HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

BERNARD FREILICH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Helen Grossman
Dates: November 6, 1984
November 13, 1984

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BF - Bernard Freilich [interviewee]
HG - Helen Grossman [interviewer]
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Tape one, side one:

HG: We are interviewing Mr. Freilich to give us the story of what happened to him in Poland with the Holocaust and this is Helen Grossman doing the interviewing. First, Bernard, would you tell me a little bit about where you were born?

BF: I was born in Drohobycz, Poland.

HG: That's D-R-O-H-O-B-Y-C-Z, Poland. And what date?

BF: April 27, 1924.

HG: And tell me a little about your family. You had brothers?

BF: Yes, we were a family of six children, a mother and father, and a grandmother that lived with us.

HG: And where were you in the family? The youngest? The oldest?

BF: I was the second.

HG: The second.

BF: Yes.

HG: And brothers?

BF: I still have an older brother who survived with me. The rest of the family perished in the Holocaust.

HG: And is he here now?

BF: Yes, he lives in Philadelphia.

HG: Tell me about your family life when you were little.

BF: Well, we had the biggest shoe store, custom-made shoe shop, in our city. And we employed, depending upon the season, 18, 20-25 people. We were considered middle class. We were comfortable by, in comparison to most of the people that lived in our city. We were considered middle class, and we were comfortable.

HG: Was it a big city?

BF: It was a city of 60,000 people before the war. In 1939, when Hitler first invaded Poland, there was a lot of refugees that were running away from Hitler and came, from the German army, came to our town. By the time the Russians arrived from the east, the Germans were in our town for a week, and then according to the pact with Russia, they surrendered the town and drew back towards the border which was the San River, which was about…

HG: How do you spell that?

BF: S-A-N.

HG: S-A-N River. Right.

BF: …and that was near Przemysl.

HG: All right. Wait. Let's go back to your family, though.

BF: Yes.

HG: What ka-, did you live near the store?

BF: Yes.

HG: Or in the same building?

BF: No, in the building next to it for most of our lives. And then we moved away in about like four blocks away from our business.

HG: And you went to public school?

BF: I went to public school.

HG: And, did you…

BF: And in 1937 I finished public school, and by then I knew that there was no future for us in Poland.

HG: One, a couple of other questions about your childhood, was it a Jewish neighborhood, or a mixed neighborhood?

BF: Well, the city in itself, and the center was predominantly Jewish. We had some non-Jewish neighbors, but I would say the city in itself had about 60% Jews. In the center of the city was predominantly Jewish. The outskirts, suburbia was gentile.

HG: Did I ask you, I did ask you, what year you were born, didn't I?

BF: Yes.

HG: So, when you were in public school, the children were mixed? Mixed gentile and Jewish.

BF: Yes.

HG: And did you play with the non-Jewish children at all?

BF: We did. We mostly fought with them, more than we played.

HG: How…

BF: Yes, we had fights. Every recess between one class and another.

HG: Because…

BF: We constantly had fights.

HG: Because you were Jewish?

BF: Because we were Jewish, yes.

HG: So you didn't play in other children's homes who were not Jewish.

BF: No.

HG: That kind of a relationship you didn't have with them.

BF: No. Only our next door neighbor. We had one next door neighbor that lived on the same floor with us that we were a little bit closer, yet during the Holocaust we never came in touch with them.

HG: No, but with that one neighbor that you were a little closer, did their parents treat you nicely? Or were they against you, too?

BF: There was a woman, and she was a divorcee. She had only one daughter. Her daughter was my sister's age, and for awhile there the two girls were getting along pretty good.

HG: When they were little.

BF: When they were little, and then we moved out of that house, and we moved into another area like four blocks away. So that building was next to the building where our business was. And our business was there until 1940, even when the Russians came in.

They let us keep our business going for about six, seven months. And then they took it away and they made what they called an [unclear], in other words, it was like a government or a government-owned shop people, and people that were making shoes were working for the government and making shoes. But all our machinery and all our possessions that we had was confiscated by the Russians.

HG: And you worked there?

BF: No.

HG: Oh.

BF: I did not.

HG: After that.

BF: No, I, I did not, I did not want to be a shoe business. And in 1937 when I finished public school...

HG: At the age, that was, this was about...

BF: That was, I was 13 years old.

HG: Oh, that must have been about eighth grade, then.

BF: Seventh grade.

HG: Seventh grade.

BF: Seventh grade.

HG: Right.

BF: I finished seventh grade, and although I was a good student, I did not want to go to *Gymnasium* which was like high school here.

HG: High school.

BF: But you had to pay for it. Only wealthy people could afford to send their children. My parents maybe would have, but by then we knew that there is no future for us in Poland. And everybody was talking about going to Palestine and getting out of Poland.

HG: That was when you were 13 years old?

BF: I was 13.

HG: So you were raised in that atmosphere.

BF: I was raised in that atmosphere, when I was nine, I joined a Zionist organization.

HG: Oh, let's go backwards then.

BF: Yes.

HG: Did, did you belong to any other clubs besides that Zionist organization?

BF: No, I only belonged to the Zionist organization.

HG: Did your family belong to a synagogue or a temple?

BF: Yes, my father belonged to, I don't know how well you are familiar with the Jewish term, a *shtibl* [Yiddish: prayer/study room synagogue]. You know, there was a rabbi, his name was the Komarno rabbi. And my fa-

HG: Was that a, was that his name, or was…

BF: No, Komarno was the town where he came from.

HG: Oh. And he traveled here.

BF: No. He had...

HG: That's spelled K-O-M-

BF: K-O-M-A-R-N-O.

HG: Right. Rabbi.

BF: Yes. And he had like his own synagogue. And those who belonged to him were like his *Hasidim*. Although my father did not wear the...

HG: The *peyes* [sidelocks worn by *Hasidim*].

BF: *Peyes* and *shtrayml* [large fur hat worn by *Hasidim*]. It was so on, but my father was very religious and we observed strict Shabbat and so on. Our business was not closed on Shabbat.

HG: The Chr-, gentile people worked.

BF: The gentile people worked. Sometimes me, sometimes my brother were just like overlooking it, coming in and so on.

HG: There was one word that you mentioned there, the *shtrayml*, the hat.

BF: Yes.

HG: Can you spell that for me? That was the black fur hat, right?

BF: Yes, it was black with brown like edges.

HG: Right. With a brim.

BF: Yes.

HG: S-T-R-A-H-M-L. It was a black fur hat with a brim that very religious...

BF: People...

HG: Orthodox...

BF: …were wearing.

HG: Men wore, besides the *peyes* and everything else.

BF: Yes.

HG: That was typical of Pol-

BF: Galicia.

HG: Galicia, Poland.

BF: Galicia where I come from, yes.

HG: Is your company, I mean your country is Galicia.

BF: Yes.

HG: Is that inside of Poland?

BF: After 1918 it belonged to Poland.

HG: It came to Poland.

BF: Before 1918 it was the Austria-Hungary Empire.

HG: Now I understand. What, so tell me more about [unclear].

BF: Well, I went to public school.

HG: Yeah.

BF: And to public school, six days a week, even on Saturday.

HG: Right.

BF: We were excused from writing on *Shabbat*.

HG: On the Sabbath.

BF: Yes. But we were listening to the lectures and so on, not making any notes, but we had to come to school. On Jewish holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and so on, we were excused from school. But let's say Passover or so...

HG: No.

BF: …we were going to school. We were, we didn't have to make notes.

HG: And the teachers didn't give tests that you had to write.

BF: No, not written tests, no.

HG: All right.

BF: Or to the blackboard when they called us, we had to say, "This is my holiday and I refuse to write. I can give you an oral answer but I will not write."

HG: How did the teachers treat you? They were Christian, right?

BF: Yeah, not all of them. Some were Jewish, too, because like I said, the town was predominantly Jewish, and there weren't only one public school, there were quite a few according to the sections of the town.

HG: Did you go to *cheder* [Hebrew: religious school] too?

BF: I did. That's what I was coming to. Around 2:00 usually our day at school ended. I ran home, which wasn't far. It was two blocks away. Had something to eat, took myself a sandwich in a bag, and went to *cheder* from three to seven.

HG: And what, how old were you when you started working in the store?

BF: I really, only when I finished public school did I hang around the store for about seven months. And then I decided--and that was the trend then--to learn a trade, because they said that, to go to Palestine in those days, you needed something, some skills like in building or so on. So I went to learn to become a metal mechanic, and since we had a lot of acquaintances, and I was one of those that my father knew the owner, and he hired me as an apprentice. To my dismay, an apprentice there, I wasn't the only one. There were like six or seven mechanics and about twelve apprentices.

HG: You wanted to be...

BF: And I was the youngest one. And since I belonged to a Zionist organization, in opposition to most apprentices, that were more leftist inclined and belonged to labor organizations, they considered me first of all a bourgeois kid, because we had our own business, and how come I'm an intruder coming to learn a trade there, where I am not one of the proletariat. I was considered...

HG: You were not one of the working people.

BF: They considered me, my co-workers there considered me as not one of their own, that I was one of the bourgeois, and how come I'm coming there to learn a trade? I don't need it, I don't have to make a living by working. I could be in my father's business. So they made it pretty rough on me. And maybe that prepared me for the harder life that came upon us.

HG: Do you think that was jealousy?

BF: Of course it was jealousy. That was one thing. Secondly, like I said, I belonged to the Zionist organization of the right wing, which Menachem Begin, the present premier...

HG: Right.

BF: I was at his wedding, because he lived above our store in the same building, and I knew him...

HG: You knew him pretty well?

BF: Yes, I knew him pretty well, I knew his wife.

HG: Was that the first, when you were very little then, you knew him?

BF: I knew him when I was 13, 14 years old. Since 1938.

HG: How well did you get to know him? I mean did you, did he, not enough to talk about politics? Certainly not enough to talk about politics.

BF: He used to live there, and he constantly had *Refarats* [lectures, reports], like speeches, in the what they called the Jewish house, which was only a half a block away from where my business was.

HG: Was that a meeting place?

BF: That was a meeting place. There was a *Tarbut*[1] Hebrew *Gymnasium*, a *Tarbut* Hebrew school which I attended to till 1939.

HG: Well wait. When Menachem Begin was there, did you, were you allowed to go, even at age 13, to these meetings?

BF: I belonged to his party. He was my commandant and [unclear]. He was the commandant of my organization. He was like the head commandant of *Betar* [an activist Zionist youth movement]. I belonged to the *Betar*.

HG: Right. That's B-E-T-A-R?

BF: B-E-I-T-A-R. In Hebrew they pronounce it *Betar*, but that's the way it's spelled.

HG: Tell me more about Menachem Begin.

BF: Well.

HG: What you remember from him personally.

BF: Well, I have never seen, I have never heard such an eloquent speaker as him. He was then a very young man and a couple of months later he got married in Truskawiec.

HG: That was a town?

BF: That was a resort.

HG: Spell that. T-R-

BF: T-R-U-S-K-W-I-E-C [T-R-U-S-K-A-W-I-E-C]. And that was only nine kilometers away, which is like six miles away from our town. This was, it was a well-known resort, and tourists used to come from far, far away. As a matter of fact, when I was still in public school around 1934, '35, the president of Estonia came to visit that resort. And we from the school went to greet him and carried flowers to him.

HG: At the, after the wedding, did he go away or did he stay, or, what was his...

BF: He still lived above our store until the war broke out. When the war broke out, he was in that age where they mobilized into the army, and he was an officer, as far as I know.

HG: In the Polish army.

BF: In the Polish army, yeah. He was a lawyer, and he was an officer in the Polish army, and he was mobilized into the army. From what I know later that he went to Vilna, and there he got caught by the Russians. But I was to his wedding, and the leader of

[1] Heb. "culture". Hebrew educational and cultural organization maintaining schools in most Eastern European countries between the two world wars.

our party, Zev Jabotinsky[2], attended. So I saw Jabotinsky then at his wedding. And we were holding, like, we used to say it, [unclear], that nobody, let's say like we were like the security guards. I was there, and that was 1939, I think it was in '39, and we were like holding hands and the whole procession, when they went into the synagogue, they passed by us, and we were like the honorary guard; we wore the scout uniforms of the *Betar*, and then we went inside to the wedding. It was a beautiful, very, very, memorable occasion. And...

HG: That's quite an honor.

BF: Yes.

HG: To be...

BF: I met him...

HG: …to have in your life.

BF: I met him here in Philadelphia when he was, and I have an invitation; he then signed. We attended a dinner. It was in the Bellevue-Stratford, and he came as a fundraiser for the Bond before he became Premier. And I went over and I told him who I was. And his wife was there, and she, I saw that he [unclear], she says, "You mean to tell me, you never let us know that you are alive?" I say, "Look, I know that there are some other people from our hometown that are living in Israel, and I didn't think that this would be so, make such an impression." But he says, "But of course!" And then, of course, there were a lot of people and he couldn't spend much time with us, so he just took out the program that we had and he signed it for me. I have it. And he invited us, he said to me and my wife, we were attending the dinner, and he told me, he says, "Any time you are in Israel, please, come and visit us. Please come and visit us."

HG: When you were in Israel, did you go to see him?

BF: No. I was there 10 years ago, it's almost 11 years ago, before he became Premier. And I knew that his life wasn't easy. He was a very busy man, and in a way I felt guilty.

HG: Why?

BF: Because. All my life from childhood on, I knew that our future is in Israel, in Palestine. And as Jews we have to go there, and I was brought up in that spirit. And yet, circumstances--turned out to be later on, that I was, after the Holocaust, when I survived, I met my wife, and we lived in a DP camp in Germany.

HG: We're gonna come to that, but that...

BF: We'll come to that. So I did not go, I'll explain it later why. But still and then I had still mixed feelings that I did the right thing in coming to America or going to Israel. And somehow, up till today, I don't know that I did the right thing. I am happy that I am in the United States. I am happy, but still, my dream, my childhood dream wasn't this. I never dreamt that I'm gonna be to the, be in the United States.

HG: In other words...

BF: I never wanted to come to the United States on my own, let's say. Later on circumstances brought to it. And I'll explain later when we come to it.

HG: Tell me about the, then, let's go back to when you were 13 years old.

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[2]Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, Zionist activist 1880-1940.

BF: Yes.

HG: And that was the time you started feeling the effects of...

BF: Oh, those effects of the antisemitism I came upon when I was seven, eight years old, and nine years old and so on. Every day in school we had fights. Jews with the *Polaks* and so on. We had in our school, we had an organized group. There was an orphanage which was a Polish orphanage that sent 160 of their boys into our school. Now they wore special like uniforms which were gray, and they could identify and they knew each other. So one of them had a fight, you didn't have to fight one, you have to fight 100 of them at once! And there was bloodshed every day in our school.

HG: You think they were taught from the time of their very early childhood that Jews were not the best...

BF: You want to hear something very interesting?

HG: What is it?

BF: And I told it to my wife a couple times, and to her, she said, "Ah, maybe you were only think." It was Christmas Eve. Must have been, I must have been eight or nine years old. Now I personally did not look like a "typical" Jewish boy. My hair was lighter then than it is now. Polish was my first native tongue. Yiddish I learned when I started *cheder*. And that was from around four years old. But up to four years old my native tongue was Polish.

HG: So Yiddish was not spoken in your home.

BF: Yes. Yes. Yes. But my language that was my first, like I say, when I went to *cheder*, my father and mother spoke in Yiddish. To us, they spoke in Polish. When I came to the store and so on, even as a child, and I was there often, we spoke Polish.

HG: Right.

BF: We also spoke Ukrainian, because the people that worked for us were mainly Ukrainian. And from second grade on, Ukrainian, the language was taught, just along with Polish. So we spoke a few languages. But my main language, till a certain point in my life, was Polish. So let's say it was very hard to identify me by my looks or by my speech that I am not Polish, that I am Jewish. It was Christmas Eve. And about six kids, there must have been four, three or four that were Polish, I think there were six, three and three. There was a girl among us, too. And we went to sing Christmas carols wherever there was a Christmas tree in the neighborhood, and we knew where the Polish people lived. In a few houses the hostess of the house opened up the door, and came over, gave us a few candies, a few cookies, or a few pennies. This I think I'll never forget. We approached one house, and that was only a half a block away from our business, the next block, and we went and it was a beautiful decorated tree, and we were singing carols, which they taught us in school and we knew them. Now, the Christmas tree was like at the window. The lady of the house made us approach the house. She says, "Come around and I'll give you some." So we all came around. We had to go around into the like a...

HG: In through a door?

BF: No, no, like, not a foyer, but how would you call...

HG: An entrance?

BF: Not an entrance, between two houses or between three houses a piece of ground like a...

HG: A driveway?

BF: Not a...

HG: No, not a driveway, but a...

BF: Not a driveway. I have the Jewish word for it. I have the Polish word for it. The English word escapes me.

HG: What is the Jewish word?

BF: A *hoiv* [Yiddish: courtyard] [German: *Hof*]. You know?

HG: I can't spell that.

BF: No.

HG: An area between…

BF: An area, let's say, between three or four houses, a little area. So when we approached...

HG: An alley?

BF: Not really an alley. I'll come upon that word and I'll tell it to you later.

HG: All right.

BF: Then as we approached she opened the door and tell us to come closer, and she looked at everybody. One of my friends she recognized. "You are Jewish, go away." She didn't give him nothing. A second one that was a Polish boy, she looked at him, she asked him what's his name, and he told his first name. And she looked at him and she gave him a cookie. After there was another Polish boy, she looked at him, she asked him what's his name. And he told her his name and so on. She looked at him and she gave him an apple and a cookie. Then I approached. She looked at me, and she asks me what's my name. And I had, my Hebrew name was Usher Berna, but in Poland, in Polish, everybody in my hometown knew me as Unio.

HG: Spell Usher. All right, Usher is...

BF: Usher, Usher Ber.

HG: U-S-H-E-R, and Unio is...

BF: Unio is, was like Polanized the name.

HG: U-N-I-O.

BF: U-N-I-O. And everybody in my hometown, up till today, when my friends meet me or so on, all Unio. That's how everybody knew me. In the whole city there was only another one, and he was a goalie for a professional football team, and his name was Unio.

HG: So...

BF: These, those were the two by that name in our hometown.

HG: So you were known...

BF: So, but she, she asked me what my name is. I said Unio. She still could not make out. So she asked me to pronounce the letter "r".

HG: "R".

BF: "R".

HG: "R". Yeah.

BF: And the thing is, the Jews,that at least they believe that Jews cannot pronounce it clearly. It's always like a [unclear].

HG: It's a [unclear].

BF: And that's how she recognized that I was Jewish and she didn't give me nothing. She said, "You are a Jew. And get out of my sight." I was then, about seven or eight years old. Had my father known that I was going to sing carols, he probably would have killed me. But that shows you what children are. Yet those are the experiences that, today I am over 60, and that happened at least 52 years ago or more...

HG: But it still stays with you.

BF: It still stays there and it's so deep. And I, I up till today, when I live today in America and hear so much about "Christmas spirit" and so on, and how in a time like this, where we came to honor their holiday and to sing for them, how they could stoop that low and single us out? Today I consider that we stooped low by ourself. As a child I didn't realize it. Today I realize actually what I did. But I still cannot forgive myself. How, where, was that Christmas spirit that they are constantly preaching?

HG: The Christian spirit, the Christian spirit.

BF: No, but, but that was Christmas Eve!

HG: That's right.

BF: Also I'm talking about Christmas spirit.

HG: You're honoring his holiday.

BF: I was honoring their holiday.

HG: Right.

BF: I know, for instance, like I said before, our next door neighbor was Polish. And I knew that they had a superstition that the first one to call upon them on Christmas morning, if it's a Jew, and a male, they'll have a good year. So I made it my business always somehow, some kind of excuse, to knock on the door, ask what time it is, wish them a happy holiday, or something like it, and she didn't know how to thank me. And how grateful she was that I was the first one to call in the morning, that that will be a good omen for a good year, especially when it's a Jewish boy. And here, at the same time I encountered this. And this is one episode that I can never forget. I think this is what we encountered. When it came like Easter, we were hiding. Easter evening, or Easter morning, Jewish kids did not go out, because we were always beaten up. So we knew that then we had to avoid. We just have to stay indoors to avoid being beaten up.

HG: And just accepted it. That you knew that you were gonna be hurt if you went out.

BF: Yes. We knew, and we knew, what can you do? They were, this is, it was their government. You couldn't sue anybody for calling you "dirty Jew" or "Christ killer" or something like it. It was, what could you do? You lived in that kind of society. And that's what made me, then I realized, I was eight-and-a-half years old, I joined the Zionist movement, and from then on I knew that there is no future for us in Poland.

Tape one, side two:

HG: Tell me, Bernie, why you didn't go to, choose to go to the *Gymnasium*?

BF: Well, there was no future for us in going into the *Gymnasium*. Let's say if I would finish *Gymnasium*, I could not go to a university. It was very hard for Jews to go to university, and in those days already on the universities there were constant--every day--there were battles. There were, blood was spilled every day. The rightist students which were Polish and we used to call, we called them the *endek*, I don't know where that name, the *endeks*[3]. *Endeks* [unclear].

HG: E-N-D-

BF: -D-E-K.

HG: E-N-D-E-K.

BF: The *endeks*.

HG: They were the students…

BF: They were...

HG: …rightist students.

BF: They were the students, the rightist students, the Polish students that wanted to prevent Jewish students from attending the university. They constantly created riots. They wanted the Jewish student to sit on the left side of the room...

HG: Like a ghetto.

BF: …and just to, like a ghetto, in the class. And there was bloodshed every day. When we say that--the youth--although I was much younger--but thinking of things like that, yet in those days I saw that there is no future for us in Poland. Our only way of getting out was getting to Palestine. And that's why I joined a Zionist organization at the age of eight-and-a-half.

HG: Then you stayed with this organization until after you were done with school...

BF: Until…

HG: …and then you became active in the...

BF: No.

HG: …you wanted training.

BF: No. I wanted some kind of training. They said, let's say being a shoemaker, or being a tailor is not a good trade for Palestine. Palestine was a country that had to be built, and only building trades were important there. And that's why I decided to become a metal mechanic. And I went into a shop that wasn't far from us, and I entered as a trainee or what you call here, somebody who's learning a trade.

HG: Go ahead, that's good, trainee is an excellent word.

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[3]*endeks* - a name derived from the Polish term *narodowa demokracja* (national democracy) that is commonly used to designate several ideologically related Polish nationalist organizations, including the National Democratic Party of Poland (1897–1945). The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition (1970-1979).

BF: Yeah. But there were like 12 trainees, five or six mechanics. And because I belonged to a Zionist organization and not to a proletarian organization in those days, I took a lot of abuse from my co-workers. And they called me that I am a son of a bourgeois, and why don't I go and take over my father's business [unclear].

HG: What were the others? Were they farmers or what?

BF: No, they were also Jewish boys, all that came, but they were leftist oriented, and they came mostly from poorer homes than I was, because in Poland, life in general wasn't so hot. Let's say there was, half of our Jewish population was struggling just to make ends meet, not to go hungry. And I come from an industrial region, I come from the oil region, and that was a very, very rich area. Like six miles from us, south of us, was the oil regions where they had the wells. And then they brought up the oil, they shipped it by railroad to our town, and we had three of the largest refineries in Europe. And they refined the oil and made it into 32 or 33 different products. Of course, the main product was gasoline, the second main product was kerosene, which a lot of people still used in those days for lighting their houses, although we had electricity and so on, but not everybody could afford it. So kerosene was also a very efficient product. And the end product was coal, bricks, they called it *Koks*.

HG: Yeah, cokes.

BF: Cokes. So, a lot of people in our town just lived from having a few shares in a certain well. They invested money, like 10 or 15 or 20 people got together and everybody invested to buy some shares, and they started digging. And if they hit it, they had it made for life. They had every month…

HG: Did this happen to the Jewish people?

BF: Yes! Like I say, half of our population lived just from shares. They bought let's say 10, 12, 15 years ago, and they were drilling, and like here they drill in Texas or Oklahoma. Once they hit the oil, they make rich.

HG: So they had an income.

BF: So they had a beautiful income, and they lived, they lived in sec-, financial security, depending upon how much they invested, how many shares they had. But in general I would say that half the city lived off oil revenues. That they were, yet there was another half that hardly made ends meet. And children of these kind of people and so on, they were going to learn trades. To them, schools, going to *Gymnasium*, was something that they couldn't think of, because going to *Gymnasium* almost cost as much as you could support a family for that month, you know, what food would cost. That's how costly it was.

HG: So it wasn't a public high school, it was a…

BF: No.

HG: …private.

BF: No, there were private. No, there was one that was a government high sch-, high school. And to that government high school there were students coming by railroad from the next town, and even some came from 29 km away by railroad, which is like almost 19 miles.

HG: They would do that daily?

BF: They would do that daily, commute in the morning and in the evening. And most of these students passed by our business, because we had it on a main street in front the station. Like 7:40 in the morning there was a, just, you know...

HG: A parade.

BF: A parade, 800 students were going to different schools, because some were going to private schools. There was a Jewish *Gymnasium*. There was a Jewish *Gymnasium* which was co-educational. There were boys and girls going. And it was like a business school. That was a business school. Yet the government *Gymnasium* was like a liberal arts school. You could go and then branch out into any university you wanted. But this was strictly a business school, and so on. But they were costly, and to me, and my father, my parents insisted on me, they said, "No, you are capable and we want you to go to *Gymnasium*." I said, "I'm only gonna waste my time. I don't want to go to *Gymnasium*. I'll waste your money. And you see what's going on." We had hundreds of Jewish engineers, doctors, lawyers, that came from wealthy families, and in the '30s when that antisemitism like from '35 on, when that antisemitism started in the universities and the polytechnics and so on, they used to send away their children to France, to Austria, to Italy, to study.

HG: Did you, did they feel that in Austria and Italy the antisemitism wasn't as violent?

BF: Not, not like, not like in Poland.

HG: Not like in Poland.

BF: Not like in Poland. So...

HG: You feel, then, that the antisemitism really started at the top.

BF: In Poland, definitely.

HG: Through the government.

BF: There I want to bring out something. That when the feuds started in the universities and so on, and the Polish, like the Right that wanted the Jews out of Poland, they said, "Get out. Just go to Palestine." Naturally, Palestine was under British Mandate, and they didn't let Jews in. They let in on a quota, 5,000 a year. We had 3,000,000 people in Poland! You know how long it would take Polish Jewry to go to Palestine? So we were like caught in between. From one side we were squeezed, "Get out." And there was no way to go. I remember in 1938 there was a march organized by our organization, but that was organized from Warsaw, and there were 1,000 people organized, and they marched on foot to Palestine. They crossed over Poland, went into Rumania, and there supposedly they were supposed to board a ship, and that's how the first illegal *aliyah* [immigration to Palestine] started.

HG: Did they get in?

