards, we went to school. We were assigned to schools and to different grades.

Q: You had never been beyond what grade in school...before you were taken away?

A: Third grade, I believe.

Q: But you could read and write very well.

Q: Yiddish, I could do well, a little Polish.

Q: You didn't know Hebrew?

A: Of course, Hebrew! Hebrew and Yiddish!

Q: You could write Hebrew?

A: Yes, of course. I wrote most of what I had to in Yiddish. All the different phrases

Q: And now you were learning French as well?

A: Yes, we were learning French with special tutors.

Q: Now, when you picked up your education, what level would you say they put you in? A level to correspond with your age; 11<sup>th</sup> grade? I mean right there in France.

A: No, we did not go to any public schools.

Q: I mean whatever school they provided?

A: We didn't go to public school. The first year we went essentially in a home. We were three months in Aigues, then we went back to Paris. We lived where Robespierre's palace used to be. Most incredible, mirrors and marble.

Q: They were trying to make you feel good, I guess.

A: Yes. The group was divided into several parts. One, lived in Rothschild's facility...25-35 different rooms. So, after we had been tutored for one year, we went to regular school. I passed a test and went on to "ecole de dentisterie", a dental school.

Q: Oh, really! Were you going to be a dental technician or a dentist?

A: A dentist.

Q: Oh, to be a dentist, otherwise said: they gave you equivalent credit for your education? They didn't expect you to go back and start over in grade school and high school?

A: No.

Q: They were really treating you as adults, I would say.

A: We were tutored for about one year or one and a half, or two years. I don't remember the exact dates...and then when we started school I went to dental school. So, we started both theoretical and practical schooling. In the theoretical course, we had a Russian professor. The school was specially established for after the war, I think.

Q: What, for Russians, immigrants?

A: No, no, no...the professor was from Russia. He was a Jewish professor who during the war was in Switzerland. So he came and they formed the school. I never did hear about this school earlier. Maybe you recall the pictures from that school.

Q: I didn't know that these pictures were from that school.

A: The school was for seven years (if one is to become a dentist).

Q: So, how long were you in France?

A: From '45, the end of April until about late '49.

Q: Four years and you said that you made an attempt to go to Israel?

A: Yes, in '47. Then I was active in a Zionist organization. I was tied up with a Zionist organization.

Q: Were you active before. Oh, I keep forgetting that you were a youngster, but you said that your family was of Zionist orientation before WWII.

A: And active also. My older brother was active in a Zionist organization. So I was active then. And then another group of about five kids and they sent us to Italy for training.

Q: That is where you would embark from...an Italian port to leave for Israel?

A: No. I left from Le Havre. I just went for the training.

Q: Is that common...to leave from an Italian port to go to Israel?

A: They had training places there for the people. Then, I went to Herzelia in Israel and I was pushed back.

Q: By the British?

A: Yes.

Q: You were not allowed in?

A: No...they did not let us. We were about eight days on the ship and then we went back to Le Havre.

Q: You were back in France?

A: In France...yes.

Q: That was the only attempt you made?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: So you stayed in France two more years?

A: Yes.

- Q: And during that time you established contact with your sister?
- A: Yes.
- Q: You just wrote a letter to your hometown? You said a postcard...something like: does anybody know anybody in my family?"
- A: Yes, something like "Weisman, the address where we had lived and if you know anybody tell them where I am."
- Q: And she was living there?
- A: No. She just came back. No, no, she came back several months later. She was traveling around to find family. While I was in Paris, she went around looking for friends, for brothers, sisters, etc.
- Q: You mean, for your family or for others as well?
- A: For us!!! For our family!!!
- Q: Oh, for your family. She had been in Israel, right?
- A: No. She, after the liberation, went back to Poland. She was looking in different places. She went to campsites looking for my brother and for another sister I had. She had been traveling around for several months and finally she went back to Poland to see if she could maybe find them there.
- Q: How many children were you in all, originally?
- A: Five.
- Q: And only two of you survived?
- A: Yes.
- Q: And you had one other brother and two other sisters?
- A: No. Two brothers and one other sister who did not survive. So she after several months, or about one year -- you see, I didn't hear immediately. The answer to the card did not come back right away. It came back about two years later.
- Q: Is that right?
- A: Yes, sure.

