

Interview with Ladislav Stockinger

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Question: Mr. Stockinger, if you could tell us how you spent your childhood, something about the family you were born into, what your parents did, how many brothers and sisters you had.

Answer: Well, how many brothers and sisters I had. I was born in Prague in 1930. And then my mother moved to Plavsko, that's in the Jindrichuv Hradec region (of what was Czechoslovakia). And then she got to know that Vrba. And she had, they had two of us. We were two, my sister and I. My sister, she's in Ceske Budejovice, and the boys are, there were six of us. One of them is in Milicin, and I don't know where the others are, the other guys.

Q: This Mr. Vrba, he was your father?

A: No, I was born out of wedlock. And this Vrba, he took us (as his own). But that was this kind of a mixed marriage. And when they took all of (us) from Plavsko, there were both Studenies (family name) and Vrbas. They would always take everyone en masse, and so we were taken to that place.

Q: But before that, can you go back a little. What did your mother do?

A: She was a farmhand, she worked in agriculture.

Q: And this Mr. Vrba, he was in what business?

A: He was a lumberjack of sorts, worked in the forest. That kind of thing.

Q: And you and your brothers and sisters, what did you do, were you going to school at the time?

A: We went to school in Plavsko, there. And that was in around 1941, something like that. That was when they took all of us, all of us that were there, they took away.

Q: Who is this all of us?

A: Well, all of the Studeny family, the Vrbas. All of the people, who were of that ethnic group, of Romany origin. They took all (of us) away.

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Q: Who took you away?

A: Well, I'm not sure exactly what it was, to tell you the truth. Czech police came and took us all to Ceske Budejovice. There was this kind of a holding camp there, and they took us from there to Pisek.

Q: Okay, can you tell us where those (Czech) police came from ?

A: No, that I don't know. Every station had their own. I think we were under the jurisdiction of Straz, Straz nad Nezarkou, the police there.

Q: And did you know any of the police? Were they from Straz?

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

Q: And what time of day did they come for you?

A: Well, they kept watch all night, so that no one would escape. So in the morning. At around ten in the morning some cars drove up, or maybe nine or something, and they took us all. They loaded everyone up and took us away.

Q: Did you know beforehand that you were going somewhere?

A: Well, we knew, we knew that we were being guarded. But nothing else, no one knew anything.

Q: And how were you being watched, or guarded?

A: By police, the police, the ones during the war.

Q: So what was it like? Where were they standing?

A: Well, around the building, the one we were living in. Because it was a big building, three families were living there, or maybe even four. So they surrounded the building, see. So that no one could escape from there.

Q: How many of them were there, standing there?

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A: That I can't tell you. No one was allowed out. No one was allowed out, so I don't know. So they loaded all of us into these trucks, and police got in each one, and they took us away, to Ceske Budejovice.

Q: What did the neighbors say, or the mayor, about the fact that you had been taken away?

A: Well what could they do? The only thing they could do was watch. It had to be on someone's order. Either from the region or something like that. So I don't know how it was (with them), but they took all of us. It was on someone's order.

Q: What were things like between you and the other villagers, or rather what type of relations did your mother and Mr. Vrba have with the others in the village?

A: Well, the only ones you could have. A Gypsy was a Gypsy, and they were who they were. You know. (smiles) You know what they say.

Q: So relations weren't very good?

A: You know they weren't, you know they weren't. There was a lot of that, and they watched as we were being taken away, and they put (us all) in concentration camps.

Q: Do you happen to remember, before they took you away, were there any conflicts between your family and the other inhabitants of that village?

A: No, I, no, I don't know. I don't know anything about that, but you know, I don't remember all of the details, not at all.

Q: And when they came for you, can you remember how it happened? What did you take with you, or what did they tell you as to where you were going?

A: Well, you could take anything you wanted to with you. All that you had, you could load it up onto the trucks, and take everything with you.

Q: And what did they tell you about where you were going?

A: No, they didn't tell us anything about that, until we got to Lety. Otherwise, we had no idea where we were going.

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Q: And what were you thinking at the time?

A: Well, what could we think? We kids, we were just thinking there was something bad going on. And the older ones were crying.

Q: You didn't ask your mothers, maybe, where you were going?

A: If she didn't know, no one knew where we were going.

Q: And how was it on the way there?

A: How was it? From Budejovice they took us to that, to that Mirovice. Or Mirovice, I don't know. The main one. And from there they took us in those cars to Lety.

Q: And how long did you stay in Ceske Budějovice?

A: ... Well, that was at least a day. We got there, and that afternoon they were taking us somewhere else. We weren't there long. That was in some type of courtyard, or yard of a prison, see, and from there we were off again, away from there.

Q: And what did they do to or with you when you were in Budejovice?

A: Nothing there, nothing at all in Budejovice. We were just sort of put there, so we wouldn't spread out or try to get out, yeah. And then more transports came, they were different ones, the others had other work to do, and they took us to Lety.

Q: Did you ever think of trying to escape when you were in Budejovice?

A: Oh yeah. I thought about it all the time.

Q: Didn't you ever try it?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: How?

A: When I was already inside, in that Lety place.

Q: We'll get to that later, that time in Lety. So from Budejovice, where did they take you?

A: To that Mirovice or Mirovice place, something like that it was called. And then we were put in another transport, and they moved us again. And then they took us to Lety.

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Q: What did those vehicles look like?

A: They were big trucks, normal-sized trucks.

Q: So they were the same as the ones that brought you there?

A: That's right, that's right. Those same kind, but different people. And then we started going from region to region, across the country.

Q: And how many of you were in each transport truck?

A: I don't know how many of us there were. However many they could pack in. You can understand I don't know how many of us there were total. There were about three families from Plavsko. So I don't know. So they took us to Dubsko, and I don't know what all from that region. The ones who were from Horazdovice, and some others, and (they took them) to Budejovice. There was that meeting point there, and then they would take them away.

Q: And did you know any of the other families?

A: No, I didn't. I only knew the ones from Plavsko. Otherwise, I knew no one else.

Q: And what happened after that? When you left Mirovice, where did you go then?

A: To the concentration camp. To the lager. We got there, it was on the edge of some kind of forest. And there were these little shelters there. And the camp, it was closed off. With a normal wood fence, a barrier, and barbed wire. And there was this building for the top officers, for the one who was the camp commandant. I didn't see him then, the commandant. He was a German, that one, and there was a woman there. Maybe she was his wife, I'm not sure. And the others were Czechs, only Czechs. Before, that camp, before we got there, it was some kind of work camp. Convicted prisoners were there, that kind, it was a work camp, Lety. But they took them away, and then those others came.

Q: And how did you know that? That it was a work camp before you got there, and they had taken those prisoners somewhere else?

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A: Because some of them were still there, cleaning up, you know. What was left of that work camp, they were there cleaning the place up. And at the beginning, before our people were in place at their jobs, some of them worked in the kitchen and other places. They would peel potatoes and stuff like that.

Q: What kind of people were they, the ones who were cleaning up?

A: They were the ones who hadn't wanted to work before, or something like that. It was a labor camp, see.

Q: Did you ever talk to any of them?

A: No, nothing like that, they were their own (group). Later, they weren't allowed inside the camp. Later, it was the prisoners who did those jobs. They worked in the tailor's, in the place where they fixed shoes, the cobbler's, that kind of thing. (But) it was the prisoners who did those jobs.

Q: And when did you get to Lety, at what time of year? What season was it?

A: In what season? Well, that would have been in summer, but what month I don't know.

Q: And the year, do you remember that?

A: The year, that was probably 1941.

Q: And now try to tell me how it looked when you got there. And what happened?

A: What happened? Whenever there were new prisoners there, they would have to get up on this assembly place, see, this area, and they would sort of look us over.

Q: And who was doing this, that processing?

A: Czechs, it was Czechs who processed us. There was this assistant to the commander, to that German or whoever he was. He was called Sterba, and he came from somewhere around Pisek. He was named Sterba all right. And he was the one who checked us in, so to speak. He separated the children from the men. And then the men were put in a different

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place, in the forest, yeah. And the women worked on the rock piles. There at that Lety, it was just a piece up the road from the quarry, and they were building a road there, that kind of a deal. And some of the others worked in the forest. There was this one guy, Hovorka, a guard. But they were Czechs, and all of them from this side, from Pisek.

Q: And where were you put?

A: I was with the other children, in that Lety.

Q: With the children. And how old were they? If you could remember, from the youngest to the eldest?

A: Well, let's see, the oldest. I was 12, and I was still with the children. But you know they did the children, the ones who could.

Q: Let's get back to your arrival. When you got there.

A: Okay.

Q: What happened to you, what did they do to you?

A: There, you had to unload everything there. All of your possessions, all that you had. They put it all in this big hall, in this big pile. And then they gave you, they gave us this uniform.

Q: What did this uniform look like?

A: Well, what did it look like. There were these kind of black pants, like in the war, you know, these sort of clogs for your feet, that kind of thing.

Q: And what did you wear up above?

A: These shirts, these sort of blouse things they were.

Q: What color?

A: They were this kind of black.

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Q: And the men, they had, the ones who were there, this type of uniform. Like back in the the time of the republic, what our soldiers wore. Yes, around, no those kind, the ones that were left, ours. _____ So that's the kind they had there.

Q: Were you given state clothing? Or were you allowed to keep your own?

A: Well, it was state, it was from them. You had to give up, all you had, everything. That all went into these, these bins.

Q: Did they cut your hair too?

A: All of it, naked to the bathroom and all of it to the scalp.

Q: How did that look, that bathroom area?

A: How did it look, well, take this here building, see. Maybe a little bit smaller, with showers there. And all of us lined up there to the outside, out to the courtyard. And just in front of there, that's where they were cutting hair. All of them, down to where we were all bald.

Q: And who, who was all of them?

A: Well, all of the women, the ones who were there anyway. The ones who came there, well everyone was feeling lousy, so they couldn't get it all, so it was all shaved off.

Q: And who cut your hair?

A: Well, those prisoners there, the ones who were there. The ones who were still left there from that, that (labor camp), the workers, the ones who were left.

Q: Tell me about that hair cutting.

A: Well, they cut your hair, they bathed you and then we were separated into blocks, into these barracks.

Q: And what block were you put in?

A: Oh that, I don't know anymore, which block. I was there with the children, then. You had three, maybe four of these barracks, these soldier kind. And there were children, just children there.

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Q: How many of you were there in one barrack?

A: There were a lot, a lot of children. We slept in these bunk beds, you see. Normal, and all.

Q: What did those bunk beds look like?

A: What did the bunk beds look like? Well they were bunk beds, you see, three one on top of the other, this way, below each other. Long, in all. Kind of like the ones, when they showed the ones from Osvetim (Auschwitz), those kinds of beds, or something like them. Three one on top of the other.

Q: And how many of you could sleep on just one of those floors, of the bunk bed?

A: However many could get in, however many fit. We were sleeping one on top of the other (smiles).

Q: And what was on those beds? What did you cover yourselves up with?

A: There were blankets, there were blankets on the beds.

Q: And what were they like?

A: They were these normal ones like the ones they used on horses kind of. Those blankets.

Q: And did you have anything under you?

A: Under us, I won't (be able to) tell you what. But there was something there, too. If it was straw, or whatever. I just can't tell you exactly. But there was something there, there on those bunk beds.

Q: And were there any other furnishings in the building?

A: No. There were just these sort of pots.

Q: What is that?

A: Well, you went and urinated in it when you had to go. And in the morning, when you had to go to the main barn, the one that was there.

Q: And what did that pot look like?

A: Well, they were these pots, this sort of stone, and into there, into that hole, when you

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needed to go.

Q: And who needed to go there, who used it?

A: The ones from those, that were there. They were from all of the barracks. And there were these leaders, yeah.

Q: What did you call them?