BF: No. They did not get in. But at least that was the start. And that's why I was convinced that going to school, going to *Gymnasium*, was just a waste of time.

HG: These were mostly college students that tried to go in?

BF: No.

HG: [unclear] on this march.

BF: No. This was organized by Begin's, that was Begin's work.

HG: That was [unclear] people.

BF: By then, Jabotinsky came to Poland, and I remember he was in our town, and he was in the next town. And he was a very eloquent speaker. He was considered the second after Mussolini. Mussolini, although he was a fascist, but they said that he was the number one speaker in the world, that he was very effective when he held a speech and so on. The second best effective was Jabotinsky. And I remember him, when he came. It was in 1938, and he...

HG: Was Jabotinsky in politics?

BF: Jabotinsky was the leader of the Revisionist, Revisionist...

HG: Movement.

BF: Movement.

HG: Right.

BF: He was the leader. He himself was from Russia, but he was then in 1917 and '18 he created the Jewish Legion that was fighting along with the British in Palestine and Jabotinsky was the leader then, with Trumpeldor[4]. And afterwards, when they disarmed the Jewish Legion, Jabotinsky tried to create an underground and work against the British and take over Palestine. He was arrested and put into Akko [Acre]…

HG: Which was the…

BF: Akko, which was the jail.

HG: Oh, the jail.

BF: The jail, near Haifa. And he was tried and so on, and finally there was a public outcry from all over the world, and they released Jabotinsky with the proviso that he's never allowed to enter Palestine. So he went then to England, and he was touring Europe, and he created, in 1924, he split away from the World Zionist Organization and created his own branch. And he called, we are not Zionist, we are Revisio-Zionists. Because, he said, "Chaim Weizmann and all the leaders of the Jewish Zionist movement are saying we have to stay with Britain, cooperate with Britain, and Britain will create the Jewish state." Because the Balfour Declaration was declared in 1918, if I'm not mistaken.

HG: Everybody believed this.

BF: Yeah. But Jabotinsky did not believe in them. And he said, "Nobody is going to hand us down anything on a silver platter. If we want our independent state, we'll have to fight for it."

HG: At that point, when you were in, at that, like about 1938, you were a young man about...

BF: I was 14 years old.

HG: 14. Very young. And then you were working in your father's store, but it wasn't his store.

BF: No, it wasn't, no, in 1938 it was still my father's store. '39, 1940 they took it away.

HG: They took it over then.

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[4]Joseph Trumpeldor, (1880-1920) soldier, symbol of pioneering and armed defense in *Eretz Israel*.

BF: In the Russians' place first the Germans came in, and the Germans were one week, and when they pulled back, the Russians came in. And he still owned the store for about six, seven months.

HG: Tell me about when you used to go to get orders.

BF: That will come later.

HG: All right.

BF: That will come later. So, I went to learn a trade in order to be able to be a productive man if I ever get to Palestine. In meantime, in 1939, the war broke out, Germany attacked Poland, and from the other side the Russians came and they came to "free" us. In other words, well, in those days in a way it was like this. They came to, the Russians word for it was *oswobodip* [phonetic].

HG: How do you spell that?

BF: O-S-W-O-B-O-D-I-P. That means they came to rescue us. They came to free us, just like we now went to Grenada to free the students. That's how the Russians came from the other side, but that's, that's the pact that they made with Molotov. Because in 1939 Poland also, when he started pressing, when Hitler started pressing Czechoslovakia, for he wanted the return on the Sudetenland, which you probably heard, Poland also became a big power suddenly, and they said, "Yes, you owe us a piece of Silesia." And while Hitler was demanding this, they demanded this. In those days, Russia said to Czechoslovakia, and Czechoslovakia was, had a very strong army, and they had a very motorized--they had a lot of tanks and so on, and they would be the only effective power with a modern army that could withstand Hitler in those days. But they needed somebody to help them. They themselves were very small, but they were very technically highly-developed, a developed country and they wanted to fight against him. So...

HG: But surely the oil fields…

BF: No, no, no. The oil fields were in our town. That was in Poland.

HG: That's right, yeah.

BF: But in order to come to help Czechoslovakia, Russia would have to go through Poland. Yet Poland said, no Bolshevik foot will ever step on our holy land. And they did not let it. So the windup is that they like for a few months, like a lot, allied with Hitler, they took away our piece of Czechoslovakia, he took away Sudetenland, then he marched into Austria, the *Anschluss*, and so on. By the time Poland needed an ally, Russia made a pact with Hitler that if he invades Poland, they are not gonna stop him. They are just gonna come, and they made up a border line. The Bug river and the San river, those will be the boundaries. In other words, they'll take away the eastern part of Poland, and let them take the western part of Poland, dividing…

HG: Dividing...

BF: …in half. And that's what happened. This way we came under Russia, too, in 1939. And when they came in, being a Zionist wasn't looked upon very favorably. They always, although there was nothing in Zionism that was against them, this was a nationalist Jewish movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine, not in Russia or in Russian territory, they did not trust anybody who wasn't with them. Their slogan was, "If you are not with us,

then you are against us." You couldn't be neutral. You couldn't be just a private citizen. You either had to be with them or you were against them. So...

HG: How were you treated then?

BF: In a way the other part, the other half was taken away by the Germans. We had the Germans for a week in our town and we saw what they did. They started beating Jews, cutting beards, taking into forced labor, hitting, shooting, they took away a few hundred men--they disappeared, we never saw them--they shot them! But then we did not know. What we already knew the Germans, in that they came in, and Yom Kippur night they pulled back, and the next day we saw the Russians coming in. They were really greeted like, like a real...

HG: Friend.

BF: …like a friend. Like somebody who really rescued you. Now you rather would be with Russia than with Hitler, then, because he wasn't killing Jews. The Russians were not. As a matter of fact, when the Russians came in, the schools opened up, the *Gymnasiums* opened up, and I went then to technical high school. We had in our town a technical high school which was specially primed to develop engineers for the oil industry, because that was that center. Now, before the war, that school had 450 students. The city had 60-65% of the Jewish population. There was only one student in that school, a Jewish student, of 450. And this one was not from our town, this one commuted from Stayje, a town that was 29 miles away. Why? Because his uncle was a congressman, and he pulled strings, and he put pressure on, and they allowed that one single Jewish boy to go to that school. Now when the Russians came in, and they said everybody is equal--we don't have, everybody is equal, in our constitution everybody is equal--for the Jewish youth, really, the doors opened up. So everybody started applying for schools but you had to pass an exam. I wanted to go to that technical high school. There were 450 students before the war up till '39. In 1939, a month later, there were 3200 students swamping that school. We had two shifts going. We had eight first grades. There was, it was a four-year course. We had eight fourth grades, six second grades, three third grades, and one fourth grade.

HG: Those were the ones that survived?

BF: No, no, no.

HG: When you said the fourth [unclear] year.

BF: No, no. The fourth year, let's say, were students that were going before.

HG: I see.

BF: They were going to third, so they went into fourth grade.

HG: Right.

BF: But mostly they were non-Jews.

HG: I see.

BF: So in the fourth grade, or in the third grade, there wasn't one Jewish student. Who could go into third grade? Anybody who finished *Gymnasium*, or what we called *Matura*. You know? It's like a masters, you have *Matura*. M-A-T-U-R-A.[5]

HG: It was like a masters.

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[5]Certificate received after completing six years of *Gymnasium* and passing a very rigorous examination.

BF: Yes. Those people who had *Matura* were accepted into the third grade. Among them was the son of our rabbi. And he himself was a rabbinical student, and he didn't, in those days, he still did not have the title rabbi because the war interrupted it. But he was a genius. About him I could talk for hours. He is today in Hartford, Connecticut. He's a rabbi.

HG: A rabbi.

BF: Yes, in United Synagogue of Hartford. He has a 1200-men congregation. A 1200…

HG: Family.

BF: …family congregation. He has four sons; three sons are already rabbis. The last, the youngest one is 16 years old, and he is now entering a rabbinical seminary.

HG: And you know him from school.

BF: I know him from school. We were neighbors. We were liberated together. We were in camp together. So...

HG: Then go ahead about the *Gymnasium*, from that point.

BF: So, I entered, at that point I entered that school. And I was overwhelmed. I was overjoyed. Of course, we had to pass a test. I passed the test with flying colors, and I was accepted. Of course, the teachers there, there were a few who remained from the Polish time who were teachers there, and now they hire, must, they must, they were forced to hire many more. So, a lot of, let's say I knew of a few that were, let's say, my father, my father's colleagues, that had their sons, but they were like older. So one became our instructor in the metal shop. One engineer by the name of Adler that lived across our breezeway--that's what I was trying to say before--across our breezeway, they had a hardware store. And he was an engineer, but he couldn't get a job. He became a teacher then. And he was my neighbor. And then I had a math teacher that lived two blocks away from our business. And he was starving. He became my math teacher, and he was a brilliant, brilliant man. He was in his 30's and so on. So, for Jewish men with knowledge, doors opened, and so it was for the youth. The Jewish youth just swamped all the schools.

HG: That was 1939?

BF: That was 1939, '40, '41. In 1941, the bombs were falling, Hitler was attacking, and they were marching, maybe--they were still five, six, seven miles from our town. I was still going to take my final exams in school.

HG: Oh boy.

BF: And I was then, I finished two years of school, entering third. And I became, what they tried to prove, let's say, in those days, free--school was free in Russia. Anybody who wanted to, anybody who had a little ability could go as far as his abilities carried him. I had one black mark. My father owned a shop and he employed people. So he was in their, everybody in Russia...

HG: K-U-S-T-A-R.

BF: A *kustar*, *kustar* means like somebody was a land owner, he was a shop owner. He employed people. He was exploiter. And this was a very dangerous thing to have it on your pass. You know, and everybody in Russia including me, which I was then

only 14, 15 years old, I had a passport. Here you have a passport when you leave the country. In Russia you have a passport when you live in the country, and there it tells…

HG: In other words, a passport was like an ID card.

BF: An ID card. But everybody, I think from 15 years on, or 16, I think 16, because in 1940 I got my passport.

HG: Had to have it.

BF: Had to have it. And there you had also a paragraph, in other words, which showed a number, whether you are a desirable citizen or a non-desirable, or somebody who they cannot trust. This, once you had that paragraph, they always looked upon you suspiciously. And you never knew when they'll come and take you to Siberia.

HG: Because of the number.

BF: Because you were an employer, not an employee. So, in a way, we were comfortable, but we were constantly living with that fear, tonight they might take us away.

HG: You mean living with fear.

BF: Living with fear that they might take us to Siberia. Little did we know that they would do us a favor then, because those who were taken survived in Russia. Those who remained later perished in the Holocaust. But who wanted to go to Siberia?

HG: You could survive in Siberia.

BF: In Siberia, yes. I have one aunt. My mother had nine bro-, nine sisters and two brothers, and one of them, the Russians took to Siberia, and she survived with her children. Her husband died on the boat to Siberia. When they take him to Murmansk, you know, in the White, not, Murmansk, on the White Sea and near the Polar Circle [Arctic Circle]. This way they took him away. And they put him on a open boat without any and he was an elderly man, a sick man, he was handicapped, he was 90% blind, he died on that boat. But that's why I say, we lived in fear because...

HG: Of that number.

BF: Of that paragraph, until I got my own passport. When I got my own passport I figured as a student, and there was...

HG: That didn't have a number on it?

BF: That didn't have nothing, but we still have the thing, Jew, on the passport.

HG: On the passport.

BF: But in those days, up till 1948...

HG: Not…

BF: '41.

HG: '41.

BF: Up till 1941 Jews were not looked upon badly in Russia. If there was antisemitism it didn't come from the top. It came, let's say, like from the bottom, like from the population, that they were jealous, because Jews, when the doors were opened, when you give Jews a chance to educate themselves and to go ahead, they always will flourish. And somehow that, I became number two student in my class. Now, in 1940, anybody who entered the school then, if his social background was favorable, let's say his father worked in the mill, he got a stipend. In other words, they paid him to go to school. I wasn't one of those, because my father had [unclear]. So, there was something else. Yet, in 1940,

Malenkov, the one who preceded Khrushchev, Malenkov came to power. He became like inner minister, Minister of the Interior of the, Minister of the Interior. So he came to the conclusion, you know, he started looking. He said, "Look, we have in a factory 70,000 employees. And when they come to punch their cards, 70,000 punch in the morning. You come a half an hour later, there are maybe 20,000 people working and 50,000 disappeared. They just came, punch the clock, and disappear." So he brought in a law and he called it *disciplina piuda* [phonetic].

Tape two, side one:

HG: This is Helen Grossman taping Bernie Freilich. This is tape two, side one. Start with…

BF: Well, while I was a student in our technical high school in 1940, Malenkov -- we were living then under the Russian rule which parted east-, Poland in half, and the eastern part came under Russian rule. I was a student in the technical high school in my home town. And while the, most of the students were receiving a stipend from the government, but only those whose social background was favorable to the Russian, the Soviet doctrine. Since I was a son of a former employer, I did not receive that. And we were constantly living with a fear that some night a truck will come and take our whole family to Siberia, because my father had in his passport a paragraph which in Russian is pronounced *kustar*, which means that he was an independent and he was an exploiter of people, before the Russians came in 1939.

HG: Kustar is spelled K-U-S-T-

BF: K-U-S-T-A-R.

HG: Right.

BF: So, for many reasons, I was like a second class citizen, even in school, although I was a good student. Then Malenkov came to power and he noticed that the production in Russia is very low, and people do not show up for work, they only show up to punch the clock, and then they disappear for the rest of the day. He saw that a lot of it, what's going on is really a downfall of the system. So he brought in a law which was called the *disciplina piuda*. D-I-S-C-I-P-L-I-N-A P-I-U-D-A, which means the discipline of work.

HG: That's two words.

BF: Yes. What it meant for us, being in school, if somebody came five minutes late, the same law applied to schools and to every industrial or commercial or anything that was under Russian rule. So even for students the same law applied. If you were five minutes late, you were suspended for a week. If you were the second time five or 10 minutes late, you were suspended for a month. If you were three times late to school, you were…

HG: Out.

BF: …out of school. They just threw you out. And since we wanted to go to school very badly and school was our way of getting out into the world and better yourself, I was doing my darndest just to be a good student, and to be on time. And then he brought out a law that if somebody wants to get stipend, he has to be an A student.

HG: Even if he was Jewish.

BF: Regardless. He had to be an A student. When that came about, there was nobody in the entire class, and we had classes of 48 or 55 and of 62 students, and there was nobody in the class that was eligible for stipend. The best students couldn't make all A's. The reason was this, that we had in those days Russian as a language and Ukrainian as a language. And we had 11, that were nine subjects. We had physics, chemistry, geometry, drawing, metal shop, we had nine subjects. Then what, just before that law came out, they separated Russian into two: grammar was one and Russian literature was another subject. Ukrainian grammar was one, and literature was another. This way we had 11 subjects. In

order to have 75%, you had to have 8 A's and 3 B's. If you had one C, nobody eligible. At that time I was approached by the director of our school, which was a Russian woman, and she was the wife--she was an engineer--but she was the wife of the Secretary of the Communist Party of our region. In other words, her husband was the highest echelon in our region, in our state. He was the highest man. She was his wife, and she was the director of our school. She was a very capable engineer. She was a very well-educated woman. And I among three or four other students was called into the office, and she said to me, "Well, Freilich, you are a candidate for a stipend, and I would like you to higher your grades." Let's say, we had a math teacher. With him, if you had a C+, you were the best in class.

HG: He was so tough.

BF: I got a C+, and there was another C+ in the entire class, and we were like 58 or 62, depending when, in which period of the year we were, because there were some that dropped out, just couldn't take the pace. And we were going at a, especially in math, at such an enormous pace that it was impossible to, we went in one, in the first year, we just had a repeat from that from the decimal system into, what do you…

HG: Fractions?

BF: …into fractions, into percentages, then we went into equations, trigonometry, space geometry, in one year.

HG: In 19-...

BF: In 1939 till 1940.

HG: 1939 to '40.

BF: Yes. In one year this, the pace of, it was just unbelievable. Nobody could keep up. There was me and another boy, a Jewish boy, his name was Ed Weiss, and he was good. He was going to *Gymnasium* before, but he didn't have *Matura*, so he entered first grade. And he was about my age. He was a good student. And the two of us, here and there, we had a grasp, but to say that we were that good, we couldn't keep up at that pace. The rest of the class just copied what we had. And most of the time when we had homework, we were given like six or eight problems, and when we had to do those problems, we didn't have telephones. Let's say I was doing my problems home, and he was doing his house, and we had the answers. The answer was given at the end of the book. And we looked. It didn't come out right, so we started all over from scratch. So we spent six hours, and we still came out with the same answer, I came out, so I couldn't call him by phone, and he lived like a mile away from me. So I used to walk over to him. I came to his house and it was like 10:30 or 11:00 at night. And I saw that the light is on, and I saw at his desk he's working. I knocked on the door and I asked him, "Ed, what's the matter?" He says, "I'm stuck." I says, "Oh, I'm stuck too." He says, "What happened?" And I showed what the end of my problem, and he showed me his, and they were identical. So we saw that it was a mistake in print.

HG: In the book.

BF: In the book. Now imagine, when the following morning we came to class, and the first thing our math teacher had his weaklings, the ones that didn't, that had a bad mark, he never made a note in his book that you had a good mark. He only marked in the book whenever you had a bad mark. A good mark didn't exist in his book, only bad marks.

So he usually had the weakest students, and the first thing he said, "Let me see your homework." Now these boys had the copy of what I had or Ed Weiss had. And they just copied from us, and showed it to him. He said, "That's no good." Now, the kid is not gonna say, "What do you mean, it's no good? Bernard gave it to me, or Ed gave it to me." He says, "Well, that's what I had, or that's what I came up with." So usually I or Ed Weiss raised, we raised our hands and says, "We have the same answer." He says, "How come?" I said, "Well, I was working last night till 12:00. 11:30 I came to Ed Weiss' house, and he showed me where he did it eight times, and I did it about eight, nine times, and I always got the same answer. So something must be wrong." He says, "Oh, you wise guy, come over here. Let's go to the blackboard." He brought me to the blackboard, and by that time I knew the problem by heart--I did it eight, nine times. So I was going through with it. He says, "Yes, it's a mystery, sorry." But he never gave credit to the kid that gave him the good answer.

HG: [unclear].

BF: He didn't give him no mark at all.

HG: Did you get credit?

BF: Very seldom. I got a C+, which was the highest mark in class, from it. And our director called us in. She called in Weiss, she called me in, she called in one Russian student who came from Kiev -- they sent in 150 students from Russia into our school and they lived in a, like in a dorm -- and he was, he had going for him, he had the possibility of getting four A's in Russian and Ukrainian because these were his native tongues. To us, Russian was foreign. We were only eight, nine, ten months taking Russian, and we were not given credit for eight, nine months. We had to be on the same level as a technical high school in Russia. Whether, now, is it possible for a beginner who learns the language to be at that level in grammar? You know, I could learn, so she calls me in and she says, "Freilich, I would like you to work up your grades." And she says, "In math, I know," she says, "Mr. Shatz is a tough teacher, but I'm sure from a C+ you can get a B." I say, "Heh, I think I deserved a B a long time ago, but-."

HG: Did you tell her that?

BF: Yes!

HG: Yeah.

BF: So she says, "Okay. So we will talk to Professor Shatz." And then she goes to the other one, she says, "Look, in physics you have an A; in chemistry you have an A." So she says, "Russian/Ukrainian, these are the problems." So I say to her--and you talk to her, "*Tovarisch--Tovarisch*, director. "How can you make 75% in 11, take away four, take away four, I said. It's almost impossible for us to make a B. How do you expect us to make an A?" She says, "Well, in grammar, I know it would be tough. But how about literature?" I says, "What do you want me to become, an essayist, or so on? My, let's say, my command of the language in one year isn't that hot. I'm doing the best I can just to keep up. But just to deserve an A, I know I cannot make it." She said, "Well, I'll talk to your teacher." And then when she called in the teachers to show in each class a token that it's possible to be a stipend student. And that's why I worked, like here they say, my…

HG: butt…

BF: …off, to achieve it. And I was going, and the bombs were falling already, but 1941, just to make the A's and so on, and I made eight A's and the Germans came in.

HG: What a marvelous ending of a story, that's fantastic.

BF: Yeah.

HG: But then when the, tell me when the Germans came in what happened?

BF: When the Germans...

HG: The bombs were falling...

BF: The bombs were falling.

HG: And you were in school.

BF: I was going every day to school, and going back along the banks of the river, not on the main road, the main roads were clogged with tanks, with armor, with so on, and the Germans' planes were coming and just striking them and bombing…

HG: What happened to the Russian people that were living in your town?

BF: They were pulling back.

HG: They were running away.

BF: They were Russians were running away, and running like mad. A lot of them were caught a little deeper maybe, but at least they ran away. I also wanted to run away, and I begged my father. I already had my knapsack and everything ready.

HG: He didn't want you to go?

BF: And my father said to us, and that, that is a very touchy story. And later on it came to haunt my father. And I said, "Dad, please, let, it's not your fault. I wouldn't have been happy anyway if I remained alive all by myself."

HG: Where did you want to go? To Russia?

BF: I wanted to run with them, because as, the day the war broke out, they started out a propaganda attack, you know, broadcasting to the Russian army, and they said like, "*Tovarisch*,"--that's a Russian word, officers-- stock members of the Russian army, "throw away your guns. Turn over your bayonets and kill your Jewish Bolshevik Commissars. Come to us. We will give you freedom. You'll be lucky. You'll live in freedom. Why do you have to live under the Jewish Bolshevik Commissars? Come to us. And long live the new world without Jews and Bolsheviks." This was a song. And every five minutes the same thing, the same thing here. We are only like 30, 40 miles away from the border. They were already people, like 100, 150 miles deeper into Russia from two sides, two prongs, and we were like cut off. And I said to my father, I said, "Dad, you see what awaits us here. They'll come. They'll kill all the Jews. Let's get out of here. Let's leave everything. Let's everybody just carry what we can on our backs. Let's take Mom, the kids, and let's get." And my father says to me, "You're talking like a child. You have never been away from home. You don't know that the minute you leave your house, tonight, tomorrow, tonight you're already a refugee. You have no place where to lay your head. You have no place where to lay down. You'll never get a warm meal you'll never have a roof over your head, God knows for how long." He says, "Here we are in our home. Let's stick together. Times will be tough, but maybe we'll survive." So, in a way, I wasn't persuaded. I said, "Dad, you know, I don't want to sound like I am egotistical and so on." I said, "But don't you hear what's going on? Don't you see what's coming?" So, my father says to me, "We have five

kids. You are the two oldest." He says, "Things are gonna be tough. I know they're gonna be tough. So you're the oldest one who would make the burden a little easier on us. Going away and leaving me and Mom and Grandma and the little kids?" And my brother is a little more softer. He was older. He's three-and-a-half years older. But he was a little bit like more sentimental. He just looked. Tears came to his eyes. Tears stood in my eyes. And he starts taking off his knapsack and like letting it to the ground. Like I say, we had like a breezeway, and there was another house. And next to us lived--in comparison to my father--he was a young man. He was in his early 30's. He was a chauffeur. And he had a truck. And the truck had two cans of gasoline, which could take him hundreds of miles away. And he had a wife and one daughter about four, four-and-a-half years old. His name was Strasser. They used to be in the business of expediting, let's say, bringing stuff in from the railroad station, or if somebody wanted to move, let's say a commercial enterprise and so on, they were movers. Like movers and haulers. And he was one of the tough guys. He was really a strong man in his 30's. And he listened to us, and I looked at him, and he just stood there, looked at me, nothing. Two years later we were in camp. His wife and child was taken away. My mother and all the children were taken away. Just me and my father and my oldest brother were still there. And I forgot about that episode. We went through so much in these two years, that who would dwell upon what I said then. And that Strasser comes over, in camp, we were in our city still, and it was the first labor camp. He comes over and he says to my father, he kisses him, he says, "Freilich, if I would have only listened to that kid," he says. "He was talking like a...

HG: An older man?

BF: Not like an older man. What do you call like a messiah, and the prophet.

HG: A prophet.

BF: "He was talking like a prophet," he says. He says, "That you didn't go," he says, "Mr. Freilich, I cannot blame you. You had no possibilities with five kids and your mother-in-law and your wife. What? Could you just start walking?" He said, "But I had a truck, and I had gasoline." He says, "And why I didn't try," he says, "if a bomb would have killed me or so on, if they bombed me on the way or so on, at least I have taken my chances," he says, "but I can't forgive myself," he says. "My wife isn't here no more," he says, "so isn't yours. Nor the kids. But why I didn't try?" He says, "If I had the wisdom of that kid..." You know, I was then, that was 1941, I was 17 years old. But I was a head shorter than now. At 17, I was about 5'2". That's how little I was. So he says, "If I would have had the wisdom that that kid, at least I would have tried." He says, "Now even if I survive, what will my life be worth?" He says, "Why I stood then, listened to that kid," he says, "I can never forgive myself why I did not at least try." That was in camp about two, two-and-a-half years later, so now I wonder.

HG: Let's go back to the day of that bombing.

BF: Yes.

HG: Then what happened after that? After the...

BF: In two days later, let's say a week after the war...

HG: This is 1941, right?

BF: 1941. Yeah. A week later. After the war broke out the Germans invaded our town. The first day there was a pogrom. There were about 160 people killed, a couple of hundred badly beaten, a lot of Jewish homes burned, broken into, robbed, destroyed, just unbelievable. There was bloodshed all over town. That was done by the Ukrainians, by the local population. That was the first day the Germans hit. But a day or two later they gave...

HG: You were still in your home at that point?

BF: Yes. Yes. They gave a proclamation that all Jews from age 14 to 60 have to go to forced labor. And a Jewish Committee was formed which was called the *Judenrat*. Now, from that day on, almost every day, me, my brother, were going to forced labor. Although my father was then 53 or 55, somehow the Jewish Committee did not put him on the list of those that are eligible to go to forced labor.

HG: The forced labor, you did what?

BF: Anything. They took us, let's say on the railroad station, and there was fire and coal was burning. We were dowsing the fire. Then they took us to bridge building. Bridges that were blown up by the retreating Russians, were blown up, all three refineries in our town were burning, so they were taking us, did we know anything about fire extinguishers or so on, they didn't care. They were just chasing people. A lot got burned and a lot, instead of [unclear] there were things exploding and so on. People were, Jewish people, then that were taken to that forced labor were just, let's say if they took this morning and they sent a refiner, to the refinery, 300 people, 15, 20 were killed, 30 were badly injured, 100 were beaten to a pulp. It was just unbelievable. For fun, let's say, if they took us to build a bridge, and we were hammering like wooden piles into the river. So we stood on that thing, and we were hammering. The SS guards that were watching us just came and pushed you or hit you with the...