- Q: But you were still there (at your Paris address)?
- A: Yes, I was still there. I was living at the same address.
- Q: And she had finally found the card and you got the answer that she was there?
- A: Yes.
- Q: But you still didn't go to meet her or anything?
- A: No. We couldn't. I did not want to go to Poland. You see by that time, she wanted to get out of Poland. There were pogroms in Poland and killings.
- Q: Well, it was going Communist too?
- A: Yes. But they were killing Jews there at that time. I didn't want to take a chance.
- Q: Still in 1949?
- A: Yes. They had pogroms there and killed several.
- Q: Now they blamed the Jews for the war?
- A: Yes! They blamed Hitler for not killing all the Jews. Since these who came back reclaimed their property, etc. They had a demonstration and killed 140 Jews in one day.
- Q: This is after the war?
- A: After the war, sure. In Paris there were demonstrations also against the Jews but they didn't have any killings.
- Q: Yes. Everyone blamed their troubles on the Jews. While they stood by and did nothing!
- A: So, finally she (Murray's sister) decided to get away from that and go to Israel. We had corresponded.
- Q: Oh, she was able to get out of Poland then?
- A: Eventually. She was smuggled out, smuggled out!
- Q: Oh really?
- A: She smuggled herself out. She got married to another guy who survived the camps and they smuggled themselves to Israel through Germany.

Q: They were both Polish Jews?

A: Yes. Both. So they smuggled themselves out and went to Israel. I, ultimately went to the U.S. in 1956.

Q: What made you finally decide to leave France?

A: First of all, I wanted to get away from Europe. I didn't feel safe there.

Q: You really didn't?

A: No! We were provided a comfortable life in Paris. A nice social life amongst Jewish people with the Jewish girls. But in terms of a future, I didn't want to settle there. I wanted to go to Israel. Israel didn't materialize so I went to the U.S. and then I suddenly changed my mind.

Q: That is all right. Let me clarify, once Israel was created you did think of going there?

A: Yes. I did think of going there and then I got another idea. We received packages from the U.S. and I received a package. It was a doll from Susie Rothstein from Boston...and a note (which said) "I hope this will cheer you up as it did my father when he was over there."

Q: Really!

A: So I decided to come to see this Rothstein girl.

Q: So the children were just making a project of contacting the children who had survived the Holocaust.

A: That's right. So I decided that I come here to the U.S. and investigate.

Q: Did you meet her?

A: No, she had not given an address. She just had put down a name.

Q: Oh, in other words you came on your own? Completely on your own?

A: No. See, after we lived in Paris for several years, the money stopped flowing from the U.S. The U.S. said – "Alright, we gave you enough...now you have to get your own job and support your own people." So, the school was terminated, because they didn't have any money to support us and they told us "you better go to work now." The honeymoon was over.

- Q: Ha...yes, something like “we took care of you long enough.”
- A: So the honeymoon ended.
- Q: You didn't have any trouble getting into the U.S.?
- A: Fortunately, we had some visitors from the State Department to our orphanage. They offered us a visa if we wanted to come. I was one of the youngsters who decided to go (to the U.S.). Some of the (other) youngsters went to Argentina. Some to Canada. Some to different parts of the world.
- Q: Who was settling you? Who was handling the arrangements?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: You mean the U.S. State Department?
- A: Yes.
- Q: No Jewish organizations or anything like that?
- A: No.
- Q: But before I forget, what happened to the dental training...you never pursued that?
- A: Well, I came here. I was six months in N.Y. and then I went to Minnesota. It is interesting how I got there.
- Q: But first tell me about N.Y. What were you doing in N.Y.?
- A: I came to N.Y. and I had a friend who had come here several months earlier.
- Q: Was this 1949?
- A: 1949 yes. I had a friend who met me at the boat. You know, he picked me up. He had a job for me and within a couple of days I went to work in a factory.
- Q: Did you speak English?
- A: At that time no. No, I didn't know any English so I was working for several months and I went to night school.
- Q: Was that high school level or college level?

A: No, high school just to learn English. So, I got acquainted with a teacher, a Jewish teacher. He said, "Murray, I am going across the country to California to see my sister, if you want to come (with me), it will cost you nothing and you will have a chance to see the country." I said, "when are you going?" I picked up my 32 things and we were on our way to California. This guy had another sister in Minneapolis and he stopped to see her. In Minneapolis, we walked in at his sister's and they started asking me questions. A young lady talks to me and say, "I have a friend who looks like you and who comes from the same place you come from." And here was a fellow whom I roomed together in KZ (abbreviated for Konzentration Lager) -- I did not know that he was alive and he didn't know that I was alive.

