Tape two, side one:

NL: This is Nora Levin interviewing Mr. Herbert Finder, tape two, side one, continuing our discussion of March 19, 1987. Now, Herbert, would you be good enough to tell us a little about the conditions under which you were taken to Drancy? You were taken from...

HF: Well...

NL: Did we go over that in the last tape?

HF: Yeah, we went. Yeah.

NL: All right. And you arrived in Drancy...

HF: Well, I arrived in Drancy approximately August 31st, 1942.

NL: August 31st, 1942.

HF: 1942.

NL: And...

HF: From...

NL: You were with your father.

HF: I was going with my father, and we came from camp Duvernay.

NL: Duvernay.

HF: Duvernay, in southern France, which was not very far from where we were arrested by the French *gendarmarie*. We lived in France 25 kilometers from Toulouse, in a small village, which is not very far from Duvernay. We were two, and from Duvernay to Drancy, we were transported in regular passenger trains. And if I recall it was like an overnight journey. We left in the afternoon. We were [there] the next day, we arrived in Drancy.

NL: Where did any officials who might have been around tell you you were going, if they told you anything?

HF: At Duvernay?

NL: On the train.

HF: No, I don't recall.

NL: You don't recall.

HF: I don't recall.

NL: And were there many people, many Jews on the train?

HF: On the train? There was only, there was a special, it was not a, it was a special train from Duvernay to Drancy. There was no other passengers on the train except people that were...

NL: In the camp.

HF: Jews, yeah, Jews from that camp.

NL: Were there several dozen? Several hundred?

HF: Oh no, there were no thousands. There were hundreds of people.

NL: Hundreds. So there were several.

HF: Yes.

NL: Many cars.

HF: Oh yeah, there were many cars.

NL: Many cars.

HF: Some passenger cars.

NL: And were you given any food? Do you remember? Or something to drink?

HF: Oh, I don't remember. I don't remember. But there were, I mean the conditions were not...

NL: Not too bad.

HF: Bad. No, there were, I mean, there were no exceptional conditions.

NL: And the conductors were French, the trainmen?

HF: Yeah.

NL: The trainmen were French.

HF: Yeah, were all French, yes.

NL: And so no one as far as you remember told you where you were going, or why you were leaving the camp? Or did your father, do you remember?

HF: I mean, I can't remember exactly what happened...

NL: You can't remember.

HF: At that time.

NL: So you arrived at Drancy and...

HF: I arrived at Drancy August 31st, 1942. And there we were assigned a room and with the other people. And we were there until September 4, 1942.

NL: Just a few days?

HF: Just a few days.

NL: Just a few days.

HF: Yeah.

NL: I see.

HF: Yeah, just a few days.

NL: Just a few days. And you were with your father all that time?

HF: Yeah, I was with my father all that time. A matter of fact, we were together with other people that were arrested at the same time. There was only one family in the village that was arrested that were also Jews from Vienna. The man was a rabbi and he was arrested with his wife and two small children. I remember his name. His name was Hedro. And we were together on the train from Duvernay to Drancy and we were also then shipped together from Drancy to the east.

NL: To the east. Now, do you remember any experiences you had at Drancy?

HF: Well, the only experience I remember at Drancy is we were given food at Drancy and...

NL: By French staff?

HF: It was all French.

NL: All French.

HF: French staff, yeah. French and Jewish staff.

NL: Jewish staff were there too.

HF: I mean, Jewish, yeah. And we were given food and we had a bed to sleep in. And on the last day, I only remember the last day before we left, they cut everybody's hair.

NL: Did they tell you why?

HF: Just to, in order to, for cleanliness.

NL: Sanitary reasons.

HF: Sanitary reasons.

NL: Was the treatment pretty decent in those few days? You don't remember being...

HF: Yeah, there was nothing exceptionally...

NL: Scolded or beaten?

HF: No, no, no.

NL: Something like that?

HF: Nothing like that.

NL: No.

HF: Nothing like that whatsoever.

NL: And you were put on a train at Drancy?

HF: Yeah. And we were actually, we left on September 4th, 1942, and it was the 28th convoy of deported Jews leaving, I mean, of Jews leaving there for the east.

NL: Convoy?

HF: 28th.

NL: From France or...

HF: From France.

NL: From France, the 28th.

HF: Yes.

NL: So presumably there had been 23 others leaving?

HF: 28, 27 others.

NL: 27 that were leaving Drancy.

HF: Before.

NL: From Drancy before.

HF: Yeah, before September 4th.

NL: 4th. Ah ha. And how long were you on the train to the east?

HF: I don't remember exactly whether it was two days or three days. I don't remember exactly.

NL: Did you have a place to sit down?

HF: Yes. Then we were strictly in what the French called cattle cars. I mean there was no more passenger cars. We had, there were cattle cars, and we were together,

not separated. I mean, men, women, children in the same car. There was enough room in each car for, and people still had luggage. And I mean everybody had a suitcase, clothing. Nothing was yet taken away from anybody. Everybody was still allowed to have their personal belongings with them.

NL: Excuse me, I'm going to close the [tape off then on] And you had been told that you were going "to the east"...

HF: Yes.

NL: By people at Drancy?

HF: Yes.

NL: Do you remember any anxiety on the part of your father or any other adults at the time?

HF: Not really. I can't really, all that stands vividly in my mind was I mean not so much my personal reaction, but the children of that family who were with us. And there were small children there. The boy was maybe five or six and the girl was eight or nine then. I remember them being very upset when they cut their hair off, in Drancy before. And I remember the children were more, and it stands vividly in my mind that they were very upset. Personally I don't remember...

NL: Did you see those children on the train?

