HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

JACK ZAIFMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Vivienne Korman
Dates: April 22, 1985

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JZ - Jack Zaifman [interviewee]
VK - Vivienne Korman [interviewer]
Date: April 22, 1985[1]

Tape one, side one:

VK: April 22nd, 1985. My name is Vivienne Korman, and I am recording the oral history of Jack Zaifman from Lambertsville, New Jersey. He will now continue.

JZ: Vivienne, thank you for the introduction. Like I said before, I was born in Radom, Poland, on March the 2nd of 1925. And my childhood was quite, quite good with my parents and my sister and brother. We were brought up in a semi-Orthodox family. My father was a merchant. And we wouldn't say that we were very rich, but we weren't poor either, so we had a good life. We had a good life. And we had very good camaraderie among, among the kids. My sister—I was the oldest, like I said—my sister was the second, and my younger brother was the third, which he was, he adored me in any way because everything I'd done was the best to him. I know I was a bicycle racer so when he talked to his friends, I was the best in the world to him. I played soccer and I was the best soccer player to his, his brother was the, everything was the best. And we were very, very happy together. I had a very large family of cousins and aunts and grandmothers—two grandmothers. I never was, I never saw my grandfathers, because one got shot on a holdup in one of his stores. And my father's father was, died very young. So, I never met them. But my grandmothers were very, very beautiful people.

VK: I just want to make sure it's working.

JZ: Yeah. [tape off then on] Like I said, my grandmothers were very great because she raised—my grandmother of the father's side—raised that family all by herself, of eight children. And she did a very good job by providing for them. She worked very hard. I remember in. And their home was always open to anybody who walked in. There was always food on the table. There could have been always a party of twenty coming in at, unexpectedly, and she always made sure that everybody will go away from the table full. She was, in that respect, she was one of the greatest—a beautiful, beautiful woman. My mother's mother, too, is a story in itself, because she was always telling me that she had a cousin in the States. I remember her always telling me that she has a cousin and he converted to Christianity. And his name was Goldwasser. And he was from Mlawa. And till Barry Goldwater was running for president, and I saw his biography in *Life* magazine that I started putting things together. And I, for one, think, that he is the guy of my

[1]Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

grandmother's, that he is the cousin, not, his father was the cousin of my grandmother. They come from the same town, and they were both the same last name. Her maiden name was Goldwasser. So, I never actually followed it up, but deep in the inside of my heart I feel that he is one of them. I had aunts and, which were two very beautiful people, with families, and cousins. And like I said, we had a beautiful relationship among them because there wasn't a Saturday we shouldn't go to see them. This was like a ritual, that every weekend we had to go see our grandparents and our aunts and cousins. They came to our home, we went to them. And this is the way we were living.

VK: What was your mother's maiden name?

JZ: My mother's maiden name was Obornyek, Hassel Obornyek [phonetic]. She was too a, five daughters and one brother they had. And my mother looked comp-, like Polish. When you looked at her features, she would, she didn't resemble a Jew. And I remember when she used to go out to shop that, from the farmers, they always used to say, "I'd rather sell it to a non-Jew." And she used to laugh like crazy because when she used to come home she'd just look at those baskets, you know which they stole, they stole, are so bitter about it, about the selling it, selling to a Jew. So but this is one of the things. We went to school. I went to a public school in Poland. And I went after school, I went to *cheder*, which I had my Hebrew education, to a degree. I wasn't really that much in Hebrew versed, but I learned *Chumash* and I learned Rashi a little bit. *Gemora* I never went into. I could *daven* very well and I always laid the *tefillin* in the morning before I went to school. So, I mean, my upbringing was pretty decent, and I believed that there is a God in heaven. This, for sure, I was left with till this day. Till 1939 of September One, when I walked home with my cousin, my cousin Gessel. We were playing soccer, a matter of fact, in the park, when the bombs started dropping down in my hometown of Radom. And he got hit right next to me, walking. He got killed, and I walked away. I walked away and I ran home to my mother, crying that Gessel just got killed. She tried to comfort me the best possible way she could. But it's one of those things, nothing would bring him back. They took three days of more bombardment of our city. Buildings were collapsing with people in them. And I, for the first time in my life, I saw destruction and killings for the first time of my young life. And it was really an agonizing thing to see. And it took three more days and the German troops marched into our hometown of Radom. And hell broke loose. It happened so suddenly that nobody imagined the atrocities with such a fear of life, that the killings were going on every day. There wasn't a day, I remember, the Germans laid cables on the streets for their telephone, for the, and somebody cut a cable. We don't know, till this day I would, I don't know if there was a sabotage or just by accident. They took out five people, and they were hung. This was at random. So among them was one priest, the Catholic priest. The other ones were four Jews. This is what we had to stay and watch at the age of 14. The killings were going on unmercilessly. They were grabbing people in the streets, every day, cutting their beards, not just the beards but with the flesh. And they were just roaring in joy for doing those things. The savagery was so bad. And I myself was

always thinking, Why? Why? I was trying to get that answer. Why is it happening to us? What did we do to deserve it? Till one day they surrounded a whole group of people, and they rounded us up. And this was like maybe about three months into the war. Rounded us up, and they took us to the train station. At the train...