Q: From camp?

A: Yes, from a concentration camp. Both of us were together, we bunked together. Gabby Schulman...so, I did not go any further. I stayed in Minneapolis.

Q: And you went to school?

A: I got a job for several months and then I decided to go to school. I took a college entrance examination in Minnesota and went to school there.

Q: You didn't have any problem getting into the University?

A: No, no.

Q: You knew English by then?

A: By then I knew enough to converse...not a lot. I had to work hard. I wasn't fluent (in English).

Q: Were you living alone or with a family?

A: I was living with a family at first and then I moved to the campus.

Q: Oh, you lived on the campus but you had no family there at all. So you were in Minneapolis for all of your undergraduate work?

A: Undergraduate. I worked for the hospital and got three meals. I served meals to the patients in the mornings. I also got a room where I took care of the house. You know cut the lawn and such I got the room free. So I worked my way through school that way.

Q: So how many years were you in Minneapolis?



A: I was in Minneapolis for ten years. I got my BA there, then I worked for a couple of years, then I went for my Master's.

Q: What was your BA in, what was your major?

A: Bachelor of Business Administration.

Q: OK, and then your Master's was in what?

A: Master's in Social Work.

Q: OK, you then went into social work, is that right?

A: Then I got a year to finish my PH.D in social work.

Q: Was that all at the University of Minnesota?

A: Yes, all at the University of Minnesota. Then I worked for year to law school.

Q: A PH.D in Social Work, by the way, is not a very common degree is it?

A: No.

Q: Not many people go on toward their PH.D in social work. It is unusual!

A: Yes, I had a job for Juvenile Probation for the Domestic Court. And I had to know the language. I did marriage counseling. Then my boss told me that I should know a little about attorneys. I should take a course in law, so I took a course in law. I liked it so I completed law school.

Q: Was that at the University of Minnesota?

A: No, I started one year and then I met my wife and I moved to Cincinnati.

Q: She was from Cincinnati?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did you meet her...in Minneapolis?

A: No, I met her in New York.

Q: You were in N.Y. at the time?

A: Yes, for a visit you know.

Q: Did someone introduce you?

A: Yes, yes. I was in a family. You see, I stayed with this family when I first came. I visited them again when I was in N.Y.

Q: Oh, in N.Y. and they introduced you to her?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And she was from Cincinnati?

A: Yes.

Q: So you moved to Cincinnati then?

A: OK.

Q: Did you have a job right away?

A: Yes, right away. Actually I secured the job before I moved and got married. I finished law school at Chase.

Q: You started law school at the University of Minnesota, one year.

A: Yes.

Q: And then when did you come to the Dayton area?

A: I came to Dayton in 1970, I think.

Q: You were in Cincinnati at the time so you just ended up right here.

A: Yes.

Q: I think that we have gone into some other questions I may have liked to ask about your life upon arrival. You didn't feel that you had any particular problem with language even though you knew no English when you came here.

A: Oh, I still have a problem with the language. I have been able to communicate. I worked hard at it. I read a lot. It didn't come easy.

Q: Here is a good question? Did you get aid in getting established? It seems to me that in most places you made your own way...most of the time. You had people who helped you and who were friendly to you but no more than that.

- A: Yes, I did not get much help except that for graduate school I had a scholarship. Then in 1956, I went to Israel to pick my sister down here.
- Q: You went to Israel in '56 and brought her to the United States?
- A: You see, I graduated from University to save up enough money to go to Israel.
- Q: You presently work at Wright-Patterson AFB. Is that correct?
- A: Yes.
- Q: What is your position there?
- A: I am an attorney with the Logistics Command.
- Q: The principal language spoken at home is English, of course. That is what it asks for down here.
- A: Yes.
- Q: All right, here are some specifics. We got into this before but this is for the records. How often, if at all, do you attend synagogue?
- A: I am conducting services here once a month for the South of town community. (At this time, this was a branch of Temple Israel and later became Temple Beth Or). So I am active here...so I guess I attend pretty often.
- Q: But you used to attend every Friday at Temple Israel on Salem Ave?
- A: Yes. Of course, when services are here. Temple conducts services here (in the South) once a month we attend.
- Q: Would you say that your primary association is with Jews or non-Jews? Or would you say that it is equally divided.
- A: Primarily with Jews.
- Q: But in working at Wright-Patterson, for instance?
- A: I am the only Jew in the office.
- Q: In the Operations Office? But there are numerous Jews working at Wright-Patterson at the base. I mean both military and civilians.
- A: Yes, of course, but in the legal office I am the only Jew. We have about fifty attorneys and I am the only one.