HF: Yes. We were toge-, a matter of fact we were in the same...

NL: They were still upset.

HF: Yeah, they were in the same car.

NL: They were still upset, yes. And so after two or three days you arrived...

HF: After two or three days, the train had stopped. Although there were several stops in between. But the train just stopped and the doors were opened on the train, from the outside. I mean you could not open the doors from the inside. The doors were opened. And we heard a German voice calling. And in German, a soldier calling all men from the age of 16 to the age of 45, to get off the train. And this was at a, not really at the railroad station. It was rather in a rather deserted railroad siding. And...

NL: Were you in Poland yet, do you think?

HF: Yes. Yes, it was in Poland.

NL: You were in Poland.

HF: And it was in Poland. It was, actually it was what in Germany was called *Oberschlesien Osten*, East Ober...

NL: East, yes.

HF: Yeah. It was not very far from Katowice. And it was, according to records I have, the name of the place was Kosel.

NL: How would that be spelled?

HF: K-O-S-E-L.

NL: K-O-S-E-L. Was this the place that you were looking for on the map?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Did you happen to find that?

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: So anyway, well the name of the place is not that important because it was not really a station. And so all the men, whoever wanted to—nobody was really forced to leave the train. No German soldier went up on the train to check if people got off or not. Whoever went got off the train and had to line up in front of the train. And opposite us was a row of German soldiers, one next to the other, holding up the trains. And we were told to line up one next to the other, and a few minutes later passed by a German S.S. We called him a *Sturmbann-führer*, and he selected the men and told them to, either to go on the other side a little bit away from the train—there was like a little area, assembly area, to go over there—or he told them to go back on the train. And my, I was standing next to my father, and next to that other man who, from that family who was with us. And my father and that other man, a Mr. Hager, he told to go to the assembly area. To me he told to go back up on the train. Because I was only 13 years at the time. Of course I had not told him that, but, I mean, according to...

NL: You weren't very big.

HF: I was not as big or as a sixteen-year-old although I was rather tall for my age all along. I was always tall for my age. But anyway he had told me to go back up on the train. But I mean he did not stop and wait for anybody whether they followed his orders or not. He just kept on going from one car to the other. And so my father immediately left for the assembly area and I just stood on the bottom without...

NL: Going back.

HF: Going anywhere. So then the German soldier standing opposite me, it was maybe a distance of I would say maybe ten feet, fifteen feet, I mean the distance was not very great, and he asked me, in German, "Why don't you go back on the train?" Now I answered him in German because I was, German was my native tongue, that my father went over there in the other area and I would like to go there too in order to be together with my father. I mean, not knowing really why he was sent there.

NL: But you wanted to be with him.

HF: I just, because although more, on the train most of the people were families, my father and I were just the two of us. There was no question of family. So I wanted to just be together with my father. So the German soldier told me then in German, "When the *Ober Sturmbannführer* will come back again, because he had to come back the same way, just tell him, stop him and tell him that you are 16 years old and that you want to go to work." And a few minutes later, after the *Sturmbannführer* returned from, after he had gone all the way to the end of the train he returned. And I stopped him and said, "*Herr Ober Sturmbannführer*, I am 16 years old and I want to go to work." So he said, "Go to work."

And this is how I rejoined my father, who was only a short, I mean a short distance, a few hundred feet away. And then they closed the cars, the doors of the train, and the train just pulled away. And we were just almost like left stranded there.

NL: About how many do you think there were?

HF: I would say probably about maybe 100 people, 100, 150 people.

NL: But most...

HF: Maybe 200.

NL: Most went back on the train?

HF: No.

NL: No?

HF: No, most of the men really, because there was only men between 16 and 50 were supposed to go to come down, so I would say most men were selected, the stronger ones were selected to go to work.

NL: To work.

HF: To work, yeah, and the others were supposed to go back on the train.

NL: And how long did you have to wait at this assembly point?

HF: Oh, I don't know if I, I think this was late in the afternoon. I think we stayed there like a few hours. And then trucks came. And we were taken away to a work, to a camp. And the name of that camp was Tarnovich, in German.

NL: Tarnovich.

HF: Tarnovich. In Polish it's called Tarnosky Gura. That's how it's listed on all maps today. Tarnosky...

NL: Gura. G-U-R-A.

HF: Yeah. Tarnosky Gura. That's a Polish name. In German it's Tarnovich. And this was a work camp under the direction of the...Germans. It was strictly, the function was to work for the German railroad. It was basically a work camp for working on the German railroad.

NL: Were you laying tracks?

HF: Yes. Now, we got to the, in the train administration on the inside was really already pretty well-established, and it was mostly in the hands of Polish Jews, who were recruited at that time from that area and they were like the, in charge of the kitchen. In charge of, there were even women, Polish Jewish women...

NL: Is that so?

HF: Young women, young. And they were in the kitchen working the kitchen and the whole camp only consisted of a few hundred people.

NL: And you were the youngest, do you suppose?

HF: I, yeah, I was the young-, I know. I was the youngest in that camp.

NL: You were the youngest.

HF: And when we went the first day from the camp to the work place, which was outside the camp—I mean every day we had to walk to the work place, which was

along the railroad, and we were building railroad siding, enlarging the railroad station and so on—the man in charge of the project wanted to know what I was doing there.

NL: A Jewish man?

HF: Yeah, the Jewish man, who was, I mean, from the inside man, who was in charge. He said to us, "What are you doing here? You cannot work as hard as the others. I'm going, "From now on you just should stay inside the camp. I don't want you on the work place. But then the German engineer, he was from Düsseldorf. He was in charge of the construction of the railroad. He said, "No. I want this boy to come every day. I want him to come here, on the work place every day, and I want him to carry my equipment." It was like engineering equipment. So that's how I worked there every day. And that...