VK: Was this your whole family?

JZ: No, no, no. Just myself. Only young people.

VK: Just individuals.

JZ: Individuals. They grabbed them, and there was a few thousand. And I was among them. And they took us to the station. They took everybody's name, address and age. And I lied about my age because I was 14. I was afraid. I was a short little fellow so I was afraid. I says, "I'm 17." They always used to say that if you're too young or too old, they'll get rid of you. So, we always, in the home we said, "If they catch you, lie." So I did. I was 17. And they took us to the train station. And towards evening, after all that commotion with all that writing and names were done, they started loading us up into cattle cars. So we were living right near that station. I knew every little part of it. We were playing there as boys.

VK: Sure.

JZ: So instead of, while the people were pushing to get into the cattle car, I went in underneath the cattle car, and I took off. I ran away. I ran away and back home. My parents asked, "Well where were you all day?" And I says, "Didn't you know that they took me away with all the people there from all the streets around?" They didn't know. Then they were happy that I was home. But that same night, the Polish police were knocking on the door, and I anticipated what they were coming for. So luckily we were living on the first floor. I jumped out through the window and then listened. It was late at night. And I heard, they asked my dad, "Where is your son? At the last count, he wasn't there. At the last name calling he wasn't there." My dad says, "I don't know." They searched that little apartment which we had, and they left. I got back into the house, and we were, the rest of the night we were sitting, thinking, what are we gonna do? Because we, this time was, this was still the period when there was no ghetto. So we were afraid in case some of the neighbors will see me...

VK: Right.

JZ: They'll squeal and my whole family would be shot.

VK: Right.

JZ: So, my father had a friend in a little town away from Radom which was called Wolanow. And he told me if I would go to Wolanow, maybe those people of his would take me in.

VK: [unclear] O.K.

JZ: So I went on a bike, and I pedaled down to Wolanow over night. And it was martial law. A matter of fact if I would have been caught I would have been shot. But I took that chance. I says, "Better I get shot than the whole family would get shot."

VK: Do you remember when that was, what date or...

JZ: No.

VK: Year?

JZ: The year was in '3-, this was in '39, still in '39.

VK: O.K.

JZ: So I took off, and I went to Wolanow, and I moved in with a family of tailors. They were friends of my dad.

VK: Jews?

JZ: And I...

VK: Non-...

JZ: Yeah, Jews.

VK: Jews.

JZ: Oh sure, were Jews.

VK: O.K.

JZ: This was a little town. It was only 12 kilometers. Was a small little, there may be, I would say in that whole town, if there were 100 Jewish families there was a lot. Was alone, and we were surrounded by a lot of farmers and Poles which lived in that little town, village-town so to say. And I, for the upkeep, I tried to help them. I was only fourteen and so I says, "Let me help you something." So he trained me how to be a tailor. He gave me a thimble, I remember, and how to hold the needle. And that's how I started to tailor business. We stayed there for another, about a year. And all of a sudden they decided there, that's enough of that Wolanow town and they're gonna liquidate it. So they surrounded the whole town, and they start like, the story was told before to me that if you're too young or too old they'll eliminate you. That's what they really were doing. They took all the old people on one side. They took all the young on one side. Now there were mothers with young babies. And the mothers, they felt they could still work, so they grabbed the babies out of their arms. And they were throwing them in, into the trucks. And the mothers didn't want to give up the babies. And they were being clubbed to death with those, with the butts of their rifles, and being beaten. Oh, that was an agonizing thing to see. Finally, whichever, some mothers jumped with the babies. They didn't want to go, and they finally let them go with the babies. And us they took away to a camp of Wolanow. They had already prepared a camp, Wolanow, surrounded by electric wires. And this was right next, about four kilometers away from a German camp—the air force, the *Luftwaffe*, the German *Luftwaffe*. And we were supposed to be the slaves for that camp. So we were 600 people in that camp. Those guys, which we got in there, and we settled, the next day they took us out again and loaded us up into trucks and they took us out to the cemetery. And all the people which they took out, the old and the young, were, all of them, shot to death. And we had to dig trenches and bury all those bodies. This was near Radom, between Radom and Wolanow, was a big cemetery. That's where we buried all those people—the babies with the mothers, with the old. And this is what we have done. And they took us back to Wolanow. Lucky I