- Q: Really! I knew a fellow who used to work there.
- A: Yes, I know...do you mean Beaty?
- Q: No, I knew Goldfetter. He was here many years ago.
- A: Well, an interesting sidelight I would like to tell you. You know last year, when they showed the Holocaust (the TV series) and I was on TV making a presentation of some of the reactions to the film, etc. A woman made a very sophisticated and intelligent comment and she got friendly with me. About one week later she came in and said, "Murray, I have great admiration for you. I will show you on TV. Last Sunday we prayed for two things for you." I said, "what did you pray?" One is that you forgive the Christians for what they did to you and the other is that you make a success at your job and that you become a good Southern Baptist.
- Q: OK. Here are a few specifics -- are you active in anything that is civic...such as groups of any kind? For instance, association of the arts or music outside of religious organizations? Anything you can think of?
- A: I am on the Board of Jewish Education. I have been on the Board of Health.
- Q: One of those community boards?
- A: Yes. And Health programs. I have been on the Board of Sinclair Community College but since at Wright-Patterson you are limited as to where you may participate (regulation about participating in partisan political organizations). I gradually got out of it. I have not been active in the bar.
- Q: I know that you have never gone back to Poland, which was one of the questions. How often do you think about what you went through?
- A: Of course, with the normal daily activities here you are busy with your life. You don't consciously sit and think about it. But, nonetheless, periodically, it pops up.
- Q: Do you, for instance, ever dream about it?
- A: Yes. I have frequent nightmares.
- Q: As you wake up and realize what you have been dreaming about.
- A: Yes. Nightmares!! I am repeatedly captured. Captured in Russia. Captured in a corner and shooting and scenes keep on popping up periodically. Particularly when I am discussing this in anyway. You know when I am talking about.

Q: Have you ever thought about now, we are now getting to a specific thing I want to ask you: comparing your own children's lives to yours. The difference from your own. Do you ever think about that? How they are growing up as compared to the way you did.

A: Well, at the beginning, before I got married, when I was single, I had two ideas with which I was toying in my mind. One was to perpetuate our family...on the other hand, I was thinking that maybe it is not kind to have children and to see them go through some of the brutality I went through. Initially I was determined not to have any children.

Q: Let me tell you...I came across something the other day. I don't even remember where it was. Possibly a woman survivor was with women who were talking and she said, "Each of us has got to have nine or ten children to make up for what happened to our people." But it is interesting what you are saying. There could have been two contrary feelings about that.

A: I have such contradictions. You see, at the beginning, we thought that maybe we shouldn't. Of course, she had different ideas. When I was in a concentration camp, my thinking was once I get out if I ever get out, I go into the woods to be isolated. I don't want to have any contact with anybody. I want to get away from everybody in the whole world...and live with the animals in the woods without any contact with anyone. But after you get exposed to that French society with all the cultural activities and the social activities, it was quite different. When the children were small and I held my children.. At times, I was very afraid that something should happen and that someone would come with a gun and grab them.

Q: Do you think that you are an overly protective parent?

A: No, no, no. I think that is not true in my case.

Q: As you know there has been a lot written lately about the children of the survivors.

A: No. that is not the case. I think that the kids are relatively normal. They lead a normal life. In the process of raising the children, my wife is a little more permissive than I am. I am somewhat stricter.

Q: But of course.

A: For example, my daughter is a 16 year-old girl. She goes out at night. We don't tell her when she is to come (home). The only thing we are unhappy is that she happens to be in a Christian environment, no Jewish kids. We are concerned about it, she knows about our concern. We hope that her ties are not going to be serious.