HG: With the butt?

BF: …with the...

HG: The butt of the gun?

BF: …with the butt of the gun.

HG: With a rifle.

BF: And you fell into the river. Naturally, you fell into the river, like, and that was November, December, January, the river was frozen. You fell through the ice. A lot got drowned. A lot got pneumonia from just getting wet. You had to go on working regardless of it. It wasn't work, it was just torture. They were just torturing people. After maybe two or three weeks, my father was called in by the Jewish Committee, and said, "Mr. Freilich, we want you to go to the Gestapo, and anything what they want in shoes or in boots or in anything, yes, you just take any order they want, we'll supply the material. You'll do the labor." When that happened, they took the best craftsmen in the city, and they sent them to work for the Gestapo or to other German units that required. Well, the first experience that my father had, but my father happened to be an Austrian soldier in the First World War. And he was fighting hand in hand along German soldiers. His command of German language was good, and he looked, although he was in his 50's, but he looked fairly good, so then he approached. The first Gestap-, his first encounter with a Gestapo man was with a lieutenant. His name was Bombolwski. You want me to spell it for you?

HG: Yes, go ahead.

BF: B-O-M-B-O-L-W-S-K-I.

HG: Okay.

BF: And when my father approached him, he said, "I'm the shoemaker. I was sent here by the *Judenrat*." Oh, the first thing, he gave him a command, "*Drei Schritte vom entferme*. If you, if you talk to me, you step back three steps. You step back three steps." That was the first thing. My father, when he heard that, it was like command, and he acted and he stepped back, stood at attention, and he repeated, he said, "I'm the shoemaker, and I was sent here by the Jewish Committee to do any kind of work that you need." So he himself felt a little guilty, you know, that he reacted that way, because when he saw, he saw a Jew with a armband, and he didn't know why he approaches him so, so he says, "Well," he called my father in, "follow me." My father walked in. Naturally they took over the nicest building in town, the most modern ones that were recently built. They were Jewish buildings. They took them over, and they made their headquarters there. And he took out a pair of boots. He showed him. He says, "Can you make a pair of boots like this?" My father says, "Yes, I can make it." "You seem so sure of yourself." He says, "*Herr Leutnant* [lieutenant], I know my capabilities. I know what I can do. You'll see what I'll bring you back, and then you'll judge it." He felt a little like, partly guilty, he says, "Okay, how long will that take you?" He says, "Well, I have to get the material, but I'll try to make it within a week." He says, "You better make it." My father says, "Yes, you'll have it." That was the first encounter with the Gestapo. And the following day another one called, and we have to go to this one and to this one, and there were 36 of them.

HG: And they were stationed there.

BF: They were stationed there. That was the unit. 36 of them. And they took over in a few different streets. And it was on the other end of town, and it was like on the right side of the tracks, in the better part of the city. And from us it was like a mile and a half to walk. And my father started walking there three times a day. It was like, and then, just one way, and then from one to the other, and one to the other, it was all, like all...

Tape two, side two:

HG: This is the second side of tape two, the taping of Bernie Freilich by Helen Grossman. Continue, please.

BF: Since it took my father so much time to just attend to it, my father started taking me along and showing me where these men lived. Although I had an older brother, but his command of German wasn't as fluent as mine. And I was always more the one that was more outspoken. Eventually I took over that job. And for the next two-and-a-half years, every day, three times a day, I used to go knock on 36 doors and say, "Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening. Do you need something from the shoemaker?" During those times many things had happened. There were times where I was running for my life. There were times where they were coming for executions, which they did almost daily.

HG: On the streets?

BF: No, on the outskirts of town in a forest. And they used to come bloody. They were drunk, drugged. And the Ukrainian police was among them and with them and so on, and they were sitting in trucks and like waiting or they had, they were just going with people on the trucks, and they stopped off at the headquarters in the Gestapo to get a final order or to get a something like and go on with it. And many a times I was running for my life, because many things were going on. Sometimes, they had a certain amount of people to execute. And sometimes, if somebody had, let's say, somebody that had some money or so on, they used to let one or two people out and grab the next two people they came across and just throw them on...

HG: In the street.

BF: …in the street. Grab them on the truck and just execute them.

HG: Anybody. As long as they wore the armband.

BF: Anyone. The head count was counted. Who it was or what it was or whether we were working for them, it did not matter, especially to the Ukrainian police.

HG: But they didn't pick up Ukrainians.

BF: No. They picked up Jews.

HG: Only Jews.

BF: Jews. In those days only Jews. And one special episode it was that I came upon, there were two of them that were very, very brutal. One name was Günther, G-U-N-T-H-E-R, and the other one was Krause, K-R-A-U-S-E. These two...

HG: Gestapo?

BF: Gestapo men.

HG: Right.

BF: Yes. They were the most brutal ones that I ever encountered. When they used to walk down into the ghetto, people used to disappear, just like mice would run into holes when they saw a cat or a dog. To them, wherever they went out into the ghetto or the *Judenviertel* [Jewish quarter], there was no ghetto yet in the beginning. To them, it was just entertainment to pull out the guns and just start shooting at random. That was their entertainment.

HG: So to see people dead on the street was nothing?

BF: It didn't mean a thing to them. We'll come to this later and I'll tell you. But, so I come and knock on the door of Krause. And he was just getting dressed, and he was putting on his suspenders. But as I opened the door, he was like in his bedroom enter in the living room. And from the looks of him in the face and the way he was going after me, I just slammed the door in his face. And usually, like usually, I would say, "Good morning. Do you need something from the shoemaker?" And that's what I said. And the way he was going after me, I just slammed the door in his face. And I had three floors to run down. I was running over eight steps at a time. What fear can do! And the speed--I would probably take the Olympics, I would make the gold medal. As I was running down and it was going a staircase down, like between the second and the third floor, another Gestapo man was going up. If it would have been any other one, he would have stopped me, because, of course, when I am running from their building like this, he would have stopped me. But this was one, that my father was his like favorite *Jude* [Jew]. In other words, my father was his confidant, and when my father could do somebody a favor, like take him out from jail, where if somebody was in jail, the next day he would be executed, my father always [unclear] this one, and he took out many, many people that way. Once my aunt was arrested because she try-, she lived in the next town, my mother's sister, and she was trying to come to us. And on her way they caught her, and they put her in jail. And the jail, once you were there, they were like every second day cleaning it out. So whoever was there, any trespass, just if you were there, was enough reason to execute you, if you were a Jew. It so happened that the doorman of the jail was a *Polak*, and he worked there before the war. And he knew us. He was a client of ours. We used to make boots for him, shoes for his family and so on. And my aunt begged him, she says, "Please, run over to Freilich and tell him that his sister-in-law is here." And why was she there? Because she was trying to go from her town where she stood with another sister, and she was hungry there; she was trying to come to our town. So she took off the armband, and put on a bobushka and was gone. On the way Ukrainian policeman stopped her, and as a Jewess they threw her into jail. When my father turned to him, he took him along, he took her out, and let her go. Among, among many other things. But this one just stepped away and he asked me, "*Schuhmacher, was ist los*? Shoemaker, what's happening?" But he never attempted to stop me. I didn't stop for any questions. And I knew Krause was after me. I knew he would shoot first and ask questions later. And I still took my chances running. When I ran down, on the grounds there was a Jewish engineer, but he was a agronomist. And he was working with a group of 12 Jews, and they were making the gardens there, with flowers and so on, and he was like their leader, you know, the group leader. He ran after me, but like I say, by the time he came down I was a half a mile away on my way home. That engineer that I passed him by, he never saw me, that's how, you know...

HG: How fast.

BF: …how fast I ran. It's amazing what fear can do to you. I came home, usually it took me like fifteen minutes. I was home in less than a minute. I ran like, I came home, I was white as a sheet. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't talk. Father asked, "What happened?" It took me quite a while till I said, "Krause was after me." He said, "Well, what did he want?" I said, "I didn't stop to ask questions. I know that first he will beat me to a pulp, and then he'll ask me questions. I ran." He said, "You shouldn't have run." I said,

"Then I would be dead. So what do you want me to do? You know Krause." So my father picked himself up, and he went there to the Gestapo, and we had another Jewish engineer. His name was Bartilod. And he was like the leader of that group, that was working, the entire Jewish group that was working for the Gestapo, he was the head man.

HG: *Judenrat*?

BF: No. No, no, no. He was just for the Gestapo. Let's say there were by now, there were like 600 people who were working for the Gestapo. Shoemakers, tailors, and so on. And we had to go everything into the office, and that was for every day, and report. Today we took work from this and this one. Today we took work from this and this one. And then we took from this one. This day I did not report to the office, because that was in the morning, and he was getting dressed. And later, after I visited them, I would go and say what I, what we did yesterday, what my orders were. I ran home. So my father went in there. He wanted to see that engineer Bartilod. That engineer Bartilod earned such respect from them, from the Gestapo, that Germans who were in trouble with the Gestapo came to him he should straighten things out for them. He had an enormous influence. There was a book written about him. It was called *Der Mittelmann*, the middle man. In other words, he was like the one that was always the...

HG: The peace maker.

BF: …the peace maker. Let's say, if they were going to a little town and they had orders to take 1200 Jews, if Bartilod came, he argued with them and intervened and so on, and he cut it down to 800. But they respected him a lot. He earned so much respect. So my father came. He already knew something, but the first thing he says, "Mr. Freilich, where is your son?" So he says, my father says, "He is so scared. He came home running. I couldn't recognize him. It took him an hour till he finally came out with words and told me what happened." He says, "He shouldn't have run." He says, "Don't you go and tell that to a scared kid, he shouldn't have run. You know Krause. You know what Krause does. So do you wonder, knowing him, that he ran?" He says, "No, I don't wonder." He says, "But he shouldn't have run." He said, "Well, what happened?" His leather coat was hanging in the foyer, a gray leather coat, and it was stolen from the foyer. Now, it hurt more his ego than anything else that anybody would dare to steal from the Gestapo from the third floor in the foyer a coat. It turned out that this coat was stolen by a Ukrainian boy that we, in the Jewish quarters, that by then it was like two separate Jewish quarters. But in meantime like every month, every six weeks, they came and took away 3,000 people, 5,000 people, and so on. And that Jewish-, that Ukrainian kid, was a neighbor of ours. He worked for one of those haulers and, what do you say, expeditors. And they had horses, and they had big wagons and so on, and his father, that Ukrainian boy's father, used to work for that expeditor, a Jewish expeditor, which was our neighbor, just like two houses away from our business. When the Germans came in he started working for the Gestapo, for their horses, and they had a *Reithalle*. A *Reithalle* is like a race course. And they were grooming horses, and he became like the head groom of these horses. So that kid was constantly going around in the Gestapo, supposedly to his father, but he was also roaming around in their quarters. And he saw the coat hanging. Nobody was there and he put it into a sack, and he went on the market a few days later to sell it. But what I am trying to say about this kid--that kid knew where every

Jew had a bunker, and where Jews were hiding. And when the Germans used to come or the Ukrainian police, he used to take them and he would show them, "There they are hidden," and so on. It finally came to this...

HG: So he was a spy.

BF: Yes, like a spy, and he, he was, he used to live there, so he knew every nook and cranny. Finally we had a plan, that our rabbi, that is now in Connecticut, he was like a leader of the youth movement in the--. And he said, "Look, that kid has to be eliminated. If we have to, we have to kill him. He, he killed hundreds of Jews. On account of him they killed, and we have to do something about it." And we had already, we were working on a plan to capture him and kill him. It turns out that that kid, about three or four days later, takes his--that coat and goes on the market in the city, you know where there was a market, with the, the...

HG: Like stalls?

BF: …the peasants, the peasants used to bring...

HG: Fruit?

BF: Fruit, and vegetables to sell and so on.

HG: Right. A market.

BF: Yeh, and people used to sell there some let's say used coats or something like this, just, yes, but Jews were prohibited there. We were just in our quarters. And there was a German *Gendarmerie* [police station], and that was a different outfit, and to the Gestapo they were like low class because the Gestapo were the higher echelons. They looked upon the *Gendarmerie*.

HG: How do you spell that? J-

BF: *Gendarmerie*. J-E-, no, G-, a G-

HG: Oh, G-, G-E-

BF: E-N-D-A-

HG: R

BF: -R-M-E-R-I-E. *Gendarmerie*. Or *Gendarm*, like, *Gendarm* is not...

HG: Like a police.

BF: Policeman, yes.

HG: Like a policeman.

BF: Yes, yes, but this is municipal police, you know? That had nothing to do with them, because Gestapo was...

HG: But they were German.

BF: Yeah, yeah, and they had their headquarters across the street from the [unclear]. But in the eyes of the Gestapo they were trash.

HG: Right.

BF: And just the same thing, they looked upon the Gestapo, you know, like they are the evil, and so on, and they are just keeping order. Now a *Gendarm* that was keeping like his beat was the market, he was going, looking on, looking on, slowly, and he noticed that a kid had pulled out from a sack, and he noticed the gray. And they had like blue gray leather coat. And he noticed that this is a German color in leather. So he just like slowly went around and he grabbed the kid, opened the sack, takes a look, and he had like two...

HG: Emblems.

BF: …emblems. He took them off, but the coat was a German coat. So he took him to the *Gendarmerie*. And naturally he gave him a few lashes good, "Where did you take it? Where did you take it?" So he said he took it from the Gestapo. Now, that *Gendarm*, when he has something like this, you know, so he calls Krause and he wants to talk to, what was he, *Sturmbannführer* Krause, and he says he wants to talk to him. So they said, "Well, he is not here now." And he says, no, he wants just to talk to him. "What is it?" He says, "Here's my telephone number. I am, let's say, *Gendarm* so-and-so, let him call me." Krause arrived at the office, he gets a message, so he calls the number. He says, "I am *Sturmbannführer* Krause, SS *Sturmbannführer* Krause, what is it?" He says, "Well, do you have anything missing?" He says, "What are you talking about?" He says, "Well, is there anything missing in your household?" He says, "Come, come, don't give me anything. What do you have?" He says, "Well, do you have a gray leather coat missing?" He says, "Yes!" He says, "Well, bring it right to me." He says, "Oh, no, the procedure here is that anything,"--you know, he reads him the law--"has to become, and he has to come to the *Gendarmerie* and sign the, and then they release it and give him back." Now, for him to go to the *Gendarmerie* was, you know, just like...

HG: Demeaning.

BF: …very demeaning. He couldn't swallow it, but in order to get the coat he went there. To make the story short, now he wanted to see the culprit, who took it, and he showed him, and he recognized the kid, that this is his, you know, the groomer...

HG: From the stables.

BF: …from the stable, his son. Well, whatever it was needed he signed all the procedures and he took him to the Gestapo. Now, do I have to tell you what he did to him? He beat him to a pulp and threw him into jail. The next morning was a execution, and they killed that kid. He was maybe 12 or 13 year old, but, thank God, that it came upon their hands that we didn't have to bloody our hands with it, because that was the thing. We had like a youth secret organization in then, and he was one of the leaders, our rabbi's son, and we then decided that we have to eliminate him. That, that was one of the things that we went through. And so it was going on for two-and-a-half years, till finally…

HG: Were you still living in your home then? Where you used to live?

BF: Yes, we were living in our home. We had a little sign, *Schusterwerkstätte der Sichereitspolizei.* In other words, Shoe Shop for the Gestapo.

HG: Over the door.

BF: This was our shield of armor. Whenever they used to come and take our neighbors, they used to kill them and so on, whenever there was, we used to, they used to call them an *Aktion*...

HG: An action.

BF: …action. *Aktion*.

HG: A-X-

BF: A-K-

HG: Oh, A-K-

BF: T-I-O-N. And you see, in the little towns, like my wife's, they used to surround, take all at once, this was it, it was over. With us it was an unending story. For three years it was constantly 3,000, 5,000, this time they took away a father, left a mother with four kids. Another time they took away a mother with two kids, two kids were left, and the father was at work. The tragedy...

HG: There was no, there was no pattern?

BF: Nothing. It was, whoever they caught, they took. A half an hour later when they had their 5,000 or 3,000, the whistle blew. Everybody used to come out like out of the holes, you were free again, till next time.

HG: Which could be tomorrow.

BF: Which could be tomorrow or six weeks later.

HG: That long a time in between?

BF: Yes.

HG: Were you allowed on the street at night?

BF: Seven o'clock curfew. Six o'clock wintertime.

HG: At dawn in the morning you could go out in the street.

BF: In the morning about 7:00 [unclear].

HG: While it was, while it was daylight.

BF: Yeah.

HG: And then, so the people were disappearing then. They were being taken away.

BF: They were being taken to the railroad. And with the railroad they were taken away to Belzec. That was the first, we didn't know till later on. B-E-L-Z-E-C.

HG: People were taken to Belzec?

BF: That was a camp where they were gassed in trucks.

HG: Right in the trucks?

BF: In the trucks. From the railroad and they were the first gas chambers in our region, there in Belzec.

HG: You saw them being taken on the trucks?

BF: No. I have never seen them, but there were some people who, who...

HG: No, taken on the trucks.

BF: No, there were some people who ran away from Belzec that there were, there was a certain group of people, Jews that were put there, like the ones who were helping with all the dirty work there, you know, and they were watched by SS men and so on, cordoned off, but somebody ran away. But when they came, who would believe? We didn't believe when the first time it happened, they say in the next town, like 10 miles away from us, they took yesterday 5,000 people and they took them away and nobody knows where. Said, "Oh, come on, those are people that think, just to make panics," and so on. "They are just, don't believe them. The Germans are cultured people. They wouldn't do things like this. Why should they do things like this? Oh no, this is impossible. That's, that's one who is just creating chaos and panic. Don't listen to him." And so, when they took away from us, we still--they said, "*Aussiedlung*," that they are taking them to, to colonize let's say in Osten, on

the east, in other words, to Russia. They're taking them to forced labor there. Nobody ever came back. You never heard nothing.

HG: They let your whole family alone, though?

BF: For a while. For a while.

HG: Until…

BF: Until, until our, we lived in, like, there was not a ghetto, it was like a *Judenviertel*, in other words, like a Jewish quarters. It was, it wasn't...

HG: Was that where your original home was?

BF: Yes. Yes.

HG: Alright.

BF: And let's say our house was within...

HG: In the quarters.

BF: …in the quarters. And then they decided to liquidate because they were taking already so many people out. They're gonna make only one *Judenviertel*, and that's when they made the ghetto. Now when they liquidated our *Judenviertel*, that our...

HG: Spell *Judenviertel*, or try.

BF: *Juden...*

HG: J-U-D-A-

BF: -U-D-E-

HG: E-F-

BF: F-I-E-R-T-E-L [correct spelling is *Judenviertel*]. That's like a Jewish section.

HG: Right.

BF: That's *Judenviertel*. When they were liquidating our, then we had to move into the other part, into the...

HG: Which was how far away?

BF: …number one. It was maybe a mile, a mile-and-a-half.

HG: The store and everything?

BF: Not in the store. We were working in our private house. The store the Russians took away.

HG: Yeah. Oh, I see.

BF: And from then on we never had a store. When the Germans came in, we just worked in our house.

HG: I see.

BF: And we had a little sign. And for a while, while all these *Aktions* were going on, we were...

HG: You were safe.

BF: We were safe. Little did we know how unsafe we were. My mother and my kids were sitting in the room. And they used to come in. Here they killed our neighbor next door because he couldn't walk. A Jew, that what I told you, Adler, the engineer, that taught me in, his father was in his eighties. And he was an old man with a white beard, and he couldn't lift his foot. There was a ledge from one part of the yard into the other, and there were like little wire, stick of wire, like, you know, like they put on...

HG: Like a fence?

BF: …like a fence, yes. And the Ukrainian policeman was putting, with his butt, pushing him, and he couldn't lift his foot. The man was in his late eighties and he was in the house just, he could make maybe two steps. And he was so scared when they came to take him out. And then he hit him, and they hit him here on the head, and the blood started...

HG: To run down his face.

BF: To run down and on that white beard, that picture I'll never forget. That is, it happened in 1942. It's almost...

HG: And they were forcing him into what?

BF: …for-, forty-, huh?

HG: Were they forcing him into a truck?

BF: No, they were forcing him first to the column that was in the main street, because this was like in the yard, like in a hou-, let's say there is a yard, there are six houses, and you have to go into a yard and then you go to different houses, but off the main street. So, on the main street there were columns of people in the hundreds and thousands, and he wanted him to take him to that column out there. And the man couldn't walk. So he started hitting him, and started pushing him. They hit him over the head, and he fell on the wire, tore his head, and started bleeding, and his beard became red. At first it was white. And I knew, they had a big hardware store, it was a neighbor of ours for years, very distinguished, very fine people. And his wife was laying in bed bedridden. She was paralyzed. She was a sick woman in her late eighties. These were old people. They could not move. So the Ukrainian policeman went, and there was only one Gestapo man like inside of that yard, where there were like 10, 15 houses. And he was like giving them commands. And the Ukrainian police was running through the houses, chasing the people out and so on.

HG: Pulling people out of the houses.

BF: Pulling them out, that's all. And then, he went over, and that Ukrainian policeman could not speak German. And he was showing him. And I was standing in the window looking. He was showing him that there was a woman, he said a woman, laying in bed. She can't move.

HG: Paralyzed.

BF: Yeah. So he, like that, what to do? So he gave him like with the hand, you know, a signal.

HG: Right. That was it.

BF: And evidently that was the first time that this policeman had something like this to do, a Ukrainian policeman. You know, later on they became more proficient. But this time, he just like went over, and that was across the street from our house, and he took off his rifle, and he was so naive that he did not first broke the window. But he shot into the window, and naturally the glass broke. And it back at him, and it cut his head, and it cut his face. And he noticed me in the window. So he came over, and our door was locked. And he starts knocking at the window, at the door. So my father goes out to him, and he says, "You have no right to come here. This is the *Schusterwerkstätte* for the Gestapo." So he says, "I don't want nothing with you." He says, "Just, I want to wash up." And he came into our house, and my mother was sitting here, and the kids, five kids, so there were three younger

kids, me and my brother we were working making shoes, and we made ourselves busy, and he, you know, he was himself, he was shocked that he saw it what he did, and he himself, that he was so stupid not to break the window and so on, so he was ashamed, and in a way he felt guilty and he felt stupid and so on. And we had about 25 people just under the boards of our basement.

HG: Hiding.

BF: Hiding. My mother's sisters and children and so on. And he sits down, and my father, my mother were...

HG: A dish of water.

BF: …like a basin with water, yes, and he started washing. My father took over and he did and you know, washed him and so on, and he like takes the rifle and he starts testing the rifle and pointing to the floor. And when I saw that, you know, I started...

HG: What did you do?

BF: …trembling. So he looks at me and he says, "What are you trembling, you dumb Jew?" And go tell him that if he shoots he kills somebody there, and then there are twenty-some people that will be dead, because he'll take them away. So my father says, "Don't mind him. He cannot stand the sight of blood."

HG: Good thinking!

BF: And he says, "Come on, let me give you a Band-Aid." And my father like took him away from me, and he gave me like a shove...

HG: Shove.

BF: …a shove. And he took him into the other room, and he took a Band-Aid...

Tape three, side one:

HG: This is tape three, side one, and this is Bernie Freilich. Continue.

BF: Well, he finally left our house. He grabbed a few people outside. He caught a little boy hiding in the bushes, maybe a scared little boy about eight, nine years old. And he took him to the column, and they took away that column. And this was like every couple of weeks. They just came back until there were less of us, and less of us, and less of us. Finally they decided to liquidate our part, our section, and we had to move to the other section. Then I come to a very gruesome part. Because in those days we were not any more there. The section, we still didn't have living quarters there, but they said they're gonna move us, and they moved our shop from our house to the other section that was just across the street from the *Judenrat*, from the Jewish Committee. And let's say, and this was like the first house you were entering then the *Judenviertel*, what was then already starting as a ghetto. And...

HG: Was there a name to the ghetto?

BF: No. It was...

HG: Just a ghetto.

BF: Drohobycz, ghetto Drohobycz.

HG: Drohobycz. All right.

BF: One day, we were still going home to where we lived in our house, but we were going the morning to work here. But Mom and the kids and our aunts and uncles and so on were hidden down there. We still left the sign there. And one day out of nowhere, and we were like the first house on the left hand side of the ghetto was the *Schuster*, the shoe shop, and across the street was the *Judenrat* with all its offices and so on. And out of nowhere they come upon the ghetto with motorcycles, with jeeps, the Gestapo, the Ukrainian police, and they run into the *Judenrat* and they start shooting, like this, when they used to take, they used to take people away. Let's say you take here, they said, "Come on! Come on!" If you went with them, you didn't run, they didn't shoot. Here, whoever they took, turned around, a bullet in the head. And that goes on like this for about half an hour. And we sit here, and I am the youngest there. I figure if anything happens like this, I was just with my father and my brother, and we were the ones who were producing. Here we came…

HG: Well, and where was your mother?

BF: Mother was hidden...

HG: In the-, in the old house.

BF: …in the old house. In the basement there, and we locked the door. But we don't know what's going on there. And then runs in Günther. Like I told you, there was Günther and Krause, these two. Günther runs in, and he is bloodied up to here.

HG: Into your shoe shop.

BF: Into the shoe shop. With his gun in his hand and he says, "Uph, how many men do I take out here? How many men do I take out here?" And he runs over, and you know, we were like sitting at the bench and working, and like he's bloody. He puts his hand, his foot on our stool, on our bench, you know, like a cobbler's bench. And I was sitting on

that bench. When I see that, I just get off the bench and give him more room. And he says, "*Putz meine stiefel!"* clean my boots.

HG: From the blood.

BF: From the blood. Well, I, you know, I see blood all over him, you know, boots. So I grab a brush. So he hits me, like with his hand, and I fell. My father was sitting next, and my father jumped over and grabbed a towel, and started wiping off the blood of him, and so on, and he still stands with his gun. "How many men do I take here?"

HG: He had gone berserk.

BF: He was wild always, but that was, that day, that was...

HG: Worse.

BF: I thought, I thought, now is the end. I'm the youngest of them all. I was, that was 1942, the end of November, 1942. I was 18 years old, but you could give me 13 or 14. I never shaved, I was pale, always, light skinned, and so on. I was a kid! I looked like a kid. I knew my work.

HG: Yeah.

BF: I was qualified. I knew the work, but I looked like a kid, like [unclear], I thought, I will be the first one to go. And while my father cleaned him off and so on, he just looked around, looked around, and just like a wild man slammed the door, he said, "Don't let nobody in." Like we would be in power to, to let anybody in or to stop somebody. And he ran out, didn't take nobody. And runs out and starts shooting again. We have seen by that time, we were already like a year-and-a-half under German occupation, there were many *Aktions* and I've seen many things, but anything like this I haven't seen. What turned out to be, they called it *Judenhautag* [Beat Jews day].