A: No, how were they called? These were still from among the prisoners, you understand. There were always these older ones who would act as leaders. Like among the women, these leaders, the ones who would distribute the food, you know. Because there were those who would distribute the bread, the marmalade, that stuff, see. So they would organize all of that, these leaders, you know.

Q: And who were the leaders of your block?

A: There were women there, too, women there too, the leaders.

Q: Could you remember what their names were?

A: No, I don't know that. Not that anymore.

Q: And did they sleep with you in the block there?

A: Yeah, they had their place on that block, too, they were divided, though, in the blocks, or in their part. They had the place where the office space had been, for example. So they would sleep there, all of them together. Maybe the their children, or something, they would have them with them, you get it. Because if they didn't want to let them go hungry, they would steal from the other one, and give it to theirs, see.

Q: And what were their nationalities?

A: Well Czech, they were all Czechs. Everyone who was there. There were these German these Romany. They were mostly these Olah something or other and these, too. And they were probably from Moravia, I think from Brno, and there, yeah. But of those who were there, they were all Czechs, all of them.

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Q: And how did the leaders behave to you?

A: Well, how would they behave, how could they behave, you know, the leaders. It didn't matter to them, see. ... The leaders, no, I can't tell you that. You know, that the, that they would fight with them somehow, and beat them, beat them. The higher-ups, you know.

Q: And you were there with the children? Did it happen that they would beat the children?

A: Well that too, you know, you know they would.

Q: Could you try to remember something about it?

A: Remember, well. Well, I was beaten, too, you know.

Q: And for what?

A: Well, for fighting.

Q: Could you try to describe what happened?

A: I can. It was the line for lunch, you understand. Everyone had their own bowl, yeah.

(smiles) This was where everyone was going to eat. And this one guy keeps pushing me. So I knocked his bowl out of his hands. Then they caught me, they were looking around the barracks, and they found where I was, and that it was me, so they beat me.

Q: And who caught you?

A: Well, the police, the ones in the camp. They were from among the Gypsies that worked as kapos, you know the ones. That time they gave me 16 swats across the ass, they did.

Q: And where did that happen?

A: Outside, at the assembly place.

Q: At the assembly place?

A: Yep. (smiles) That's where they gave it to you.

Q: And who gave you the, the blows?

A: Well, I'm telling you, the same ones, the ones who were the kapos, instead of the guards who were outside. There was this kind of Romany administration, of the Romanies

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there. The ones who worked in the kitchen, the other ones. And the guards, they were Czechs, too. They rotated and guarded around there, on the inside, too.

Q: And what did they do, these kapos from among the ranks of the prisoners?

A: The ones, the ones who decided for us. When they said you were going to get beat, you got beat. Or if you looked one in the eye, like that. These were the ones who were going to work, you get it. They would guard you while you worked, and then make sure you got home.

Q: And did they speak Czech or German?

A: Czech, Czech. They were all Czechs.

Q: And would you recall any names or nicknames?

A: No, that I don't know. I know that Hovorka, and Sterba, he was the assistant, to the commander. They were all there, but I... .

Q: And the kapos?

A: They were, they were Poles. They were Poles, Pollacks, the ones who were locked up. They had uniforms, they would guard in these shelters, the ones. They were all around that camp. They were Poles, but they were, they were still in camp. But for some kind of good performance, they got there, for good work, and they guarded.

Q: Didn't you ever try to warm up to them a bit, since they were prisoners, after all.

A: They were assholes, on the contrary. They had their own, their own barracks, you know, there. And with those batons, they were the guards.

Q: ... The kapos lived on their own, or with other prisoners?

A: On their own.

Q: And were you ever in their barracks, where they lived?

A: No, I wasn't. Not that, that was kapo, that was their own territory.

Q: What did you do in that camp, all day? Or try to describe a whole day, from morning, when you got up and what happened.

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A: Well, you were, either you went to exercise in the morning, yeah. Then we would head off to do our business, all of us, and there would be a long line of two kilometers. Then the guards, the leaders, they would have the tomatoes there and I don't know what else, on the old grassy area, it was. And you got your food there, those tomatoes and other vegetables.

Q: And who were the ones in charge, the guards?

A: The ones from there, from the leaders, the ones who were there.

Q: And you ate there too?

A: Not that, no. You didn't have anything to eat there. There was just a little of that red cabbage, there at that assembly place. It was big, between the barracks, like where the buildings were, nothing more. Otherwise there was water from these spigots, and they cooked with it. It was bad.

Q: What do you mean by the assembly place? Did they grow cabbage there?

A: Between the barracks. The assembly place was there, there was a street, let's say two meters, three meters wide, which went between the barracks, that's right. And all of them, the ones I don't know, if there were five or six barracks to the place, there was a meeting point in front of this one block, yeah. And that was the assembly place.

Q: And you said something about red cabbage that was growing there?

A: It was planted there, it was.

Q: Right there in the camp?

A: Right there in the camp.

Q: And the tomatoes and the other vegetables, they were there.

A: That was, that was beyond the fence, outside the camp, outside the camp.

Q: So when you would go to the bathroom, they would guard you.

A: That's right.

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Q: So you would go outside the camp?

A: Yeah, you would, you would go outside.

Q: If you could just recall something of your daily routine, from the morning on. How did the whole waking up process go, and at what time?

A: At what time, at what time, it depended. In the morning there was breakfast. There was black coffee, and some spread, I tell you, that they gave some bread spread with some marmalade. And then at noon, you had a little soup, of that red cabbage, water, and that was, that was lunch. And for breakfast there was, well, it was different. There was everyone there and in the evening there was this kind of roundup, all over the barracks. Everyone there in the barracks had to show up, and they would count them according to how many beds were occupied. And the ones who came before, the big barracks, the children, they were all counted. That was when we weren't working. And when you went to work, they would roust everybody out. For calisthenics, exercise, and after that the water, when the bin was filled they would empty it, take it away. And the women would go to work, and they came back in the afternoon. No, yeah.

Q: Let's get back to the food. You said that they spread something on bread, with marmalade. How long was that, about, that you got that bread with marmalade.

A: Well, how long was that, well. I was there half a year, around half a year. So about a half a year then.

Q: So the whole time you got that bread?

A: Yep, the whole time, this piece, you see. And the women got I don't know what, they would get these quarters of this loaf of bread. The ones who worked there.

Q: And they were spread with marmalade?

A: No, maybe not, that was only for the children. Not that.

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Q: Try to remember, were there small children with you, that had trouble even walking at the time? Or how was it?

A: You know that there were. There were whole families there.

Q: And so who took care of the children? The small ones?

A: They were all there, in the barracks.

Q: With you?

A: It was all there. There was everything, both big and small, everything.

Q: And how did the children, how did they eat? Or what did they do at night?

A: Well it was these nurse women, or those higher-ups that were there, the ones who were supposed to take care of them, and who had to feed them, or whatever needed to be done with them. Because their mothers had to work, they went to work.

Q: But did the children lived alone, separated from their mothers, or with them?

A: Separated.

Q: Separated.

A: Alone, they were, they were divided.

Q: How was it at night, when one of the children had to go to the bathroom?

A: There was, there was this, whoever had duty. They didn't look out for anyone's health there, or anything like that. That one, that one, dies, dies, doesn't die, doesn't die. None of that kind were there. No, not at all.

Q: How was it at night? Would the children cry?

A: Well you know they would. They cried, all together, no one would get close, you see. The one who was stronger and had a little big of that, well he held out. Otherwise.

Q: And what about the older children, didn't they try to help the younger ones in some way?

A: Everyone was just out for themselves. It wasn't some kind of an institution or something

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like that, for that kind. It was a camp, where they would look to where you would disappear from the world. There wasn't any kind of that.

Q: And when it was morning after breakfast, what did you do after that?

A: After that, after we went around the camp, flew around the camp.

Q: Freely?

A: Right, free, it wasn't like that there. They locked the barracks at night. Otherwise, nothing. But if they caught you, one of the policemen, he would take you apart, if you were ever running around like that. (smiles)

Q: For what actually?

A: For that you can't go there, that. In with the grownups, you couldn't go there, weren't allowed. You didn't have anything to do there. They caught you, boom.

Q: How did you spend the time, shorten the day? What did you do? What did you play?

A: I was a little rascal, I was, look, I'll tell you that straight away. I was a wretched one, I was. I would look to see what I could get into. And I would always be hanging around the kitchen. There were these old women there, and all of that cabbage for the soups. So I would gnaw at the crunchy parts. And I held out.

Q: And how did you get to those, to those bits of hard cabbage?

A: It was either, look. There was a car that would come, not a normal car, but comedians would drive these things around. And they had made that kind of a car into an area, where they would peel the cabbage. There were three old women there, or four, and they would sit there and peel. And throw them to the ground. So I would steal them. (smiles) Yeah, and sometimes, I would get problems because of it, too. But there was nothing we could do about that.

Q: And did someone else go with you, to go for those cabbage pieces?

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A: Well, you know, they went. To collect the hard parts that were thrown outside from the kitchen. Sometimes they would bring in anything possible. So you would pick it up, but they would watch you there, too. When they caught you, they would beat you.

Q: And who was watching you?

A: Again, it was again one of the guys, of the ones who were there.

Q: From among the prisoners or the police?

A: From the prisoners, the prisoners. They were the guards, and they were afraid that there wouldn't be enough for them, so they would throw us out of there. And that's the way it was there. (smiles)

Q: And what about the women in the kitchen, how did they behave towards you?

A: There weren't, there weren't any women. There were only guys there.

Q: In the kitchen there were only men?

A: That's right.

Q: And there in the other?

A: There was a Gypsy there as black as a boot, see.

Q: Komediantzky.

A: This one, he was called, the main one, I know that he was called Serinek, they called him. There were only guys there. They would always take the cooks by twos on all sides, and for 1000 there was one kettledrum full. And they would spoon it out from there, the soup, or whatever it was. There to the rows.

Q: And how did the cooks act to you? Were you able to get a little extra food out of them?

A: That didn't even come into the picture, you know it couldn't. They were the kind of people who had friends there, and they would look. You would have to have had a friend in the kitchen, to give it to you. There were friends like that, but there wasn't anything to steal, or find to take, there wasn't anything there.

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Q: You talked about some old women who would give you the old cabbage bits.

A: That's right.

Q: What kind of women were they?

A: They were Romanies, too. There was one who was called Sulcova, she was from Tabor, there. Sulcova.

Q: Could you talk to her a little bit?

A: With her, with that old grandmother, yes.

Q: What did she give you? Or how did she act?

A: When she saw that you were picking up the shells of the cabbage, they weren't allowed to give any, no. They were taken away, see. She wouldn't say anything, or she would maybe peel a better one, a better piece.

Q: And where would they take it away?

A: They would cart it away, I don't know where.

Q: It wasn't used as food for the prisoners.

A: No way, not that. They didn't have anymore of that, that, that was taken away. I don't know, what was his name, Pergr it was, he was the one who would take it away. He would cart away corpses and other things.

Q: And where would he take them?

A: There. ... Look, it was in front of this other area, they would make these coffins in front there. I don't know anymore, he was from Brno, and he was a carpenter there. And then there was too much of it. Maybe they thought it was too much, boards. So they threw them on out over there onto those.

Q: Let's get back to that Peldr. What did he actually do there?

A: He worked as, he would cart loads, he went to the villages and things like that. He wasn't watched at all. He was free with the horses. And one of his responsibilities was the corpses.

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Q: You were talking about some corpses. If you could just return to that

A: Okay, okay. ... They were loaded up and taken outside the camp, into the forest. They had there, I never went there. It was rumored that they had big holes dug out, and they would throw the corpses into them.

Q: How did you hear of that?

A: Again, from the women or something like that. They would go to that quarry, it was just a piece up the road. There was a pond there, and we would go there to bathe. On Saturday or Sunday they would make everybody go down to that pond to bathe. If it was nice. So they would throw you on in there.