NL: And Father was actually doing the heavy work...

HF: Yeah.

NL: Laying the tracks.

HF: Laying the tracks. Now the other man who was with us, that Rabbi Hager, he did not last very long. He died within a very short time.

NL: By the way, what happened to his children?

HF: They were...

NL: They went on that train?

HF: They were left on the train...

NL: By themselves?

HF: With everybody else. No, with his wife.

NL: Oh, the wife was there.

HF: The wife was on it.

NL: So they went straight on to Auschwitz, presumably.

HF: Presumably.

NL: Yes. So he perished quickly?

HF: Well, the people that could not work any more, that just got weakened off after, there were, we never knew what happened to them, but they, every few weeks there came a truck and they were loaded up on the truck from the camp and they were sent, the rumor was to Auschwitz to be gassed, in other words, the ones that were not able to continue.

NL: Continue.

HF: Because I remember one day during the winter of '42 I became very sick. And the Jewish camp leader told me, "Don't stay, even how no matter how sick you are, don't stay in the camp because today they will come and pick up everybody who cannot work any more."

NL: Did you get something to eat that could keep you sustained?

HF: Well, we got, actually we only really got one meal a day. We got a piece of, every evening we got a bowl of soup and a piece of, and a portion of bread. And that was our...

NL: That was your sustenance.

HF: Sustenance for the day. Now if we wanted to save part of it for the, bread for the next day, there was really...

NL: Nothing for breakfast?

HF: No, there was one allocation, one daily allocation. And during the day this became a, and breakfast we got, they called "coffee" in the morning, like a black brew, but nothing else.

NL: Nothing to eat.

HF: And the same we got at noontime also, like black brew.

NL: There was nothing in the fields that was growing that you could pick?

HF: Well we were not really working on the field. We were working on the railroad...

NL: On the railroad. No [unclear]?

HF: No. Well, occasionally, I mean, we would get sometimes, civilians would throw food at us or a Polish civilian or even sometimes even some of the German guards would give you, you know.

NL: How about this German who wanted you to carry his equipment, did he ever give you any food?

HF: No.

NL: No? Did you stay by his side most of the time?

HF: No, no, not.

NL: No.

HF: No, and then later I was, many, being that I was the youngest, so a lot of my function was to build fires for the German guards. You know...

NL: In their barracks?

HF: Because it was windy. No, outside like campfires.

NL: No, outside. To keep them warm.

HF: To keep them warm, because I mean we were not inside a camp. In other words we were really outside and it was their function to, every guard was assigned a certain amount of prisoners. We called it [unclear]**.**

NL: So they got cold.

HF: They were cold. That was more, one of my functions, either carry the equipment or to make a fire or to do all kind of different, or go for coffee. I mean, for...

NL: For them.

HF: For, and do all kinds of different chores.

NL: But you didn't get any special favors from them in the way of food?

HF: No, no. On occasion someone would give you something, but it was really nothing that...

NL: And were you near Father most of the time?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Did you see each other every day?

HF: Yeah, mmm hmm.

NL: And you slept in the same bunk?

HF: We slept in the same barrack.

NL: In the same barrack.

HF: In the same barrack. I mean, we got, in other words, food what they thought would sustain the people to do their work, because that was their function.

NL: It was not manufactured work. This was genuine work.

HF: No, no, it was strictly construction work.

NL: This was genuine work. It had a purpose.

HF: Genuine that, yeah it had a purpose for the German railroad.

NL: The German railroad.

HF: It was, no, it was not work that...

NL: Made work.

HF: No, no, it was strictly work for the German railroad to keep the...

NL: Now were the guards S.S. men? Or were the people you came in contact with army people?

HF: It changed.

NL: It changed.

HF: Some of them were S.S. men. Some of them were S.A. men. Some of them were soldiers like on leave from the army, I mean not on leave, like recuperation from the Eastern Front.

NL: The Front, mmm hmm.

HF: Sometimes our guards were very old men. It always changed.

NL: I see, ah ha.

HF: It always changed.

NL: And what about the composition of the workers? Did you, of course many just fell.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Collapsed.

HF: Yeah.

NL: So there was...

HF: Yeah.

NL: I guess a great deal of turnover.

HF: No, it was really, it just reduced itself.

NL: Reduced itself.

HF: Yeah, we did not get...

NL: No new...

HF: No new people came.

NL: Groups.

HF: No new, I don't remember any new group that came to us. Now the inside administration was strictly run by Jews. And the outside leadership, you know, this was all one Jewish *Kapo* responsible for a group than towards the...German authority.

NL: Did you have any contact with the inside Jewish...

HF: Leadership?

NL: Leadership.

HF: Oh yeah, constantly, because they were in charge of distributing the food on the inside.

NL: Oh, they distributed the food.

HF: Yeah, yeah. There was no German...really involved...

NL: I see.

HF: In the administration of the camp whatsoever.

NL: Did the Jewish people inside eat better than you did, as far as you could see?

HF: Oh yeah, well, sure, they had access to the kitchen. They were over, they had...

NL: So they didn't share?

HF: No, no, they had all the food, I mean, it's, I mean if X amount of food was given for the camp, they would take whatever they wanted and distribute the, they were in authority charge.

NL: And they were mostly from Poland?

HF: Yeah, they were mostly from Poland, from that area. They were really from that area.

NL: From that area. All right, and did you get any rumors, did you hear any rumors, any reports about what was happening outside your own little area?

HF: The only...

NL: Any news or...