HG: Spell *Judenhautag.*

BF: *Juden*.

HG: J-U-D-

BF: J-U-D-E-N. *Hau*, H-A-U, T-A-G.

HG: Beat Jews day.

BF: Like kill, kill Jews day.

HG: Right.

BF: The story, supposedly, or the thing was, that they went, they had somebody that squealed on somebody that there's a Jew hiding on Aryan papers, you know, on false papers. And supposedly when they came to that and knocked on the door and went in, he had a gun and he shot at a Gestapo man and he injured his face. And that was, that was the thing. And that's like, that was supposedly why they did that. They killed maybe 200 people that day, I don't know, I don't know the exact count or so on. In the evening, while we were coming home, it was dark, it was November, maybe later than that time. And as we were approaching from the main street, we had to go over a little bridge. There was a little, a little creek, not river, it was a little creek, and as we, and then along the creek you make a right turn, as we just crossed the bridge, and it was so pitch dark, and I stepped upon something, and I got scared. And I took a look, and I couldn't see nothing, and my father had matches, so he lit the matches. There was a woman laying…

HG: A body.

BF: …shot to death and a little infant sucking at her breast. The baby was alive. So we knew that they were in that section, too. Because up till now we thought maybe it's over there, and we only hoped that here, we are still like let's say 100 yards from our house, and we don't know what's happened in our house. When we see this, so that was our first sign, you know, that they were here, too. And something like this, you know. If the baby would have been dead, too, it would have been a lot easier to take it, but here was a baby sucking on the mother's breast, and the mother was dead maybe six or eight hours, because it was already dark. It was past 6:00. So...

HG: What happened to the baby, then? Did you take it?

BF: No, we were afraid to walk out in there. Who would then pick up a baby? If you had people hidden, and they were hidden downstairs--a baby cries! You know how many people did not let anybody in, or how many mothers smothered their children because they were crying, and the Germans were searching for them, and they were afraid for an outcry? So this was a liability, you know. It's so shocking. Before that I have never seen a dead body. And here, all of a sudden, things start happening like this, and, and you get like, you cannot describe it. You get like stunned. And here you see a mother laying dead, and it shocks us so that, and you're afraid to pick up the baby. And we ran to our house, and when we saw that our house, it was locked and quiet. And we gave a signal that we are home. And they answered. You know, you, it's, I can only answer with this, that that engineer Bartilod that I mentioned before, many a times we used to go to him and ask him for something or so on, later on in camp when we were, because we, we, later on we went to camp, and we used to ask him, so he says, "What are you sitting here? What is your stinking life worth?" He says, "How many times can I pull you out? Get out! Do something! Disappear!" He said, "So I'll take you out now, so they'll take you tomorrow. How many times can I take you out?" He says, "What are you sitting here for?" In other words, he let us know, run. Do something about it. When this happened, and my father was by that time well-known among the German higher echelon, because the Gestapo itself socialized with let's say, that was an industrial center, and there was like, let's say a woman sent from Germany, and she was the secretary of the whole oil region that they took away. And she was the general secretary of the *Beskiden Oil Aktiengesellschaft*.

HG: Do you remember her name? Do you remember her name, the woman's name?

BF: It will come back to me.

HG: Alright.

BF: At the moment I cannot remember. And she one day she sends her chauffeur to us, while we were still in our *Judenviertel* and she says, the chauffeur comes in and he says, "Mrs. so-and-so would like, Miss so-and-so would like you to come and make her some shoes." My father looks at him and he says, "You know, I'm not allowed to make anybody shoes unless she can get a *Bezugshein* from the Gestapo."

HG: A permit?

BF: A permit, *ya*. He says, "Oh, that's no problem." And he says, "Will you come with me?" And my father goes in to his car, takes this beautiful limousine. You know that was the oil, she was the baroness of the oil industry there. And my father comes in, and

she comes in. She says, "Oh good, Herr Freilich." She already knew him, and she says, "Well I have a problem." She says, "I'll show you." And she opens up two closets, opens up the doors, and they are lined up with shoes, and on the door are shoes, too. "Take a look," she says. I--wrong *Schuster*. And I have nothing to wear. And she is about 6'2", like, what do they call, an Amazon. You know?

HG: Right.

BF: And, like this, you would say, a giant. My father looks at her and he says, "You want me to make a pair of shoes?" She says, "Yes." He says, "Well, when do you want to wear them?" She says, "What kind of stupid question is that?" She says, "I want a pair of shoes I can wear." So my father looks at her, he says, "Well, you have a closet full of shoes and you cannot wear them." She says, "No, I can't. Those stupid shoe makers." And you know, mostly they were people who used to work for us. They were Ukrainian; now they opened shops all over the city, and you know, when they were supposedly, and they didn't, and my father looks at her, and says, "Well, evidently you have a problem." She says, "Yes." He says, "Well, you called me here to solve your problem." He says, "You want me to make you a pair of shoes, tell me for what purpose you need it, when you're gonna wear them, and I'll make you a pair of shoes, and you'll be satisfied." He says, "But you'll need from the Gestapo permission." She says, "That's no problem. I'll have permission." "Then, okay, fine." She says, "Well, Saturday night we have a ball, you know, and I want a pair of shoes for the ball." He says, "Fine. I'll make you a pair of shoes for Saturday, but will you kindly send the chauffeur now to take me home and bring me here in the evening." She says, "What kind of stupidity is this? I never heard something like this!" And now, you know, she's a German, and she is a [unclear], and what kind, so my father says to her, "Look, I don't mean to offend you, but you want me to sort the things out for you. You have a problem. Evidently your feet change with the time of the day. At the end of the day your feet must be swollen. And you want evening shoes. When I'll take you the measurements now, and make them for now, you won't be happy with them." He says, "And in the evening I cannot come, unless your chauffeur will take me and bring me back home." So she says, "You're talking sense." She says, "Okay, so when do you want me?" My father says, "Well, look, 7:00 would be all right, and by 8:00 I would be back home. But you're sure it's already after curfew, so your chauffeur will have to take me. I am not such a big shot that I would ask you to escort me with a taxi, with a car back and forth, but since it's curfew time already and I have to be here in the evening to take your measurements." She says, "That's no problem." We made her the shoes, she went Saturday to the ball, we delivered them Friday, she went Saturday to the ball. Monday morning the chauffeur comes.

HG: Again?

BF: "My boss wants to see you." So my father comes in there, and she says, "Oh, Herr Freilich, these shoes are *wunderbar*. They are wonderful." So my father says, "Well, I'm glad that I have." She says, "But I never heard of anything like this." He says, "Well, so thank God that I knew what to do." She says, "Now I need another pair of shoes." My father says, "Well, what do you want?" She says, "I want something for the office." He says, "Okay, you want something for the office, I'll make you these shoes. But if they get

uncomfortable, let's say by 4:00 or 5:00, I won't be responsible for them. You'll be able to wear them a couple of hours, because that evidently is your problem, you retain...

HG: Fluids.

BF: …fluids, and that's your problem, and that's why you have so many shoes." She says, "Okay, make me something for the office." In the meantime she prepared a basket full of food and she says, "*Herr Meister*, that is for you." Butter, cheeses, sugar, flour, that was worth 10 pair of shoes. In comparison, how food was expensive then, and how little we had, that you know, for a sewing machine we used to get a half of bread, a piece of cheese, and five pounds of potatoes. People used to give away a sewing machine. I forgot to tell you that, how in 1941 and '42 what a famine there was. How many hundreds of people in our town every day, 50 to 60 people died of hunger, swollen from hunger.

HG: Starvation.

BF: Starvation.

HG: Because there was no way of getting food.

BF: There was no way of getting...

HG: There was no way of getting anything.

BF: There was no, what they were giving us was nothing. Besides that, we were crammed in into the *Judenviertel*. You couldn't go out, and beside that, the war went over, so the army...

HG: Cleaned out.

BF: …no, went over the fields, and a lot of fields were ruined. Because the war broke out in June, just before the...

HG: The harvest.

BF: …harvest. And then, we had a lot of floods, the same, that even peasants, even peasants, were starving, not Jews, but peasants were starving. But at least they had some mobility. In our region there was oil and there was salt. So they used to take salt and go with it by train like 100, 200 miles west and change it for corn or for wheat, and so on. This way, a Jew wasn't allowed to go on the train. A Jew wasn't allowed to leave. So thousands of people died. Well, I'm coming back to her. This way we were acquainted with her. And she was the head of that oil industry. And the oil industry started to organize a camp of Jews that were working in the refineries.

HG: Oh, were they engineers?

BF: It was a labor camp.

HG: Was it…

BF: No, no, there were, there were [unclear] there were engineers. There were quite a few engineers. And when the Russians ran away, they blew up, and we had the American system, which used to be called *pipstinn*[6]. Just like they had here in Newark or in [unclear], you know, with the high things. It was an American system.

HG: Pipe...

BF: *Pipstinn*. P-I-P-S-T-I-N-N. That was the American system, and the Jewish, the engineers that were employed in those refineries were mostly Jews. And they had some

[6]Unclear, may mean "pipe still", a distillation apparatus especially for petroleum oils and tars.

of the blueprints, and they started rebuilding those refineries. The Germans started rebuilding. And those Jewish...

HG: With the help of the Jews.

BF: With the help of the Jews and so on. By now, all of what we were called, our region was called eastern Galicia, was *Judenrein* almost. There were no Jews. We were the last camp, but they used to bring every couple of weeks commissions from Berlin to show that without these two camps, 800 in Drohobycz and 1,200 in Boryslaw, which was the oil *Felds* [fields], there is no, the oil industry, the war cannot go on, because it's a vital part. The oil is vital for the war effort, and without these 2,000 Jews, they cannot produce oil.

HG: That's interesting.

BF: So, as much, they didn't do it as much for the love of us.

HG: Oh no.

BF: We were the last Mohicans, and if they wiped us out, they would have to go on the Russian front, which they were not too eager to go to. The odds weren't so favorable. Killing Jews was much easier. So they used to bring every week, every second week, commissions, and they used to come and visit the camps, and visit the refineries, and look around, take pictures, take all kind of things, and sign documents that without these two camps, no oil can be produced. And thanks to this, at that time my father, when we, our *Judenviertel* was liquidated and so on, my father went to her and said, "Please do me a favor. Take me to your camp." She says, "*Aber Herr Freilich, Sie sind dooh, so froh*, You are so happy with working for the Gestapo. You are so safe." He says, "Look, my quarters, where we live was already, is liquidating. My wife and my family will have to be put here. I am not any more in the same house working where my wife and family is. Please take us into the camp." And she took us into the camp.

HG: That was you and your father?

BF: Me, my father, my mother, my s-, the whole family.

HG: The whole family. How many relatives?

BF: Five kids.

HG: All, and all, just the immediate family?

BF: Mother, Mother, the immediate family.

HG: Your grandmother?

BF: My grandmother then went to another daughter. They would not let the grandmother. Just the immediate family. That was a labor camp.

HG: But they did let you in, taking you.

BF: *Ya*, but that was a labor camp. It so happened that my mother then was pregnant. This is a very painful episode to talk about. And just, we were in camp, and my mother was due, and my mother went into the, in the camp they had no facilities for birth and so on. They wouldn't allow it anyway. So my mother had to go into the ghetto to give birth to the child. And a little sister was born. And the next day they took the whole hospital, they took it, they took them onto those trains to Belzec, and they took Mom and the little baby away.

HG: To Belzec?

BF: To Belzec.

HG: Spell Belzec.

BF: B-E-L-Z-E-C. My little sister wasn't even named then. Now...

HG: They took the whole hospital?

BF: They took the whole hospital, with the nurses, with the doctors, everybody, they took them away, loaded them on the train. By the time we learned about it, and my father had some influence and he would maybe be able, it was too late, and my mother was taken away. A [unclear].

HG: You never saw her again?

BF: No. About a year ago, we put a monument up here in the cemetery for, let's say, the Jewish Holocaust survivors, which I am a member of, put up a monument for the Holocaust's survivors, for their families that perished. And everybody could name on those tablets...

HG: On the stones.

BF: Yeah, members of their family. Of course there was a charge for each one. And then I was left with a problem. And I called my rabbi. I said, "Rabbi,"

HG: Your sister.

BF: My sister. She didn't have a name. Now I have to name somebody. What do I do now? The rabbi started crying. I said, "What do I do?" And before that, I asked that day to the store happened to come in, like two talmudical students from New York. And they were making some research, I don't know, and they didn't ask for donations, but if you wanted to give something to their seminary, they would accept. But they said, "You don't owe me nothing." They were doing some research, I don't know what. And I asked one of them. And he looked at me, he looked at me, he says, "Look, I think I know the answer. But I want to make sure that this is the answer." He says, "I'm going back to New York. But I'll be here tomorrow night again. I'm going to ask my *Rosh Yeshiva* [head of the Yeshivah] in New York." And he came the following day, he said, "You know, I promised you that," he said, "they wanted to send me today away to, like to Connecticut. I said, I have to go to Philadelphia." And he told the *Rosh Yeshiva* that story and he says, "I promised the man that I'm gonna give him an answer and I, please send me to Philadelphia." So he sent him again to Philadelphia. He came and he said, "Look, you can name your sister after any Jewish woman in Jewish history. You can name her Sarah, you can name her Leah, you can name her any, you know...

HG: Rachel.

BF: Rachel and so on.

HG: Any Biblical name.

BF: Any Biblical name or just a name, either the mother's name, or her sister's name, or your grandmother's name, who was alive at that time, and the baby wasn't named.

HG: In other words, give your sister a name.

BF: Give your sister a name.

HG: Of honor.

BF: Yeah. And I, I called my rabbi also. I belong to OCJCC, Rabbi Romirowsky. And when I told him, he says, "Bernie, but I never heard about it. Why didn't you ever come?" I say, "Rabbi, I never had a reason to talk about it. We never went so

deeply into these things. You know, if I would tell you stories, you know, I can talk to you for years, because there were years where these things were happening. I never had a chance. But now," I say, "I'm putting up the names of my mother, of my father, of my sister and brothers. Here was a baby that wasn't named. And I am up in a dilemma. What do I do?" He says, "Bernie, just name any Biblical name or just a name like after...

HG: Somebody that was alive at that time.

BF: …somebody that was alive at that time." So I named Sarah.

HG: Beautiful.

BF: It, I never talked about it. My wife didn't even know about it. You know, it was 1943 already. You know, but my mother was about, I don't know if she was 40 or 41, and she became pregnant. And in those days to think about an abortion or so on, although, you know, I, I never, you know, in a way, I, I was already 18 years, 19 years old and my brother was 21. And we felt a little bit, say, gee whiz, why didn't Dad do something? He knew that Mom's life [unclear] in jeopardy. There were abortions being performed. And here, for *secunas nefesh*, like you say, when your life is jeopardized, you are allowed to, even according to *halakha*, according to the Jewish...

HG: Law.

BF: …law to perform. Because with a baby you had no way of hiding. And then, it, was there more danger than the Holocaust? But my father said, "No." My father said, "No, if we have to live, we'll all live, too. Whatever happens happens. That's the way it's gonna be." So, I never talked about it. It was something that was very painful. It was something that I just, I just couldn't find-- even when I told it first, I told it to my wife. Then, when I have, she says, "Why didn't you ever tell me?" I say, "What, what should I tell you? This was something that you know, that in a way," I said, "you know they were so naive. They saw the danger what it brings to, and so on, and yet they didn't act." And we wouldn't dare to say something like this or so on. So mother was taken away with the child.

HG: So you found out how?

BF: What? Mom was…

HG: That she was...

BF: …pregnant. The bulge…

HG: No, that she was fi-, that she was taken away.

BF: They took away the whole hospital, and somebody let us know. And my father left the camp and ran to the Gestapo because you know and so on, and it was too late. By the time he learned it was too late. Now we were in camp. And in camp was my sister...

HG: The camp was Belzec?

BF: No, no, no, no.

HG: Oh.

BF: No, no, at Drohobycz. In the...

HG: Drohobycz.

BF: Drohobycz, in the camp.

HG: Do I have the spelling? I don't think I...

BF: D-R-O- Here, you have it.

HG: I, I have that, go ahead.

Tape three, side two:

HG: This is tape three, side two, and we're continuing with camp Drohobycz.

BF: Now, me, my father, and my brother, were going out every day into the refineries and there a shoe shop was set up, and we were working making shoes for the German elite. In the evening we used to return to camp. My sister, my brother, and another sister were left in camp. And there were like family quarters. We had like an apartment. But we knew that we cannot trust them. So we built a bunker. We dug a hole with a camouflage trap door, and that was leading underneath another building.

HG: How'd you get rid of the soil?

BF: We carried it out little by little in our pockets and so on. In the camp itself there was enough place where to throw it away. Beside that, it was a bakery there, and in the bakery there, it wasn't used. And there were a lot of pots. And they were standing empty in the thing. So we filled up that whole oven with the pots, with soil. And we used to hide the kids there. One day, it was in camp, you know, it was under constant oversight of the SS that were guarding the camp, and the Ukrainian police. And they got wise to it and somehow they learned about the, that bunker and they came to take the kids away. And the kids, we made it with a double trap so that they could, just in case-- they even discovered the bunker --they still had another thing to escape and just shoved themselves in with soil in a different oven. It was like a double thing. But even when they came to this and discovered this they still had a way of running away. But, when they caught my sister, and she was the third one, her name was Bronya. When they caught her, and my little brother, he was very, you know, during the war years the kids were so, here you would say streetwise. He became so wise and so on that he knew everything how to hide and everything. But when he saw that they caught her, he took his little sister with him, he said, "No, but they caught Bronya, there is no use." And he crawled out and gave himself up. And we were in the refineries working and they took him on the truck and 15 minutes later they executed them in the forest.

HG: By shooting?

BF: Yeah. You know, right, it was the name of the forest was Bronica [usually spelled Bronice].

HG: How do you spell it? B-R-

BF: B-R-O-N-I-C-A. A lot of Jewish people lay in that Bronica. We came back from work and we saw what's happened.

HG: So there was you and your father...

BF: Just me, my father, and my brother.

HG: The three of you left.

BF: The three of us.

HG: From the whole family.

BF: From the whole family. Now, I started after my father. I said, "Dad, we have to find a way out. They're gonna kill us little by little, one by one. As long as we stay here they're gonna kill us. We are not far from the Hungarian border, and they said that in Hungary the Jews are still safe." I said, "We are only 30 miles away, and it's only through

the mountains." My father says, "No, you know, I'm not gonna go." I said, "Well, this time I'm not gonna stay any longer."

HG: He felt it wasn't, there was no use in going?

BF: No, he felt that there he doesn't know the language, and that the Hungarian Jews were not very hospitable to Polish Jews. They were like denouncing them to the police and so on, he says, "Whatever happens, it's God's [unclear]." I say, "Look, you didn't, I listened to you then," and by then that Strasser, the guy that I told you was there and he, that was after, he said, "If I was as wise as that kid was..." Now I wasn't a kid. It was 1943.

HG: And you were how old by this time?

BF: And I was 19 years old, and I grew up a little bit. And I said, "If I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die with my boots on. I'm gonna try." I obtained a revolver. We had a little organization going on, and that rabbi's son, he was with us in camp, and his father. And we had secret meetings and so on, and we decided to send a group, a first group, one.

HG: Was there a name to this organization?

BF: No, just, you know, we, he just knew, let's say we were like 20 boys, all in our let's say, late teens or twenties, and he knew...

HG: Early twenties.

BF: …early twenties, yes, and he said, "Look," he says, "if we're gonna go our old ways, our parents' ways, we're not gonna survive. We have to do something about it. Let's try and organize a group. Let's run away. Let's run to Hungary." We organized a group, and I obtained a gun, and there was a story that one day they caught a guy. And you know, usually it was that the Gestapo used to like beat him and so on, torture him, and tell me where Jews are hidden, and so on. And we, that guy didn't know that I had a gun and so on. And we are in camp now. And a Ukrainian policeman comes to the camp and says, reports to the SS man, the main from the camp, and he says, "The Gestapo wants to talk to Freilich." And there are three Freilichs. There is father, and my brother, and I'm the youngest. So they called my father. If anything they thought maybe the Gestapo wants some work because we used to work for them. My father goes away there. And we had some rumors, and we knew that that guy was squealing. He was...

HG: Jewish?

BF: …trying to, yes, he was trying to save his hide. So he was, there is a Jewish bunker or so, and he said, "Freilich has a gun." Now, by that time, we had sent out a group that was going to Hungary. And we had somebody that was like a Ukrainian, two Ukrainian men that were supposed to lead them and show them the way how to go. They took money and they led them into a trap. The Ukrainian police was waiting for them. And three boys were killed and two were wounded, among them one of my cousins. And he came back to the camp and told us what happened. So we...

HG: The wounded cousin?

BF: No, no.

HG: Oh, somebody else, yeah.

BF: He wasn't wounded yet.

HG: Yeah.

BF: But he came back and he told us what's happened. There were 12 boys that went, six came back, three got killed, three got wounded and caught by the Ukrainian police there. Six ran away, among them my cousin. He came back, so we gave up that project. And now we said, "We're gonna have to do something." In the next town was already, at this, at the mountains, already like in the mountains, everything was a hill and down and forests and even the oil wells were among those hills. And when the people, let's say the Jewish people, were going to work, they weren't guar-, they didn't have that many guards to guard them. Because if they had 1,200 people, they would need 1,500 people to-- 1,500 or 2,000 men to guard them. Because to every oil well, one, two, or three or five stepped out of the column and went to work. And a half a mile further, another five stepped out. These people had access to the mountains. And they were going, running, going deep into those mountains and building bunkers there. They used to put in food. They used to put in some members of their families that were not in camp, that were still alive in hiding places or what. They used to build those bunkers. I got to know about it, and I said to my father, I said, "Now I'm taking it on my own. I'm not listening to you anymore. We have to take some measures to save our lives. If we're gonna sit here and do nothing, they're gonna kill us." So I sent out that cousin. We had some money because we liquidated all our assets that we had, turned it into money or something, you know, like gold or something. And he organized a group there of five or six boys that were in the other camp, and they used to go out. And instead of going there they went to the forest, worked there, built out a bunker. They built a bunker in the for-…

HG: In the camp?

BF: No.

HG: Not, I'm sorry, no.

BF: Not in the camp, in the forest, like, 15 miles deep in the forest. One of the boys that was working there, his father was a sheet metal worker. So he was working with sheet metal, and his father was a man in his 60's, but he had a young boy, and he was a student. He was a nice boy. Nunyik was his name. And he, when they built the bunker, they had a problem that the water was seeping through the ceilings. Let's say they made it out of raw wood that they chopped down, digged into the side of the mountain.

HG: The [unclear].

BF: And then they covered up a little bit, covered it with soil, and made a secret entrance.

HG: So that it would be hidden.

BF: It would be hidden. You could stay on top of it and not, not know that you stood on top of the bunker. But they had seepage problems. So he went and he made a roof, a metal sheet roof from the inside. And that place was about 18 yards long.

HG: Yards?

BF: Yards. Long.

HG: That's huge.

BF: And about five to six yards wide. We had there an oven made out of sheet metal that we cooked, and we baked bread.

HG: And you could heat.

BF: But only during the night. But that was later when we ran away. But the meantime...

HG: So they wouldn't be able to see the smoke.

BF: That's it. Only at night. And a little chimney that we used to push out at night and during the day we used to pull it in. Oh, look, you had, because...

HG: Clever.

BF: Oh, there were, in that forest there were about 800 people within the radius of a mile.

HG: Were you aware where the others were?

BF: Yes, we knew.

HG: All right.

BF: Not all of them.

HG: No.

BF: I knew of a few.

HG: Yes.

BF: In a way it wasn't good. Because, I'll tell you what happened. Now, I send my cousin out there. He should be like the supervisor and he would be the trustee because you know, to some strangers, you give money to buy...

HG: Excuse me, one minute.

BF: You don't think it's on?

HG: I just wanted to make sure I wasn't missing anything. Go ahead.

BF: Yes. So I sent out my cousin to make sure that they really buy food, that when we come there, there is a place where to stay and it will take a couple of weeks, a couple of months, until the Russians are gonna come. That was the end of '43 already. You know the Russians were coming closer and closer. They already took Kiev back and they were approaching the Polish border. And one day they were not too far away from Lemberg, and they liberated some Jews that were hiding out in some places, like we were hiding out or so, and they were with the Russians about a week. Then the Germans gave them a shove, and they took away maybe 30 miles back and they kept, caught these Jews and they brought them to us in camp. While we were still in our camp they brought them to us and none of them survived. So then I made myself a vow. I said, "If I ever get liberated and the front moves this way, I'm moving this way. Back over, not stop, order, but going back away from the front. If the front is going this way, they are attacking, I'm going this way."

HG: You're going in the opposite direction.

BF: I'm going the opposite direction. No more. Well, to make the story short, the Russians were coming closer and closer, and we decided this is the time to run.

HG: To move.

BF: To move. And we ran away from camp. Back to that bunker. And we were there for three-and-a-half months. Every night...

HG: Three-and-a-half?

BF: Three-and-a-half months.

HG: Right.

BF: Every night we cooked, we baked bread. We even had running water inside our bunker, in order not to go out and make tracks on the snow. Because this way, if somebody would come, they would see tracks. You need water. So in order to stay mostly inside and not to make tracks, or let's say we had to go for food, when we were coming close to this, we took branches and we camouflaged our...

HG: After you.

BF: …after we walked we camouflaged our steps.

HG: Your brother was with you, right?

BF: Yes, my brother was with me.

HG: But not your father.

BF: And my father was with me.

HG: Your father, too.

BF: Yes. And my father was with me. And we ran away there, and we stayed there. It turned out the bunker was built, there was supposed to be twelve people. By the time we came there, there were 22. You're not gonna throw anybody out.

HG: It was smaller.

BF: You're not gonna throw anybody out. So we stayed there. It so happens the Russians stopped. They are not moving forward. Our supplies dwindled down and dwindled down, and we had less food and less food, and we had to go out and get food. Now we go out and we buy food. We had some that we could trust. We could never trust entirely those people. They were Ukrainian. They were killing us. They were selling us out. They were doing everything. They knew if a Jew comes out, he has money, so they're gonna kill him and take away his money, because he had some money to go and buy food. So we tried to obtain food and surprise the peasants as they were going into town to sell it. We set up like in the middle of the forest and we watched. And we jumped a woman and she sobbed, you know, "[unclear], please please take anything." I said, "No, we are not taking nothing. What is the price for this in town?" So she said. "Okay." "We'll pay you ten percent more and you don't have to go in town. We'll take it from you every time you go there, but if you denounce us, if you tell anybody that we took it from you, we know who you are, we know where you live, we know your house, we know how many cows and there how many chickens you have." And we really went there, you know, to the village to look up. We followed her in order to know.

HG: Right. Right.