was registered as a tailor so I worked inside, sewing uniforms, repairing uniforms for the German Army. The other guys weren't as lucky as I, because they worked on the outside. And they were being beaten to death, every day, every day dogs tearing them apart. You had a broken leg or you broke an arm, or if you hit something, you got shot, because they didn't take care of you. The conditions were terrible in that camp. Typhoid fever broke out, typhoid fever broke out and people were dying like crazy. So, Radom wasn't too far so they were always, in this camp they had always a force of 600. So say if ten people died today, they brought in ten from Radom. So the, when the *Appell* was in the morning, when they counted you, there were always had to be 600 people. When the typhoid fever was so, the epidemic was so great, that all of a sudden one morning before we went to work, the *Appell*, because they counted you like you would have been gold, every day there had to be the exact number. They surrounded us with the Gestapo, a lot of Ukrainers, a lot of Lithuanian troops which joined the German Gestapo. For no reason at all they started calling out the ten, "Out!" The men that went out, they got shot. They got shot. I had a friend of mine which had a brother. They called up my friend, and a brother went out begging, and they shot them both, two brothers. There was a father and two sons from Wolanow which they called up one and they both ran out, "Please!" begging, and they were all three shot. Three hundred and fifty people were shot from the 600. Three hundred and fifty. We all stayed and we died a thousand deaths not being shot. We didn't know what's gonna, who's gonna be the next.

VK: Sure.

JZ: And they were shooting you with dum-dum bullets. A dum-dum bullet is a bullet, when it hits your body, it explodes. So it tore you apart. This was a day which till this day, I cannot forget. Because you lay sometimes at night and you wake up, with seeing those things.

VK: Sure.

JZ: Because it's so imbedded in my mind that it's very hard to erase, very hard to erase it.

VK: Sure.

JZ: After that massacre was finished, we had to dig trenches again and bury those bodies. I contracted the typhoid fever. I don't know how, or from fright, from fear, or from picking up one of the bodies, who knows? And I got typhoid fever. Typhoid fever is a sickness which burns you up alive. It's, temperature goes up to 106 and it's terrible. You're delirious. For three days I walked to work, from Wolanow to the camp of the Germans. I was, I, the fourth day I felt that I couldn't make it. I really couldn't. And the minute you sat down on the road, you got a bullet. So with all your might, you walked. So the fourth day my friends carried me under the arms, really carried me. I was just dragging my feet. And I got, finally I got to the place. I got into the shop. And there was a German in charge of that shop of mine, a guy by the name of Fritz Steinmetz, a decent person. A German, but a decent guy. I walked over to Steinmetz and I says, "Mr. Steinmetz, please

help me, because if you won't help me you won't see me tomorrow. I'll be shot. I'm sick. Please help me." And he called in another guy, a guy by the name Adolf Hammel, Adolf Hammel. He was a Sergeant in the air force, but he was in charge of the clothing. So they were working always together because we had to fix uniforms. He gave the uniforms. So they were very friendly. And they were discussing amongst themselves what to do with me. And they decided to save me. Adolf Hammel took me in his car, and took me deep into a Polish village, and bribed the farmer to keep me there. And I stayed there for another four days in that Polish farmer's house. He came every night, Adolf Hammel, to find out how I am. And the one thing which I remember saying to him, "*Ich brauch einen Arzt. Ich brauch einen Arzt.*" [I need a doctor. I need a doctor.] And this man went to, back to Radom, which was only twelve kilometers, and he asked for a pass, to bring me back to the Radomer Ghetto. Because that time was already a ghetto in Radom. And they had a primitive hospital. They had doctors. And they took me back there. And I stayed there till my, the epi-, you know, the typhoid holds you for 13 days and 13 nights and then the crisis sets in. And luckily I got some medication and I started feeling better. But I remember the 13th night. I remember I got the shakes so bad that I thought I'm gonna fall out of that bed. But after that, for about a couple hours, I felt that the temperature was going down and I started thinking. I could feel, and my head was getting easier. But it leaves you so weak that you cannot even lift a pen. Your muscles in your body are all burned out. You cannot walk at all. You have to start learning all from the beginning how to walk and how to lift your arm. It took about another two, three weeks and I came back to my strength. And they called the camp, and Adolf came and picked me up. He picked me up and took me back to Wolanow. I wanted to point out that there were, in those dark days when the murderous gangs were doing, there were still some decent people among the Germans too. And I stayed in Wolanow yet till the end of 1941. Because in, after the Germans attacked the Russians in 1941 in June, they, we stayed another few months and they liquidated Wolanow. And they took us closer to the German border, a camp by the name of Blizyn. And we went into a camp called Blizyn which was ten thousand inmates, ten thousand. And it was women and men. And that camp was set up of shops, shops of making uniforms from scratch, uniforms. Matter of fact I was in that shop with Zalmud Kizar, [phonetic] which wrote the book, *Blood and Hope*. I was with him in that camp. He was from Bialystok and I was from Radom, but we met there. I made jackets for the German Army, reversible jackets, green on the one side and white on the other, to camouflage for the Russian front. There were shops where they were making boots for the Germans, shirts, sweaters, and all that kind of stuff. And in that shop, in that camp, there was a guy which was in charge of it he was an *Oberscharführer*, a guy with two stars, and a black uniform. He just walked around every hour on the hour. He visited every shop, see if everything is in order. In that camp I got acquainted with a guy, in Wolanow, and we got very friendly, like brothers, a guy by the name of Michael Berkowitz. Michael Berkowitz contracted typhoid fever in that camp. And what they were doing with guys in there, they put you in,