- Q: Is she involved in (Jewish) youth groups, etc.
- A: Yes. She goes with both the youth group of the Temple and with youth groups of Beth Abraham. She even went to the Chebe Sheminar for a weekend with them...because we encourage it.
- Q: Well, that is good.
- A: But when parents have experienced as in my life...obviously I cannot say that my life and past don't have an impact on my behavior. (They have to try and balance it).
- Q: Do they ever ask you about it? Are they aware of what you went through?
- A: When they were very small and they asked, what is this number?
- Q: There on your arm?
- A: Yes. But when they got older they shy away from it. For instance, Neil, he once took a course on the Holocaust. I lectured on it. He took a course several years ago and he didn't want to hear any more about it. They offered that course here and he said, no, he didn't want to take it. He knows as much as anybody else.
- Q: We may never know what their real feelings are because they can't explain it.
- A: Yes, for example., at the Temple last year I had a session with all the classes together. I made a presentation (about the Holocaust). I asked the teacher to excuse my kids, if they didn't want to be there. So, I asked them, I am going to be talking about my experiences. Do you want to be there or not? They both said no, but all of a sudden, while I was lecturing, I saw them out of the corner of my eye sitting in back of the auditorium, hiding. I ordinarily don't talk about it and never make any reference to it... to my experiences. I don't want to embitter their lives with my experiences. But I feel personally that they have a normal, healthy life, in spite of my memories. Of course, I don't go around pitying myself all the time, either for what happened.
- Q: Well. Anybody could understand it, even if you did. Okay. There were two questions which should be answered before we go into a conclusion, that you had mentioned to me off the tapes. They are really not questions but they pertain to the two conversations you had in 1945 shortly after you were liberated. The woman first of all.
- A: The woman was in France.
- Q: OK, the German was right after Buchenwald?

- A: It took place in Buchenwald while I was there still.
- Q: Oh I see. What did this man say. He was prisoner as well?
- A: He also was a prisoner. He portrayed himself as a Communist. He said that he was a Communist leader. He said that the “Jews paid a heavy price in all the tragedy. You look German, you speak German, why don’t you come with me and forget that you are a Jew.”
- Q: Otherwise sad, “forget your identity”, but you still wouldn’t be in Germany.
- A: Of course not. Even today I don’t want to buy a German product.
- Q: There are people who cannot understand that by the way.
- A: I don’t want to be fanatic about it. I did not pursue much of the “Wiedergutmachung” (Financial compensation for damages done by the Nazis) because I have strong feelings. I don’t want them to pay off for my parents and for the other members of my family. How can I struggle for so many years and almost give up my life and settle the accounts that way. I didn’t have any hate against the non-Jews, because they are the crazy people, which in their letters and their songs, copies of which I have...they express that it is not us but they who are the crazy people. So we have to save them. We have to educate them and they are the ones (who need the cure).
- Q: You would not buy the arguments some of them make that you brought this upon yourself, etc. That is obviously wrong, but then I have seen results of public opinion surveys taken right after the war or even before the war when people said that the Jews brought this upon themselves.

Tape three starts here and it appears not to follow straight away from the previous one so no attempt is being made to provide a transition.

- A: I have been faced many times with the question why did so many Jews allow themselves to be arrested and butchered. Now to answer this question we have to understand, first of all, the context of the mind of the majority of the Europeans, in general, or the Jews in particular. We are conditioned against violence, guns are something strange frightful objects. You are not allowed to use them. The only person who could handle a knife was a mohel, you couldn’t use it except for a holy purpose. This is part of our culture. We couldn’t understand that someone else would use it. Now the other part is, besides from our cultural conditioning, is that the Germans had taken a scientific approach. They used modern psychology and technology to dehumanize.

- Q: You are one who can completely understand that now you get a very much better perspective of the whole thing now.
- A: As I said they begin to dehumanize. How did they do it...they used the plan of deprivation, first of all you deprive them of all outside influences...then you starve them. Now, if I would ask anybody if he has suffered, did you fast one day -- Yom Kippur?
- Q: Yes, yes!
- A: How did you feel at 5: P.M.?
- Q: Pretty hungry.
- A: What do you think, with what is your mind occupied?
- Q: With food.
- A: Now suppose you go on with that day after day and day after day!
- Q: That is why, Murray, I can't understand why anyone survived that hunger.
- A: Nothing else...even if the physical body can take it but psychologically you get messed up. You cannot control your thinking. Your flow of thought is completely preoccupied. What to put into your mouth. You don't care about danger...you don't care about being killed. It is an irony----you risk your life in order to survive. If you would say to a hungry person who has not eaten for a couple of three or four days..."You go there and we might give you bread"...you could see five thousand people in line, waiting. Now what are they waiting for...for their death.
- Q: You mean that it wasn't just those showers, they could have been told that there is food there or whatever.
- A: That was their motto. They said a piece of bread...if they give them a piece of bread they go in there. Sure they lured them in. Of course, and then watching while they eat the piece of bread...lo and behold somebody got a bigger piece, so they dropped to the level of an animal as far as functioning mental capacity. Very few could foresee and those who could foresee didn't have the physical strength to do something about it. You couldn't do anything about it...just let me give you a simple example about this. During the war with Japan, on some of the islands there were 12 Japanese soldiers who controlled an army of 25 thousand American prisoners. Why didn't they resist?
- Q: Is that true? I know of no such incident.