BF: And we knew everything about her. We said, "Now, look. If you're gonna tell anybody, you are dead. And if you think that I'm only alone, I gave a whistle, and you know, we were like two, and then two more, like, gave a whistle back and got up.

HG: Right.

BF: And supposedly like this. We had here and there a weapon, but mostly we had no weapons. But we had to play it strong. We had to show them that we are not afraid of them, and when we were walking in the forest and the peasants were going to their villages, and there was a path and the path is that narrow, and if you go off the path and give him the way, he is gonna kill you. He'll have to make him get off the path. And I used to

walk just like this with my hands like this. And sometimes he was as close as you are to me. And he had…

HG: Mr. Freilich is showing me how he had his hands in his pocket, to show that he had a weap-, to make the, the…

BF: To make him believe that we had...

HG: …the peasant think that...

BF: …that we had weapons.

HG: …he had a weapon, so that he still had the upper hand.

BF: Yes. And they were stepping down and giving us the right of way.

HG: Respected you, out of force.

BF: Out of force. Many a times our lives was that, that close. We came upon Germans, we came upon, we kept going, pretending like nothing happened, walked away, and they thought we are peasants, and we just walked by them and nothing. Until one day they raided the forest. The Germans. They knew that Jews are hidden there, and they raided the forest. Why did they raid the forest? They caught a boy that was working with us in the shoe shop. And the leader of the camp was so bothered that Freilich and his two sons ran away that he couldn't sleep nights. And that boy was also a shoemaker.

HG: Was he a Jew?

BF: Yes, and he was working with us. And we took him to our bunker. And he took with him a girlfriend. That girlfriend happened to be a very intelligent girl. She was going to not only to *Gymnasium*, she was already a university student. But she remained an orphan. Everybody was killed from her family. And she remained in the ghetto all alone, and she happened to live next door to that boy. Now that boy came from a very poor family and he couldn't, he was very, very poorly educated. He didn't even finish public school, and he went to learn a trade. He became a shoemaker. But he was a very, very good soul. A good-hearted boy. And when he saw her there, and she was starving and so on, he took her like under his wing, and he used to bring her food, and he built a bunker for her where she was hiding and so on, and he fell in love with her. And finally when we made that bunker and we took him along, he took her along to our bunker. Now that girl belonged with us to *Betar*, to that organization of Menachem Begin and Jabotinski and so on. But she was older than I. She was about my brother's age. And somehow, when she had to lay on a bunk with him and like face me and my father and my brother, that was killing him. He wasn't on her level. He really wasn't. Sometimes, you know, in the ghetto, when nobody knew about it, it was different. But now she was in the forest. And why she had, you know, she just couldn't, and she just couldn't stay there. And she found herself another boy that was a handsome boy in his early twenties, and he had his own bunker. And sometimes we used to take a walk like to catch some air and go out, and she got acquainted with him. And she said, "Please take me away. Really I can't stand it. Take me away." And so on. And boy meets girl. You know?

HG: That was it.

BF: That was it. And she left.

HG: It must have broken his heart.

BF: It broke it. He had a nervous breakdown. He almost went berserk. And what we talked to him and what we talked to him, and for a couple of weeks, he just--. Now, it was the other way around. He couldn't stand the abandonment, what she did to him. That he, he practically saved her life. The rejection and so on. And he couldn't face the people in our bunker.

HG: He had lost face.

BF: Had had lost face. Yet he was a very good boy. So we saw that the only thing is somehow to make a deal with another place to take him away because he cannot face us. It was killing him. So we made a deal with another bunker. We said, "Look, we'll give you so much and so much food. Take him. Beside that, he's a shoemaker and you need a shoemaker to fix your shoes. We have here shoemakers, because me, my brother, my father, so take him, he is a good deal for you." And they took him. And he, in a way, not that he was completely healed or so on, but it was easier for him to face it. He didn't have to face these people. There were 22 people that knew what she did to him. That she abandoned him, that she rejected him and so on. So he went to another bunker. And they caught some people, like walking from the forest and so on, and they held them. And we knew that they're gonna raid the forest, but we never thought that they would come that early in the morning, because the Germans, as brave as they were, at night into the forest they wouldn't go if their life depended on it, not to catch Jews. Somehow we figured that they would be in the forest 7:00 in the morning, and we misjudged them.

HG: When it just started to get light.

BF: And that was already the end of May, 1944. And they surprised us and they came to the forest and 5:00 in the morning, around 5:30 they were already near those bunkers. And we planned on evacuation of those bunkers for 5:00, 5:30. And as they came they came upon people walking out from the bunkers and trying to walk away. Because we said, we took all our food that we had, in metal canisters, and we buried it, away from the bunker in case they'll discover the bunker they should not...

HG: Get the food.

BF: …have the food. So we like took our food and we buried it like 100 yards away. We made our sign near that and that tree. We buried and so on.

HG: Yeah.

BF: And we knew where we buried our food. We managed to escape, but a few bunkers before us, they caught those people. And among them they caught that boy that went into exchange to the other bunker. Now when they caught him, they took him and that head of the camp of our camp, he said, "Kill him. He has to tell you where the Freilichs are." They almost killed him, and he said, "I don't know nothing about the Freilichs." And he didn't say a word. "I don't know nothing. I just by chance happened to run away the same night, but I never ran with the Freilichs." They did not give up. Now we came back and they caught like 40 some people from three other bunkers. We heard shooting and so on. But we were like 300, 400 yards deeper, and we managed to escape. These people they beat and they showed them to our bunker, and they came to our bunker and they tried to set it on fire. They took pictures before of it, and they sent those pictures to Berlin. Later on they caught me when I was going to the bunk 5. We dug another bunker maybe five miles away from

that place. And now we needed some people who have a little money and to resupply again. Because in our bunker we had 22 people, and there was only one family still beside us that had some valuables. We had some leather, we still had some, a little bit of money, not much. Our money was running out, and we needed somebody with money to resupply the bunker. So we built up another bunker and then I was sent into camp in Boryslaw, because our rabbi and his son, two sons, were caught, with 20 some other people. They had a bunker that was a German that was the head of the Jewish, *Zwangsarbeit*. That means Jewish slave labor. He was the head of that office. That rabbi, that is today in Connecticut, he was his secretary. And he became so acquainted with him, he became so close with him that he persuaded it. And under his house he had a garden with like a bird house, you know, like they have, beautiful, what do they call...

HG: An aviary.

BF: No, what would they call it, like, anyway, under this they built a bunker that had English toilets, flushing water. It had electric lights. It had food. There were 28 people hidden there. And like I said, the guy, I started telling you about my father when they took him to the Gestapo, about the gun, but I didn't finish.

HG: No.

BF: The same guy they were still holding and he was still squealing. And that guy denounced that bunker. Now that day we were in that camp when they took Father away, we were sitting in camp and, you know, we suspected, because they caught one of the boys that was with us. And we suspected that maybe, you know, after torturing, that maybe he said something. And me and my brother, we are sitting there looking, and we already had the bunker in the forest. And we are just like, you know, having a battle with ourselves. Do we run now, or do we wait for Father, or any minute they come and take us? And it's 12:00, and it's 1:00, and it's 2:00, and it's 3:00, and Father doesn't show. Around 5:30 Father comes back. That's like coming back from the dead. And just by the look, so I just try to ask Father what, and you know, there are other people sitting here. You never can trust, especially the [unclear] and so on. I just saw that Father gave me a dirty look and says, "Keep quiet." So I didn't ask.

HG: You got the message.

BF: Yes. When we got to our house, we had like one room in the camp, I asked Father, I said, "What happened?" So he says, "You gonna kill me." I said, "Dad, what are you talking about?" He says, "Well, I played dumb today." He says, "And I got away with it. If it had been you or Sam, you probably would have been dead by now." I said, "Dad, what happened?" He says, Dagia-- Dagia was the name of the assassin from the Gestapo men who was interrogating him-- and Dagia was a half-way decent guy, because that was one of the guys that I never was afraid of. You know, he wasn't a vicious guy.

Tape four, side one:

HG: This is tape four, side one, and we're continuing with Mr. Freilich's story.

BF: Well, Dagia was the name of the Gestapo man that was investigating, interrogating, how do you say...

HG: Interrogating.

BF: …interrogating my father. And he said to him in plain words, he said, "Freilich, let's not kid each other. You know why you are here." And my father said, "Why am I here? I don't know. I thought that you called me to, you need some shoes and you want them." He says, "Freilich, stop that bull." He says, "I want the weapon that you have hidden in camp." So my father said to him, Mr. Dagia, you know me for a long time. It has now been three years since we met. I have done many things for you. I have done a lot of work. And that what I do very well is make shoes." He says, "I have nothing to do with weapons or so on." He says, "You know that we have ways of finding, making you tell the truth and so on." So my father says to him, "Look, if you think so, I know I am in your hands and you can take your gun and shoot me. You know, a Jew's life today is very cheap. But I have no weapons. I don't know of any weapons." The truth of the matter was that my father did not know about that gun.

HG: So he was telling the truth.

BF: He was telling the truth. Maybe, deep in his mind he might have suspected that we have something because we were constantly telling, "Dad, we're gonna run away. We're gonna go to Hungary. We're gonna go to the forest, and we're not gonna go empty-handed." But he did not know about the gun. So he said, "Look, Mr. Dagia, you can shoot me. I don't know a thing and I would tell you." He held him the whole day like this, from 9:00 till 5:30 in the evening. Finally my father says, "Look, I'm in your hands. Just...

HG: But he didn't torture him.

BF: No. No. He, he, you know, knew him personally for three years, and he knew that my father-- he said, "Would you," and then he tries to mention the name of the boy that was from a different town, maybe 300 miles away, but he happened to wind up in our camp. He know, "Do you know Nestel?" Father looks at him, "Nestel? Who is Nestel?" So he says, "Nestel." And he says, "He comes from Radom and so on." He said. So my father looks at him. "Mr. Dagia," he says, "I am in my 50's. The other boy is in his twenties. Do you think that I could keep company with somebody like this?" And he is afraid even to mention that my sons are this age. So he just doesn't say that much that, my son, he is my son's age or something, because he was afraid that this way he might entrap us. So he says, "Do you imagine that I would have anything to do with kids like this?" He says, "Look, I am just a man who is trying to survive." He says, "Look, that war will end. I wish you would go home and meet your wife and kids." He says, "And I wish that whatever is left for me to live that that war would already come to an end and I would also survive." He said, "That's my wish. But if you want to shoot me, you can shoot me." So he says to him, "Oh, Freilich, you think I don't know? You told me that you were a soldier." He says, "A soldier is not afraid of a bullet. A soldier is not afraid to die." He says, "But you know, there are worse ways." He says, "I'm entirely in your hands. But you know me for a long time. And you know that

I wouldn't have anything with a kid like this to do." So he repeated that maybe 50 times. He says, "Freilich, you're lucky that I know you." He says, "Go," he says, "and I don't want to see you here no more." And he called that Ukrainian policeman, brought him back to camp, and that was the thing. But my father like said, "See, you gonna kill me." I said, "Dad, what?" He said, "Look, I don't know nothing." But I said, "Look, you're at their mercy. They can kill us whenever they want. Any minute. So we have to get a way out." And that's when we decided to run away to the forest. And my father then gave in. He said, "Okay, do whatever you can." So we ran away to the forest, we had our bunker, and we stayed there until they caught that...

HG: Which was for how long?

BF: Lizer. It was about four months.

HG: About four months.

BF: Yes.

HG: In the bunker.

BF: In the forest.

HG: In the forest.

BF: In the forest.

HG: Then what?

BF: Then I, like I say, when they caught our rabbi and his two sons and 20 some people, when they brought it to that camp in Boryslaw, because the camp in Drohobycz was liquidated, and there was still a camp in Boryslaw that was where the oil wells were. And there were a couple of hundred people. They took one transport away, and they took our entire camp from Drohobycz, 800 people, and they took them away, except those that ran away the last couple of days. So maybe 100 ran away. So they took like 700, and they took like maybe 500 or 600 from Boryslaw, because Boryslaw was always, you know, half were at work, they were on those shifts. When they surrounded the camp, half of them were in the, either in the forest or in the...

HG: Like you were.

BF: Yes.

HG: And then you went from the forest where?

BF: Now from the forest I went to the camp, because that camp in Boryslaw was still functioning.

HG: I see.

BF: And any Jew that was caught at that time, that was 1944, May and June, and they proclaimed that any Jew can come into the camp, and he'll be in camp, and they don't shoot Jews no more. That there is a new rule that they don't kill Jews no more. And it was...

HG: Right.

BF: And it was entrapment. And for a few weeks wherever they caught Jews they brought them to the camp. They caught them in the forest, they brought them to the camp. They caught them in bunker, they brought them to the camp. This way, I went whenever I needed something to exchange money or so on, I went into the camp with a column of working people. In the camp you could always change some money, like American dollars for the Polish *zlotys* and so on, because they were in constant contact with

the outside world. They were going out, and in their oil wells or in their refineries there were Polish people and Ukrainian people working, and they were constantly changing money for food or something like it, and they constantly were in contact. So in the camp you could always get. I was going for the sole purpose of recruiting somebody to come to our new bunker that we built up, and I wanted the rabbi and his sons and another family. And I met with them, and I made a date. I said, "Three days later I'll come to pick you up. Get ready." On our way back, in the morning, the kid who was the leader, and he knew the territory, his shoe laces opened up on him and he stopped. And we were going like one, two, three, never three together, because it was...

HG: Three, one ahead of the other.

BF: One ahead of the other, like 20 yards apart. Because there was a rule then you should not congregate because it was like a war zone already. So if they saw three people together, they would shoot from far away.

HG: Right.

BF: So we were walking like 20 yards away from each other. And he was the leader. And we came to a "Y" in the road. And he told me, "Keep to your right." And I was the first one. And I kept to the right. And I walked on a well, a oil well ground. And there was an old German, maybe in his 60's, because they called him the *Schutzwerke*. They were specially mobilized to guard industrial complexes because there was a lot of sabotage going on.

HG: Were they in uniform?

BF: Yes. Yes. And I almost came upon him face to face. And he says to me, "*Halt! Stehen bleiben!*" That means stop.

HG: Stand still.

BF: Stand still. And I answered him in Ukrainian. I say, "I'm going to the village, to Opaka." That was the name of a village. And he looks at me bewildered. Like, "What's the matter with you? I don't understand that." He told me. And I just keep walking. And he looks, and suddenly my cousin follows me. He was like 20 yards behind me and he comes upon him. And he says to him, "*Halt! Stehen bleiben!*" And he repeats the same thing what I said, "I'm going to the village." In Ukrainian. To Opaka. And he, he like stands there, so he can't believe it. So he shakes his head. He says, "What the heck is going on? I say *Halt*." And I, boom, the guns are ready, and they keep walking. Then the third kid came upon him.

HG: Who tied his lace.

BF: You know, he tied his laces, and he was trying what to catch up, and that was around the bend, around the building. And he didn't see what was going on. And he came upon him. And that kid was already, he was an orphan for a long time. His family was taken away months ago. He was in camp all by himself, and that's why they recruited him to build our bunker, and he came with us. But he was born in that town, in Boryslaw. If a German catches him, and one Ukrainian that was working there, Kanchav, he says, "Hold this guy." And now, I was at the peak of the hill and I realized that I made the wrong turn. I should have gone left instead of right. And I start cutting left and running, and my cousin does the

same thing. And as we are running down we come upon that grounds, in, what do you call it, badlands, where you can sink into, how do you call that?

HG: Marsh?

BF: Where. Marsh. It's yes.

HG: Yeah.

BF: And suddenly I hear he has his gun and he yelled, "*Halt*." And he, I look around, he is aiming. And I say to my cousin, I lift up my hands, and I say to my cousin, "We better stay now, because that guy's gonna shoot us." And I lift my hands up. And he waves us back.

HG: He signaled you back.

BF: Yeah. So I see I am in an open field, no place to run, and every step I take I'm deeper into the...

HG: Into the marsh?

BF: …into the marshland, and I cannot run. And the guy is with the rifle, and I am maybe 60 yards away. You know, I'm like a shooting duck. So I stop and we turned back. We turned back and we come to him and he says, like this, holds his gun to me, "Who are you? Partisans?" I say, "No! We are Jews." He says, "Jews?" I say, "Yes." We heard that Jews now are being taken to camp, and anybody who they caught, so he calls, first he starts searching us. And I exchanged $50 in camp and I had a wallet that big with Polish money, you know? That big! He takes off my boots, he takes off my socks and looks at the sole of my foot, at the bare sole.

HG: He's looking for money.

BF: He is looking in my collar.

HG: For money.

BF: He is taking off the hat and looking in the lining. He is sear-, and here in the wallet he don't even look. And calls the police that he caught three Jews. So they say, "Just send them down to camp." And that was maybe 500 yards from the camp. So he says, "But they tell me they are from the forest." And I hear on the telephone the other one. The other one said, "Just send them to the camp." So he takes and escorts us to the camp. And us, he brings us to the camp. He gives us over to the watchman, and they take us into camp. They take us into camp. Now there was the Jewish camp leader there, he always resented us that we, my father never paid him any respect while he was coming into our town. And the truth of the matter was, that he was one of like, he had also *pascudnyakas* [obnoxious person], like they say. And my father couldn't stand that. So...

HG: And this was a Jew?

BF: And this was a Jew.

HG: Yeah.

BF: So he goes over to me, and he says to me, "You are Freilich." I say, "Yeah." He says, "Well, you're gonna show us where your father and brother is, because Hildebrand," which was the name of the camp commander, "is after your father already for a couple of months." And he says, "You're gonna show us." So I tell him, "If you took me and I stood right there, I wouldn't know where I am. I was taken into the forest at night, and two weeks ago when they raided our bunkers--and you know that they raided because you

know they brought the people here--and I don't know a thing. I thought that my father is in the camp. Everybody was running in a different direction, and I was running in a different direction. I never saw my father since, and now I'm hungry and thirsty and cold and so on, and I was on my way to camp but that German guard stopped me." So he says to me, "Ach," he says, "get out with your bull," he says. "I don't wanna listen to it." And he goes over to my cousin. And he says, "You're gonna show us where Freilich and his son is." So he says, "I don't know. I was with him together. We were on our way together. I never saw my uncle." He just slapped him in the face. He was a big, and my cousin was also, was 6'3", wasn't a, and he just fell into a closet, broke the door, and fell into the closet. But I've never seen blood just splash.

HG: From your cousin?

BF: Yes. And then he goes over and talks to that little boy. He said, "Yoshkutz," he says, "He has to protect his father." Points to me. "He is protecting his uncle. Who do you protect? You have nobody to protect. You're gonna show us where they are hidden." So he says, "Mr. Eisenstadt, I don't know. We were running away. He is telling you the truth." He says, "You, too? You are also [unclear]?" He says, "Who do you have to protect? You don't have to protect nobody." At that moment, the deputy commander of the camp walks in. Now he knew me personally, very well.

HG: From making the shoes?

BF: Yes. And every time, if I wasn't five minutes on the bench he was asking, "Freilich, *wo ist dein Sohn*?" Where's your son? So he comes over, and he looks at me, and you know, when I was deep there in the marshes, and my boots were all now drying up, and it was white, you know, and naturally I was four months away from camp, and I wasn't in the air, you know, hidden in the thing, so I was pale, pale, I was always. And he says, "Freilich, look at you how you look." So I say, "What? Herr Shay [phonetic]," like that's how I was called, Herr Shay, and he spoke a good Polish. He was like half Polish. So I tell him two weeks ago that they raided the camp, there was shooting and so on. "You must know about it, because I know that you were there, too." So he looks, he gives me that ironic smile, says, "But I ran. Everybody ran in a different direction. And I don't know where my father is. Somebody told me that my father is in camp." So he says in Polish to me, "Freilich, [unclear - Polish phrase]. We are here to fool you, but you are not gonna fool us." And he says to me, "Well, you don't wanna tell me, we'll give you to the Ukrainian police. They'll open your tongue." So I tell him, "Herr Shay, you would give me to Ukrainian police? No, you wouldn't do that. You know me too well to do that." He says, "Well, we'll take a truck, with guards, and we'll go to the forest. And you'll show me where your father and brother is. And if they'll come out, you'll come back to camp and you can stay here." So I say to him, "I don't know, I really don't." He says, "Well, I see you don't want to help yourself." He says, "The Ukrainian police will make you talk." Now we knew, you know, like everything, you know, spreads around, the commander of the Ukrainian police was an Austrian by the name of Nyemetz. And he, whenever he caught a Jew, he gave him to the Ukrainian police to work, to, to squeal. If they didn't squeal...

HG: To torture him.

BF: …not tor-, to beat up.

HG: Yeah.

BF: If they squealed, then he told them, "Now," he says, "let him have it. Because they squeal on their own." And he tells them to beat even more. If you didn't squeal, you held out, they gave you a good beating. But if you held out and you said, "I have nothing to say," you held onto your story what you said, "I ran away then when they were this..." fine. So, we made ourselves up our mind. I said, "Boys, we are going, we'll take a beating, but we stick to our story because either way we'll get beat more, and then they're gonna keep us till, they'll take us to the forest to show where the people are. So that we'll take our beating and stick to our story. You know, they take us to the Ukrainian police, and they put us down into a cell, and on the walls there were, you know, scratched out names of some of my friends, some of my acquaintances.

HG: People who'd been there before you?

BF: People who had been there before who were executed like three months ago and four months ago. The dates and so on when they took them. Not far away they had like sand dunes, and they were executing them. And I figure, "Well, here's our end." In a few minutes a policeman comes out, "Come on out, Jews." And he takes and gives us brooms to sweep the yard. And we are sweeping the yard, and I like, while I'm sweeping the yard, I take a look. With a bicycle, a Ukrainian policeman comes over to me and says, "Here, clean my bicycle." And I take a look. This is a guy who used to work for us. And I tell him, "Unufra [phonetic]," that was his name, "don't you recognize me?" He starts shaking, and he says, "Who is it? Unio or Simcho?" He couldn't, because he left us, it was 1939.

HG: Sure.

BF: That was 1944.

HG: Yeah.

BF: Five years later. You know, he left us, I was 15 years old. Here I'm 20.

HG: Right.

BF: I grew up. I was maybe five, six inches taller by then, pale and so on. But at the minute I said, "Unufra, you don't even recognize me!" He says, "[unclear] Unio or Simcho?" I said, "Unio." He says, "What are you doing here? Is anybody alive?" I say, "Just from what I know, Simcho and my father, but that's why I am here. They are keeping me here because I-- they want me to tell where they are." And I just stick to my story. "I don't know where they are." I say and I tell him, "In the forest two weeks ago when they made their raid, my father and my brother were with me. But when the shooting started and so on, everybody ran in different directions." I says, "I was two weeks in the forest. I was looking for them. I couldn't find them. I thought they were in camp. I was on my way to camp, and they caught me. The guard caught me." So he says, "Oh, boy," he says, "you are out for a good beating." So I said, "Well there you can help me." He says, "What do you mean?" And we knew like everything, you know, we knew the procedure and so on. I say, "You know the tall guy?" And we knew his name. I forgot now his name. I said, "The tall Ukrainian policeman, the one that is torturing and beating," I said, "Well, he is your pal. Just tell him that I am one of your friends and they should go easy on me." So he says, "But, how can I do it?" Now when we were in the cell, I pulled out the money and spread it out everywhere--into my collar, into the lining of the boots--the other boys did so. So we had

money, you know. Even if they find something, maybe something will be left, and we spread it all out.

HG: And hid it everywhere.

BF: And hid it everywhere. Into the hat, into the lining where they were searching us, already we were searched. So now we think maybe they won't. So he says, "Now what do I do?" So I just put my hand in my pocket, and you know I had rolled a two 500 zlotys, that was like $3.00 worth or something like this. I say, "Look, I have this. Buy a bottle of vodka and buy kielbasa, and give it to them and tell them to go easy on us." So he looks at me, and he says, "You know, you still have a Jewish head on your shoulder." So I say, "That's not the only thing I want from you. I want more. But that much you owe me. And don't forget, that war is coming to an end. You might need my help, too."

HG: What a way to survive.

BF: Well, you had to use you-, all your wits that you had. So he looks at me, he says, "Well, okay, they're gonna take you any minute. Let me run out and talk to that other guy." Okay, five minutes later they come in, take us into the cell, and that's where they used to give us a workout. Ten, five, about a few minutes later, three of them come in and, they're big, you know, with wooden and rubber hoses and on. And he says, "Which one of you is Unio?" I said, "I am." He says, "Oh, you filthy Jew. You don't know how lucky you are that Unufra told me that you are his Jew. Otherwise I'd broke every bone in your body." And he says to me, "Okay. Go ahead, scratch yourself up. Make yourself bloody." And he in meantime was beating on the...

HG: On the wall?

BF: On, no, on the, there were, like a [unclear] on the bunk. There was like one bunk and he was beating on the bunk and so on.

HG: To make it sound like he's...

BF: To make it sound like he is beating us. And he, here and there he hit a little bit or so on. And then he says, "Come over." Takes us to the light and looks us over. And we look and he says, "You are still too clean. Scratch yourselves. Bloody yourselves, so on. Take some dirt from the floor. Mess yourselves up." We messed ourselves up, tore off our collar, tore off a sleeve, you know, like this and so on, then he looks us over, he says, "Okay, now you look all right. Now you're gonna be called to Nyemetz. You're not through yet." Ten minutes later they call us for interrogation. We come in, and he sits like a judge in court, like on a high bench. And here is a barrier, a wooden barrier and so on. And he says, "Which one of you is Freilich?" "I am." He says, "Well, I have strict orders from SS *Sturmbannführer* Hildebrand that until your father and brother are not back in camp, you're gonna stay here." So I, I go with my story. "Herr Shay, I don't know where my father and brother is. You can keep me here forever. I was going to camp on my own free will. I thought my father and my brother are there." "Wait a minute!" Now he's starting to interrogate me. He says, "Wait a minute, you wise guy. Which forest were you in?" So I tell him, "The Opaka forest." He says, "All the Jews that *man heute erwischt*, all the Jews that we catch today, they all say they were in that forest. What bunker were you in?" And I see he's starting to show me pictures. And he picks up and picks up. So I say, "Well, the easiest way that I could describe my bunker that was different from all others, we had a

slanted roof and we had a sheet metal roof." So he looks at me. He says, "What else did you have?" So, I said, "We had running water inside." So he says, "Ho, ho, ho. The Jews in Opaka *Wald*. They had themselves so good they could have lived there for 10 years." So he says, "Well, no matter what you gonna tell me, you stay here till your father comes. I just wanted to know whether you're telling me the truth." And then he shows me the picture.

HG: Of a bunker.

BF: Of the bunker. When they came. After we escaped, they came further and they discovered the bunker, and they took pictures, and they were sending them to Berlin to show what heroes they are, what they were doing, how they were catching Jews in the forest.