in a barrack, and you laid there till you died. I did one day, I boiled up some hot water. I had a lump of sugar. So, I melted down this sugar, and made a like a tea for him. And I had ten minutes' time to go out to the washroom. So I what I had done, I ran across the camp to the other end of the camp to give Michael the tea. When I got, I got to the camp, until I got in there, because I was already, after that typhus I wasn't afraid that I'm gonna, because I was immuned already to it. So I got in. I gave him the tea, and thank God he survived. Hopefully it's the tea. First we have to thank the Almighty, but hopefully the tea was number two. And he survived. He's alive and he lives in Australia. I gave him the tea, and I ran back to the shop. I had the ten minutes' time, and there was a Jewish policeman at the door. And my number was 1675. He looks up the number, to take off my number, he says, "You were out fifteen minutes. Where were you?" And I says, "You know, Michael Berkowitz who sits right next to my machine?" I says, "He's sick, so I took over some tea, and please, don't make a issue. I'll finish my work on time." And I went to the machine to work. And a few minutes later the hour was that the, that *Oberscharführer* came into our shop. He walked in, and my number is being called, 1675. I walked up to him, and he asked, "Where were you?" Before I had a chance to say anything, I got a beating. And the man walked around with a whip like you train animals, and a piece of leather at the end. Each time he hit me I was cut all over like a German Shepherd which tore me apart, which I have scars till this day from the beating. The whole shop cried from the beating which I got. I cried, but not from pain. I cried for being betrayed, being betrayed by a Jew.

VK: By a Jew.

JZ: Which reminded me again to those two Germans which saved my life, and I almost lost of it because of a guy which wanted to be a Good Samaritan for the Germans.

VK: Do you remember his name?

JZ: Surely. Milstein, a *Kapo*. So this Yilek Milstein, this man did this to me. For two weeks I was swollen, swollen. But I had to go to work. Because if you didn't work you got shot. I worked. I couldn't sit, but I had to work, and finish my work too, on time. This was the life in Blizyn. And this was the people you're surrounded by some, some of them, some of our Jews too. Finally they liquidated Blizyn.

VK: Who liquidated it?

JZ: The Germans.

VK: The Germans.

JZ: They finally says, "That's enough of the shops. We don't need more uniforms." And we were hearing about Auschwitz. We heard about a camp, about gassing people, but we still didn't want to believe it. Even being, seeing all the murders going on, we still didn't believe that there is mass murdering and there's people are being gassed. And we wouldn't want to believe it. They loaded us up finally into cattle cars out of Blizyn. Out of the 10,000 people which we stayed in Blizyn, 3,000 came out alive. 3,000 only! That means 7,000 died or that they got killed or they got shot, whichever it is, whether from typhoid fever. This is the way we got out. They got us into cattle cars so tight that we