Q: And how long would it take for a cart of corpses to fill up? You say that at first they did these bins, and then not.

A: That's right, they did these cases full, and I don't know what his name was. Then not anymore, because I don't know what happened to him, I don't know. But that's the way it was a full half a year. Then they took me to the forest, to collect kindling, that's right, and I just blew it off. I just had to get out, so I escaped.

Q: We'll get to that later. I'd like to return to this Peldr person. Where was he from, and why was he given such freedom?

A: Well, because his wife worked with the officer there, with the German in the kitchen, yeah. So he had the chance to drive the horses and transport all those things around. There in those other villages, all that belonged there. So he was never watched.

Q: Did you ever talk to him, with this Peldr?

A: No I didn't, he was an older guy. No. Not that.

Q: And do you remember, how did he act to the other prisoners?

A: He acted like he was a wretch.

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Q: Why?

A: If he hadn't been such a wretch, well, you know. They wouldn't have worked with him,

you get it, so they wouldn't have ever let him out. He would take packages from the people, the ones who would come there, the ones who had someone on the outside. But he didn't give them anything, he would take it all for himself.

Q: How do you know that?

A: I just do. ... He would deliver the packages, but he wouldn't give them anything.

Q: Did you ever see anything like that?

A: I saw it, I saw it.

Q: And how did that work? What happened? What did you see?

A: What could you see. That you got those packages, that you would split it up with the rest of your family or with the other prisoners, or that whom it was supposed to belong to wouldn't get it at all. He had people there, in the village, where he would leave it and then go pick it up later from the same ones.

Q: How did you find that out, all of that?

A: How did I figure that out? I figured it out pretty easily. Because that guy Vrba who was there, he had a son, so he knew something about it. That son, that Karel is in Nova Bystrice, and he's still living, more than 80 years old, he is. He worked with the tailor's, you understand. So when we would go out (from the camp), we would talk about it, you see?

Q: So you heard it from whom?

A: From that Vrba.

Q: From Karel Vrba?

A: From Karel, yeah, and he's in Nova Bystrice.

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Q: You mentioned some packages. Were the prisoners able to receive packages from the outside?

A: Oh that, I don't know, I don't know. I don't know the number, maybe they came, but that, they didn't come just like that.

Q: Were the prisoners able to write, send letters from the camp?

A: No. Nothing there. You were doomed to liquidation there. There wasn't any writing, no pardons there, you hear. It was dead.

Q: And what about visits, did anyone come to visit you?

A: Nothing like that. You were written off there, written off and finished, see. -- And I escaped from them through that forest, you understand. How they took us and put us together, with someone else. It was a guy from Prague and Vrba, too. And so we escaped from them.

Q: What happened?

A: Well, what happened. ... We were bald, shaved bald, yeah. In those shoes, those clogs. Those were throwing up dust, flinging around (smiles) down the path to the first train, that's where we ran. And we went to Prague, riding black, without a ticket.

Q: To the train where?

A: Well, somewhere close to Mirovice, or, some little village where trains would go to Prague. And we got there, no one noticed us, no one, at least until we got to Prague. And this Pepik fellow, he says, we're going to go see his uncle, see. It was, like, it was like his uncle. And his name was Kocka. We stayed at his place two weeks, at that Kocka's place. And he had us picked up. He gave us away (smiles). So they put us, I was there two months, into that institution, that's where they locked us up. Because they couldn't put us in a prison, not yet, because we didn't have, we weren't that kind. So that put us in that institution for... . It was for those up to 21, or however it was. Only we stayed there for about two months, and then we had to go back to the camp.

Q: And where was that institution?

A: ... I can't tell you. Maybe it was near Ruzyne, where it used to be. ... It was a big building,

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I don't know. And in that institution, they would stay there until they were 21. And I know, it was Ruzyne earlier.

Q: How did you find out that it was Kocka who gave you up?

A: Because they caught us at this place. No one knew it, only, only he did. And he turned us in. So they put us in that place, and (later) another escort came for us. The police, but this time Czech again with that Vodak, and we took the train back to Mirovice, and then walked back to the camp, see. We came back to the camp, and that was a real fix, it was, there was hell to pay.

Q: How did things happen?

A: Well, they beat you, whatever and however they could.

Q: Can you go into more detail than that?

A: More detail, well. You know what a good beating is, when they beat you to the point where you're unconscious?

Q: What did they beat you with?

A: With sticks, wood.

Q: And who?

A: It was that Sterba guy, actually, the one who was the assistant to the commandant there. And ... There were two of us, so each one got it, with your legs pulled towards us. We were chained together, all tied up. And they threw us there, where there was this kind of a small road leading from the laundry. There they were, where the people came with those, with those carts, that's where they threw us. They had made a morgue out of one of the areas, see. Because there was nothing there to use, when there was, when there was that typhoid fever. So they would throw (them) in those carts, and they would take them away from the carts. So anyway, they tied us up, chained us to each other. And when he had to go to the bathroom, I went with him. Or if I had to go, he would have to go with me, too. And

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whoever had some job to do, his job, then they would beat us, this policeman, see. And I was there, I kid you not, three, maybe four months, in that cart.

Q: Let's hold on just a second, stop right there. Who was it that was with you?

A: No one, they were doing this kind of correction, you understand.

Q: There were only two of you there.

A: Just two in that cart, otherwise no one else was there.

Q: And how was it furnished?

A: Well, there wasn't anything there. A wooden floor and take a cart of some kind, and just the boards and the rest, however it was. Otherwise clean and gutted, there was just nothing in there. Clean floor only, and that. Without wheels, it was sitting there on the ground.

Q: And when you were there in that cart, who would watch you, guard you?

A: Always the one who had duty, that's it. The guy who had watch, he would always come over to us to see what we were doing, and sometimes he would even shoot, so that we would always remember, and... .

Q: How did you get food there? Into that cart?

A: Yeah, you didn't get any. The only thing was that they would always throw you a piece of cucumber. No one cared about you there. That, that was the death. Once in a while a piece of those old cabbage bones, that someone might throw at you. (smiles) Those old women knew that we were there. They were able to walk by sometimes, see. To the bathroom, to the place we washed. Otherwise, not a bit, the ones in there.

Q: And what did you drink?

A: But that, that never came into the equation. Maybe someone would give you something from the well, but that was under lock and key, too.

Q: And where was the well?

A: It was near the kitchen. And they watched it. There was this one Gypsy guard who

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watched it. They called him Mina, that was his nickname, anyway. He had gold, all gold, and he was a guard. It didn't just happen like that.

Q: And where did he stand, near the well?

A: Maybe during the day. And at night you couldn't go anywhere, if you were chained like that. What could you do? You were locked up, you couldn't do a thing.

Q: And what did they do with you when there was an assembly?

A: They counted us. They counted us.

Q: So you went to those assemblies?

A: No, they just counted us in that cart. None of that, they didn't spoil you there, no. And after about three months, they would let you out. I couldn't even walk by then. You were just used to having your legs chained up to another. Two and two. With chains on your legs.

Q: Can you describe how you were chained? And with what?

A: Well with chains. Chained up like that, here was your friend, and his right leg was chained up to your left, to the other prisoner. Or the other way around. Right to his left.

Q: Did they ever take your chains off?

A: Well, when they finally let us go, after those three months. You hadn't washed a thing, all those months. You're there, you're there. It wasn't a camp for anything like that. Survive, somehow, some way.

Q: And how was it when they finally took off the chains?

A: Well, when they finally took the chains, we were able to walk around normally, around the barracks and that, but then there was that typhoid fever, see. There was that typhoid. So you would sleep on those bunk beds, in those barracks, and there was hunger, a lot of hunger. That was the end. Look, look ... You're lying next to, next to maybe three or four corpses. And you didn't have anything on you. There were just bones around you, of the

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people, of the children. And you had to sleep with all of them, all of that. And I had survived it, up until then.

Q: Did you get sick, too?

A: No, I didn't get sick. Because there was this, there was this German, but she was a prisoner, too. From that punishment, part of her punishment was she had responsibility for the women. And so I somehow caught her eye, and she would give me something to eat

every now and again. And she, she was a German, she had more power than most of the others there. And that was the way I survived. And all of the children from our place, they all survived.

Q: Your brothers and sisters?

A: All of them.

Q: And they were with you on the same block?

A: That's right. They were. I would have to go steal the rags that were hanging out there. Because there was that, that typhoid fever, there was terrible diarrhea and the like. So for them to have something clean for themselves, I was the oldest, so I had to go out and steal. But if they caught you, it was the end. (smiles)

Q: Where did you go to steal?

A: To the clotheslines they had hanging up there. Some of the women there, the workers, they would wash the stuff and dry it, see. So I would go there and would steal it from them.

Q: And where was it drying? Can you remember where it was?

A: It was near the barracks, there. Next to the barracks, you know there was a nail and a piece of line or cord, and that's where it was. There wasn't any. You didn't get anything there, there was, there was just a little stove. There was a boiler, and (the guy) there was named Havrda, he was from somewhere near Cimelice or somewhere around there. And he would go dry the stuff, see.

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Q: He was a prisoner?

A: No, he wasn't, he was a civilian. He was a civilian. He had that big boiler, and he would take care of all that was there. Either he gave you clean rags, and he would put it all together in one pile, and otherwise the flames would burn it all up.

Q: What did that boiler look like?

A: The boiler, what did it look like. Take a boiler they use on that asphalt, the kind of asphalt that's in a tank or bin of some kind. The tank. This was something similar, only it had behind

it this kind of little door, and under the pressure of that steam or fumes, it would destroy it. The germs of all of it or whatever it was. And whatever was on top, too.

Q: Was it portable?

A: Oh yeah, it was portable.

Q: And how often did he come around with that tank?

A: He was always coming around.

Q: Would he just stand there?

A: He was always in that camp. That was his profession, and he would always go home at night, and come again in the morning. He was a civilian employee.

Q: What about your parents? Your mother and that Vrba? Did you see much of them?

A: Not much. I didn't see Vrba at all, he ... they executed him somewhere, it belonged to Moravia at Telc, that was the main city of that region. The main court was in Telc, that's right. So he was executed there, this Vrba, and my mother got typhoid fever and died there. Q: How did you find that out?

A: I just found it out, that's all. I had gotten out already. So I was looking for her, in the dead, and I couldn't find her there, so that meant that she had been taken away earlier.

Q: And where were you looking for her, among the dead?

A: Well, there in those carts, the same ones we were imprisoned in. And she wasn't there.

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Q: And what did one of those carts actually look like inside? Did you go there with your chains still on?

A: No, I had already been released from those, I had already been released from those chains.

Q: And how did it really look, in those carts?

A: They were these normal-looking things, there was nothing there. They were old ones. But they had been cleaned up, those dead bodies, so they wouldn't be lying around the barracks

area. So they put them there, because there were so many of them that that Peldr couldn't cart them away fast enough.

Q: And how long would the corpses stay in those carts?

A: Well, it just depended. Because he had a system, and when he would come, he would take them away. So count three, four days, that's how long they laid there.

Q: And you never saw your mother again?

A: No, I never saw her again. -- And the corpses, that laid there on the beds, before they would find them, they would be starting to decay. You just couldn't get away from it, none of us.

Q: And what about you, when one of the children died next to you, what did you do? A:
Well what could you do. Either you told a kapo that there's one of those there, and they took it away, but I'm telling you. You would wake up in the morning, and there would be three, four dead right there next to you. But they were nothing but skin and bones, nothing but skin and bones.

Q: And did you ever find out how they executed that Vrba?