HF: The only thing we heard is what sometimes the German soldiers would tell us. Now we, for example, we knew about the German defeat at Stalingrad.

NL: Did you?

HF: Because the German soldier would tell us or, you know, especially when I would build a fire for them and standing and I had the advantage that I spoke German, because very few people spoke German. Because most, all the transports that came was from western Europe. So not many spoke German. So, I mean...

NL: That was an advantage for you.

HF: It was an advantage.

NL: And did you get the feeling that they realized that this was a very great defeat for them?

HF: Well, the only one recollection I have was of this German S.A. man telling me that they really feared the Russians. They did not want to be captured by the Russians, because they knew of the atrocities that the Germans committed while advancing on the

Russian front. And the example he gave me was they would tie people around the tree and then douse them with water, I mean, in the wintertime in the cold of the winter and the people would just freeze up.

NL: Freeze. Yeah.

HF: And we also suffered tremendously from the cold, because the problem was all the time that we worked outdoors all the time. And whenever we came back, we had to stand for hours in front of the barrack for the count to come out. Now...

NL: You didn't get any special clothing for the winter?

HF: No, our clothing was very, very...

NL: Did you have boots?

HF: No, our clothing was very, very minimal.

NL: Just shoes.

HF: As a matter of fact, at that time we still had our civilian clothing.

NL: I see.

HF: We were not even issued any clothing, whatever people brought with them. But eventually people died and it became that one took the clothing from another and...

NL: Did you have a coat?

HF: Yeah, we had a coat, yeah. And what I was gonna say, now there was a chance, people didn't attempt to, but we were not guarded as heavily that some people could not escape.

NL: I see.

HF: But it was made clear that for everybody that was missing, a certain amount of, would be shot on sight. I know one time really somebody was missing and every tenth person in the row that was standing, they would just pull them out and they would shoot them. So I mean there, so there was a big deterrent about escaping. And the second biggest deterrent was that there was a reason for them to send western Jews to Poland for work camp because nobody knew the lang-, people didn't know the language, didn't know the area. They didn't know where they were. So that was the other biggest deterrent. And we were in that particular camp for about six months, until the Spring of 1943. In 1943, they took everybody that was left in that camp and they liquid-, they closed that camp down. And they sent us, including the Polish Jews that were in, in autho[rity], they were in charge. And they sent everybody to a work camp in Sosnowiec. Now Sosnowiec is just outside of Katowice. Now this was not a very great distance. We, I think only, maybe an hour or two hours.

NL: May I ask, was the work on the railroad finished?

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: No, I don't know by what decision they decided all of a sudden to move.

NL: I guess the moving of the front?

HF: No, no, no, no.

NL: The victory at Stalingrad made some change?

HF: No.

NL: No? Well, all right, so you...

HF: I really don't know why they...

NL: They may not have had a good reason either. Sometimes they were just...

HF: Because the camp at Sosnowiec was basically the same thing.

NL: I see.

HF: With all that, but there we was already in established camp. Or maybe they didn't have enough people left there to do any productive work. I just don't know.

NL: So you resumed the same kind of work.

HF: We resumed the same general type of work. We were in a little camp. It was also a few hundred people, in barracks, in Sosnowiec. And every day we were taken by train to Katowice.

NL: To Katowice.

HF: Katowice, yes. And there were, we worked at the main railroad station in Katowice. And we were also building, and we worked in...

NL: Stations.

HF: Building a railroad station. There was...

NL: And then you were doing heavier work?

HF: Then we were doing heavy work, yeah.

NL: But you personally did not.

HF: Yeah, then I was already doing heavier work. And basically, the purpose of that was to build supply lines to the east for the German troops. Now we saw many, while work on the main line we saw many German troops transferred, going east.

NL: Going east.

HF: Yeah, we saw many what the Germans would call *Lazarett* trains, *Lazarett*, hospital trains.

NL: Hospital.

HF: Coming west.

NL: *Lazarett*.

HF: *Lazarett*, yeah. And we also saw many movements of *Volksdeutsche*, from Russia, moving back west.

NL: West.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Interesting, yes.

HF: So due to the fact that we worked on those main lines, we always saw that all those trains were going...

NL: Traffic...

HF: Traffic going all different directions.

NL: Did you have, did you hear any rumors or reports about Auschwitz or the fate of Jews in the east?

HF: No. Well, we were in the east, actually, but we did not...

NL: But you didn't know what that meant.

HF: No, we were...

NL: The trains going "to the east."

HF: No.

NL: You didn't know where they were going to.

HF: No, no, remember we did not see any trains of Jews going, we did not see.

NL: Oh, and you didn't hear about those?

HF: No, we did not hear about it, not to my recollection.

NL: And at Sosnowiec you also were in the company of Polish Jews? These were...

HF: A few. Yeah, but most of the Jews, they also were from the west.

NL: Ah, and how about the...

Tape two, side two:

NL: This is tape two, side two, continuing our talk with Mr. Finder. Was the food any better here, Herbert?

HF: No, it was just as bad, the same.

NL: The same thing.

HF: It was the same thing. There was not really, just that it was a different location and I think that it was more concentrated. We worked more, the whole camp more worked in one general area. So we had less contact with civilians, with Polish civilians, or German civilians, than we had in Tarnovitch. And the administration was a little bit more cruel.

NL: More cruel.

HF: Yeah, more cruel. But basically we got one ration of food a day, and that was supposed to last us until the next...

NL: The next day.

HF: Next, every evening.

NL: Did you suffer ill health besides your loss of weight?

HF: No...

NL: Were you or your father ill during any of this period?

HF: No, no.

NL: No.

HF: But many people, I mean, many people died through lack of food, but basically, I mean, the population in the camps decreased continuously.