couldn't sit down. Three nights and three days we were on the train, from Blizyn to Auschwitz. We couldn't sit down. There were people, people died standing in that cattle car. Finally we got to Auschwitz, and they opened up the doors and they started screaming, "*Raus! Raus! Raus!*" And we started jumping out of those cattle cars. And something told you very, very definitely, there is something wrong here. Because you, we smelled in the air, burned flesh. And I says, "My God, that's really true what they were saying. They're burning people here." And they started lining us up to five. And we marched through the gates of Auschwitz. And there was that man with the black shiny boots which with the finger, left and right. At the time I didn't know who he was. I had, in later years, I found that this was Mengele, the Angel of Death, which stood there and directed. And we were being torn apart. You're going maybe with your brother, or you're going with your father, you're going with your friends. One to the left, one to the right, one, tearing apart. And that's how it was. I went to the left. The left was people to life. The right, that time was the people all on the right side went to the crematorium. What was my job in Auschwitz? Auschwitz was a camp of death, of destruction only. My job was to sort out the clothing of the dead. You should have seen–thousands, thousands of unifor-, of suits, ladies' dresses, shoes, mountains of shoes, mountains of glasses. There was a group was just pulling out the teeth, the gold teeth from the bodies. Drums, drums of gold. Drums, like you see in some of the shops which they have those drums, those metal drums, full of gold teeth. This was the job. And I was one day laying in the bunk, on the bunk bed in Auschwitz. And next to me was a guy by the name of David Friedman, from Lodz. And Mengele walked through and picked him out, picked him out. It could have been just...

VK: You.

JZ: It could have been me. He took him out. And three weeks later I seen him again. He was castrated...

VK: Oh!

JZ: Without anesthesia. This was some of the experiments what he was doing while I was there. I stayed there at that *Kommando* and I says, one day there was a group going by. I says, "Maybe I'll walk away from it. I'll walk away." I don't know where I was going. I didn't realize it wasn't, it was like God's hand took me from there and He says, "Walk." I walked. I walked, and we walked out of Auschwitz. They took my number, they registered me, and that means that everything jived. And I was loaded up again to a cattle car. And I was shipped to Dachau. I got into Dachau. There they didn't need no more, first of all Dachau was a camp, a working camp. They worked you to death, worked you to death. The job which I was doing in Dachau was carrying cement. We were building hangars for airplanes underground. So they were building mountains of dirt and then pouring cement on top of it. Then we had to dig out the dirt so there was an empty shell left. And in that cement which we carried, hundreds daily were killed. Daily. Because, you know, you fell with a bag and you spilled a bag, you got shot right away. You're, you know, and they chased you, or emptying those cars from, with those bags of cement, some

of them were loose cement. We were spitting up cement. We were walking, we were gray from the cement. The food which we were getting in that camp was, towards the end, it was terrible, terrible. We were getting a slice of bread which was mildew. And it was so dry and mildew, when you blew at the bread, it fell apart. That's the way we were fed. And a cup of coffee, ersatz coffee, and a dish of soup. This was the meal for the day. I worked at this place a few months, and then they took me to another place to dig trenches for laying pipes. I laid pipes and it was a terrible thing, because you felt like you're dying a thousand times a day. And...

VK: Where was that?

JZ: In Dachau.

VK: In Dachau.

JZ: Yeah, outside...

VK: Outside of Dachau.

JZ: Outside of Dachau they were taking us out to build all kinds of things. We were laying pipes there. And one of those days a guy, which was the guard, was just going back and forth watching us. For no reason picked up the rifle and hit me and I [unclear] two feet. He hit me right in the [unclear] and he grabbed the shovel and showed me how to work. Surely, for two minutes you could do a job. But you stay, you stay for years, you're undernourished and you're almost a skeleton, that shovel felt like a thousand pounds each time you had to lift it.

VK: Sure.

JZ: So, this was Dachau, the way I lived in Dachau. And I have seen guys which gave up, really gave up. They says, "Looks like humanity and God has forsaken us. No use living because..." And so help me, like they would commit suicide. Like, they would take poison. You found them dead the next day, next to you, laying on the bunk bed, dead. Dead. One thing about me, I have to say, because I am analyzing myself a thousand times...

VK: Sure.

JZ: How come? How come I survived? And I had the will of a, you have to first say that God which carried you through, but I had a will to live.

VK: Sure.

JZ: I really didn't want to give up. A matter of fact, when I was in Auschwitz, when I was going through Auschwitz and I was going to be tattooed, crazy how it sounds, I watched who has a good handwriting. Crazy, you know? A young mind, in those dark days when people were being burned, I say, now I went to, over to a Frenchman because his, he was, his numbers were even. They weren't big and small and big and small. So I stayed in the line. I could move from one till the other till I got that guy, he should do my tattooing. I says, "If I survive I want to have a decent number." It's crazy how it is, you know, but that's the way I was thinking. Everybody has different ways of trying to latch on. I latched on...