HG: Let's stop here.

BF: That's it.

HG: And would you mind continuing again? Are you sure?

BF: If you wanna listen.

HG: The preceding was taped on November 6, 1984, and we're going to stop now and continue next week.

HG: This is a continuation of Bernie Freilich's report on the Holocaust. Today is November 13, 1984, and we want to hear the rest of his story about Boryslaw. Did I pronounce that correctly?

BF: Boryslaw, yes.

HG: Right. Would you go on with that? Do you remember where we stopped?

BF: Yes.

HG: All right. Go ahead.

BF: We woke up on June 22, 1944. [Tape is bad, hard to hear well]. And the camp was at the stoop of a mountain. Three sides were surrounded by mountains, and one side was facing the main street. [unclear] we woke up and it was earlier than usual, you know, we looked out through the doors and through the windows, we saw just ring after ring of SS guards, standing apart maybe 50 yards, and there were like eight rings of them cordoned off surrounding the whole camp. Normally we would have tried to escape, because I did have a hiding place in the mountains, in the forest. But that would have been committing suicide. Nobody could have escaped that. They stood with machine guns and eight rows and one from the other was about five or six yards apart. There were hundreds of them surrounding the camp. And the camp was maybe-- in the perimeter of the camp was about 100…

Tape four, side two:

HG: This is the second side of tape four. Would you continue please? With Bernie Freilich.

BF: Yes. Within a half an hour they started coming closer and closer toward the camp and there was like a reveille call, and we had to come down and just like soldiers there in...

HG: In line.

BF: Form lines. And they marched us to the station which was about two miles, somewhere over three kilometers. On both sides as they marched us, there were guards standing with machine guns, SS guards, Ukrainian police, gendarmes, and all kind of other police units. They brought us to the train and they put 100 men or women into a, one...

HG: Car?

BF: …car. Within a...

HG: All men? No women?

BF: Men and women.

HG: Oh, I…

BF: There were women among us, too. They put us 100 people into one car, and the train stood for about two, two-and-a-half hours and then it took off. And we were going west. They told us that they evacuate us from the barbarian Russians that are approaching us, and they don't want the Russ-- they're gonna save our lives so the Russians don't kill us. For 48 hours we were traveling west. They didn't bring us any food or water or anything. Just whatever we had with us, we nourished ourselves.

HG: You could, did it stop at all to let you out to...

BF: No.

HG: For any reason?

BF: No. The train did not stop at all. Finally, after nearly 48 hours, we arrived in concentration camp, Plaszow, which, P-L-A-S-Z-O-W.

HG: Good. Go ahead.

BF: This was, the camp was built on the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Krakow. K-R-K-O-W [also spelled Krakow]. That was the place where the concentration camp was built. Our first sight was high elec-- high towers with guards on them. And barbed wire all around it. And from far away from the cars, inside the cars we could see like lines of women standing and working. But it was far, far away. Later on when we came to camp we saw that these were Hungarian women that were taken to concentration camp Plaszow, and these were the first inmates that we saw that wore striped suits. The women wore only a striped dress, which consisted of blue and white stripes, and just a little hankie on their heads. Their heads were shaven, and that made a very big impression on me. It really was very, seemed very brutal to us. Because up till then, while we were in *Zwangsarbeitslager*, which was like a labor camp, we never wore any special uniforms. We wore our own clothes. Sometimes it was raggedy, but we never had any uniforms. Where there for the first time we noticed prison guards. And from far away it just reminded me of the pictures that I have saw of the Israelites working in Egypt when they were building the...

HG: Pyramids.

BF: …the pyramids and so on. And this left a very, very strong impression on me. I cannot forget up till today. Later on, they took us to the showers. And we had to undress and leave everything that we had outside the showers. And we went in for showers and when we came out, they *entlaust* [deloused] our clothing. Supposedly it shouldn't have any vermin in it and so on. They put it in the chambers where they, never got, nobody got his own clothes back. It just...

HG: They didn't give you uniforms?

BF: They didn't give us any uniforms, but they gave us some clothes that they took like from P.O.W.'s, like Russians or so on. And one thing didn't match the other. Let's say, I was considered a tall man then. I was 20 years old, and I was considered tall. So was my brother. The average height of let's say some of my friends, or most of the people that came there were about five inches shorter than I was. So I have gotten a pair of pants that just covered my knees, or the jacket, the sleeves just covered my elbow. And then we came again what they called to the main square, and they called it a *Appellplatz*. That was the place where every day we had to get up for like reveille. They counted us, but then they started a registration. And they registered everybody's name, and they asked us name and so on. And they gave us a number. From then on they said, "From now on...

HG: The number was on the uniform?

BF: The number they gave us...

HG: On your clothing?

BF: Yeah. The num-...

HG: A band?

BF: No. There was a little number.

HG: A patch.

BF: A patch. Here on the left hand, the left side just above the heart, and then on the pants. Just a few months before we came to that camp, they also tattooed people with a "KL", *Konzentrationslager*. By that time it was June, 1944, and the Russians were really marching with great speed forward. I don't know if that was the reason. Anyway, they didn't...

HG: They didn't.

BF: No, we didn't have any tattoos. As they registered us, they asked everybody what kind of profession he has, what kind of trade he has, or so on. Since my father, my brother and I were always working in the shoe shop, we registered as shoemakers. And so we wound up in the shoe shop. But, as a gag, or maybe as a way of making people, deprive people, and make fun of them...

HG: Demeaning them.

BF: …demeaning them, they asked for writers, bookkeepers, engineers, and so on, in other words, people, white collar workers who were proficient in some languages and so on, and since we came from industrial area, we had a lot of engineers and a lot of white collar workers, who worked in the oil industry in the offices, they thought that that would be something they would get such kind of jobs. And they registered for it. Within a few minutes they brought out a truck full of big brooms with big handles. And they said, "Okay,

all your professional that just registered, bookkeepers and so on, here are your Pelicans." Pelicans was the name of our pen, a very famous pen in Europe. He said, "Well, here are your Pelicans." And they put them to work to clean up the camp. That was the first greeting. We stepped out, and we were put into the shop. And we were put into a shop with about 1,200 shoemakers. They were working for the Wehrmacht, for the German army, making all kinds of boots, shoes. I was put in there with my father and my brother. I was working at the same bench as my father did, and my brother, since he was an upper maker--he was making the upper part of shoes--he was just working maybe a few, 50-100 feet away from me, but still in the same building. Generally, conditions in Plaszow, especially for us, were not so horrendous. But...

HG: Did you have food regularly?

BF: We had, they gave us food, but that food, it wasn't enough, but you couldn't starve on it. That was in Plaszow.

HG: What did they give you? What was the food like?

BF: They gave us...

HG: For breakfast.

BF: For breakfast they gave us a little black coffee. It wasn't coffee, it was a *Ersatz* [substitute] what they call.

HG: Right.

BF: And they gave us a piece of bread, maybe I would say a half a pound of bread, a piece of marmalade, that was in the morning. Noontime they gave us soup, more bread, in the evening they gave us again soup and sometimes twice a week a piece of like sausage.

HG: Meat.

BF: Meat. Yes. But it was like sausage. A piece.

HG: Yeah.

BF: That was it. But mainly, in Plaszow, in concentration camp, although it was a concentration camp, we had in a way indirectly a contact with the outside. So everything had its price. You could buy, there was money in the camp, and for money you could buy practically anything.

HG: You mean the people...

BF: The peop-...

HG: …still had money in spite of their clothes being taken away?

BF: No, let's say, we were working in the shoe shop. There was enough leathers and so on that we could get some and make a pair of boots and sell these boots. Now, you ask, who did we sell it to? There were people, let's say, who were bringing in white *kalk* [lime]. Let's say, they were going on the outside, because in camp that wasn't available. And since we had to build something in camp or so on, they were bringing in material from the outside. At the same time they were taking things out of the camp. So they smuggled in eggs, sugar, butter, cheese and so on, and everything had a price in camp. So as long as we were in Poland, because the camp was in Poland, in Krakow, was just, within, a hands stretch, practically. If you could jump the wires through, in five minutes you would've been inside the city…

HG: Krakow.

BF: In Krakow. That was on the outskirts of Krakow. So there was a [unclear] and beside that there was some commandos what they called, some groups of people that went into Krakow to work. So somehow there was a contact, and they used to bring something in. Of course, if somebody caught them, they would have been punished, but I think mostly the German guards were bright, and they cooperated with that, because there couldn't be such a great quantities of that food available for a price. But they were bright and things for those who at least had something to exchange, like, let's say, we were able to make boots and sell them, to take some shoes and sell them. And they were, that was an expensive commodity. So we called it organizing. You organize something and this way you had it a lot better than the average prisoner. While I was in Plaszow, one day they brought in 12,000 Polish people. They surrounded them while they were watching a soccer game.

HG: Just Polish citizens?

BF: Polish citizens. Among them were letter carriers in their uniforms, there were railroad conductors, and they had special uniforms, and so on. Whoever was, the entire soccer...

HG: Audience.

BF: …audience that was there, the soccer stadium was surrounded by the SS, and they brought them into the camp.

HG: And these were, they, they were a lot of Gentiles?

BF: Only Gentiles! There were no Jews. That's why, what I want to bring out that episode. Why I wanna say that, that all the time the Polish people [unclear].

HG: Yeah.

BF: The Polish people used to say to them, to us, "Why do you go like lambs? Why don't you make a revolution, like, why don't you jump the wires and run out of camp, whoever will run away will run away but here they'll kill you anyway." So that episode sticks in my mind. Because here they brought 12,000 people that were Polish citizens, that in a way cooperated with the German authorities, that felt that they are safe there. Some of them not only cooperated but were really like on the side of the German. They were really collaborating with the Germans, not only cooperating. The excuse was that two Germans were killed during the night in one of the sections of Krakow, and this way they wanted to pay retribution to the...

HG: To punish.

BF: …to the, to the Polish people, why they did it. They wanted to show them that the German life is dear, and they're gonna pay dearly for it. The truth of the matter was that they shot two Polish people, they put them on in German uniforms, and they let them lay till the morning in the street. And then that gave them that excuse to go and teach the Polish people lessons. When they brought them into camp, and they were just surrounded by a wire fence about six feet high, away from us, but they started talking to us and we started asking them, "How come they brought you here?" And, "Why are you here?" And you could see, as they were checking their documents and so on, some of them that for just no reason at all there was a special place in the camp on top of a hill that they called *Hooyava* [phonetic]

gora, that means, *hooyava,* mountain, that hill. In the area of that hill every day they were shooting people to death, and at the same time, there was always a fire burning. They had no crematorium in that camp, but there was a fire burning, and this way they were burning the bodies and disposing of them. And that was going on 24 hours a day. When they brought these 12,000 Polish people, every 15 or 20 minutes they took 20 or 25 of them, took them up to that hill, and you could hear the machine guns working, and they disposed of them. Here the rest of them were trembling, maybe 500 yards away, and it was within eyesight, so you could see, and you could hear, and we asked them, "What are you waiting here for? All you have to do is jump these wires. The minute you are on the other side, you still have your documents with you. They won't kill all 12,000. They'll kill 1,000 of you, but 11,000 can run away! Once you're on the other side of the fence you are at home. Why don't you jump the wires? Why don't? To us, I say, even if I escape from here, it's you who would catch me and denounce me and hand me over to the Germans. So for us it's much tougher to survive on the side, but you all you have to do is just get across that wire fence and you are free."

HG: And they had their papers.

BF: They still had their documents. They were not registered yet, because they took them like, when they took them with trucks, they brought them in, and there are 12,000 were in a little perimeter just surrounded by barbed wire, and then they started registering them. Some were executed, some were released, and some were kept in camp, and for no reason whatsoever. If they didn't like somebody's face they executed. If some, one of them didn't have a good document that he is working, employed somewhere, let's say in a vital industry, in a war industry or so on, he was shot, and so on. So they shot that day about 1,200 to 1,500. About 2,000 or 3,000 were retained in camp. A lot of them were released, and this was going on for three, four days till they finally disposed of the unwanted ones, whom they killed. Of those who had, let's say relatives on the outside who intervened for them, that had a little pull with the Germans on the outside, those were released. Some of them were bought out ransom, for ransom. Like some people had money and that. And they bribed some German official. He came, he said, "This is my employee, let him go." And so on.

HG: Very systematic.

BF: It was, it was just like you could, you were just buying human lives, interchanging. And it was amazing, especially to us, because all the time they said, "Oh, if it ever comes to us, we will fight, we will die. We will die with our boots on." Yes, they died with their boots on, on top of that hill. But there was no resistance whatsoever. And yet, they were just a stone's throw away from their own homes. That's what power does. Yet the same people were taunting us constantly, "Why don't you remove? Why don't you escape? Why don't you do something?" And yet those were the people that when they saw a Jewish child on a street, the Germans couldn't recognize them. It was they who recognized them, caught him, and hand over the Jewish child to the German, or too a, let's say, a Jewish man or a Jewish woman, they were the ones who really handed them over, because the Germans themselves could not make out, could not recognize us as well as the Polish or the Ukrainian people did. So that was my first experience in Plaszow. We were there for seven weeks.

Then one day they started calling reveille, and there were trains standing, and they started evacuating us, because the Russians were coming closer. Although they took us like 300 miles from my home town only seven weeks ago, this time the Russians were almost close again, and they said they have to take us out.

HG: Did they tell you where they were going to take you to?

BF: No, they never told us anything. They were just loading us on trains. It so happened that when they started taking the transports, first they started taking women away. And as we were standing, and the women from our town, especially from the camp in Drohobycz and Boryslaw, started running away. They did not want to go, and started running into the barracks and hide. And that was something that never seen or unheard of, in a concentration camp, not to follow orders? Where they stood all around with machine guns? So, the SS guards started pulling their guns and shooting, but the women didn't heed their commands. They just kept running away. So the guards from the towers started shooting. And it almost worked very well. And a lot...

HG: Did they follow them into the barracks?

BF: They followed them into the barracks. They started pulling them out, and the women were screaming and fighting back.

HG: But they weren't shooting?

BF: No, they were just, at first, when they were running they shot a few while they were running.

HG: Right.

BF: But then they ran back into the camp, into the barracks, and a lot of them hid. A lot of them didn't walk back, and brought them under gun and so on and put them on the trains. By the time we reached the train, that was in the morning, by the time we reached our next camp, we stood a whole day outside. And they didn't give us no food, nothing whatsoever. It was already dark.

HG: 12,000, or, how many shoemakers were there did you say?

BF: No, that, only shoemakers were 1,200.

HG: 1,200.

BF: Yes.

HG: Did they take them all?

BF: They took the whole camp. They were liquidating the camp. And in camp there were 40,000 people.

HG: Right.

BF: And they were leading us to the trains, and the trains we were loaded again 100 people to a...

HG: In a car.

BF: …in a car. Before I reached the train, an SS guard called me away to hold, like a long bench, because there was a high embankment, and the train, it was just built. And there was gravel and sand just put on. And as we started running on, the gravel used to roll off and it was very steep, and it was very hard to get on top...

HG: To the train.

BF: …to the train. At that moment they brought a bench. But since it wasn't parallel, in one side it was high and one side was lower, he was looking for tall young people, and he pulled me out, he pulled me out of my group where I stood with my father and my brother, and made me hold...

HG: The bench.

BF: …the bench. And I was holding like this above my head, where on the other side it was just, one man was holding it on the ground, and I had to hold it that high in order for people...

HG: Over, over your head.

BF: …over my head. And naturally, holding a bench like this that people stepped on, it was very, very tiresome, and it was, it was gruesome.

HG: And people…

BF: And people...

HG: …were walking on this bench to get into the train?

BF: …people were, yes, they were.

HG: To climb into the train.

BF: To climb into the train. Now, why did he take me out? He noticed that I have a pair of good boots. While working in the shoe shop, I made myself a pair of good boots, because I figured, wherever I'll go, shoes are the most important thing. If you had a good pair of shoes, you were not so injured, so badly, in your feet or in your legs. If you didn't have good shoes, that meant instant death. He noticed my boots, and he says to me, "C'mon, pull off the boots." So he pulled another prisoner, let him hold the bench where I am, and he pushed me back into the, took off my boots. I tried to plead with him and show him. I purposefully put half soles on top, it should show that these were repaired, that they are not new, but that was just some extra there. They were very well made and a very good material, and when I started pleading with him, he just took off the rifle, and he wanted to hit me with the butt of the rifle. That was one thing that I always watched out, not to get hit on the head. I pulled off the boots and I gave him. And now I was barefoot.

HG: Did he give you his?

BF: Nothing. He didn't give me nothing. He just took the boots away. What? We were going on transport. What? Will I go and squeal on him? The train, it was leaving in a, let's say in a half an hour, and who would dare to squeal on him, he would kill you. I was lucky that he didn't kill me. Now I went back into the group that I was standing with, and he noticed that it's almost impossible to climb up that hill. It's not that it was so steep or so, but as we started climbing, it was fresh gravel that was put on, and it was rolling from under your feet, and you were sliding down. And they were standing there and just killing people left and right. There were two of them standing with like two by fours, and just, when he gave a command, a sign with his...

HG: With his hand?

BF: Not with his hand, with that stick that he was hitting. He had a two by four, and about four or five feet long, and with this he gave the command. So, two rows of fives, ten people had to move up. And I figured that my father would now be a problem, because...

HG: He wouldn't be able to make it.

BF: …he w-, he wouldn't make it. It would be very difficult. So I am a, now saw that I stood the first one on the line on the left side, my father next to me, my brother next, and I, you know, we talked among ourselves. I said, "When we get up the hill, first of all, we'll run up and then pull Father up. He shouldn't be beaten up." As our next approach, and we are the first five standing, naturally they were hitting people left and right and people had all kind of things that they were trying to take along with them. Some had some food, some had some clothing, and you know, they had like little packages. And there was a package in the newspaper wrapped up and with a string tied up. And that guard, the SS guard went over to it, touched it with his stick, and he says, "Uh huh. *Speck*." *Speck* means ham, like...

HG: Meat.

BF: …meat, yeah. But it's really bacon. That's the interpretation of the word *Speck*. And he points to me. And he asks, me, "*Willst du Speck haben?*--do you want the bacon?" I knew immediately that whatever I'll say...

HG: Was wrong.

BF: …was wrong, and I'll take a beating. And somehow, automatically, I choked up and I couldn't get a word. Now, as we stood, and there was my father's friend, who was also a shoemaker and who served in the army with my father in the Austrian army, and he knew that we will try to pull up Father, so he stood one row behind us and he changed with somebody, and he wound up that he stood next to me, and then Father and then my brother. Now we had to pull up two older men. And as I choke up and I couldn't get my voice out, and I just, I, I don't know, I couldn't get a word out. I don't know, I didn't know what to say.

Tape five, side one:

HG: This is tape five, side one, of Bernie Freilich's story, and this is Helen Grossman taping. Go ahead.

BF: Well, as I climbed up, I couldn't get a word out. He asked the guy next, which was my father's friend from way back. And he used to work for us as a shoemaker. And he asked him, "Do you want the bacon?" He replied, "Yes, I would be grateful." He says, "Then go and get it." As be bent down to pick up the package, he just started hitting him over the head with that two by four that the man was half dead. At the same moment, the other guy gave a signal, "Go." And ten of us had to go up...

HG: To the car.

BF: …to the car.

HG: To the train.

BF: To the train, which was brutal. It was almost impossible. But with all that energy that I saw here, and with all that that I was so scared, and I saw what the man got that was really for me. It just, that I don't know, by what miracle I climbed up and I didn't say a word, but he asked him. This way he beat him. The man was lying there, all in blood and so on, and we jumped the train, the…

HG: Got in.

BF: …the embankment. I don't know at that I made it first up. I had no shoes, maybe that was easier for me. So with the toes I was grabbing on and not sliding back. I was the first one up, I pulled my father, and my brother was pushing him from the back, and he made it up. As he made it up, getting into the train was already, you had to make the embankment, getting into the train was already child's play. We got into the train, but naturally, I had no shoes, and my toes were bleeding from the gravel. Here I said to myself, "I always wanted to grow, and I made these boots especially for that reason, to have a pair of good boots. If I come to a strange place in a concentration camp somewhere or so on, and here I'm bleeding. My feet are all bruised on the bottom and I have no shoes. Well, in the train, somebody had a pair of...

HG: What happened to the man?

BF: The man was half dead when they took him into the train. They just picked him up...

HG: They did get him on the train.

BF: They got him into the train, yes, but he was half dead. He couldn't survive that. I have...

HG: From the beating.

BF: From the beating I have never seen. And he was a close friend of ours. They took us to Austria to concentration camp Mauthausen.

HG: How long a trip?

BF: Four days and four nights.

HG: What was the name of the next camp?

BF: Mauthausen. M-A-U-T-H-A-U-S-E-N.

HG: Where, did you say, Austria?

BF: Austria. Yes. After four days and four nights without food, without toilet facilities, without nothing, and it happened to be a great heat wave. That was the end of August. Like the third week of August. It was brutal. The train stopped here and there, but it was like in Germany, little towns and so on, and nobody there to even approach us. We were pleading with people.

HG: For water.

BF: Bring us for water and so on. At one place the SS guard that was guarding the train, and they were coming with us, they were riding on the train, and we were pleading, "Please, give us some water, give us some water." So he asked, "Do you have something valuable?" And I had some Polish money, and I knew that to us in Austria it won't mean nothing. I had a stack of money and I just handed to him. And I figured, he'll take the money anyway, he wouldn't bring us nothing. It turned out that he brought us like the soldiers had a little...

HG: Container.

BF: …container, *menashkem* [phonetic] bowl.

HG: Like a flask.

BF: Like a flask, yeah. No, no. Really a kind of...

HG: Like metal.

BF: …a half-round container that they carried on their belt. He filled up with water and he handed it to us. I was amazed that he did that. That was maybe on the third day when we were going. And I didn't get a sip of that water. We first gave it to my father, and naturally to some older people that were with us and so on, and altogether there was about a half a quart, maybe a three-quarters of a quart of that water. It was horrible. After four days we arrived in Mauthausen. And now Mauthausen, the station, was about six km, which is like four miles, from the camp. Now we had to march in columns. And you could see, like in the ancient, in the Greece, not, like in Middle Ages, but a castle was built on the top of a hill. You could just see towers there. And we were marching around that mountain, around, till we finally made it to the top, and that was like one of the biggest fortresses that I have ever seen. The walls were like 40 or 50 feet high, and all built from granite. And the prison was builded, they had, in the camp they had...

HG: Then Mauthausen was a, an old prison.

BF: Mauthausen was a concentration camp. And it had, just like, let's say Auschwitz was, in Poland, it had different camps surrounding it. Like five miles away there were a few camps, 10 miles, 20 miles away there were other camps, and they were all affiliated. Mauthausen was the central camp. They brought us in there. After four days and four nights without water, without food, without anything, when they brought us, and we were a transport of about over 5,000 people, and when we made it to, into the camp, they started letting in 250 people at a time into the showers. Well, the mob was just, you know, everybody wanted to get to the showers to get a little water. It was just unbearable. Everybody was crowding and wanted to get in there first. So they started pushing us back, and nobody heeded their command. They started hosing us with water. Well, this created even a greater thing, because everybody wanted to be hosed. By that time it got dark. And maybe the second or the third group was just going in, when suddenly we were picked up

like with a wave, and separated from our father. So we made it with one group into the showers, and my father was left behind. It wasn't like in orderly fashion, where you would stand and go 100 or 200 again and again. It was just like on Times Square on New Year's Eve. Have you ever been there? I have been there. You know, this, this reminded me of, you just had no power or no direction. Wherever the wave carried you that was.

HG: You went.

BF: And the wave carried us into the showers. And in the showers we started looking for our father. He wasn't there. That was during the night. The next morning when they took us out, they put us into different barracks, and they called that now we'll will be for two weeks in quarantine, because could be that we are diseased, or we carry a disease or so on. They wouldn't want us to infect the rest of the camp. That's where the trouble started. We were nude, completely. All you could carry too was a belt.

HG: To hold up what?

BF: They said, "Take your belt with you." That was the only thing that we were allowed to take into the shower. So we had a belt. My brother happened to have my mother's watch. It was a white gold watch, with diamonds set in it. And here, behind the buckle, he pushed it in, without the strap, just the watch in itself, and it was with two big diamonds and a few little diamonds. And he had that in his belt, and as we were going through, now, as we were marching out, the SS guards were controlling us. They looked into our mouth. They looked and they saw all of our teeth. They looked in our ears, and then, you should excuse the expression, they had two sticks and they looked in the rear.

HG: In the rectum.

BF: In the rectum, yeah. I would have thrown it away, to be honest. I wouldn't have wanted the beating or so on if they found, but my brother put the watch here under the buckle of the belt and carried it through like this, and they waved him through. And as we were in the quarantine, my brother tells me, "You know, I managed to carry through the watch." I said, "Why did you do that? They could have killed you! It wasn't worth it." He says, "Well, maybe it will come in handy." As it turned out, my father was put in a different barrack. Being in a different barrack meant a different transport, going to a different camp. And we tried to prevent that. And we were looking for a way somehow to get united with our father. Either we would be transferred to his barrack, or he would be transferred to our barrack. And somebody said--we had a lot of friends from our home town and so on--and as we were talking, they said, "Freilich, do you have something, or so on?" I say, "Look, my father isn't here. All he would want is to get transferred." He says, "Well, there is one guy, he is the *Blockschreiber*. In other words, he is the guy who does all the paper work for the barrack. Talk to him." So me and my brother, we walked over to him and we told him, "We have something of value. Could you do us a favor? Either transfer us to our father's barrack, or transfer our father to our barrack?" So he asked us what we had, and my brother took out the watch and gave it to him.

HG: Your mother's watch.

BF: Yes. And he gave it to him. He says, "Okay, I'll do it." That was it. He never did anything. He took the watch away. We were lucky that he didn't kill us. Because usually, if they were handed something or so on, they did not want anybody, a witness, to

squeal on them or so on, so at night they usually used to take that one and kill, throw him off into the quarry where they were, and that was one of the deepest quarries that I have ever seen in my life.

HG: Did you see people murdered that way, in the quarry?

BF: Dozens of them. Dozens of them.

HG: What did they do? Push them into the quarry?

BF: They pushed them down. And it was like 15, 20 stories high into the quarries where they were taking the stones. And we were taken there to the quarries to carry stone. That was our, twice a day, entertainment. Where we were barefoot, without shoes, just with a belt, and they took us into the quarry to carry stones. Now, one day, I've seen myself, there was a father and a son. And the *Kapo*, which is like a foreman--in camp they called them *Kapo*--that is an Italian name, and the *Kapo* somehow got wise that this is a father and son. And he went over to the son and he said to him, "Take your father and push him down in the quarry." Now, the son was about in the early, maybe 28 or maybe 30, and the father was like in his 50's. The first instant he says, "Oh, no. I won't do it." He says, "You won't? Then I'll make your father throw you down." And you could see the battle going on with him. And he started beating him and so on. So the father, like, went to the end of the quarry, and he said to him, "Come on, push me down! Push me down! Save your life!" He says, "I won't make it anyway. Maybe you'll survive." He was talking to him in Yiddish. And the son just like reached out, and before the son reached out, the father jumped himself, but he made it look...