NL: And did you get new transports to this camp or was it just a general thinning out?

HF: I, no, no, it was just a general thinning out, a continuously thinning out of people that perished. I mean they were beaten on the work if you didn't move fast enough. They were beaten continuously. And as you got weaker, as we got weaker, your condition became worse, because you could not keep up with the other people.

NL: Yes, yes.

HF: And we were there until November, 1943. And in November 1943, the camp was also dissolved and we were put on a train and shipped to Birkenau. So that was then our first experience with Birkenau.

NL: By train or again by truck?

HF: By train.

NL: By train.

HF: By train, yeah. But that was only, also only, it was only a very short distance away. Now whether at that time they dissolved all those little labor camps or not, I don't know. But from there we, when we arrived in Birkenau we arrived there at night, in the late evening at night. But there was no selection because these were already all only men,

only working men. In other words, it was not a transport that came with wives, women, children and so on. All I remember that we were transferred into Birkenau at night and were put in the barracks, and there we got our tattoo.

NL: Were you whipped off the platforms by the guards? Did you see Mengele?

HF: No, there was no selection. There was no guards. They were, yeah, we were with the dogs, guards, it was Germans with dogs mainly. And they were, chasing for barracks, where we were...

NL: Which had already been occupied? Or was it an empty...

HF: No, no, it was just an empty, another barrack not occupied. But it was a barrack where we received a tattoo on our hand. Everybody in Auschwitz, rather Birkenau, got their tattoo, their number. And I have a number 160,440, which was a consecutive number given at the time and my father had 160,441. And...

NL: Were you still with the group from Sosnowiec?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Basically.

HF: Basically we were, but then we were, split up and made into smaller groups and put into barracks, large, we had already very large barracks. [phone; tape off then on] O.K., so we arrived in Birkenau. After [unclear] tattoo. We were chased into...

NL: The very large barracks.

HF: The very large barracks and everybody just had to find an empty space. Because it was, they were, the bunks were three...high and took three people wide. We always laid in the same bunk with three people wide and three people high. And that was our first experience to...

NL: It must have been very cold by this time then.

HF: It was around the beginning of November, 1943. Now, in Birkenau we were not assigned to any work force. We were just staying there. Every morning we were chased out of the barracks and we either had to do calisthenics outside and, or we had to roll in the mud, or we had to go out and carry stones from one area to another area. Just busy work. And mostly were chased by Germans with dogs, to hurry up from one area. I mean, and then another group would pick up the stones again and this was a constant harassment and constant, I mean not like before, with work, productive work. This was mainly, like taken out of Birkenau and carry stones or...

NL: Senseless.

HF: Senseless.

NL: Senseless.

HF: Yeah, and continued with chasing with dogs, and rushing around back and forth. And this lasted for about, we were there about three weeks.

NL: Did you get any information about what was happening on the outside world from any of the prisoners?

HF: No, there we were very isolated.

NL: I see.

HF: In Birkenau nobody really worked. Too much. And I mean we saw, we saw the crematoriums.

NL: Did you.

HF: And we knew about the gas. Then we knew already about the gas chambers.

NL: Did you?

HF: From the inmates.

NL: This was the first, first time.

HF: This was our first experience.

NL: First time.

HF: Because we could see the smoke. I mean we were right in the middle of this large camp.

NL: The crematoria were close enough that you...

HF: We could, yeah...

NL: So that...

HF: We were right...there. We were right inside that area. We could see the smoke around. But we didn't see any, I never saw any trains arriving, or any selection or anything like that.

NL: Did anyone tell you where you were going or what would happen to you?

HF: In Birkenau?

NL: In Birkenau.

HF: No. Nobody really knew how long this would last or what would happen. Nobody really knew anything. And after three weeks, and we got assembled every day, every night we had. In mornings we had assembly. Night assembly. And one evening assembly they just called out that these and these names should line up on the other side. And my name and my father's name was among that list that we had to line up on that other side. And it was many people from our transport from Sosnowiec. And they were, again, they were mostly Jews that originally came from western Europe. And we didn't know why we had to line up. In other words, we had to line up there and we were not allowed back into the barracks. And then we had to walk to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was an adjoining camp to Birkenau. And we walked to Auschwitz and Auschwitz, we were given new clothing. We were given clothing. We were shaved. We were put...

NL: Your hair hadn't been shaved? It had been shaved.

HF: It had been, yeah, but I mean they shaved again, yeah.

NL: Another shave, yeah.

HF: We were shaved again, were given new clothing, and we were to go to take showers there in the shower area, to take showers. And we stayed there one night.

NL: Let me backtrack for a minute. Did you have a chance to bathe in the other places at all? Did you get any soap at any time?

HF: On occasion.

NL: On occasion.

HF: But very, very, very seldom.

NL: Seldom.

HF: Yeah. Most of the time we undressed on the outside, went in the shower. Even in the middle of winter no matter how cold it was we always undressed on the outside, left our clothes on the outside, went inside, showered, came out again, put on our clothes again.

NL: Yeah. But now at Auschwitz you got it, was it hot water?

HF: I don't remember if it was hot water or cold water. Anyway we were supposed to shower. We had to [unclear] in and, I mean it was always under a lot of commotion. And then we were given some food. And we slept there one night in the barrack. And we stayed there one night. And we were separated from the other people from that camp, except the ones, the Jews and the *Kapos* are the ones that were in charge. And we stayed there one night. And the next night, the next day, rather, we were put on trains and shipped out. And then we were shipped out to Warsaw.

NL: To?

HF: Warsaw. Warsaw.

NL: Warsaw. And now this is...

HF: This was November of 1943.