- A: Yes, a colonel told me, that is true.
- Q: Oh, they only had 12 men guarding the whole army.
- A: 12 men guarding 25 thousand American prisoners, because they were starved, they were degraded, they were driven for days without food.
- Q: Diseased too?
- A: And that is what they did. They only wanted to save every bullet. They planned to minimize the possibility of resistance. Like the German who said -- when he talked in the market square in Lodz, 'we need you, we want you, bring your dishes because we don't have any. We need you. You are the best support of the Germany. We don't want you to go to the Russians. Please come with us, you get a big bread.'" Even the doubters, the strong people who were skeptic are beginning to believe.
- Q: Well, the mass will go along, that is mass psychology too.
- A: This is part of the tragedy. Then they trap you in such a way that you are overwhelmed with technical equipment...with and with electricity, etc. The second point is if you risked a resistance and kill a German you are not only risking your life but they arrest the entire community.
- Q: What do they kill ten for one or something like that?
- A: Hundreds for one. Whoever was present, they kill them.
- Q: Yes, yes, we had this discussion last Sunday, about the bombing. Would you think that you would have been better off if the camps were bombed?
- A: Probably not. We probably would have been killed. The only thing, we were hoping was, that if the area around the camp was bombed, that maybe we would be able to run away en masse. Because, around Auschwitz we heard that there were partisans, so we could have run away to them.
- Q: That is a question which was not even brought up. Were there ever any forces which made effort to attack the camps, such as partisan groups?
- A: Not to my knowledge.
- Q: They stayed away from them, the camps.
- A: The people from inside would have tried to make the breaks.
- Q: I mean, there weren't, like partisan armies who tried to liberate you even?

- A: No. We heard that there were partisan armies. Jewish partisans as well as non-Jews but not inside or trying to break in.
- Q: That would have been interesting.
- A: The only thing. When the Russians bombarded the place where we worked, we were hoping that they bomb the camp at night and smash the electricity. Then there would have been no light and we could have run away.
- Q: You never heard of any mass escape like thousands who made an attempt?
- A: No, nothing but individuals. Only some individuals who bought their way out. Not many, maybe one or two. The largest group were the five people which included Chaim.
- Q: They just bribed their way out? They didn't actually escape?
- A: Yes, they bought their way out. They were in supplies where they had an opportunity to get things.
- Q: Wasn't it dangerous for the German guards to take bribes? Didn't they risk their lives if they were caught accepting bribes?
- A: Of course.
- Q: But if you gave them a bribe how did you get a guarantee that they would ever live up to their commitment? Did you just take a chance?
- A: They could kill you. They could kill you just as they did with the girls. I ran into a girl prisoner in camp. It was in Buna. There were a group of girls who came to us. And you can guess what they did to the girls. They picked the nice looking girls, they raped them and then they shot them. You know they promised that they would take them out, and then they just shot them.
- Q: We may already have covered what your message would be but I just want to get on record that other conversation. The one with the woman in France. Please tell us about this now.
- A: All right. When I just was in the Lutestia Hotel (there is such a hotel with 305 rooms located at 43 Blvd Raspull Paris VI). When we first arrived, you know where they expected the infants and the little children. A woman came and looked around, she was looking for her son who must have been about my age.
- Q: Was she Polish?