HG: Like...

BF: …like...

HG: …like the son had pushed him.

BF: …like the son had pushed him. Well, the son then, he was badly beaten up and so on, and when he saw the father jump he just looked around and just dove after his father, and they both died. That was one of the most gruesome scenes that I have seen, and that was in the first day of Mauthausen. Now they brought us the quarantine. In the morning they chased us out. And since we were on top of the mountain when the sun was coming out, it was coming out way down there, and just the shadow of the walls around it, the sun didn't hit us till about 11:30, 12:00. So it was so cold.

HG: When it was directly overhead.

BF: And then it was directly overhead and it was burning like fire, and there was no place where to hide. The bathrooms were closed. You had, in the bathrooms or in the toilet there was water running, but during the day they didn't let you in there. So you had to stay all day there without going anyplace. And if somebody had to go, from the towers the watchmen used to shoot if somebody couldn't hold it any longer. This was hell on earth. They held us there for two weeks. Now at night they used to cramp us in into large rooms. There was nothing. Just a floor.

HG: A barrack.

BF: No, it was like a barrack but a stone barrack. They were brick or stone, and they were--they were well-built, they were solid.

HG: But no cots or beds or anything.

BF: Nothing. There was nothing, just a floor, and the floor was made out like tile. And they laid us down sideways like sardines, head to toe. Head to toe, but not like this, but on our side. And the guards, the *Kapos* used to stand up top and beat you with rubber hoses or with sticks, "Tighten up, tighter, tighter, tighter." So they put them maybe 1,000 people into a room. The room was maybe 50' x 50', but 1,000 people to one room. You couldn't turn, not that, you could hardly breathe. Now was the time that they opened up the toilets, that they opened up the washroom. It was going, but they put the lights out in the room. So if you wanted to get up and go to the bathroom, you had to step over hundreds of bodies. Well, I couldn't hold any longer, I tried to make my way to the bathroom. I stepped over people. Some were pinching me. Some were hitting me. Some were, it wasn't, I made it to the bathroom. Now I couldn't get back to the barracks. And if you were outside the barracks, the guards were shooting. You could only go to the bathroom and back to the barrack. I made my way to the bathroom. I washed myself, I drowned myself full of water as I could. The time came, I had to go back to the barracks. It was impossible. Beside everything, it was dark in the barrack, and you had to tread over hum-, bodies.

HG: Walk over bodies

BF: Walk over bodies. It was impossible. Finally I called my brother by name, and he heard me, and I, to learn the direction and which one to go. Well, I was again pinched and hit and hurted, but I made my way back. Next night I did not go any more, because it meant stepping on somebody's throat, on somebody's face, on somebody's belly, on somebody's arm, and injuring people. And it meant injury to myself, too. My legs were just ripped apart, they were bleeding from the pinching, from the scratching, that the people were scratching. For lunch they gave us soup. So they gave us, the first potatoes just came out, it was like August. And the young potatoes came out and they had fresh *Kraut* [cabbage]. And they made *Kraut* and potatoes, but they made it purposefully so salty that it was impossible to eat. Now we started eating that. You couldn't, because water wasn't available, so you stopped eating, because we knew you, you gonna eat that salty food you're gonna just die from thirst.

HG: Was there a breakfast?

BF: In the morning they gave us like a little coffee.

HG: Right.

BF: Or *Ersatz* coffee. But that was for lunch. So they were giving you a quart of soup, and it was really dense. There were whole potatoes with a lot of *Kraut*, and it looked nourishing. But on purpose they made it so salty you couldn't put it in your mouth. If you ate a little bit, you needed quarts of water, gallons of water to wash it down.

HG: A form of torture.

BF: That was a form of torture. That was done on purpose. So, "Ah, hah," they said, "*Die vollgefressenen Juden*, these obese Jews, they don't want to eat this soup, we'll show you." The next day they were not giving us with the quart, they had like on a stick a quart measurement and that way they, they gave us with that what they gave us the coffee. So it was like the size of a glass on a stick. And when they dipped that into the soup, three quarters of the soup stuck to the glass, and you only got maybe two spoons full. They said, "Ah hah. We gave you. You didn't want to eat. Okay. We're gonna see how smart you are.

You'll outsmart yourselves." So, in the next couple of days, naturally we got hungrier and hungrier and hungrier, and they gave us with the thing that they were supposed to scoop up and dole out coffee, or, a beverage whatever it was. They were giving us the soup, but three-quarters of it got stuck in...

HG: In the glass.

BF: …in that container, and never made it into the thing. So, these two weeks were hell on earth. We could not wait to get out, to go to a camp, to a work camp, would be already like, get-, seeing life again, because that was the greatest torture you could ever see. The sun was burning you, especially, I was always light complected. My brother wasn't bothered. He is dark complected. I was light, and I was red as a lobster. The skin was peeling, I had blisters. In the morning, till the sun came up, till 11:00, 11:30, we were freezing, standing there nude, and just walking around, and there were just stones. Everything was just stones. One day one of the boys from our town--this is a story in itself, but I'm not going to go into-- he was a student. His mother was a very high official, and she was working in the office from the oil industry. She was a beautiful woman, and before the war a Polish prince was in love with her. She had a lot of acquaintances and a lot of friends among Polish people, because she was married to a very wealthy man who had his own oil wells and so on, but she was divorced from him. And she had that son. The son was about two years older than I, but about a year and a half younger than my brother. And he was a student. He was going to *Gymnasium*. She tried to help him to survive, so she persuaded one of her friends, which was a Ukrainian professor, and he came out, came out to there, and made a disclosure to the Gestapo that this boy is his son. That he is, he fathered that son, and being this, he was only a half a Jew, and there was a special statute in the law that said, anybody who is only a half a Jew could be living as a free man in the city, but he had to have a special pass from the Gestapo. And every month he had to go and register with the Gestapo. So they took him out of camp, and he lived as a free man by himself, although the mother was in camp with us. But, when the Russians were advancing and the mother saw that they're gonna take us away and so on, she ran away and hid, and I told you in the former episode with the rabbi of our town, and with his son that is today in Connecticut, she was...

HG: In the forest?

BF: No, she was hidden in one of the bunkers that the Ger-, a German that was the commander of the *Judeneinsatz*, of the Jewish *Zwangsarbeit*, that means the Jews that were put to labor, to forced labor, he was the head of that office. He was ver-, became very friendly with our rabbi's son, and after working for him for two, three years, he persuaded him to build a bunker under his house. He made it in the garden, and there were 20 some people hidden.

HG: You mentioned that...

BF: Yes, I mentioned...

HG: …in the last tape.

BF: Yes, I mentioned.

HG: And the bunker.

BF: Yes, I mentioned that, but now I'm mentioning about the son. Her son, when she was running away, she was afraid that now they'll go after her son, so she took her son

into hiding with herself. When they discovered that bunker because somebody squealed on them, they threw them into camp again, and they brought him into Boryslaw. And now, since he went with his mother, that means that he denounced his non-, half-non-Jewish part, but he was with the Jewish part. Now they threw him into camp, and they took him to Plaszow with us, and then to Mauthausen. Now while, in Mauthausen as we were walking around nude, he picked up a little harmonica, in the stones, like hidden, and he tried like to play it. And it wasn't playing. And my brother stood next to him and said to him, "Suchastov, what do you have there?" He said, "I just picked up a harmonica." He says, "Let me see it." And my brother just asked him, "Where did you get it?" He said, "It was hidden here in the stones." And my brother said, "Hidden? There must be something." And he looks in the harmonica, tries to play it, it wasn't playing. He looks inside, he saw white cotton stuffed in. He tried to pry it open, and he couldn't. And I was maybe ten, fifteen yards away, you know, I was just looking for shade, not to get...

HG: Burned.

BF: …sun, burned in the sun. And I'm here and there were you know thousands of people. People are people, you know, like, you see in a camp, it wasn't. But I heard my brother calling, "Unio. Unio." That was, you know, there were two in our town by that name. The other guy wasn't there. So I knew when I heard my brother's voice, I said, "Yeah, what is it?" He says, "Come over here, I have to show you something." And he knew that I was handy, I was working with metal, I was working in technical high school in shop. I was working a year and a half before in a metal shop and so on, so he says, "There is something inside. How can we pry it open?" So I said, "Give me your buckle. You have a metal buckle." It was too, too wide. We couldn't. With this also. So I took a stone, and I just started knocking a stone against a stone and chipped off a thin piece, and I pried it open, and inside there were two bubbles of cotton. We unraveled the cotton, there were two diamonds. One was as big as my big nail. The other one was like my small one. That one must have been seven or eight carats. The other one was about two-and-a-half. Now we were already through search. They didn't search us no more. We were already in quarantine. Whatever you had then, it was yours. So my brother says to him, "Now you found it. Here's the bigger stone. Hide it. Hide it in your belt." And he took the smaller stone and he hid it...

HG: Hid it in his buckle.

BF: …in his belt, in his buckle where he had mother's watch. And we are talking to him, and why did I bring out that he is a student? He was going to school. He was a student, he was going to *Gymnasium*, but, a nickname for someone who was a mamma's boy, and he was a timid boy and you know, not streetwise and so on. He was a very intelligent boy, but really, he wasn't streetwise, and he was never exposed to camp life and so on. He'd had it easy. His mother always paid his way for him. So we told him, "Remember, don't be a student," because that was a nickname for somebody who was, like here would say, mamma's boy. We used to say, "Oh, he is a *Student*." And we told him, "Remember, don't sell that cheaply. Don't give it away like Esau sold for a porridge, his…"

HG: His robe.

BF: No, no, to Jacob, he sold his *b'choireh* [birthright], let's say the firstborn son.

HG: Yeah. His title?

BF: His title, yeah. We told him, "Don't sell that cheaply. Don't sell it for a bowl of soup or for a piece of bread. If you ever get to a camp or so on, even if you have to starve, just try to get an easier job, somewhere where you can get something easier, at work, that the work wouldn't kill you. Because from hunger, somehow you will not, because in the working camp, in the concentration camps where they work you hard, they give you enough food to survive." There wasn't an abundance, but there was just about to carry you, you should be able to do the job. If you couldn't do the job, they killed you many ways. Two days later they separated us. My father was taken away to a different camp. We didn't know where. We were taken away to a different camp. And that Suchastov, although he was in our barrack, he was taken away to a different camp. Now they took us like five miles away to a...

HG: Did they march you?

BF: Yes.

HG: Yeah.

BF: And that was a camp called Gusen, G-U-S-E-N II.

HG: I have it.

BF: Gusen II.

HG: And that's a camp.

BF: That was a camp. But a horrible camp. There, when we came in, we encountered the first transport of Hungarian Jews, men, because I have encountered women in Plaszow, but I didn't see no…

Tape five, side two:

HG: This is Bernie Freilich. This is tape five, the second side, and it's in Gusen Camp II. Go ahead.

BF: As we were marching into Gusen--there were two camps--one was Gusen I--as we marched through that camp, that camp was an old camp that means, a camp that was already well-established, had all the facilities, and it was half-way decent there. But the camp was mostly inhabited by *Polaks*, Polish political prisoners, or let's say for anything, if somebody committed any kind of crime, steal something or anything, in Poland they used to send them to a camp. And that's the way, that camp was under supervision, let's say the best, the *Kapos*, and the block leaders or the *blockschreibers*, which were the ones who were doing the...

HG: Doing the writing

BF: …paperwork, were mostly *Polaks*. And when they saw us marching in, and they started talking to us in Polish, there were some, a few wise guys from us, and they made some wisecracks and so on, and somebody from, especially the people from Krakow, one of the boys said something fresh, and they were standing like two stories higher, and we were marching in here, and they would go, "Hey!" Like, "Hey, you!" They mentioned [unclear].

HG: Translate.

BF: "Hey, you Jew, Jew boys! Here you're gonna work in the sweat of your, in the sweat of your, on the sweat of your bread for a piece of head." Instead of in the sweat from your heart from, of your brow for a piece of bread. They twisted it around. And they started pelting us with rocks from the top. Right there and then there must have been 20 or 30 people badly injured and some killed, by rocks. They had rocks from the quarries that they had right there, and they were just dumping it on us. And it didn't mean a thing. The Jew was the lowest of the low. Anybody could do anything to Jews. We marched through that camp. They held us there for about two hours and then they marched us into Gusen II. Gusen II was a camp that was just building. The camp was maybe then, it wasn't even a year. There were like six or seven barracks. The facilities were very, very poor. The organizing of the camp was very, very poor, and, like I said, we encountered the first Hungarian Jews. As we started asking them, "What are you doing here?" They said, "Don't ask. We are here, we came a group of 1,800, and within two weeks there was 420 of us." That's how it dwindled down. The death ratio was just unbelievable. The main thing of the camp was that they were taking prisoners to build tunnels into the mountains to make them bombproof, so the Americans or the British could not destroy the German war industry. So they dug deep, like two, three miles into a mountain and built tunnels, and then the *Messerschmitt*-, or the *Steyr Werke*, those were the main industries in Austria, they were building airplanes or armament. So they wanted to have facilities where the Allies couldn't bomb them out. That's where they used those prisoners for building those. Now we were assigned to those tunnels to build. As you got into a tunnel, building it, as you got, let's say, 500 feet or 1,000 feet into the mountain, there was no air. They did not bring in air. The air, as, the deeper you got into the mountain...

HG: The less air.

BF: …the less air. When they were finished, they were pumping air in for the people there, but that had already the shops set up, the machinery, those were working. But we were just the slaves that were building it. So as you were walking in there, the deeper you got, you got woozy, we got light-headed, and used to fall. Beside that, there was a little railroad that they had, and on those railroad things we were standing, and the, it, like steam power things. We were digging and splitting up the...

HG: With power tools.

BF: …with power tools, yes. And as we were there, you were shaking and your feet were falling out, and it was just unbelievable. And then, sometimes you fell with a drill in your hand, because you got dizzy, you couldn't, you had no oxygen there. The water was just unbelievable. We took a drink of the water, you immediately had dysentery. People were falling like flies. Since...

HG: That's how they cut the population down.

BF: That's it. That was instead of gassing them or so on. They used their last breath out of them, and then they killed them and that was it. If somebody couldn't work no more, then they killed them.

HG: They shot them.

BF: No, shooting would be too expensive. They hit them with a hammer over the head, head down into a pail of water, drowned them, and then they took them to, with the truck to Mauthausen to burn. There was a crematorium.

HG: At Mauthausen.

BF: At Mauthausen. Since I was considered tall and so was my brother, and let's say, in order to build the tunnel you had to bring in beams to support it, so they took four or five men to carry a beam that weighed a half a ton. They were just unbelievable. I was always either in the front or in the back, and so was my brother. And they gave us two or three people that were five, six inches shorter. They couldn't even reach with their shoulder the thing. We saw that this is the end of us, that, that work there, the rate, the tracks, you know, small railroad tracks, and the beams across, and it was dark, it was poorly lit, you had a bulb maybe every 100 feet or so on, and it was so dark that...

HG: You couldn't see.

BF: …you couldn't see where you were going. And most of the people either stumbled or so on, sometimes the beam fell and it fell on top of the people. It was, that was the end. So we were looking for a way, somehow, so we were talking, I was talking to my brother and I said, "What's the use keeping the diamond? We're not gonna make it here. We have to look for a way out." So, since we came in a group with our people that came to Plaszow, and then from Plaszow, in Plaszow most of our people survived, we came to Mauthausen, and there we were only two weeks, so some of our people got to, like a softer job. What was a softer job? Let's say, in the barracks, they needed what they called *Stubendienst*. In other words, somebody who kept the barracks clean. So one of, he wasn't really my friend, he was much older, but he belonged to the same organization that I belonged to, the Zionist organization, and he was one of its leaders. And he knew that we always had some valuables or some money, so he approached us, and he says, "Freilich, do you have something? Do you have something of value that you managed to get something

through?" So we look at him and I say, "So, what, what can you do for us? What? Give me another kettle, another soup, a bowl of soup or another piece of bread? This is not what we are looking to do." "What are you looking for?" I say, "If we could get into the shoe shop. That would be…"

HG: To work.

BF: Yeah. Into the shoe shop. So he asked us, "Well, what do you have?" We knew that we could trust that guy, because he was really a neighbor. We grew up together in the same organization, and he was a leader of that organization, and I knew I could trust him. So I told him, "Manu, we have a diamond. But we don't want food for it. We don't want anything else. We want one thing. If you have some possibilities to get us into the shoe shop, we would gladly give this away." So he said, "Let me try." And he went over to the block leader and he told him, he says, "I have here two brothers from my home town. And they have a diamond. They are good shoemakers. They would give it to you if you could give them a job in the shoe shop." Now, the block leader, who was he? He was 15 years in jail, in jail for murder, and he became, you know, through the ranks of the prison, later on they threw him in concentration camp, and naturally he did their dirty work pretty good and he became block leader. Now, he comes over...

HG: Was this a Jew?

BF: No, German.

HG: Oh, a German.

BF: A German. Yeah. A Jew couldn't, didn't have a high position there. That, our rabbi's son became there a *Blockschreiber*, which was the highest rank that any Jew...

HG: Anybody could have.

BF: …could have in that camp. But he was an extra talented guy, unbelievable. But, now, that *Blockälteste*...

HG: Leader.

BF: …comes over to me and grabs me by the arm, and says, "Are you Freilich?" I said, "Yes." He says, "You have a diamond." I say, "Yes. My brother has it. I don't have it." So he says, "Where is your brother?" So I call for my brother, you know, and we were like, how far could we be, 10 yards away at the most, it was so cramped. So my brother comes over. And he says, "You have a diamond?" He says, "Yes." He says, "Let's have it." So my brother starts to stall a little bit, you know, on time. He says, "Well, I don't have it with me. I would like you to give us a job in the shoe shop," and so on. He says, "Yes. I'll give you. But where is the diamond?" He says, "Well, I don't have it here. I have it hidden." So he looks at his watch. He had a watch, and only they could have, a block leader or a *Blockschreiber* could have a watch.

HG: Could have a watch.

BF: Nobody else had a watch in camp. But they had, because they had to make the *Appells* [roll call] what they called in time, and so on, reveille, everything, so they had watches. So he holds me by the arm. He says, "You have five minutes. And within five minutes you don't come back, your brother is dead. And then you're gonna be dead." My brother realized that he, there is no playing around with these guys, and he just said, "Okay,

I'm gonna get it." He says, "You have five minutes." In the meantime he holds me by the arm, not to hold me near, but he holds me, you know...

HG: Yeah.

BF: …really strong. Where can you escape? How far can you escape? Up to the wire and there the guard shoots. So I stood there. My brother went, went around the block, you know, from the belt, pulled out the diamond. So he calls him into the barracks, he doesn't want to do that transaction in view of the people. And he calls us into the barrack, and the barrack is empty then. And he says, takes a look, and he was fascinated by it. He said, "Okay." And he calls over one of his, like, they had a little, they used to call them pupils. They had like young boys who were cleaning their shoes...

HG: Boots.

BF: …yes, ironing their shirts and so on. And sometimes they used them as homosexuals.

HG: My.

BF: But they were in prison for so many years they were all mostly homosexuals, and they used these. So he called over his, his little, his pupil, and he says, "Bring me out a bread, and bring me out," it was like a cube of margarine. And he gave us a bread and a cube of margarine. And he went in himself to his room and brought out four portions of salami. There were like four slices of salami, he gave it to us. And he says, "Okay, boys, in meantime you eat." So, what can you do? You're in his power. He can do anything with you, whatever he wants to. So we start eating, and he comes over, and he goes over to the, now to the barrack administrator. And he says, "These two get everything double. They get a double portion of soup every day. They get a double portion of margarine. They get a double portion of whatever it's given out that day, they get double." So, we thank him, but we say, "You know, Herr *Kapo*," no, "Herr *Blockältester*, our main thing is we wanted, we would like to get into the shoe shop." He says, "Yes, I'll do that." And he takes us as we finished...

HG: Eating.

BF: …eating, "Come with me." And he leads us over to the shoe shop. The shoe shop and the tailor shop were together in one barrack. And that was called the *Kleidungskammer*, in other words, the dress up place. And the leader of that was a *Kapo* about that big. He was five feet, but was the biggest murderer in camp. Everybody was afraid of him. He was one of the oldest prisoners there, and he had such authority without belief. Now he went over, and he offered him naturally a price, which in camp, everything was going on cigarettes, I don't know what he offered him, how many cigarettes, he didn't tell him, and he told us, "Don't you dare to say that you gave me a diamond, already." And he offered him, let's say, so many and so many cigarettes.

HG: Right.

BF: Which was the...

HG: The exchange.

BF: …the exchange rate in camp. Everything had its price according to cigarettes. And he offered him a price. He says, "Here you have two young fellows. One is a shoemaker and one is an upper maker. And I heard you always had trouble with

shoemakers and upper makers. Here you have two brothers. They can do a job for you." So naturally he offered him the price, he accepted; now he wanted to check us, if we are shoemakers. So he gives us, he calls over-- why did I mention that there were Hungarian Jews? Because in the shoe shop there were like eight shoemakers, there were eight Jewish shoemakers. They had one upper maker, one upper maker was killed a week before because he broke a needle on the machine. For breaking a needle on the machine they killed you.

HG: Cost you your life.

BF: That cost you your life. Something didn't come out right, the shoemaker blamed the upper maker, the upper maker blamed the shoemaker, he killed a shoemaker and an upper maker. Now he needed an upper maker. And he takes us in. But what did he do? How, you know how wisely they were operating. He chose a 16-year-old kid, and he made him the foreman over these eight shoemakers. Why? Because somebody older would be wiser, wouldn't squeal and so on. The 16-year-old kid, he could blackmail, saw that he was blackmailing everybody, and he was telling him everything that was going on. And we, they were so afraid, and there were people in their 50's, in their 40's, in their 30's, and here we come in. And he calls over, "Gesa," that was the name of the 16-year-old boy, "I want you to give him something to work, and check out that they are good shoemakers. And I'll come back later and I'll check what they did." And he leaves us. That Gesa picks up an old boot, a rubber boot, that was so rotten through and through, that here at the heel it was separated completely.

HG: The heel was separated...

BF: The heel was separated from the top.

HG: …from the upper.

BF: It was rotten through and through. Yeah. And now, there were no tools. You were working with such unbelievable. A hammer, it was like a blacksmith was working with a hammer. Sewing, instead of sewing like with twine, or so, like shoemakers sew, we were sewing there with wire. Now, to sew that with wire, this was so rotten through that this was slicing just like you slice cheese with wire.

HG: It would cut it.

BF: Yeah, it would cut it.

HG: It would cut it.

BF: It was slicing it. And I couldn't do. But when the *Kapo* stood there I started working, working, and when he left, I called over that Gesa, I said, "Please, Gesa, look, I'm a human being and you're a human being. I was lucky enough to get a ticket to get into the shoe shop. A lot of people don't have that luck. I'm a good shoemaker; so is my brother. He's a good upper maker. Please give me something that I can show the *Kapo* that I am a shoemaker. Because what you gave me, it's impossible to do." So he says to me, "You go ahead and do it or I'm going to the *Kapo*." I looked at him and I tried to talk to his conscience. And I said, "Look, Gesa, you are only a couple of weeks away from home, maybe a month ago or six weeks ago you were still home. You don't know what camp life is. You have never experienced camp life. I am already four years, I was in different camps and so on. You see, if you say that to somebody else, not to me, but to some of my friends, that you're gonna call the *Kapo* they would kill you. You know what a squealer means to be

in camp? I'll just pretend I didn't hear it. Because squealing on one another in camp, that's the greatest crime among comrades. We are the same comrades of our misfortune. We try to help each other here. We don't try to destroy each other. I'm not gonna take away your job. Just give me something that I can show that I am a qualified man, that I can do my job." He runs to the door. So I run to the door, stop him, and I say, "Look, let me tell it to you squarely. If you're gonna squeal, that *Kapo*'s gonna kill me tomorrow. If my brother survives, he will kill you. If we both get killed, my friends will kill you. We have a comradery. How do you think we survived four years of camp? Not by squealing. We don't squeal on each other. But a squealer doesn't live in camp. It doesn't work." Finally I got mad, and there was a little opening, like in the attic...

HG: In the ceiling.

BF: …in the ceiling for an attic. I crept that boot, the rubber boot that he gave me, threw it up there, and I pick up a wooden shoe like they all had, that the prisoners had, and brought to fix. And I take that wooden shoe, and I start working on it to fix it. He runs over to me and tries to wrestle the boot out of me, that shoe. So I say, "Look, I don't wanna beat you up. Please, don't make me do it, but I am now fighting for my life." I say, "I have a chance. Why don't you give it to me? I am not gonna do you any harm. You'll still be here, Gesa. You'll still be the same man as before. I'll be one of the eight. I'm not out to harm you. I just wanna save my life. I have a chance. Help me." He doesn't listen. And these Hungarians, [unclear] they start talking to him, "Tzeidel," in Yiddish, "Stop it. Stop it. You don't know who you're talking to. He's gonna squeal." I say, "He is not gonna squeal, because if he's gonna squeal he's not gonna live either. I'll make sure of that. I die, the *Kapo* kills me, my friends kill him. That's the way it goes in camp. If somebody squeals, he has no-" Well, he wants to grab the shoe out of me and I don't let him. He starts fighting with me, I grab-- I didn't wanna hit him in the face or so, make him bloody, or make him a shiner or so on-- I grabbed him, head between my knees and gave him a few dry...

HG: In the ribs.

BF: …in the ribs, and I said, "Look, kid, I don't want to hurt you, but you're not gonna take my life away. I'm gonna fight for it." And I let go of him, and those older shoemakers started coming to me and kissing and, "Please, don't hit him. Please don't do it." So I look around, I say, "You know something? You people are, you made him what he is. He is a kid. A month ago he was home. He doesn't know nothing. And if you let him get away with such blackmail, he's gonna kill any one of you whenever he wants to. You made a monster. Whatever the *Kapo* told him, fine. But you are with him 24 hours a day. Why don't you teach him a little morality?" So they start talking in Hungarian to him. He says, "You see, these *Polaks* have experience. They have been through camp. What do you think, they're gonna be such little, think, you, you gonna, they gonna be blackmailed as easily as you blackmail us? You found those *Polaks*. They're gonna teach you a lesson. They're gonna cut you down to size." And now they, like, give us moral support. And I say, "Look, let's remain friends. Let's forget whatever was, that was nothing. It's almost time now to finish. The *Kapo* will come soon. I'll just show him what I did, and we'll be friends like nothing happened. He saw that not only, you know, he was defeated, but he was losing the support of his own *Landsmen* [compatriots] and so on, and they said, "You see, we

don't,"--one of them was there that said-- "Look, we should have done that from the beginning. Maybe then you wouldn't hold us, like this."