NL: Still November of '43.

HF: Yeah, we were only three weeks.

NL: Three weeks.

HF: At, it was, to the best of my recollection it was late November, 1943.

NL: Late November. And now you're part of a *Kommando* to clean up the ghetto?

HF: Yeah. Now when we arrived in Warsaw, there were already there five thousand men from Auschwitz were sent to Warsaw already earlier, that fall. And they already had set up barracks. Now this was in...

NL: In the ghetto or...

HF: We were right inside the ghetto.

NL: Inside the ghetto.

HF: Inside the ghetto.

NL: Had you heard at all about the Warsaw Ghetto?

HF: No, no, no. We didn't know.

NL: Nothing about the revolt, for instance.

HF: No, no, no.

NL: What did you find, besides the barracks?

HF: In the ghetto?

NL: In the ghetto.

HF: Well, actually, it was like two, it was a large, a small camp inside a large camp. In other words, our barracks were surrounded by walls, with barbed wire on top, with guard towers, and Ukrainian soldiers guarding them.

NL: Did you see any of the rubble of the destroyed buildings?

HF: Well, yeah...

NL: Yes.

HF: I will come, now, then, this was inside the ghetto. The ghetto, again, was around, surrounded by the other wall. So we had a small camp inside a large camp, which was really the ghetto. We never got out of the ghetto. Every morning we walked out, we were sent out or, out of...this camp, into the ghetto area...

NL: Into the ghetto area.

HF: Under supervision by...

NL: Ukrainians.

HF: No, we actually were not guarded then. Because the whole thing was one big camp. The ghetto was one big camp, but at night we had to...

NL: Go into your smaller one.

HF: Into the smaller camp. And basically it was, again the inmates themselves would had risen to higher positions, who led the people to work, who got their...

NL: Rations?

HF: Orders.

NL: Oh, orders.

HF: Who got their orders from the Germans. But all administration—I want to emphasize—all administration for all the camps up to now, and even later, was always done by inmates.

NL: And in your case, Jews.

HF: Yeah, mostly. Now the only, the first time we were exposed to non-Jews was in Birkenau, in Auschwitz and in Warsaw. In Warsaw we had a contingent of German non-Jews, who were also inmates of the camp.

NL: I see. These were political prisoners do you think, or...

HF: Some were political, yeah. We were living in the same barracks, but they were in charge. In other words, they were given the administrative positions. They were in charge of the barracks, they were in charge of the camps, they were in charge of the work details.

NL: Rations.

HF: Of the rationing, of the food, of the kitchen.

NL: And how did they treat you, Herbert?

HF: Well, they, we were almost equal except for their position. I mean they were *Kapos*. Actually, the worst *Kapos* were the Jewish *Kapos*.

NL: Is that so?

HF: The Jewish *Kapos* were responsible for many deaths and more than the Germans, from German *Kapos*.

NL: How do you account for that?

HF: We were, suffered much more viciously from Jewish.

NL: In these other labor camps?

HF: Yeah, in these other labor camps.

NL: More beatings?

HF: Yeah, well, there was no, in the other labor camps there were no non-Jews. Everything was under Jewish administration, up to the outside world, of course the engineers, the people in charge of construction were non-Jews. But everything else was done...

NL: I wonder if there was some cultural antagonism, Polish Jews against western?

HF: No, some of them really were not Polish Jews. There were some German Jews there.

NL: Who also were...

HF: Yeah, yeah, it was, you know, that they wanted to protect their status. This was their status, was guaranteed them along with survival.

NL: And if they were harsh they would last longer.

HF: Yeah, yeah, it was basically to gain the favor of the Germans. And many German soldiers were very, not very impressed with them, really did not like them too much, because of their, I mean, they did not, could not see that the Jew should, should really...

NL: Show that much power or authority?

HF: Power and authority. Now I mean I'm not talking about the S.S. who was in charge of it. I'm talking mainly about German soldiers guarding, on guard duty, not the S.S.

NL: Not the S.S.

HF: Who was in charge of the...

NL: Camp itself, yes. Now...

HF: Now...

NL: Oh, excuse me, go ahead.

HF: Now in Warsaw the Germans that were in the camp were mostly, they were different categories. There were some that were old political prisoners that had been in prison since 1933, and who also, very few had survived down the road. Then there were just...

NL: So-called anti-socials?

HF: Anti-socials, yes.

NL: Yes.

HF: They were people that were thieves on the outside, criminals.

NL: Did you encounter some homosexuals?

HF: Homosexuals, yes.

NL: And they were all mixed?

HF: All mixed.

NL: All mixed.

HF: All mixed.

NL: And of course many non-Jews.

HF: Yeah, well, they were a smaller portion of the camp. They were in, and the reason was, what some of them had told me why they were there, because that if they had gotten a prison sentence—the anti-socials; I'm not talking about the politicals...

NL: No.

HF: During Hitler's regime, if they were several years in prison, afterwards that he would not let them back out into the...

NL: Regular society.

HF: Into the society. But were sent to concentration camps. You know, some prisoners, they went to concentration camps. And they were, because they were Germans they got a little better treatment. They got a little more authoritative treatment, because they had the more food.

NL: Did they get better, they did get better food.

HF: They had, well, it was like everything else. I was like, a certain amount of food was given by the Germans for everybody. And whoever was in charge took care of himself too.

NL: It was sort of a trade-off, yeah. Was the food here at all better for you?

HF: In Warsaw?

NL: Mmm hmm.

HF: Warsaw was one of the very poorest conditions that we had.

NL: Oh my.

HF: Yeah. First of all the winter was very cold. And from 5,000 that were there in November, by January-February it was only like 1,000 left. And this was due to a typhoid epidemic.