A: I found out, once we had gotten out of that concentration camp. After that, after they had released us from that concentration camp. But I'll tell you something else. Just before they let us out, a German officer came, I can't remember his rank anymore, or anything like that. And

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he called me and my sister out of the ranks, of the ones who were left. He just came up and touched us on the head and pulled us out, sort of brought us over to the side. How he got us I don't know, or what. Like he was able to recognize the Gypsy ethnic origin, something like that. So he put us off to the side, and after a while he let us go. And Vrba's kids, too. And all of those Vrbas, all of them from Plavsko, they went, they could all go. Whoever didn't die there, they all went back. But what there. So one of the villagers there took me on, there in Plavsko. He had me educated, it was a big farm there, it was, a lot of fields. So I stayed with him there.

Q: What did you do there?

A: All sorts of things. I went to school, and after school I worked for him. Farm work, all he wanted me to do, whatever was necessary. Things were good there at his place. And after the takeover I gathered my things together and went and learned how to be a butcher. So I worked there in Nova Bystrice, yeah, in Nova Bystrice. And after that the Communists locked me up again.

Q: We'll get to all of that later. Let's get back to your siblings, your brothers and sisters. Were they all freed (at the same time you were)?

A: All of them, all of them were freed. But they weren't of age, they were all still young, minors, so they were put into a children's institute. They were somewhere in Nova Bystrice in a children's home. And they stayed there until they were able to take care of themselves.

Q: Did you ever go visit them?

A: No, I didn't, I didn't. I had to study and learn, see. Then they arrested me, those Communists, kind people that they were. And I sat for another eight years.

Q: We'll get to that. It's that camp that still interests me.

A: Okay.

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Q: If you could just remember, what were the roll calls, the assemblies, and how often did they take place?

A: ... Those assemblies were, the assemblies were. Just before lunch, just before dinner, that's when those assemblies were. And they would count around the barracks, as I've said.

Q: They counted you at the assemblies?

A: No, in the barracks. ... There you know where someone was hiding, and if he was.

Q: And did you ever hear of a case when someone besides yourself escaped, in the time you were a prisoner? Or someone who tried to escape?

A: No, I don't know. At least I don't know about it.

Q: And did you ever witness anyone being punished?

A: I did.

Q: And how?

A: They were, they were. What happened I don't know. They hung her up on some kind of stake, in the kitchen, see. That was, some girl it was, and she hung up on that nail, or stake. With her hands in back of her, on that. They had had it before, it was some sort of thing to hang a flag. They hung her up on it.

Q: How long?

A: Well, how long. However long she could hold out. However long she could hold out. If she could hold out a half a day, then she was there half a day.

Q: And what happened to her after that?

A: They took her down, and that was the end.

Q: She was dead?

A: Yeah, she was dead. They took her away, and the end. There where you had your peace, where no one would bug you anymore.

Q: Did you see who took her down?

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A: Yeah, I saw.

Q: And where did they take her?

A: There where the dead people were.

Q: What kind of a girl was she? Where did she come from?

A: That I don't know, I just know something about it, because ... you don't worry about who it was in that kind of a situation.

Q: Did you see anything similar anytime after that?

A: Yes, I saw. I saw that they would beat you in some way, but you didn't need much of that, see. That would hardly move you. Or I saw this one time where someone actually ate a rat. It was near the kitchen, this kind of humpback, and it was terribly hungry. But I'm telling you, you can't blame it on the Germans, that was all done by Czechs.

Q: What other kinds of punishments were there? What other punishments did you see being used?

A: Well, I.

Q: Beatings?

A: There were different kinds of beatings, they might give you one kind for doing this, another for that, or on this part of the body. With a whip or a piece of something else, and you had to do bend over. And if you held out, you held out, and if it got you, and you couldn't hold out, then they could start digging. (smiles) That's the way it was.

Q: What happened to you?

A: Not me, not me. Not me. I was just in that cart, and they beat me and all that.

Q: And did you see those punishments?

A: I saw them, yes.

Q: And what were they for, for example, those punishments?

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A: The Poles would carry them out. But what they were for, I don't know. If (they were done) badly, I don't know. Don't look them in the eye, that's the Poles again. They were there with the punishments. But they guarded, they had the power, the guards and all, there.

Q: They were Polish Romany?

A: Polish, that's right.

Q: How was the washing done, your own body, that is? Was there a bathroom somewhere?

A: Yeah, there was a bathroom there, but there was no hygiene, no cleanliness. You got to wash when they took you there. It's a dead (topic).

Q: Were you able to go to the bathroom when you wanted?

A: Yeah, we could, but what are you going to do there?

Q: How did it look? What was there in that bathroom?

A: There were pipes made out of wood, but if there was no water there, what are you going to do there?

Q: There was no running water there.

A: No. (smiles) There was only running water there when they brought you there to cut your hair, or to bathe you, but after that no one would worry about you anymore. Because they would take people away from there, see ... To Osvetim (Auschwitz), or wherever they would go.

Q: And what about in the morning, when you wanted to wash up?

A: But no one would wash there, what would you wash (yourself with), just tell me that.

Q: You said that there was a pond around there. How often would you go there?

A: Well, it had to be a nice day, and it depended on which guard was on duty or what orders he had, as to whether to take you down to the pond or not. There was some kind of a pond near the road. It was just a few meters from the barracks. But they would drive all of us down there. All of us, children, whoever could walk.

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Q: Did you ever see your mother there, when you were bathing?

A: But she was already dead, not there anymore.

Q: And how did that happen, that bathing process in the pond?

A: Just like it was in Russia, like when the Russians came here and went swimming naked. There, too. The rags you (were wearing), whatever you had. And everyone into the water naked. Women, men, all of us who were there. Children, everyone all together. There were no (exceptions).

Q: And who would take you there, to that pond?

A: Well, the ones who had duty that day, the guards, or the kapos who were off duty or something else. Whoever was around. -- There were some old prostitutes in that camp, too, that they had brought from Prague. And there was some tailor work done in that camp, too. They would mend all of the old rags and the like. And there were some people who weren't being punished there. You couldn't choose there, something, anything. -- There was a doctor there, that's true.

Q: And how was the doctor there?

A: The doctor? He was Czech or something like that. He would give us shots, vaccinations.

Q: And what did he vaccinate you against, or why the shots?

A: I just don't know. No one told you what it was against. They just stuck you with a needle and that was that (smiles).

Q: And how often were you given shots?

A: I was just there once, I was just there once.

Q: And did anything happen after the injection? Did you feel some kind of change?

A: Nothing I could make out, no relief.

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Q: And can you remember the doctor, how he was?

A: Well how could that have been a doctor. Okay, a doctor, whether it was a Czech or a German, one of the two. But most of the doctors there were German, in that camp.

Q: What did he speak to you in, that doctor? What language?

A: He didn't speak to us. What, you go to a doctor and he's going to talk to you. You just stood there in line and you'd get a shot in the rear end, and then there was another Gypsy, and she was there to assist him. You see? And none of that (foolishness).

Q: And who was his assistant, do you remember?

A: ... I'd know the name, but he died, that guy.

Q: That's okay.

A: His name was Serinek, Serinek he was.

Q: But that was a different one than the one who was working in the kitchen?

A: He was not the same, no, different guy. He just had to do this, that guy. It was a completely different person. There were different people in the kitchen. ... There were a lot of people there, you know, if you had to remember them all by name. And besides, it didn't matter what their names were. I was just looking to get out of there.

Q: Do you remember a case when one of the prisoners took up with one of the guards, or that one of the police there chose one of the prisoners (to be his)?

A: But you know how it goes. They were always shoving around with the Poles. There were fights, you know there were. A woman locked up as a prostitute, from Prague they were brought, to give them that opportunity.

Q: And where did it happen?

A: Right there in the camp. There were these little areas, rooms two or three of them, you get me. All of them had their own. So there.

Q: And who lived there, in those little rooms?

A: The kapos lived there. Maybe there were two of them per room, and right next to them

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was the tailor's, the kitchen was a little further up, and so it went. They weren't with the other normal people.

Q: The tailor's?

A: That's right.

Q: The tailors, where did they live?

A: Right there in that line, in the barracks. But there was that elite, their own, the ones who could be trusted. And then there were the Poles, they were up there with the Czech police or guards. But they were lower. And the tailors were there next to them, and the cobblers and the cooks from the kitchen. And all of the camp's employees.

Q: Would you happen to remember what barrack that was, and where they were? Where were the prisoners who had higher standing?

A: Well, you would have to know how the camp really looked like. ... The barracks were numbered. And I'm not sure anymore if the doctor was in Number One or not. There was a four and a five, but I'd be lying if I told you I really knew which was which.

Q: And the kapos lived in that part of the camp?

A: Jo.

Q: And how big were the rooms there?

A: Well, I'm telling you it was a big barrack, but the rooms were all separated into two or three areas, divided like. But otherwise it was a big barrack. But it was separated, yeah.

Q: And how did it look, what barriers did the whole camp have, so that the prisoners couldn't escape?

A: How did it look? There was a wooden fence outside, it was about five meters high. And on the other side, between the two, before you got to that barrier, you got to this (barbed) wire. And that same thing, all the way around. Just like the Communists had and were using, they had that, too. No difference between the two.

Q: And the wire, how high did it go?

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A: It wasn't high, just enough so you couldn't get over it. And otherwise it was the same, first and then the second. They just kept following their own example and kept going.

Q: Could you explain to me, the time you escaped with the other boy, how did you make it away, when you were gathering the kindling, those small pieces of wood?

A: How it succeeded, that time. Look, there was one, maybe two policemen with us. And before that he went to the bathroom, and then I went. But we had already agreed to carry out the plan, and how. How we were, look, only when they were coming after us (smiles).

Q: And where did you go to the bathroom? Where could you go, to the bathroom, there?

A: That was in the forest, there where we were gathering firewood.

Q: And no one went with you?

A: But he had to stay with the other guy. If he had gone with me, the other one would have escaped. You can't cover both of them at the same time. But that was near the camp, you see, and you had to see that you were out of there fast, because of the dogs that would come after you, that they wouldn't get you. Otherwise they would get you.

Q: Who was the worst in the camp? Whom do you have the worst memories of?

A: That Sterba, that Sterba, the assistant to the commandant. You understand. He was a Czech, but he was a bastard.

End of tape 1

Tape 2

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Q: Mr. Stockinger, we all know that the human organism can't survive long without water. Where did you get water? How often and how much?

A: Look, there was just a little liquid, some tea or something like that. Otherwise, I don't know anything about any water.

Q: And how much did you get per day, how much of that liquid?

A: There was a cup, so in the morning you got some tea or what do I know maybe some kind of water. And the liquid that you got at noon, that was water, you understand. And in the evening, water again, but liquid from the kitchen.

Q: Aha. So you went there?

A: No, no. They distributed it with the supper, see.

Q: And about how much? Maybe a liter a day?

A: No, it was more than a liter.

Q: Aha. And when you were locked up in that cart, with that Pepik and with that Vrba, how much was it? How much liquid were you given?

A: No, not there.

Q: Okay, but you sure must have been thirsty.

A: That's right, but where can you go. If you couldn't leave that cart.

Q: And how long did they not give you any water?

A: Well, water, look. If they gave you something to eat at all, that counted as water. That was soup with the cabbage or something like that. Otherwise, nothing.

Q: And they gave you that occasionally.

A: That they gave us.

Q: Everyday?

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A: Well, if they remembered you, the one who should have, we got something everyday, otherwise, not.

Q: What did you do to make sure you got something? When you were famished, so hungry you couldn't stand it, when you were still locked up?

A: Well there, you didn't get anything there. Just like in the army, if you're in some kind of unusual confinement, you can't get out.

Q: And did you cry out at times?

A: But there was no one there to help you. It was pure, dumb luck if someone happened to walk past. Maybe they were cleaning up, or something like that, so they would give you something. Otherwise you didn't get a thing.

Q: Was there any good guard there?

A: Look, to tell you the truth, no guard was a good one, because if he had been good, he wouldn't have done it, he wouldn't have. Those were people interested in a job, otherwise they didn't have to do it. They guarded people and cut them down. They weren't interested in us Gypsy shit. And there were enough of them around.