Tape one, side two:

VK: All right.

JZ: You asked me about my parents. I'll tell you about my parents. My father was shot in Radom at the, when they were liquidating the ghetto, he was shot. How do I know? My father's brother was with him, the youngest brother. And he is alive. He lives now in Israel. And he was, he fell right next to my f-, matter of fact, they were both shot. But my father was killed instantly, and my uncle was shot in the shoulder. And when he fell, he cut his head open. Where they were chasing him, they were drunk. The Germans were drunk, and they were shooting at random whoever they got a hold of. And he fell, and he laid a whole night among the dead. And they brought down from another ghetto, the people to bury those. My uncle says, "I'm alive." So one took off a raincoat and covered him up, and he was only shot through the, and this was only a wound. So he went through and he survived. So he's, a matter of fact, written up in the book of Radom, that he is a survivor of that killings which was going on when that liquidation of the ghetto. My mother, sister and brother, were taken away to Treblinka, which nobody came out of there. So, this was one of the things that I know that they're not here. A matter of fact, I went, my kids, I have here my own kids with me. And they begged me to go and put in the names in the computer, which I did. They still hope. But I know that it's, you know, I was searching all over Europe prior to my coming to this United States. And that was an endless, endless hope. So, but for the sake of my own children, I went and I registered the names.

VK: Yes.

JZ: And we'll see, hope. So this is what happened to my family. I was talking to you about Dachau.

VK: Right.

JZ: And I stayed in Dachau till the liberation, not completely the liberation because April of 1945, April the 24th of 1945, they rounded us up, the able bodies which were able to walk, and they marched us out of Dachau. And we walked with the Germans towards Buch-, towards Mittenwald, towards the Tyrolean mountains. They wanted to set up another front against the Allies. And we were the slaves to carry all their equipment. And all of the way from Dachau till the destination where we were liberated, there were bodies alongside, on both sides of the road, because people were giving up. They couldn't walk. And the minute you gave up or you sat down at the road you got a, you, every minute you heard, "Boom. Boom. Boom." Every minute there was somebody shot. Every minute! The whole way we didn't even bury those people because we were being chased by the Americans. So we kept running, running. We got over through a town, the last town I remember it was Wolfratshausen. And this is in Bavaria. We got over to this town and we got out of the town and we got into a little village by the name of Buchberg [phonetic-May mean Buchenbert, a village in Bavaria]. We crossed a big bridge. There was a river. I don't remember the name of the river, but the Germans dynamited the bridge. We were on this

side, and we saw the American comes on the other side. Now, just to last another few hours. And so many died. So many died the last minute. But, it took, oh, about two hours and they put up a hanging bridge over. And they surrounded us, surrounded us, and the joy was something which it's hard to describe. The Americans cried, and we cried for joy and they cried over looking the way we looked. And I remember an American which took off a coat, wrapped it around me, and carried me off to an ambulance. Because I was seventy pounds at liberation, a walking skeleton, a man with no hair at all. No hair. I lost all my hair from malnutrition. Swollen. I looked like a hundred years old. And so many people died after the liberation, because the Americans gave them everything they could. They took their, they would give their heart at that time. Food, and this wasn't, our systems weren't used to that kind of food. The people were dying from good food.

VK: Sure.

JZ: So, luckily I was, again taken to the hospital, which I was fed accordingly to my weight. And I came back to my strength. They say, "There's bones, there's flesh."

VK: Where was the hospital?

JZ: The hospital was in Wolfratshausen. It was set up by the Americans, a clinic. And it was a primitive but there was, at least there were doctors and they know what to do.

VK: Sure.

JZ: And it took a few weeks and I was back on my feet. And we settled in a little displaced camp called Feldafing, in Feldafing, in Germany. And there we stayed. And I met a girl there.

VK: Yes, oh good.

JZ: I met my wife, which I married in Feldafing. I had, I was married in 1946. We married under the sky by a very Orthodox rabbi from Hungary, because my wife is Hungarian. And we stayed and I went to school. While I was in Germany I never had the opportunity before, before the war started. So I went to the Academy of Art and I learned cutting and designing. Since I was a tailor, I says, "Let me be at least a full fledged tailor." So I learned cutting and designing. And I, we waited to come to this United States. My wife had family in Trenton, an uncle, which she kept writing to him and he was very happy to hear that she is alive.

VK: What's his name?