NL: Typhus.

HF: Yeah. Of course there every, there there was not no difference whether it was German or Jews or I mean, typhus didn't...

NL: Everybody, well...

HF: Know any difference.

NL: Did you encounter any Polish civilians during this time?

HF: Yes, that was, I met, during the day it was Polish civilians were inside...

NL: In the walls?

HF: Inside the big camp. It was inside the ghetto. And they were also there for the same function of cleaning up the camp.

NL: Now was this in...

HF: And then we got some news then, but of course...

NL: News.

HF: And...

NL: What did they tell you?

HF: Well, not, see the news was that, very few of them could speak anything but Polish. And most of the...

NL: Inmates.

HF: Inmates did not speak Polish. Now, my father was one of the few who did speak Polish.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: And as a matter of fact, many of the Germans sort of...

NL: Used him.

HF: Used him to interpret, because he originally had come from Poland and migrated to Vienna. And then of course he became a western. See, the Germans for some reason did not take into consideration that among those western Jews might be some Polish Jews. Or maybe they did, maybe they just, or something. So many of the German *Kapos* used him to relate to the Polish civilization. That's when we found out what really happened in Warsaw during that time and what happened in...

NL: Some of the civilians told you about the...

HF: Yeah.

NL: Destruction of the ghetto, for instance?

HF: Yeah, they told us about it. Well, we saw the destruction because we were among the [unclear]

NL: Yes, you saw the rubble.

HF: Yeah, we were inside the rubble.

NL: And so, and then you knew that there had been some resistance.

HF: Yeah, yeah, we, then, yeah, then we knew exactly.

NL: Did any of the civilians bring any food to you?

HF: Well, they would bring if you could pay for it.

NL: And how were you supposed to pay?

HF: Well, at first the first ones that came before us, did find some things in the old ghetto yet while cleaning up, and they would trade it with them. Now later, the later one, well, it was, you, if it was early sometimes you'd find something. Sometimes you would steal something. You would always, they would bring, there was, in Warsaw itself for some reason there was plenty of food available.

NL: Is that so?

HF: Yeah, because they would bring in, I mean the Germans had money. Somehow they were, and they would trade...

NL: They would spend it.

HF: Would trade with the *Volksdeutsche*. If you had *zlotys*, well, their currency, they would bring you white bread, salami, whatever you wanted. But most of the Jewish inmates didn't have any money. They had nothing. Now one thing happened which saved my father's life and my life actually later was that he had some gold teeth. And he would, he extracted them and would sell them to the Poles.

NL: He could do that himself?

HF: Well some way that was done, you know, like you had those gold crowns. Of course, although the German had registered everybody that had gold crowns. But at that point nobody really worried that much about it.

NL: So he used that as a bargaining chip?

HF: Yeah, for...

NL: For some food.

HF: Yeah, for money, and then the money you would get...

NL: The money.

HF: But I mean, I'm really getting ahead of it, because like I said, most of the camp died of the typhus epidemic. Not most, but almost three-quarters of the camp died.

NL: And you fell ill too?

HF: I had typhus. My father had typhus.

NL: Were you able to go to any kind of clinic?

HF: Well there were barracks, but they just put the sick people. Now people did not really die from typhus. How did the typhus spread? It spread because you didn't get any change of clothes for two months. No change of clothes. No washing. There was no facilities whatsoever. And so typhus was spread by lice, and that's how it spread. Now, most people did not die from the typhus. They died afterwards. Because everybody got so weakened from it that unless you had opportunity to get some extra food, you could not get any...

NL: [unclear]

HF: So that's when my father would go with gold teeth and we got a little bit extra food and somehow you survive. And many of the Germans died.

NL: Is that so?

HF: Proportionately even more than the Jewish, because they were stronger. They were bigger, you know, because they had more. And the old saying, "The bigger you are the harder the fall," and that's exactly, it happened very truthfully because bigger people need more food. So they also, and...

NL: Also. Oh. Now, when you say you were there to clean up the ghetto, what did that mean, actually? What did you do on any given day?

HF: Well, basically we were going out there where the buildings and clean up brick by brick and we would clean the bricks, and then they would ship the bricks out somewhere. That was basically to clean the bricks, to clean the bricks.

NL: To send them to Germany, presumably.

HF: I don't know what...

NL: You don't know.

HF: And there were a lot of Poles working in the ghetto too. They worked, to tear down the walls, because it was dangerous. They had those walls of the buildings standing and just single walls. And that was basically the function.

NL: You didn't find any Jews in any bunkers?

HF: No, no.

NL: Or did you hear about any Jews who survived in bunkers?

HF: No, that was so much later. I mean the uprising was in 19-...

NL: No, I mean, presumably there were still some Jews left in the ghetto after May of '44. But you're speaking now of November.

HF: November, right. From November there.

NL: Yeah. And so you stayed in the ghetto for how long?

HF: We were there until April, '44. Not April, I'm sorry. Until July '44.

NL: July '44.

HF: July '44.

NL: Now, how long was your father sick?

HF: With typhus?

NL: Yes.

HF: Oh, we were all sick a few days, a week. I don't even remember. The time, I must have been delirious at the time because I don't even remember what happened to me.

NL: You were delirious.

HF: Yeah, during that time.

NL: Did anybody give you any kind of care?

HF: No, there was no care.

NL: There were no women around?

HF: No, there were no women.

NL: This was an all male...

HF: This was an all, there was no women in the camp at all.

NL: And no medicine.

HF: No medicine, no, no.

NL: No medicine.

HF: There were some...

NL: So...

HF: Doctors, inmate doctors. But I mean they were...