Q: When did you see your first dead person?

A: Dead? Well, when that typhoid fever broke out.

Q: And when was that? Remember just, ... the first body, that you ever saw.

A: Well, it was when they began dying of that typhoid fever.

Q: And when was that?

A: When we were still in that cart. They would put them in the carts, right next to us, they would put them right there in the carts.

Q: And did you ever see a person die? How did he or she die?

A: I saw it, when there were people dying next to me. But they were skin and bones.

Q: And when did you see it for the first time? That was in summer, or sometime after?

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A: It was in summer, in summer. Because when they put us back there, it was already in July, when we escaped and they put us back in that cart. That was in summer, and the typhoid fever had already broken out.

Q: And what was the heating in the camp like?

A: Where?

Q: Well, you know, once winter hit.

A: Where would we heat there? It would have been a waste of coal. (sneer) You know, that was like a liquidation camp, so why would they bother heating it there? The only place they heated was in the kitchen, otherwise nowhere else.

Q: They didn't even heat for those who had a better position?

A: They didn't get coal either. There they ____ nothing. The kitchen was the only place where they heated, otherwise, nowhere else. Wood would be gathered from the forest.

Q: How many blankets would you have at night?

A: ... Nothing. All we would get is one blanket each. Only if someone died could you perhaps grab their blanket, when it was cold. Otherwise nothing. You wouldn't get more than that.

Q: Would the children sometimes steal blankets in the evening?

A: Yes, that would happen, certainly. When one is cold and hungry, anything can happen. You know, to survive.

Q: Did you ever get some clothes from the tailor shop?

A: No. Everything was from the tailor shop, but it was for the children, understand? Otherwise no.

Q: For who was the tailor shop working?

A: They were repairing clothes for the police and the Polaks who were there.

Q: I see. Did the children sometimes get some clothing?

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A: They would always bring them completed you know. There were mainly these pants and shirts. They would sometimes come from some hospital because it was those that tied in the back. You know how those shirts are. You put your arms in them and it gets tied in the back. And clogs for the feet.

Q: How would they punish you there? Where would punishments take place?

A: Where did they do it? I personally was punished the most in the vehicle.

Q: That means that someone would crawl in and...?

A: They would pull you out. After all, the vehicle was pretty tall right? It is slow, so I guess into those curtains. It has a door, windows, so they would crawl after you in there. They would thrash you good. (laughter)

Q: And how were you locked in that vehicle?

A: It wasn't shut at all.

Q: I meant about you and that Vrba.

A: It wouldn't be shut.

Q: Were you able to walk around in that vehicle?

A: Yes.

Q: And you wouldn't be able to get out?

A: We would not be allowed to do that. As soon as they would have caught you they would have given you a good thrashing. It was a sort of disciplinary measure.

Q: Did you see that Peldra there?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did you first see how they were carrying away the dead?

A: He would carry them every day.

Q: Already in the summer as well?

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A: Certainly. As soon as that typhoid fever would hit. It was terrible. Some would die of hunger because of the female examiners who were there, you see. They wouldn't give the children anything to eat because either their parents were already dead or they couldn't get to them. So they would make sure their own would get food.

Q: Do you remember where Peldr would take the dead bodies?

A: Yes, they would store them for a bit around Mirovic. But once night came, they would take them away, down there where that pool was, in the tip of the forest. There, they apparently would dig some pit, or maybe more of them. I don't know. But they would then throw them into there.

Q: You saw this, how Peldr would..?

A: Peldr went there. He had this sort of truck you know. I several times saw when they would be thrown into it, as he was heading out. At first they would put the bodies into coffins, but later not even that. They would throw the bodies one on top of one another in that truck, down there in that way.

Q: How often would he do this.

A: Well, let's see. He would always take away that number which he had from the village cause he worked as a maintenance man there you see. And when he had a spare moment then he would drive with those dead bodies there. They would pile them up in those vehicles, sometimes pulling them out of the bunks or buildings and so on.

Q: How many times a week about?

A: To the number? <Na tu počtu?>

Q: No, I meant with those dead bodies.

A: Well, I guess whenever it was necessary or whenever he had a free moment.

Q: How many do you think would die daily?

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A: I don't know. I don't know how many would be dying there daily. I can't say cause I didn't have an overview of that. I didn't even concern myself with this after a while. All I can say is what they are saying. It is true that that German commander was there, although I never saw him in the camp.

Q: Do you remember what his name was?

A: No. But I do know that that Peldrova cooked with her daughter. That Peldr had two daughters there. He was employed there.

Q: Do you know how he looked?

A: I never saw him.

Q: Never.

A: Never. That Štěrba would handle all matters for him.

Q: I see. Does the name Hejduk strike a chord with you?

A: Hejduk? ... Don't recall that at all.

Q: And how did this Štěrba look?

A: That Štěrba? He was about this high, he wore riding-breeches, tall boots with a cane stuck in it. He was kind of smaller and rounder like.

Q: ... What was his face like? Was it long, or?

A: It was round.

Q: Round.

A: Yes, round.

Q: How old was he do you think?

A: That Štěrba? When the communists later put me in jail, I met at a camp in Jachymov. He was representing the chief of that camp there.

Q: How old do you think he was? ... Was he young still?

A: Back then, I'd say he was about 45 years old.

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Q: Did he also punish?

A: He did it the most.

Q: I see. Where would he punish the people there the most? Did he have a special room for this?

A: No, no such room. If there was some more problematic case, he would probably call them into that office. They had some office there past the gate. Otherwise, he would punish people right there on the spot.

Q: Where that tall stake was there?

A: Yes.

Q: Who would ... there, that stake?

A: There was this one stake, a pole, which was near the kitchen.

Q: I see. And who would do the pulling, to pull the people to the top?

A: Well, either it would be the Polaks, yes them. They were like SS except for the fact that they were there as a punishment. They were locked up as well but they had more power.

They helped themselves with those SSes and even guarded in those _____.

Q: I see. How many people were punished in this manner?

A: Yes, they were punished in this manner.

Q: How many did you see yourself?

A: I had to watch twice myself. Once at the pond there, at the end of the fence where there was a stake. And once at the kitchen there. There was also this girl there. What they did though I don't know. Don't know.

Q: Who did they hang there by the pond?

A: It was also a woman.

Q: Why? What did she do?

A: I don't know, I can't tell you.

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Q: How long did she have to hang there for?

A: How long? Well, until she fainted.

Q: How long about do you think. You saw it with your own eyes, right?

A: Well, the way they were bloated up there, I'd say she wouldn't last more than half an hour.

No longer I would say.

Q: And ... did she survive it?

A: Well, the SSeS would most often just take them away.

Q: Did you ever see smoke in the camp there?

A: No, only from the kitchen.

Q: Did you ever see some other vehicles there? Some larger vehicles, or something of the sort, where something would be burned?

A: No, nothing like that.

Q: What did they do with the clothes where there was lice?

A: Well, before they would leave everything, those of us who would have to leave as well, they made this totally new camp you see. They made a new camp next to the old one. And those who were supposed to be let go they put into the new camp, from which they would let them go. Then they left some commander there from one of those Gypsies and who was supposed to liquidate the camp. I learned later that they burned everything. But nothing of the sort at least while I was there.

Q: What did they do. Oh, did we interrupt you? ... Does the name Maxa mean anything to you?

A: Maxa was an SS. SS Maxa.

Q: What was his job?

A: I don't know. However, for example, he would watch over the camp and he had some commando who would watch over those who worked in the forest, yah. Maxa.

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Q: Was he good or bad?

A: I cannot say if he was good. But of the SSES who were there, I can tell you none of them were good. If he didn't hurt me then I am sure he hurt someone else.

Q: And what about the name Baloun?

A: That Baloun guy had this red snout, and a lump on him (laughter). He was a bastard, that bastard Baloun.

Q: Give us an example.

A: He was taller.

Q: Give us an example of what he might have done.

A: He was guarding inside. We worked. He was probably one of those from Pisek somewhere, all of them were. Baloun.

Q: And how about Černý?

A: Don't know that guy.

Q: How about Pesek?

A: ... Pesek would sometimes be at the commando and sometimes in the forest, where they would be working. You know, he would sometimes be in camp and for a while not. They would alternate.

Q: Do you remember a Bouda, or Kansky?

A: ... No, don't remember that. That depends where they are.

Q: What was the name of that German woman?

A: I don't know. That German woman was shut up there, but she was kind.

Q: Did she know how to speak Gypsy?

A: ... I don't know if she was a German Gypsy. It is possible but I do not know. She had, she would go with those other women to the quarry, to work. More of them would go there. They

would always grab a bunch of them for that, to make them carry. But her name I don't know.

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Q: How did she look?

A: ... How did she look? ... Can't say that either because we were all shaved to the skin there.

Q: How did you know that she was German?

A: Well, she had this sort of accent, a German accent. And when they had those roll calls she would speak German.

Q: Were there more Germans there?

A: There were. There were these German Gypsies there. And others from Brno and those **Olaši** as they called them. You can bet they were there.

Q: And how were those **Olaši** different? How did you recognize it was them?

A: Well, because they would have a different Gypsy accent than our own.

Q: And the Germans?

A: Yes, you can recognize them as well. When they taught us to exercise. ... There was **ryhcum, rajcum** and _____ and I don't know what all they would teach us there. You knew it was a German when she would be hollering out the commands to the women.

Q: How would the police, the SS greet each other.

A: I never saw this, truly.

Q: Did you ever see German policemen there?

A: Once yes, otherwise never. They would come, we would be standing in rows, children as well, and they would touch each of us on our heads in this manner, yes. I don't know why, or like this. And to me and my sister they would wack us in the side. They would look into our eyes, yes. My sister has blue eyes and me as well. And they would wack the two of us in the side. I don't know what they meant by it though.

Q: And what about the others?

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A: He would look them over, took some away, and let the Vrbas be. He let them out and took others away with him.

Q: And who would pick them out. How did this person look?

A: That was some German officer, higher up there somewhere. Otherwise, I don't know.

Q: Do you know his name?

A: No, I don't

Q: Have you ever heard of the name Lis?

A: ... Well, you know how it was back then. Only those people working around the kitchen. I didn't get to those people like they did. If they would have let me in there, I would have looked for a way to escape.

Q: What happened to those people they took away?

A: They were sent to the new camp.

Q: I mean those were supposed to be sent off to Auschwitz.

A: We didn't find this out at that time. Look here, they came with this sheet, read from it, some were put aside and then you might never have seen them anymore.

Q: Did anyone try to defend themselves?

A: No. What could they do, after all?

Q: Did you know at that time the fate of Auschwitz?

A: No, I didn't. At that time, I wasn't so interested to which concentration camp I might be sent.

Q: And when that German came for the first time, to pick out some people, ... What time of the year was it?

A: It was in summer, in summer it was. Because, yes, summer.

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The tomatoes were ripening, so it was fall. before they started letting people go. But.

Q: What did the Studenies do there, like for example the older Studeny?

A: Studeny? He worked in the forest. The old Studeny worked in the forest, but beyond that I don't know much.

Q: Did he have a slightly better position?

A: Yes, certainly. Because they were helping those... Look here, each SS who wants to survive must make a gang of these bastards who would help him. Otherwise, no one would give a shit if they got shot or not, so they would have to form some pack around them. So they chose people they were satisfied with, otherwise...

Q: ... How did the Polaks speak amongst one another?

A: I don't know. They were Polaks, but how they spoke to one another I don't know.

Q: Did you understand them when they were talking Gypsy?

A: They would explain things to us in a way that we understood, making us do knee bends. They would punish us in this way.

Q: And you tried this yourself?

A: Me no. This Vrba and that Tonda, until they fell.

Q: How many about?

A: I don't know how many knee bends, I don't know. But until they fell.

Q: And after that? What happened to him?