- A: No. She was a Frenchwoman. She started screaming, "Why are you here. My son isn't there...he looked like you!" I must have resembled her son. She must have been shocked, maybe, I looked somewhat like her son and she had been hoping.
- Q: Did they take her away?
- A: No. She calmed down. You know there were nurses who were talking to her in French, which I couldn't understand. It was a heartbreaking scene. A lot of people came there inquiring about children.
- Q: Do you want to give some thought to what you would say in concluding.
- A: The things which seem to me, which I have learned through this tragedy is that man is a creation with a lot of weaknesses, a lot of frailties. He is strong in his desires and often weak in his capabilities. Some are capable to rise above mediocrity but the majority are capable of both. To be brutal people and good people. It will depend upon the condition they are in and on the occasion. I think that a civilized, intelligent people should be constantly aware of this. Whenever the sign of fanaticism, whether it is from the right or from the left, appears we should resist it from the beginning, in order to avoid such tragedies. It is not impossible for such a tragedy to happen again...whether it is against Jews or Cambodians or anybody else. As a civilized people we should constantly be aware of such fanatics, wherever they are, from the very beginning.
- Q: Do you believe that the world really learned a lesson from the Holocaust?
- A: Yes, I think so. You see the progress we have made. This is something which you brought up in our informal conversation without tape. When there was a ship of Jews --mainly children -- wandering around for two months on the high seas, no country wanted to take them in. So they got destroyed by the Nazis. Look what happened to the escapees now. We send planes to pick up Cambodian children. When was it about one year ago?
- Q: Yes, that was maybe only because the United States was directly involved in all of this tragedy. I wonder how we would react elsewhere. For instance, what has the world done lately for Africa, for instance. People are starving there regularly.
- A: Whether we are involved with it or not. See the Cambodians, we try to accommodate them and bring them in. We have a great sympathy for the Russian Jews. They put a little pressure on to help us. They probably wouldn't get out without the American Jews. I think that we have made some progress. Also, I feel it and therefore, I like this country and I am grateful to be here. Let me give you an example. At the beginning of the time when I was here. When I first came, they wanted me to go to Korea. I told them that is ridiculous. I came here to live not to die. If I have to be in Korea so I will go back to Europe.

- Q: Were you ever in the army?
- A: No, they wanted to take me and induct me. I told them quite frankly, rather than go into the army, I go back where I came from and take care of things there.
- Q: Were you a citizen? (Prior to the change in the law after the end of WWII fighting you had to be either a U.S. citizen or have taken out your first papers to be inducted into any of the U.S. armed services).
- A: They take non-citizens also.
- Q: I mean you were not a citizen of the U.S. yet at all?
- A: No, no. So I was reluctant to go into the service.
- Q: Yes.
- A: I was fed up with the military. As a matter of fact I was so afraid that if I saw a military uniform on one side of the street I go to the other side.
- Q: Were you actually drafted?
- A: I was called for induction, for examination.
- Q: Oh, I see. Did you pass the physical?
- A: They gave me a 4F (classification as physically unable to serve). I don't know if I passed the physical (obviously no one explained what 4F meant). I didn't care to know.
- Q: I would think that you would have some kind of exemption.
- A: Well, maybe they gave me an exemption but I wasn't interested in going into the Armed Forces.
- Q: Well there was something with your eyes too, remember? You may not have passed the physical.
- A: But later on, for instance, in the middle 50's, when Sen. Joseph McCarthy was messing around again, I was frightened. I thought that they would first go after the Communists, and the next time it would be against the Jews! But I was very proud that the American people got together enough to get him the "hell" out of there! So I started gaining confidence...actually regaining my confidence.
- Q: Do you believe that this society is really unique?

A: Yes. That this society is unique and that it can withstand the test. But again, of course, you cannot expect courage from everybody. When it comes to a showdown between others and the Jews, I know that we will be the victims. But, we are a political force, in this country, and we particularly should be constantly on the guard that no fanatics take hold and try to run this country and rule over the people.

Q: If you had still lived in France, as an example, as you did for a while and the incidents of anti-communism are not uncommon, would you feel particularly uncomfortable when that developed?

A: I was very uncomfortable. I saw it. That is why I wanted to get away from France. I wanted to get away from Poland. The repeated outbursts you heard, for instance, I was watching where a street peddler -- a French peddler -- with some food to sell, and a policeman attempted to chase him away...you know, give him a ticket, the peddler said, "If I were a Jew, you wouldn't bother me."

Q: That is what he said?

A: Yes, so this type of anti-Semitic remarks bothers me.

Q: Yes, it is a tradition there, unfortunately. I mean there are other societies though where you might think that you would feel comfortable or maybe not? The U.S. is so unique.

A: I wouldn't want to take any chances anyway. Maybe Israel.

Q: Have you thought about going to Israel?

A: Yes, but you can't compare it. I mean that you still can't compare it.

Q: Oh, you have been there before, I mean that you have been there several times.

A: We still think about it from time to time.

Q: Oh good!

A: Well, eventually I hope that we will go.