NL: They couldn't help you.

HF: No, no.

NL: So it was just your own body that fought it.

HF: You just survived it. Yeah, you survived or you didn't survive. And that's why so few survived.

NL: So you were ill probably for several months?

HF: No, no. Typhus lasts only a couple weeks.

NL: But when you recovered, your...

HF: Yeah, the recovery was, yeah.

NL: Then you were very weak.

HF: Yes, very weak.

NL: Debilitated. Were you able to somehow work after that?

HF: Well, the ones that were able to work, worked. And the others just died.

NL: So you and father eventually...

HF: We survived.

NL: Went back to work?

HF: Yeah.

NL: And stayed at this work until July, '44.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Now were you getting any news about German defeats on the fronts?

HF: Well, yes. We knew pretty much what was going on through the Poles that were, entered the camp. But there the camp was replenished. See, after we were down to a few, we got new transports from Auschwitz all the time. So the population remained fairly constant in Warsaw, I mean the camp population.

NL: The camp, yes.

HF: After a while we got Hungarian Jews. We, there we got the first transport of Hungarian Jews in '44 that came to Auschwitz, to Warsaw, from Auschwitz. And...

NL: Were you getting any more news about what was happening at Auschwitz?

HF: Well I guess by that time we pretty knew...

NL: You knew.

HF: We knew what was going on.

NL: You knew what was happening, yes. And were you able to communicate with the Hungarian Jews at all?

HF: Well, we were all in together. I mean, whoever spoke German. They spoke German and...

NL: They spoke German.

HF: German, and...

NL: Was there some sort of communication or did you keep separate from them?

HF: No, no, it was all, everything was...

NL: All together.

HF: Wherever there was room in the barracks. There was really no separation.

NL: No cultural...

HF: No, no, no.

NL: Difficulties.

HF: No difficulties.

NL: So you stayed there until July of '44 and then?

HF: Well, in July of '44, we were evacuated from, I mean they closed up this whole camp, in...

NL: Again, it was...

HF: That happened when the, we heard already the bombings from the Russians, the artillery of the Russians when they advanced towards Russia. So the Russian Army was getting very close. And they were fearing, then that's what started the revolt of the Polish, Warsaw Revolt started at that time. One thing I just want to bring out. Before, while we were still in Warsaw, we knew about the atrocities that the Germans did in Warsaw. We heard that every time they would, that a German would be killed, for example, they would just arrest 50 Poles anywhere on the streets of Warsaw, and they would bring them next to our camp, inside the ghetto was the old Polish prison. And there they would shoot them.

NL: Was that Paviak?

HF: Paviak, yes.

NL: Paviak.

HF: It was right next, Paviak was right next to our camp. And they would, and then, well we had to dispose of the corpses. And as a matter of fact they were, at that time they were building even a crematoria in the, in our camp.

NL: Is that so?

HF: But that was never really completed. But the way we had to bury, and we had to burn all the corpses. I mean, there was a special detail that did that. They would lay a layer of wood and a layer of corpses and then just douse them and we had like a pile that would burn for days. And that was continuously burning. But that was one of the functions that all the Poles that were killed by the Nazis were brought into the, our camp. And not to the inside of the camp because it was into the ghetto area, into the larger area. And there we had to dispose of them. As a matter of fact, one time one of the Poles that worked with told my father, I mean I could not talk to him, that the day before his son was caught up in one of those...

NL: Conflagrations?

HF: Well, yeah, in one of those, where they would arrest a...

NL: Roundups?

HF: Roundups.

NL: Roundups, yes. But that was before...

HF: That's how they terrorized. That's how they terrorized the population against revolting.

NL: So this was of course before the Warsaw Revolt.

HF: Yeah, that was before. That was during the Spring of...

NL: The Spring.

HF: Yeah, so we, all the time that we were in Warsaw. And then when they were feared of the revolt, of the Polish Revolt, they closed up, and we walked out of, the German...guards and the prisoners, everybody just walked out, out of Warsaw. And we walked for three days.

NL: Oh my. Mmm.

HF: And we walked.

NL: West?

HF: West. We walked to Lodz.

NL: To Lodz. Did anybody tell you where you were going?

HF: No, no. We just...

NL: Did you get anything to eat on this walk?

HF: Well, no, I don't think we got anything to eat. We didn't get any water. Water was the biggest thing because it was July and it was very hot. And then we walked on the road and just, and whoever didn't keep up, they would just beat them or shoot them and I know after a day or two we arrived at the, I mean at night we didn't walk, because they were worried, you know, they just, they put us inside a big field and they just would surround the field and...

NL: Also, the German guards?

HF: The German guards. The German, I don't know whether it was S.S. at that time.

NL: Did you get any...

HF: We might have gotten some food.

NL: Some food from the civilians on the way?

HF: No, no, no. This was all pretty well isolated.

NL: Isolated.

HF: Isolated. And I remember once we came to a river. Everybody just rushed into the river.

NL: To drink from it.

HF: To drink from the river. And the ones that got too far away they would just shoot them. They got too far down in the...

NL: And I'm sure lots of people got sick from the water.

HF: And then the next night, some miracle, we camped in the field and people would start digging. There must have been very low ground water because after we dug only a few feet, there was water. And everybody could, that was the first time everybody could just drink as much as they wanted because there was just so much water. I mean, actually we dug with spoons. We had a little spoons. All we had was little spoons and we could dig holes.

NL: But no food.

HF: No food. And that lasted for about, after the third day, we arrived at the railroad station. And then we were put on trains and, big cattle trains, and shipped to Dachau. And that was a journey of several days.

NL: Several days.

HF: And that was in July 1944.