A: After that he would go to work. They would make those seams, you know. They fixed boots those Vrbas did. They had a better position, for which reason they survived. What will I tell you. Because they had better opportunity, to get to the kitchen because maybe those cauldrons. They had maybe four or five cooks there yes. And if they would ever need to, they would go to the seamstress shop and grab some people for help. So they would always be

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around food. They wouldn't need to eat every day but all it takes is to take a piece of this or that every day to survive. The worst was for those who couldn't or didn't have the strength or those whose parents were already gone. They would just drop like flies.

Q: ... When you were there in the beginning, did you ever try somehow to get to your mom?

A: I no but she tried to get to me. She would bring me some bread a few times. I was still locked up in that vehicle. But if they would have caught her, they would have smacked her one, like that bastard Štěrba... He's probably not alive anymore. And this Hovorka, I don't know, but he could still be alive. He also was a bastard. You know how it was back then.

Q: Do you know what they did with him after the war?

A: With Hovorka? Nothing, nothing at all, because I know for a fact that that Vrba would go visit him, somewhere near Pisek. He apparently played the accordion, that Hovorka, who would go visit him.

Q: Did you ever get to see the local villagers? There in Let? _____

A: Local villagers?

Q: Yes, from Let, as in those living in the village.

A: No. ... There were pasture lands there before. There was nothing there back then. During the war, there were only tomatoes growing there.

Q: ... How it is said, how those Polaks, the neighbors with those women. Do you remember who it was with, who they chose or how it went about?

A: You can bet they were choosing they were. They had the ability then. So whoever would have the means, then she would go for it, yes. All I saw was when that prostitute from Prague had died. One of them died there, stretched out on the table. I know that much.

Q: Could these women have declined perhaps?

A: Why couldn't they decline?

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Q: And the police perhaps as well?

A: I don't know. I didn't see that. I don't know. But if she was crafty, look here, like what they did over there... You know, they were chosen in the offices, chosen there, you know.

Q: Do you remember the names of those prostitutes?

A: No, I don't know. They were grabbed up in Prague. They had about four of those girls.

Q: Were they also Gypsies?

A: No, they weren't. They were jailed for prostitution there. But if they did something like this, I don't know.

Q: Were they nice looking?

A: Nice? ... Maybe for screwing but, beyond that, you know how it goes. But this Peldrova, she was good, and her daughter was as well. They ate plenty there, if you can understand me. They had enough food from that kitchen there. Peldr as well.

Q: How many doctors did you see there?

A: I saw one there.

Q: What did he look like?

A: That doctor? He was smaller, stronger like. But he was like I don't know. He had an assistant there as well ... named Růžička, or something like that. But that boy died. He was a bit thin. And he had a girlfriend, but more than that I can't tell you. But I met her later on outside. I was studying in Novy Bystrice and she was alive, his old lover. But how she was named...

Q: Was he the one who would inoculate?

A: No, he would only help him. He was an assistant. He was a young boy at that time.

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Q: A medic of sorts.

A: Yes, something like that.

Q: So then a doctor that would inoculate.

A: Yes.

Q: And who was that? ... Did he live there?

A: No, I didn't see that, that he would live there or something.

Q: So did he come there from the outside?

A: He had to come in from somewhere because they also had that ordinance there, so he had to come in from somewhere else.

Q: And what happened to you when he inoculated you?

A: Me, nothing..

Q: And the others?

A: I don't know. They weren't some injections, like some are heard to say. They didn't give any injections - that's a bunch of bull. There was that typhoid fever there and diarrhea and all sorts of diseases. But I would have had to die myself if he gave out some kind of death injection.

Q: Did anything change after the inoculation?

A: I didn't recognize any difference.

Q: I mean like in the camp itself.

A: Nothing at all.

Q: Did the health conditions change at all there?

A: It was always the same. There was, that came out of, because it was terrible there. Such dirt and all they would cook was cabbage with that water. You got soup, it wasn't, it was water. Out of hunger it was, otherwise. ... And these again did that.

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Q: What if there were husbands there and they would live separately.

A: Yes.

Q: Were they able to meet sometime?

A: They were able to meet, but once the men were mature, they were taken away from there.

They were gone. They would work in the forests and I don't know where else. No way. It would have to be some **kapo** or something like that, that he would be able to meet with them.

Otherwise, the men were always away. There were children with those women there.

Otherwise, the men were gone. And these there were the Polaks. But I don't know.

Q: What ever happened to the Polaks?

A: I don't know. Perhaps they are out free, like these are.

Q: What ever happened to those who managed to escape?

A: From the camp?

Q: Yes.

A: I know of one case, yes I do.

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Q: What was the difference between the German Gypsies and the Czech ones?

A: None. No difference at all.

Q: I see. And those Germans from Moravia for example. What kind of people were they?

A: How would I say this. I didn't see any difference between them.

Q: Were there perhaps still some Jews there?

A: Well, Jews, that's a tough one. How am I supposed to tell them apart? (laughter) There was no chapel there where someone could go pray to and I didn't see anyone praying in their bed. (laughter)

Q: And among the Gypsies. Were there any Jews there?

A: Well, certainly there were some there.

Q: How could you recognize that? How did you recognize that they were Jews?

A: Well, how can you tell those Jews apart at all? ... Well, they are different, a separate breed those Jews. For example, you can tell the Czech type from the German type you can.

Q: What would you say I am?

A: ... This is tough to say too I would say, yes.

Q: Well, maybe but, for example, I don't have to wear a star.

A: Well, look here, what were they like? We didn't come into contact much with them because they wouldn't talk much with you about anything. But at least what I know, at least what I can say, the worst Gypsies were those from Southern Bohemia. But that doesn't mean much.

Q: Was there anyone there who would wear the Jewish star?

A: No. I didn't see any of that. Perhaps among the Polaks, but I didn't see anything like that, so I can't say.

Q: Okay, now back to your parents a bit. You lived together with all your half brothers and sisters in Plavsko was it?

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A: Yes.

Q: So then they took you all away?

A: They took us all away. But my step-father was the father of the boys, who they took away already in 1940.

Q: And where to?

A: The main Czech court was in Telč, here in Moravia where the main head of the court was. That's where it belonged. Czechs then belonged to Třebon yes.

Q: I see.

A: Because Jindřichův Hradec was named Naus Haus, which was like Czech.

Q: How was Plavsko named?

A: Al Plac.

Q: I see. And the one they took to Telč.

A: Yes.

Q: And why?

A: At that time, I don't think I can tell you how it was, I was still, I don't know. All I know is that they took away two brothers, that Pepik and the one who was named Hynek. They never came back. And when we were at home with those here in Let, they sent Hynek's clothes back - boots and coat. In short, they sent them home.

Q: And what was your stepfather like?

A: He worked in the forest and on the highways. I don't know.

Q: Was he dark? Was he a Gypsy? Why did they take him away?

A: Well, why. The Vrba's I guess were originally Gypsy and maybe these were already mixed, although I guess the grandparents were probably Gypsies or such. So it then happened that they grabbed them all.

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Q: When they took you guys away, were you like photographed somewhere? ... On the road perhaps to Budejovice?

A: Nothing, or I don't know. I guess not.

Q: ... Did you have any friends in that camp?

A: No, I didn't. Except perhaps that Pepik, with which I ran away with that Vrba and others. You couldn't count on any friendships there at that time.

Q: And when you ran away, how long about were you on the run before you got somewhere?

A: Well, we broke away sometime before noon, but you couldn't hide anywhere cause people were digging up potatoes (laughter), so you just had to bury yourself somewhere. But by night I know that we got to one village, yes. We got onto a train and rode black all the way to Prague.

Q: Where did you hide in the train?

A: Nowhere, as we normally sat in the compartment. I was shaved bald and my friend as well. So we sat in those coats and no-one recognized us.

Q: And what did you say? What were you talking about?

A: Well, he only told me that we will go to his uncle, who ended up giving us away (laughter).

Q: How long did you stay with your uncle?

A: Well, I can't say. I'd say about a month.

Q: ... So then they came to take you away again?

A: They took us away and threw us into some infant's home, which was for those who were under 21, that institution.

Q: Yes, to that institution.

A: Yes.

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Q: Was it different there than in the camp?

A: Yes. There, if you didn't do anything bad, then they wouldn't beat you. You also got regular food.

Q: And what did the other children say when you would talk about that camp?

A: Well, what can one say. They weren't Gypsies there, in that institution. They were normal people, who perhaps only did not listen at home and who were sent there to that home for kids under 21, where they would be educated and then let go.

Q: Like a reformatory?

A: Yes, something like that. How it was beforehand.

Q: And what did those who worked there say? Did they know that you were from that camp?

A: Well yes, because those gendarmes took us there.

Q: But what did they say when you described camp life a bit, what goes on in there?

A: We didn't describe anything, for sure not.

Q: Did you not even say that you were in that camp?

A: Those gendarmes told them that we ran away from the camp and that they will leave us there until the escort will come.

Q: And ... they didn't say anything there, in that institution?

A: No. One morning they came for us and took us away. The uncle came with a spear and took us away (laughter) there again.

Q: And you were on the road a long time to the camp again?

A: I don't know. I'd say that we showed up there again in the afternoon. We went from Mirovic by foot. At this point I was thinking if I should run away or not. One person was with us.

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Q: So you considered running away again?

A: I was always considering this. I guess I'm just that way. I can't stand having to be locked up somewhere, you know

Q: So you were a month there at that Kočka. You were the entire time inside?

A: No, we would go outside as well. We would go outside as well.

Q: And what did you do that entire month?

A: Well, nothing, to work.

Q: No, nothing. How did you kill time, when you couldn't go anywhere?

A: We usually hung around the brook. There was this brook there, at Kačerov, a brook there. But we couldn't show ourselves in case someone saw us. But he worked with the local police, how it was before. He was a **konfirent** and let us be taken away. If he would have at that time told us to split, we would have and it would have been over. (laughter)

Q: And where would you have gone?

A: Somewhere. All one needs is some clothes. You could have taken something when you were leaving the camp, but there was nothing left. It was all gone.

Q: ... I will show you a picture with one of the prisoners in it. Do you remember this person?

A: ... This looks like Studeny, but..

Q: You knew him?

A: Studeny? Yes, but ... their names are, the mother was Studena. But if it is him... Or Korba, if it is him, I don't know. He should be now in Nový Bystřice. ... But if that is him, I don't know. Is it? ... I think that it is him.

Q: ... Now I will show you ... something, what is down there below.

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A: That's in that quarry, the road which was being made.

Q: Did you go take a look at it there once? Please show us.

A: No I didn't. I was at that pond, yes.

Q: I see..

A: That was a bit of a distance. That pond that was there. ... That is ... a road was being constructed there. ... That's that road which was there.

Q: Show it to the camera please.

A: That's that road there. ... It wasn't so far away from the camp. ... I would need glasses for this.

Q: Those wouldn't be enough?

A: Those are for long distance.

Q: Get us some glasses will you please?

A: They're over there on the table. There's even a sort of lens there. I don't see very well.

Q: ... Does the name Vintr strike a chord with you?

A: Vintr? There were more of them there. I'll take a look. Vintr. ... I don't know about this. I can't tell, can't tell. That's somewhere in the commando there, but.. That guy there reminds me of someone, that stronger looking one.

Q: It's not a very good copy.

A: Well, ... look here, I got 16 smacks from this one, with that baton. He was named Antonín Studený. ... You know? This, this first one here. That's the brother of that Studený.

Q: ... And was he glad to give that to you or did he have to?

A: ... No, he didn't have to give it to me. And that's Tonda Studený. This one I don't know and this woman used to work in the kitchen there.

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Q: Which woman?

A: This one.

Q: Show her on the camera please. What was she like?

A: She was in the kitchen, with those. ... This one, she looked like Vrba's nanny. She's dead now. This one, you know.

Q: You see well now?