JZ: Joseph Kraus, from Trenton, New Jersey. He had a restaurant, a Jewish deli and another restaurant. And he sent papers for us. But she, since she was a Hungarian, the quota was very slow, and we had to wait till '49 to be able to come to this United States. And there was a long wait and we almost gave up really. But at the last minute when President Truman signed the law for admitting 200,000 refugees to this United States, we were among them on the list. So we came and, but one of the unfortunate things, it happened that the uncle which we wrote to and which I never met, and she never met, died while we're aboard ship.

VK: Oh.

JZ: So we never saw him. But he had a son which he left a son, a doctor, Dr. Kraus, which was waiting at the, he was waiting at in the har...

VK: At the boat?

JZ: At the boat, in Boston. And, as a matter of fact, I got a telegram on the boat. I didn't want to tell my wife that her uncle died. And everybody was rushing to get off the boat and I says, "What am I gonna rush?" To myself. I says, "There's nobody waiting for us." So we got off the last people. The last people. And that was a boat I think of 1100. We got off the last people, and that cousin was already going frantic. He says, "What happened? Did they miss the boat? There's something, you know?" And he was walking to the HIAS and to the Joint to find out. And they said, "No, he's there on the list." But we finally got out and there is a man which hardly spoke Yiddish, and we couldn't speak a word of English. That was a, but it was a cry, it was a reunion of, a very emotional reunion.

VK: How long did the boat take to come over?

JZ: Ten days. I lost 25 pounds coming over, on the boat.

VK: I'm sure! The North Atlantic, sure!

JZ: I was at that time, the ocean was so rough, I was, I remember getting on the boat in Hamburg. And we got on the boat, and the first, we must have got on, that must have been like 3:00 in the afternoon, and the first dinner was served to us on the boat. We ate a fine dinner because it was, the boat's name was the *S.S. Marina Fletcher*, and it was with the waiters and oh the whole thing, that was really a real unique boat. And after we finished dinner we went to a place where we slept. And my wife in one end of the ship, I went in the other end of the ship. And in the morning we got up and I learned one word, a few words really. I said, "Juice, eggs, toast." Because you had to ask, tell the waiter what you want for breakfast.

VK: Sure.

JZ: So I walked in the dining room for breakfast and I, the minute they was, start bringing the juice I felt like something is coming. And I was holding my mouth and I ran out to the washroom and that was the end. This was, I never had anything in my mouth for the ten days! Absolutely nothing. It's a funny thing the way, before I left Germany I bought, I made myself clothing like I would, new clothes. So I says, "I'm gonna come to the United States. Let me not be like a beggar. Let me look like a *mensch*." And I bought myself a hat. So when I got dressed to come off the boat, I put on, the pants were falling off. Luckily I had a belt to hold on!

VK: Yes.

JZ: Everything was hanging. But I put on my hat, and it fell over my ears! And I says, "My God, how could I lose in the head!" So I says, "Well, my body lost, but the head?" So, this is a story in itself that I lost...

VK: Yes.

JZ: Even my head shrunk at the time!

VK: Yes.

JZ: So, this was the life which we went through. And we came to this United States in 1949, April 5th. And the experience was, we were very lonely, really, because we looked very much to see her uncle, and to have somebody of a family, to touch somebody which is our own. And he died. So, even the son and the rest of the family were quite, quite good to us. Because they took us into their home for a little while. And then we struggled like the rest of everybody. Well my wife worked and I worked. And...

VK: You worked as a tailor?

JZ: As a tailor. I worked as a tailor, and she worked as a seamstress, because she had training from the ORT in Europe. So she knew how to sew a little bit. So she went to work, and we both worked and saved and saved and saved and were able to buy ourself a home which, and then we started planning for, a family. And the first child of ours which was born was a girl, which I was pretty, we were disappointed because I wanted a boy. But you know, it's...

VK: You love her.

JZ: Sure do I love her. The story...

VK: When was she born?

JZ: She was born in '51, yeah, '51. So, we had our first child. My wife stopped working. And then we had another daughter. Then we had two more sons. So, it's, if you believe in fate, the way things go, that I have a name after my father, I have a name after my mother, I have a name after my sister and I have a name after my brother.

VK: Right.

JZ: So, the whole family has names. And it's so beautiful to see that the chain puts links on again, you know?

VK: Sure.

JZ: And there's still a continuation of life itself.

VK: And that's why it's so important for you to do this taping, so it will be forever.