A: Yes, yes, I see. This one with the mustache I don't know. ... This one would beat me, I know that.

Q: ... I'll show you once you recognize.

A: This, ... this is a bit strange this. It's a bit strange. ... It would need a copy. ... In those shelters lived those and this.

Q: ... About how many people would live in those shelters? Like in one of the shelters for example?

A: Well, look here, I'll tell you. One, two, three, six... six in one of those small shelters. Because there were these shelters there and the small ones would go along one side in an L shape. They were in the center. Two large buildings were in the center. This was for the military. And on this side, where the kitchen was, they were there as well, there were the cooks and the kitchen staff, those you know. They were there.

Q: And were their children there in the cells?

A: No, they were there in those big buildings. Children.

Q: ... And do you know...

A: And this, this is outside that building.

Q: Which building?

A: ... Here, I guess where was the main chief, because these buildings were not like this inside. There weren't any, or windows, any.

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Q: And you?

A: In that building? I was in that building.

Q: And when?

A: Well, when they caught us and brought us back there.

Q: What did they do with you after that, there in that building?

A: On that one side, when he came, there was this corridor there where on one side there was these offices there. There was this small one there, the one who would slap us in the face. On the other side was some women. There they wouldn't let us go further. ... And she was also, if she was his wife, I don't know.

Q: And what did they do with you there?

A: There were others in the vehicle as well and then they put those irons around our feet.

Q: How did it look there?

A: In the shelter?

Q: Yes.

A: It was a trailer.

Q: I mean in that building there. Inside.

A: Well, I didn't actually go inside. That German woman there, what she was I don't know if she was German, I can't... She had a bunch of pictures all over her walls, pictures of some people. Pictures of tattoos. You know, this one. But otherwise nothing.

Q: What kind of people were they?

A: ... Who were there?

Q: No, on the pictures there?

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A: I don't know. All I could see was the skin, the tattoos. Perhaps tattoos of animals, I don't know. But ... yes ... you know, that was so long ago, who would remember? You know, they would have these packs of people around themselves so no-one could get to them and slice off their heads. Otherwise, I don't know.

Q: Show us please. ... Who was this person?

A: This person? I don't know but it seems that this was the kitchen. Yes, here was the entrance and here was that little road. Beside that was the vehicle and here was I guess two, two, two rooms like. ... This seems, but before, when were there, that working camp, you understand.

Q: Do you recognize any of those cooks?

A: No. This I don't recognize. I don't recognize this, there were different ones, you know, after me. ... I don't recognize this. ... This is also from that camp?

Q: Yes.

A: ... I would have to be somewhere here (laughter). I don't know this. This I don't know anymore. I can't even see it very well. ... But I somewhere there, it is possible. I think I was away at that time, and here is that pond. They would always force us there, here was the quarry, and here they made that road up there. They would always force us there, with the women. Children and everything. That's it, but it's different again, after all those years. It is possible that some of the people there have, had those photographs. .. This no, don't recognize that.

Q: ... This neither?

A: ... I don't know, where this one got a tie. Nothing of the sort was there.

Q: Well, if you can't recognize..

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A: ... Don't recognize.. I'd say Vrba, and this is no-one. They were all over the place there. That is a policeman with a baton, don't know. You know, it would often change there. Many people died there, yes. This one reminds me of Hovorka, but I'm not sure. ... He, he, they were with them in the forests. ... Don't know. They wore those clothes as well, these black ones.

Q: And what kind of people are those?

A: These?

Q: Yes.

A: These seem like those Polaks. These, yes. And this one is a normal gendarme ... because they would wear those clothes which they used to wear during the republic. ... This one was the main cook, this one.

Q: I see.

A: And this one, this one was named Serinek. ... This one in the center, that black one.

Q: And his first name?

A: I don't know what his name was. They used to call him Serinek.

Q: What was he like?

A: He was a bastard. A bastard that one. He beat people.

Q: That was not Ed.

A: There were two brothers there. Seems to me that one of them was called Pepik, that boy, he went away. They took this one away. And this Ed, this one isn't Ed? ... That's Serinek, this one is.

Q: And who are these girls?

A: Look here, this one would be one of those seamstresses, who were there, because none of us there would have been so well groomed. They were from those seamstresses there,

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who were there, the ones they brought in. Otherwise, there, they would put some tie around the neck, you know. (laughter) Is it good? ... Look here ... This one here, this was Tonda's wife, Tonda thrashed me. She was named Tonka. Tonka, and this one is Pepik, and this one is named ... Andula, and this one is named Jan Vrba. But he died. Wasn't too long ago.

Q: Show them please to the camera.

A: This one...

Q: Show us with your finger please.

A: With my finger, yes. I know all of these.

Q: And this old one?

A: This old one? ... This old one I don't know. Look here though, I think that this is Tonda Vrba. This boy, he's still alive, this young one. He's Pepik, Josef is his name. That's hers. This woman she would help out Havrda, the guy who would burn the clothes. This one in the center here and that one, that daughter in Miličín, the one in Miličín, that is her mother. She's now named Vrapcova. She lived in an apartment building there somewhere, yes.

Q: And this young one?

A: This young one? That's Pepik, Jozej is his name.

Q: Pepik?

A: Vrba.

Q: Vrba.

A: Yes, him too somewhere.

Q: And this one up top, up on the right?

A: This one?

Q: Yes.

A: He died. His name was Vrba, Jan. He would fix boots. He also worked in the kitchen. ...

Yes.

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Q: And, ... good.

A: ... It seems to me, it seems to me, I even have a picture of her. Here it is. Yes, so, listen here, ... yes, ... that is definitely that Smetanka. This is that Hrlova, this is Antonin Vrba, and this is that Josef, how we had him there. And this one, I can't tell you right now as I can't see it very well. ... And this is that Smetanka from the kitchen there. ... It's also a bit mixed up here with those seamstresses. And this one here worked, she worked, she helped that Růžička at the doctor. This one, ... oh, like this? ... Yah, it's pretty hard to see. But this is that Vrba, who is the husband of that Andula. ... This is Karel, who is still alive, that Karel.

Q: What's this Karel's last name?

A: Karel Vrba, from Nova Bystřice. ... The one sitting here, he's from Bystřice.

End of tape 2

Tape 3

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Q: What happened to you after the war? For how long did you go to school?

A: I took the regular eight years, yes, eight years in general school. And then I studied further. ... Butchery. I worked in Nova Bystřice, with a guy named Gasner yes. He was a German and it was good there. Later on, they kicked him out, that Gasner, who left everything there - a pub and a butchery. So he left everything there how it was, taking only with him his cane and his hat. He didn't have it too far to Austria and was replaced by some Kolář, a butcher from Český Vorešný, who ran things after that. After that, you know how it was, near the border. Later I got involved in something and the communists put me away for 21 years they did.

Q: For what?

A: For spying. I grew up there near the border from my youth and all of a sudden I was a spy.

Q: Did you want to run away?

A: No. Where would I run to after all. I had a swimming pool, from Austria it was. I could have left any time, if I wanted to.

Q: How old were you back then?

A: 18, yes.

Q: Wait a minute, did you have a girl already at that time?

A: I had nothing. I was single.

Q: Where did you live?

A: With that Koláře, there in the butchery, which Gasner used to have. But then they put me away, the supreme court judging against me ... and those people, I didn't even know them, intricated us. There was about 16 of us, who I never even saw before, and they sentenced us for spying they did.

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I never saw them in my life before, those people. Then they took us to Jachymov.

Q: How did they take you away?

A: They took us to Jachymov. That was, that was a camp named, not Nabídky, Bratrství, where I worked in the camp. But the head there, or the representative, that Štěrba worked there.

Q: What did you see when you got there?

A: What did I see there? There were prisoners there. Prisoners were there.

Q: ... And how about the buildings, surrounding there, how did all that look?

A: There you, there, ... The camp, the camp between the forests, you understand, and the buildings. There were about four or five buildings there.

Q: Constructed from wood?

A: Wood, yes. What else can I tell you. Yes, we were captives, prisoners there.

Q: Where did you sleep?

A: In sheds, there.

Q: And on what?

A: On those bunk beds again, three on top of one another, those bunk beds.

Q: How many of you were there?

A: There were more of us there. Sometimes there would be 16 of us there, and in those large ones, which were corner rooms, then about 30, yes.

Q: And how were the supervisors or those who worked there?

A: Well, the supervisors were usually those who also worked for the Germans. Same thing. ... And so we ended up there. There was this head chief there, some Trnka was his name, a bastard as well. And from that Bratrství, it wasn't bad there, I can say that, because the Russians had a lot for food. It was good.

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Those Russians, look here, bad food or something, you could get extras, from those Russian, you can't even imagine. Yes, they gave extra, sugar, sauce and so on. And they would give on that Mikolaj up there, 1200 meters above Jachymov. Mikolaj it was called.

Q: What is this Mikolaj?

A: Another concentration camp. But you can't even imagine that, what was there. We were there, we walk some two kilometers to work, perhaps even more. The forests, corridors. The ones on the end were tied and the ones in the middle had to hold on to one another and that is how we would walk to work, yes. And the food wasn't good there, the food was bad there. And you couldn't get out until all were ready. You know, without a clock, those were long hours. Sometimes it would be late at night before we would get back. And those assemblies, those assemblies, two or three hours wasn't enough. Sometimes we would stand there the entire evening. Depended on who would be counting. Some of them couldn't even count. They might have made a mistake. I was there for about three years, three or four years at that camp. But these Jehovas who were there, those who didn't want to carry a weapon, yes. I'm telling you the truth. There was this long latrine there, large and long, and they stood there naked in the cold in those latrines, you understand, or otherwise they tied them in the corridors by the arms, wearing only long johns. It was bad there.

Q: What happened to them after that?

A: To those people? I don't know, I don't know what happened to them. I tell you, I didn't give a shit about all this anymore and tried to escape.

Q: Wait a minute, when they put them out there on that, was it in summer or?

A: In winter. In winter it was. Understand, and they even told you that the same thing was going to happen to all of us. Because, in short, there was some _____ up there and they

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those boys, once the sun came down, or I don't know what, they wouldn't work on Saturday, or on Friday they wouldn't work and they would go yes on Sunday. They had certain days you see.

Q: Tell me, how long did those Jehova's stand there?

A: I'm telling you the truth, look here. Some of them would stand out there some three or four hours.

Q: ... And did they manage?

A: Well, they had no other choice you see. If they couldn't handle it then they would throw them into correction. There they would come to their senses and then they would take them to _____, to the correction.

Q: Who was in charge there?

A: I don't know who the head was.

Q: Were there Russians there?

A: Yes, Russians were there, but inside the camp it was ours. The Russian ran a shaft there yes and they had supervision over what the prisoners ate, yes.

Q: And why were they punished like that? Why did they have to stand out there like that?

A: Well, because they were Jehovas and because they didn't want to work on Friday or do that shift.

Q: The Fridays, yes.

A: Or some of the others would have it on Saturday, others with the sunrise, still others with the sunset, I don't know. There were more of them there, those ranks of Jehovas.

Q: Were Jews there as well?

A: I don't know.

Q: And what was your average day there in the camp. What time would you get up?

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A: Well, it depended on who went to the shift, then would get up at four. Yes, whoever went on the morning shift, otherwise the alarm would go off around six in the morning yes. And you would get back at night, from the shift yes.

Q: ... And what did the SSes do with you there?

A: With me? Well, I sat about half a year in correction, and it was better there than to work in the pit, and then they took us out of there, and I went elsewhere.

Q: Wait a moment. Did anyone die there?

A: I can't say that. I don't know if anyone would have died in that camp. They would take them down to the hospital, but I don't know what happened to them after that.

Q: And how about the tortures?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they survive the tortures?

A: Some yes, some yes. I survived it as well. But there were some who would not survive. They ruined the healthy, beating them and other stuff. There were beating commanders there.

Q: How else would they punish there? Did they have other ways of punishing there?

A: Well, it would depend for what. When you went, when you didn't want to work in the pit, then they would put you into a hole, they made one for you and covered you up, but that was still tolerable. But you would just want to get out of there as soon as possible.

Q: What did you get there for food?

A: Well, it was various yes. Although it was not much, it was various yes. It was tolerable because the Russians would give extras.

Q: And to drink?

A: To drink? That again depended on where it was. Look here, there was a place there

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where you could buy beer. You would get these vouchers with which you could buy yourself a beer. But they thought this wasn't good, so they canceled the beer.

Q: ... Did anyone ever hunger there?

A: Yes, that happened as well, certainly. People also were hungry there. Certainly. But you could survive it there in those camps because some people would eat more and some less, yes. So it would always be possible to get the food there. In any case, it was still bad.

Q: In that first camp, that Trnka, how did he look?

A: Trnka? He used to be a motorcycle racing competitor. He used to ride this cinder-track, as they say (laughter). He was tall, lanky, and he would walk with a limp, dragging one foot behind him. He was a bastard as well.

Q: Why would you say he was a bastard?

A: Well, because he would beat us. Not only me but others too.

Q: And how would he beat you? How? With a baton?

A: Not with a baton but he had his methods. They would turn on the water in the bathroom you see and they would let you stay there an hour or two, in that water. Then these apostles, you see, these policemen would come, who would tie your legs and pull you up like a pig and they would thrash your feet so that you could barely walk for a few days. That was his method.

Q: ... Did people die in that second camp?

A: I don't know about that. I haven't heard of that happening.

Q: So you managed to get away from there.

A: I got away from there and went to Bora, yes. I came to Bora when there was that affair there yes, where the shit hit the fan again. Those prisoners again, one was named Bumba and I don't know, he was a policeman. He wanted to let some prisoners go again. They had

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it organized that they would just take them away, let the prisoners go, and that cars would just drive them away across the border.

Q: How was it in Bora. Were the conditions there better or worse?

A: Worse, worse in Bora, my goodness that was bad. I came there and got iron put on my feet, ball and joint. When you wanted to go to sleep, you had to do it in this way (laughter). You had a chain tied to a belt and you couldn't walk. When you were allowed to get out, you had to do like a duck walk. Jumping in this manner and you had to go to sleep with that ball. It was a correction overlooked by some Brabec and the shortest period you could spend there was three months, after which they let you go up.

Q: You tried this yourself?

A: Food every three days, what else should I tell you. You would try to walk dragging that iron behind you. (laughter) And then they would let you go up there, putting you in one department working with plumage. You had to tear those feathers and make 60 blankets a day. The plumage would come in from Poland and it smelt like mighty bad. 60 blankets a day. If you did not fulfill this after the three months, they would put you back into the ditch with half a portion of food. So I said to myself, the hell with this as well. So, from one hell to another. A doctor then came and all the younger ones would go to the shaft. 12 of us went to the shaft in Slavkovska. It was a new camp and I said to myself that perhaps this will be better. I looked around but I just didn't care anymore. 21 years they sentenced me and I said, "You guys can all go to hell and lick my ass," when all of a sudden they would make you assemble and they immediately shot four or five of the boys. They wanted to run away. It was the police, some Sunday, when the ditch was being repaired. Those boys forced the police into those cages, took away their guns and hung the cages between the floors so that they could not get away yes. (laughter) And the boys ran away. And at that Lokta in Karlovy Vary, you know, where you can get to. It was all surrounded there, soldier here, policeman

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there, in that Pohraničí. So the boys crawled into some building, and they fired until those poor boys were eventually shot. They shot them and killed them those torturers.

There the army just started. There was this army there, where they laid them down in the courtyard you understand and the entire camp had to walk around them, hats down and walk around them. Around and around in circles and that head chief, some Huňáček was his name, would say, "This is how it will end with anyone who will try to get away," or something like that. Such words of wisdom. But, you know, freedom is freedom and the boys would constantly be trying, right? It was the worst to get out of this camp. You know, as soon as you would do the slightest thing, the slightest bad thing, they would punish you and shove you into that hole, that correction. I got to that army in Pribram, the army camp it was called.

Q: Wait a minute. How would they kill there? How did you say?

A: Well, the SS shot and killed those boys.

Q: How long.

A: I don't know.

Q: And why did they shoot them?

A: Because they took the guns away from those SS and hung them there like that between the floors. They ran away but they managed to catch them.

Q: How many of them did they shoot like that?

A: About four. Four at that time.

Q: What were their names?

A: I don't know. You can't expect me to remember that.

Q: Was it Luňáček?

A: His name was Huňáček, that head chief, but mostly those political, those self-edified there in the camp, mostly they would do it. They had big functions there. They made the decisions.

Q: So from there where to?

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A: I moved on from there. ... I got a bit farther from there, to Ležnice, a camp. Once again, I had the poor fortune that I had that Trnka there again. They sent him there. And there again I would be tied up, tied up in that shaft, under the knees in the mud. It was bad there in Jachymov. Bad indeed.

Q: Wait a minute. That army camp, how long were you there for?

A: At that army camp? ... I don't know how long it was exactly, I guess about three years. It was a bad camp I tell you.

Q: What do you mean by bad?

A: It was bad there. Living there was bad. Everything there was bad.

Q: You mean like the food or something?

A: Everything.

Q: And punishment?

A: Punishment as well. You would walk to work tied up like that. Tied up and holding each others ears like that, like a monkey. And maybe 500 of you would go to a shift you know. Not each of us would walk the same but you must go in the same step and around the corridor. All you would need to do is take a bad step and that wire would already dig into you. There were policemen there sent as a punishment from Slovakia you know. They would send Czechs there and Slovaks here.

Q: Did they say why?

A: Why?

Q: Why were they there?

A: They certainly wouldn't confide in you. There were some sad ones there I tell you, like in the army. You had to get up and announce yourself when they came. There were also poor Slovaks there. They were glad when you would make them a cup of tea and gave them a piece of bread. It was terrible indeed.

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Q: And how did the police treat you? How did the police treat the prisoners?

A: Depended on who. Whoever was smart and held together with the pack and covered their backs, they wouldn't worry about it. And I think that those kind of people, just to get a crumb, would do all sorts of evil there. At one camp there was this SS, Jakes was his name. Him and his brother. I wanted to beat the piss out of one of them, it wasn't long ago yes. He was a co-driver. They threw him out of there later. He was also a bastard. There were various types.

Q: And from there to where?

A: From there I moved on like Hanzelka. Then there was a court again, but before that they took me to Mirov yes. There it was also bad, in Mirov. We got there. There were gates there, everything electrocuted with the gates behind them. That had one, two or three, three of those courtyards yes. I was in the center courtyard and we worked. The first period we take plums from the church. There was this big church there. But that didn't last so long, only the season. Then some other group would take those peppers. And then those who worked on those motors, filing for Zábřech somewhere. It wasn't so bad there but the vicar would come visit us and the army was constantly there. Those vicars, they tried, you can't even imagine.

Q: How for example? Give us an example.

A: A concrete example. They were isolated all the time on that courtyard, there with your average wall about three and a half meters. They would give them all sorts of opportunity.

Q: Like for example?

A: Well, for example, they didn't have any visitors or contact with the outside world. They didn't get print, in short, cut off totally from the world.

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Q: Did you ever have visitors?

A: I didn't have anyone. Who would come after me? I didn't care anyway. If I could have, I would have broke from there as well. But you couldn't get out of there because there is this 100 meter sharp drop cliff and there were guards there at night for example. I was thinking of nothing else than to get out of there.

Q: What did you do there for work?

A: It was different. There were big halls there which could fit some 300 people. People would sow and other stuff there. Or **stanion** would be ripped off from paper, and various stuff like that. And there was this ... Husak, that friend, my goodness, what was his name? He was there how many years?

Q: You saw him there?

A: Yah.

Q: And SS were there?

A: There were bastards there as well. You won't find too many solid people there in jail. There was this Dělbič there, from Podkarpackej Rusi who would thrash you with keys, under the ribs or something like that. It was various yes.

Q: What was the worst punishment that you saw there?

A: ... They didn't kill people in that fashion there. For correction, they would put you three months into correction and let you cool off in there. Down there in the dungeon, where you would sleep on those bunks. A brick bed with a board over top. You would get a blanket, at night mice would take chomps off of our toes. ... You know how it is in those castles.

Q: What was the temperature like down there?

A: Well, temperature, yes, there was heat there. It was not cold. There were so many people there that you would all heat up the rooms with your breathing. And if there were some ovens there, then they would only heat in the hallways, and that policeman would always be looking

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into the peep holes (in the doors). Sometimes they would put a bakery there on it, so some departments would have good heat. You know, in Mirov.

Q: And from there?

A: From there I was let out. I don't know what president was running the show at that time.
Can't remember anymore.

Q: And when was it about?

A: .. That was back in 57. The court rulings were looked at again and it was determined that I was there for nothing, yes.

Q: They told you this in the jail?

A: Yes, in the jail. In short, they came to tell me that they are setting amnesty for me from this or that year and that they will let me go.

Q: So where did you go?

A: Well, I stayed with a friend for a while in Prague. You know, with nothing or even a penny in my pocket. Only what I had on myself, which wasn't much because they shut me in when I was 18 or 19 and let me out when I was 27. Let out with nothing for my name.

Q: And where did you anchor down after that?

A: Well, it was various. I worked where I could and finally anchored down here in the forest yes.

Q: Where? Here?

A: Yes.

Q: In Plané?

A: Plané, yes. Then for 20 years I would go to Soběslav to the manipulator and the rest here.

Q: Did you ever receive any compensation?

A: Well, like this. For those eight years they gave me about 12,000 CZK yes. They found out that I didn't do anything at all.

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Q: And they gave that to you when?

A: ... Well, when they let me go they were supposed to give it to me in the 60s, but they canceled it because the courts were supposed to be without fault, and it wouldn't look good

for them. So they canceled that decision. But now it was in 1992 or something that they finally gave it to me. Otherwise, it was all bad. But I didn't have it as bad as others cause, for example, others they would break their ribs or kidneys. I managed to avoid that cause I was young yes.

Q: Did you ever have health problems because of life in the camp?

A: Where?

Q: Well, like afterwards, did you have any problems resulting from your chains or from the camp?

A: No, I didn't. Nothing of the sort. They let me go and practically gave me a kick in the but goodbye. I went looking for work but was careful not to get around too many people, so they wouldn't take me away again.

Q: How long did you work for? Until what year did you work?

A: Work? Well, I'm six years in retirement now, otherwise I worked all the time.

Q: Did you get anything from that first camp?

A: I got a hundred thousand crowns for my mom.

Q: And when was that?

A: When was that? ... I can't tell, but not so long ago, not so long ago. It took a long time. Like when you were here the last time, and then it took three months before I got it.

Q: For yourself?

A: Yes, for myself.

Q: No, I mean like when you were in prison there. Did you get anything yourself for that?

A: Yes.

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Q: You also received?

A: Yah, the hundred thousand crowns.

Q: Because of your mom?

A: Yes.

Q: And for yourself?

A: For me, they gave me only 14. They counted it up to only 14 they gave me yes. ... So I don't know what.

Q: Well, I'm glad that you got that.

A: Yes, I did, but look, that was...

Q: Now I would like to show you another picture from that first camp you were at. Grab your glasses and tell me if you recognize someone.

A: ... Well, this is Štěrbá, he's like everywhere, that little one.

Q: Put your glasses on please.

A: ... You know, they had these dogs on the side when you went into those sheds, I know that. But that's Štěrbá.

Q: But he has a star there. You didn't see that star.

A: I know, but...

Q: Tell me what other camp you saw Štěrbá in.

A: ... In Jáchymově.

Q: Not there _____.

A: Down there, his name was ...

End of tape 3

Conclusion of interview