JZ: You know, did I tell you, I never wanted to talk about it, truthfully, not. Till 1977. I never, I never told my own kids. I never told my own kids. And you ask me, "Why didn't you tell your own kids?" You know, when I was laying in Auschwitz and in Dachau, on the bunk beds, and I was trying to think why are people so bad, what did they want from the Jews? I was philosophizing with my own way of living. And I came to the–actually an understanding of myself, that hate is the reason of all those things. And looking back, I says, "People are born innocent. People are really born innocent. How, how do they start hating? There must be an implantation in the mind of a child to hate." So I says, "If ever I survive, if I ever survive, and I have kids of my own, I'll never let them hate, because I don't want to put that seed in their mind." When they're grown people is a different story. Then they could think for themselves. But if I implant that little seed of hate for the Germans, they'll hate for the rest of their life. See because I always thought, well those two

Germans which saved my life, that there were still good people. And I says, "Maybe there were thousands more like who save others."

VK: Sure.

JZ: So I, how could I implant something in the mind? So I says, "Never." Till '77. '77 I had a rabbi in my congregation, came into my store one day. And he says, "Jack, do me a favor, please." I says, "Yes, rabbi, anything. Anything. What can I do for you?" He says, "I committed myself to Pennsbury High School in Levittown, PA to talk about the Holocaust. And since I know you are a survivor and you're a member of my congregation, would you please come with me?" I says, "Rabbi, everything you ask, but not this, please, please. I want to erase it from my memory. I don't want to remember it." And, since he was a psychology major he knew how to put it to me. He says, "Jack, what do you attribute your survival?" And without even thinking I says, "A miracle, rabbi. I walked through the shadow of death every day of my life. A miracle!" He says, "Don't you think the miracle was to tell the world what really happened?" He says, "Don't give me an answer. Think about it, and let me know." And like, you know, he left. And I couldn't forget that miracle which I just said to him nonchalantly. I says to myself, "Maybe he has something which I don't know." I finished the day's work. I went home. I ate dinner. I couldn't forget it. I laid in bed and couldn't fall asleep. I says, "You know, it's 32 years after liberation. I guess I'm hardened enough to be able to talk about it." And I called that rabbi the next day and I says, "Rabbi, you know, I never talked about it, but maybe I'll go with you." Oh, he was very happy. That rabbi is from Philadelphia. He used to be now in Trenton, Rabbi Gary Charlestein.

VK: Oh, I know Gary. From, he grew up at my synagogue.

JZ: So, and Gary...

VK: In fact, his wife is here doing the same thing.

JZ: Is that so?

VK: Yes.

JZ: Gary Charlestein put me into this.

VK: Sure.

JZ: He's the guy which is, has to take the credit for me going around talking, because he was the guy. He put it to me with the miracle which I never thought of. So, Gary says, he was very happy. He took me to Pennsbury High School. He is a very eloquent speaker. He knows history a lot better than I. He is an educated person. He gave the history of Nazism, how Hitler came to power. And then he says, to an audience which was over 780 students and the faculty members in the auditorium, he says, "We are fortunate enough to have with us a survivor, which went through Auschwitz and Dachau, to tell you his life story." And he put me up in front there. He introduced me as Jack Zaifman. And like I said, I thought I'm hardened enough to talk about it. And I started opening my mouth, and like somebody would tore my wound open all over again, I started crying. I started crying. [Gasp!] My God, I couldn't stop crying, in front of all those people. I really was ashamed

of myself. I says, "Oh my God." It took me about ten minutes and I composed myself, and I wiped my tears, and I looked out at those people in front of me. And I have seen something which every human being would like to see. I have seen compassion. I have seen love. I have seen those young people who would like to embrace the world and make a better life for everybody, not only for the Jews alone. And I says, Jack, to myself I says, Jack, if you could put an impression like this on young minds, even how much it hurts, you'd do it. And since then I'm doing it.

VK: So you go all around to different high schools...

JZ: Oh yes.

VK: And organizations?

JZ: I graduated, now I'm going to colleges.

VK: Oh well that's good!

JZ: I just did Ryder College. I did Trenton State College. And I do all the high schools, yeah. Like I says, "If they ask me what are you doing I says, 'I graduated from the high schools. I'm going now to college.'"

VK: What about your wife's history? Has she talked about it?

JZ: My wife don't want to talk about it. Really, she don't. She says one is enough in the family. So, she doesn't. She was only a short while, because the Hungarians didn't go into the war, actually till being taken till '44. And Wallenberg tried saving so many of them. And she was only one year, actually 13 months exactly, where she was in camp. But I was since day one.

VK: Well; Jack, I thank you very much.

JZ: I [unclear].

VK: On behalf of Gratz College. And I'm sure that whoever else you want to get this tape, they'll make copies. One copy will go to you, one copy will go to Gratz College and for any other archive museum.

JZ: I appreciate it. Thanks.