HG: So tight.

BF: Anyway, we finished the job. The *Kapo* came in, took a look, he says, "Okay," he says, "But remember," he says to me and my brother, "Now," he says, "You cannot accuse that the shoemaker is wrong or the upper maker is wrong. You do something wrong and you both go to the crematorium." So we said, "Fine." We finished the job. It was 5:30, 6:00 is reveille. After reveille we are going again to the, to build the tunnels with the railroads, and there, that was Tuesday.

HG: You mean during the day you worked in the shoe shop?

BF: No, no, we didn't, we didn't, we didn't, it had to go through the *Schreibstube*. In other words, the paperwork had to be done before we were transferred. We were working there, and we were still...

HG: In the tunnels.

BF: …in the tunnels. We had to go to that commander. That was Tuesday we were tested. Wednesday nothing. Thursday nothing. Friday nothing. I thought, nothing is gonna happen. And we are even afraid to mention anything, to go to that *Blockälteste* and ask him something, "Hey, you took our diamond, why don't you deliver?" Because he's gonna kill us. So we thought, look, at least he doesn't kill us, we get a double ration every day, so we see that he is holding somehow his bargain. Saturday night we stand at reveille and they call out like people. They call my number and my brother's number, and they say-- they don't call us by name. Now we have number, 87534, 87535 was my number. "87534, 87535, tomorrow you go to the *Kleidungskammer*, to the shoe shop." And that's how we wounded up in the shoe shop. That was our ticket for life. Now we started working in the shoe shop, and from the higher echelons of the camp and so on it started, like, "Look at these well-fed Jews, the *vollgefressenen Juden* they called us. We, first of all, we worked in a warm barrack, because in order to make shoes, it had to be warm, it had to be indoors, otherwise, and there was a stove, we could bake a few potatoes that we somehow organized. We could warm something up. We could make somebody, let's say when a *Kapo* brought something, he gave us an extra ration, a few cigarettes and so on, and we already had something to change into food. And we got our, like I say, this was our ticket for life. And like this it went on for a few weeks. And everything was fine.

HG: By that time it was what year?

BF: It was still 1944. It was the fall of 1944. And then, here and there, a lot of our friends, to be in that camp, the life span, the longest, normally, what they said, was four to six weeks. The strongest man couldn't live longer than six weeks under those conditions. When you were going out to the *Kommandos* in those tunnels, you worked that kind of work, four to six weeks, you could endure no longer. A lot of my friends died, were killed and so on. There were, from malnutrition, and from cold and so on, there were all kinds of sicknesses. And there were like certain kinds of boils that people got.

HG: Infections.

BF: Infections, yes, they called it *Phlegmone*.[7] F-L-G-M-O-N-A. And if somebody got-- that kind of thing, usually it came on the leg, here and here...

HG: In the groin.

BF: …yeah, all under the arm or so on--it was a terrible infection and hardly anybody survived. And out of nowhere, I don't know where from, suddenly I developed a *Phlegmone* like this, and it came right here...

HG: In the groin.

BF: …near the groin. And I tried not to go to the hospital. I went in and we had like a *Lazarett*, which was like a clinic, and there were Spanish doctors, from the Spanish Revolution. They were Communists. They were one of the first ones. They were brought in 1937, '38, or '39. They ran to France when Franco came to power. And when Hitler, in 1940, invaded France and took over France, he-- a lot of these Republicans, what they were called, Spanish Republicans-- the minute he caught them, they shipped them into concentration camps. So in the '40s, like '41, '42, '43, there were thousands of them.

HG: You think they brought the *Phlegmone*?

BF: No, no, no. What I'm trying to bring out, that they were the two doctors in our clinic, and since I was working in the shoe shop, we were already considered like a little bit, higher echelons. We were not…

[7] *Phlegmone* (German) phlegman, a boil inflammation with pus, with infiltration of connective tissue.

Tape six, side one:

HG: This is tape number six, the first side, of Bernie Freilich's story. This is Helen Grossman taping. Go ahead.

BF: So I went into the clinic and there were two Spanish doctors. They tried to help me. They gave me some medication, whatever they could, but after a few days it was getting worse and worse and they told me...

HG: What kind of medication did they have?

BF: …they had very primitive medication. They had, like, *Jodoform* [an antiseptic dressing], which was like a yellow powder, like iodine. They had here and there a few aspirins. They had very, very little. So they told me that my only help, if I want to survive, is to go to Gusen I. There was a hospital. And there maybe they can do something for me. They will try to help me, too, because they were taking the sick prisoners to sick bay, like to the hospital there. I came there...

HG: To Gusen I.

BF: …to Gusen I, to the hospital, and the doctors looked at me and started to look at it, and when he squeezed it, I passed out.

HG: From the pain.

BF: From the pain. There were three Hungarian Jewish doctors. One of them was around 60. One of them was in his 50's, and one was a very young doctor. I don't know even if he was 28. He was a very handsome guy, a strong guy, a good-looking guy, but his behavior towards inmates, that was prisoners, even of his own faith, left a lot to be desired. They took me to the operating room, and the surgeon was a Polish doctor. I noticed that he had the insignia here that he was Polish. Before he started operating, I started talking to him in Polish. And he looks at me, he says, "How do you know Polish?" I say, "I was born in Poland." And I somehow felt that my only chance was maybe to talk to his conscience. And I asked him in Polish, I said, "Doctor, could you please help me? Could you do something for me? I'm 20 years old, and I would still like to survive. I have a brother and I still have a father." Although my father by then was dead but I didn't know. So I said, "I would still like to see them again." So he looked at me and he told me in Polish, he said, "Look, our medication or our equipment here is very primitive. And to tell you the truth, the sentiments here are very, very [unclear]. If you gonna just hang on there and not kick and not yell and not, maybe you'll make it. But if you will not, here a human life doesn't mean a thing. So hang in there." And he took a wooden, a piece of wood like where you, look on the, but a thicker one, and he put it between my teeth. And he said, "Bite in there."

HG: To keep from screaming.

BF: To keep from screaming. And to keep from...

HG: Shaking.

BF: …shaking or kicking or so on. He said, "I'm not gonna tie you. All I can do is just freeze that area a little bit." And he had, took a needle, and he wasn't injecting it. He was just spraying the area, and that was like numbing it. And he started, he took this operating knife, what do you call, a...

HG: [unclear]

BF: …and he started cutting. I just put my hand underneath the operating table, which was also primitive, a metal table. It just, I felt that I am just lifting myself up and was just biting in, and I passed out. And when I woke up, the Hungarian doctor, the young one, was carrying me on his shoulders to the room, to the hospital, like to the, I just came to myself. And I was nude, just here, bandaged, but completely nude. And I asked him, "What happened?" He says, "Just lie still. You were operated on. I'm gonna come later and look at you. Maybe I'll bring you something to quiet your pain a little bit if I'll get a hold of it. But if you want to survive, just don't touch it. Don't try to open the bandages or so on. Just lay there." And he put me in on a bunk, and I had a bunkmate there, also Hungarian Jew, and I just passed out. And for the next 10 to 12 days I was just out. I was just, I had a very high fever. I didn't know where I am. I was just dreaming about my father, that we are running away and that I. All kind of dreams. I cou--, I didn't eat nothing. Even that little bit that they gave us, my bunkmate took everything away. All I asked him is, "Please give me something to drink." So he was giving me the coffee, the *Ersatz* [imitation] coffee and that, he just fed me little by little, little by little, and so on. I woke up, maybe 12 days later. And I tried to sit up. I just didn't have the strength. I was always pale and so on, but I saw that I lost an enormous amount of weight. I didn't eat for two weeks, just a little bit of water, or coffee or something like it. And the pain was excruciating. The doctors used to come and here and there, the Hungarians...

HG: Change the bandages.

BF: …changed the bandages and so on. And after being three weeks, there came a time where they couldn't keep you any longer. They, either you had to go back to the camp as you were...

HG: That you came from.

BF: …that you, yeah, that you are now able to go to work, or otherwise they sent you what they called *Bahnhof*, *Bahnhof* is station.

HG: Meaning.

BF: Like a railway station, going to Mauthausen to the gas chambers and to...

HG: And that was it.

BF: And that was it. So they put me out, like to go back to camp. And there stood the same Polish doctor that operated on me. There were two German doctors. And the report *Führer*, which was like the head of the administration in camp, also SS. And they looked at me. I was as white as a sheet. And I could hardly balance myself. And I saw that they wrote on my papers. And they took me to the next room. And here they put on a number, like they have written down my number, that was the prisoner number, but with ink, heavily, like, with a, here with a...

HG: Right on your chest.

BF: …right on my chest here. That meant that now you are assigned to the transport. That means that you are going to Mauthausen to be annihilated. When I saw this, the Hungarian doctor, the older one, came in, and I begged him. I said, "Please give me a pencil and a piece of paper. I want to write good-bye to my brother." For this you could get killed. Because having a pencil or writing or something like this in camp, that was taboo. He was a little afraid, but I tried to talk to him and I started crying, and I said, "Please, this is

my last wish. Wouldn't you do it for me?" So he looks at me, he says, and he knew my name, and why did he know me? And he knew my name because the Spanish doctors, twice a week, they were bringing sick to sick bay, and those who were supposedly cured they took back to camp. Those Spanish doctors were always coming to me, and my brother always sent me a little package, a piece of salami or something, two pieces of salami, a little bit of margarine, or, you know...

HG: A piece of bread.

BF: …a piece of bread and so on. In the beginning I didn't even know that my brother was even sending the first two weeks. Then I realized, and those Spanish doctors used to come. I was waiting, like tomorrow the Spanish doctor, it was Thursday, and the Spanish doctor would bring in the sick people, and he would come to visit me. He didn't come. He sent one of the like, boys, that were like a under *Kapo*. He sent him in to deliver the package. So I asked the guy, I said, "I would like to speak to the Spanish doctor." He says, "Well, he doesn't have time." I said, "Will you kindly tell him that I want to talk to him?" Well, he walked out. The Spanish doctor didn't come. That was already a bad omen. I saw evidently he tried like to help me and he learned about me, and now he, he doesn't want to face me. He knows this is the end. What is he? This was very, very, depr--, I thought this is the end, so I begged the doctor, and finally he gave me a piece of paper, and I wrote good-bye to my brother and I told him, I said, "This is the end. I have already a number on my chest and I'm assigned to the *Bahnhof*, and I'll probably never see you again." And usually Friday morning-- that was Thursday-- and Friday morning those who were assigned to camp were going back to camp, and those who were assigned to *Bahnhof* were taken to Mauthausen and killed there. They took the ones that were going back to camp, and I gave to one of them. I said, "You give that piece of paper to my brother. He'll reward you. He'll give you food or so." And usually my brother used to get, so he used to give him a few pieces of salami, a few cigarettes, so that he could buy some food for himself. So one of them took it that was released, and he told my brother what happened, that I had the number here and so on. But he doesn't know, the transport did not leave Friday morning. By the time he came to camp it was like Friday noon. But he came and he told my brother that the transport didn't go. So he figured. Saturday usually they wouldn't take. Sunday neither. Monday. Maybe I have time, somehow time is on my side. Maybe some miracle is gonna happen.

HG: Were you feeling any stronger?

BF: I was a little bit, but I was very, you know, I was, I lost a lot of weight. The wound wasn't healed. And the thing what they did this, this you know got me down mentally even more.

HG: With the number on your chest.

BF: Yes. And I was just, you know, I was waiting to be taken, that's all. Saturday morning went by. All right, nothing happened. Sunday I knew they wouldn't take. Now Monday. Quiet. I said, gee whiz, maybe God is on my side. Maybe somehow I'll make it. If my brother will have enough time, he'll somehow work. Well, my brother, that Friday, when that prisoner came back, the one that was in hospital and supposedly well--he was shaky, but--they accepted him to go back to work. He brought my brother the letter and

so on. And my brother ran into the Spanish doctor and he started crying for them. He said, "Look, that's my only brother that I have. Nobody else is alive. Please help me." So they say, "What can we do? Here we can help, but what can we do further?" So they say to him, "Why don't you go to your *Kapo*?" That outfit that we were working for that we made. He says, "He has a lot of power. He can do something." So my brother went over to the *Kapo* and he started crying, and he said, "Look, *Kapo*, if my brother doesn't come, I'm dead, too. Because without him I cannot work. And if he doesn't come back, you don't need me either. So please help me. See what you can do. Save my brother." What he did, how he did it, I don't know. But nothing happened on Wednesday. On Thursday the Spanish doctor comes in, and he comes in himself, and he says to me, "You know, we turned every, every which way. And if there is a chance that one prisoner will get out it, you are the first one." The night before, the Hungarian doctor told me the same thing. He says, "Freilich," usually they knew everybody by number, me, he knew by name, so he says, the old man came over, and says, "Freilich, if there is only one that will get out of this, it will be you." I say to him, "Well, evidently there isn't, so give me another piece of paper and let me write again." He says, "No, this time you're not gonna do it. Your brother has turned every stone and pulled every...

HG: String.

BF: …every string that there was. And I'm telling you, you're going back to camp." I say, "But since you're not so sure and you don't know positively, let me have." He says, "You know what, I'm putting you for Thursday, for tomorrow, back again to, going back to camp. Before the commission again."

HG: Then you were going to Gusen II.

BF: Yeah, yeah, but you had to go through again that commission on Thursday in order to be released on Friday. And when I come in Thursday, and as I walk in, and there is, you know, whatever there was, but there was efficiency, German efficiency, there was my whole record. Everything. And I saw in red, in red ink, "*So fort in die Werkstätte einsetzen*."

HG: Translate.

BF: Means, immediately transfer into the shop. And signed, Commander of Gusen I. These doctors, in that report, the German doctors, and the *Reportführer*, the ones that signed my death certificate only the week before, now look at the paper, and you know, they had a pile of papers. They didn't see now when I came, 87535, he looked, "Uh, huh." And I see in red ink, like a [unclear], "*So fort*," you know, and I just leaned, to. So he asked me, he says, "Where did, which shop do you work in?" I say, "In the shoe shop." So he looks, he was like disappointed. He thought that I was maybe working, you know, in the airplane factory and I was a good mechanic or something, but for a shoemaker? Something like. "*So fort in die Werkstätte*." So I say, "I'm working in the *Kleidungskammer*. I'm a good shoemaker." So he says, "Of course."

HG: Go in.

BF: "Go! You're released!" And he signs my release. Now the doctor is doing me a favor. When I came back, the Hungarian, both doctors, come back and start kissing me. He says, "Well, you came back from the dead." You see, and now he is doing me a favor.

He says, "Those who are being released tomorrow morning he puts right next to the door." The door stood open the whole night. The window stood open the whole night. And I was laying at the lower bunk, uncovered, and it was the second of December, and I was freezing to death. But I thought, this is already worth that I'm going back. That kept me warm. 5:00...

HG: In the morning.

BF: …in the morning. Dark. Pitch dark. They call, "*Ausgänger, geht raus*!" That means, those that are being released to the camp, out. And they chase us out, outside, and there is about three, four inches of snow on the concrete.

HG: No clothes.

BF: Completely barefooted. Nothing. Nude. Not even a belt there. Nothing. And they say, "Go to the *Kleidungskammer*, to the chamber that will give you your clothing." And we are coming there, and there are packages laid out, laundry, our striped jacket, striped pants, and a hat. But they put it out from the laundry wet and it was frozen stiff. And you try to pick it up and it's a piece of ice and you cannot take it apart. And you gently warm it with your hand, it should not rip, because, otherwise, this is your suit. This you have to wear, and if you break the ice it breaks the thing and it's full of holes. So, gently, slowly we stood there and took it apart. And it wasn't, mind you, how warm our bodies were in the snow and so on. And we put that on. We put it on and it started thawing on our bodies. And as we stand there...

HG: Wet.

BF: …it's wet and it's cold and so on. Suddenly we hear a cry, "Transport, out." And all those others that had the numbers on their chest, we were standing here to go to camp, the other ones were going, and they took the transport away. If that didn't come through, I would have been in that transport and I wouldn't be here today. That's how I came back. Now...

HG: Now you're at Gusen II.

BF: Now I'm going, I am walking a mile and a half to Gusen II. Like I said, I was so weak. The wind was turning me over. They gave me a pair of wooden shoes that were torn before I put them on. As I started walking I fell twice, bloodied my knees and my hands, and I come to the camp and they assigned me to a different barrack.

HG: Not to the...

BF: Not to the barrack where I lived before I left camp, before I left for the hospital. Now I know when I am in that different barrack they're gonna give me to a different *Kommando*, to a different job. They don't know that the camp Commander said...

HG: Back to the...

BF: "Back to the shoe shop." And here they watch us like hawks. We come in, and they used to call those who came from sick bay, usually they lived two, three days, and they killed them there, and that was it, because, you know, they were sick. They could hardly walk, and they were only a handicap for [unclear]. Besides that, they had to deliver the quota of dead bodies. So those were the people that they were killing off. And I thought I'll never make it. Finally, and they watch us, they don't let us out of the barracks. I sit there for two, three hours. I'm bloodied. I look, and they called these that were like ready to go,

you know, any day, they called *Muselmann* [German: Muslim, Nazi camp slang for prisoners on edge of death]. That means, you know, you were nothing but a skeleton, a dead body walking, and you lasted a few days. So, the *Muselmanns*, usually they were watching they shouldn't go and steal something. They shouldn't get something or so on. And they wouldn't let them out of the barracks. Finally I go over to one and I say, "I have to go to the bathroom. Will you let me out?" He said, "You'll wait lunch." I said, "No, I. How long can I hold it? Would you rather have me do it in here?" He says, "I'll kill you!" I say, "Wait a minute. I worked in the shoe shop, and I don't belong here." He is already turning a stick and going to hit me. So I just pulled back and sat down in the corner and was waiting. And the minute I saw that the door is like free, I just made my way to the door, ran out, and now, I'm sneaking in into my own barrack where I lived before, and I'm afraid that nobody will recognize me because I look like a skeleton. I look like a *Muselmann* what they called in camp. And I finally make it. We were working night shift, like I said before, because they called us the *vollgefressene* [Ger: overfed] *Juden*. From then on we were working night shift. They shouldn't see us. And at day time we were sleeping. So my brother was sleeping, and I finally made it to his bunk and I start ready to waking him, and he thought that there is somebody some like of our *Landsmen* and so on coming to beg for some food. And he wakes up, and he says, "I have nothing here. You come after 6:00 to the shop. I'll give you something to eat." And I look at him, and I shake him, I says, "Simcho, what's the matter with you? Don't you recognize me? It's me, Unio!" Finally he says, "That's you?" He says, "Oh my God!" I say, "Get up! What are you sleeping? They put me to Barrack 3, and you know, they're gonna kill me there. If I don't come within a few minutes back there, they're gonna kill me!" So he gets dressed in a hurry. He says, "You're not going there. Come with me to the shop." And he walks with me in the shop. But anybody that sees me in the shop, they talk to each other, "Ohh, he's a goner. He wouldn't last even a week." The *Kapo* wasn't there, but there was another *Kapo* that was like from the tailor's shop, and he was a Czech. And he was a very liberal guy. He was really a human being in camp, I would say one of very few. He took a look at me. He says, "Oh my God! What happened to you?" I say, "I was in Gusen I in the hospital. They operated on me. And they already put me to the transport, and luckily that I, five minutes before, they called me out to come here, and the transport already is in Mauthausen, must be dead by now." So he says to me, "Oh my God." He says, "Now listen to me." And he says, "Kid," to me, he says, "If you wanna live, stay away from water, stay away from coffee. If you don't have enough food, tell me. I'm gonna give you. You just eat baked potatoes," he says, "bread, salami if you can, very little marmalade, what they handed to us, mostly dry food. Otherwise," he says, "you'll go. If you don't have enough, if your brother cannot provide it for you, you just come to me." And he takes out a half of bread and a cube of margarine and a few pieces of salami. He says, "Go easy on the salami. Don't start eat it all at once, because your stomach probably cannot take it."

HG: Right.

BF: He says, "Eat the bread, but very little margarine. I shouldn't give you the whole thing."

HG: It'd be too rich.

BF: Yes. And he says, "Little by little, don't you dare to touch the soup. You're gonna kill yourself. And if you think that you are so hungry you can eat up the whole, eat up as much bread as you can. A little bit of margarine, very little. I'll bring you something if I can." And he brought me some like, it was like *suchas* [phonetic]. It was something like crackers, like cookies. They were not sweet, but some, and he, he gave me.

HG: Dry, dry biscuits.

BF: Yes, dry biscuits. And he gave them to me and he says, "If you wanna live, you stay away from that. Any time you're hungry and you don't have--" I say, "I think I'll have." My brother by now has established, you know, like a reputation. I was away for seven weeks. But my brother really got in with the kitchen, and he had enough food. We were giving away five times as much food as we were eating ourselves, ten times as much. Well, I started back in the shop. The *Kapo* came in and he looked at me. He says, "Will you be able to work?" I says, "*Kapo*, just being here and in a warm room and being with my brother, I'll be able to do anything." He says, "Well, that's good. I'm glad." So my brother says, "*Kapo*, you know what happened? They assigned him to Block 3." He says, "What? Who?" I says, "Well, that's what they assigned me." He says, "Over my dead body." He takes me to Block 3, he comes over and he says to the *Shreiber*, the one, he says, "This is my man. He belongs to Block 11. And you immediately sign him over." He says, "Well, I cannot do it before the *Appell* tonight. He still has to be at the *Appell*." In other words, 5:30, he says, "From 5:30 to 6:00." Or sometimes the *Appell* was three, four hours if somebody was missing, sometimes six hours. But usually it took about a half an hour.

HG: That was the roll call?

BF: That was the roll call, yeah. And you had to be there where you were assigned this morning. Dead or alive you had to be there. If they couldn't find you alive, if they found you dead, they needed a body count. And if they found you, that you were hiding or you were sick or something, they killed you anyway, but the body count was there. Well, I had to go back that evening, back to roll call there. But my *Kapo*, like I said, he was the biggest murderer in camp, and everybody had respect for him. He says, "Anybody touches him has to respond to me. If anybody touches him, I'm gonna kill him." I came there, I stood through the *Appell* and after the *Appell* my brother came running, took me back to the shop. He came to the shop, and they just kept me warm, and I was so glad to be in. I sat down near the stove and I took some work there. I just held it in my hands; everybody tried to do my work for me and so on. A couple of weeks went by, and I gained my strength back, and I really started working. And usually we had by 2:00, by 2:30 at night, we were through with our work and then we had to sit till 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning. So here and there people used to take a nap. And we had like the straw mattresses that they were filling up. We had just the mattress, unfilled, and we had it piled up high. So we used to lay down there on the...

HG: In the shop.

BF: …in the shop, but the door was locked. And everybody did it. Only I was the fool one day, and the *Kapo* was knocking on the door we should let him in. And I tried to straighten out the sacks, and I was the last one to run to the chair, and he noticed me. If it would be anybody else, he would have killed him. But he saw me, and he was just so mad.

He slammed the door and ran out, didn't say a word. He calls me in the next day to his room, and he gives me his work what he wants me to do, and he gives me twice as much. But I was always outspoken, whatever I had to tell, I was telling him. Whatever I had to demand, I demanded. So I said, "*Herr Kapo*, you're giving me double the work. Now, it's not that normally it couldn't be done, but you have to understand that now we don't have the good materials. We had, a few months before, they brought from Warsaw, from the uprising, the *Polaks* that made the uprising in Warsaw...

Tape six, side two:

HG: This is tape six, side two, of Bernie Freilich's story. Go ahead.

BF: Now the *Kapo* said to me, "Uh huh. I know, you wanna sleep, too. That's why you can't, you don't--" So I told him, I said, "*Herr Kapo*, I wasn't sleeping. But the truth of the matter is that that evening I had a terrible toothache. I had finished my work, and then I, it was driving me crazy. The clinic was closed. It was 2:00 at night."

HG: Could you have gotten some attention for a tooth?

BF: They would give you maybe, like an aspirin or something like it. And my teeth were bad, and I usually had toothaches. And I told him I had such a toothache, but despite that I finished my work, true. I was leaning back there not to sleep or so on. I was just in terrible pain. So he says, "Then what do you want?" I say, "Now you're trying to punish me. You're giving me the double amount of work, and by now the materials aren't good. Because the good boots that we had from the *Polaks* that were brought from Warsaw from the uprising, by now have ended. We have to, the cleaning of the material and the putting it together takes more time than the whole work would take a normal." So he gave me like an ironical smile, he says, "Nyah! You still wanna take a nap." I says, *Kapo*, no I do not nap. I told you that I sat down there closer to the oven to be a little warm and I had a terrible toothache." He says, "Okay, then, make me one pair." He like gave me to make two pair of shoes for that night, and it was impossible. Even under normal conditions it was impossible. So he accepted it. If it would be somebody else, that person would be dead. If he caught somebody, to him, to kill somebody didn't mean a thing. For breaking a needle, for making something that was wrong, he just took a stick, laid the guy on the floor, put it on his neck, and stomped on the stick until he choked him to death. Then he picked him up, put him in a pail of water that we had when we were, let's say, leather we were soaking, put him head down, drowned, and then he said...

HG: In the water.

BF: In the water, and then he said to one of the shoemakers that was sitting, "Abramek, out. Out with him. Carry him out."

HG: Carry him out.

BF: Carry him out on the stack where the dead bodies are. That was to him, to kill somebody didn't mean a thing.

HG: Life was cheap.

BF: Cheap. Cheap is not the word. Now we are coming like to the middle of the winter, and...

HG: 1944.

BF: It was already January, 1945. And it was very, very cold. And our shop was the other half of the-- by that time they made a hospital already in Gusen II. And there was a hospital, and there were about 400 people laying sick. They decided to finish those people off, to kill them. So they took away their mattresses on which they were laying. They took away their covers that they had. They opened up the windows and the doors. And the temperature outside was minus 24 centigrade. That's a lot lower than minus 24 on our

Fahrenheit. It was very cold. The shrieks, those people, the cries and so on, were just unbearable. And we were just a wooden partition...

HG: Away.

BF: …away. And the wooden were drying out, and there were like little openings between them, and you could see it what was going on. Our *Kapo* used to go in just for fun, pull somebody off, step on his throat until he killed him, two, three, just, just for kicks. It was just unbelievable. This, this is something that I'll never forget. It will remain with me for the rest of my days. The process was too slow. After three days and three nights there were still like 270 people from 400. So they decided that they'll chase the people out, outside.

HG: Out of doors.

BF: Outdoors. And the people were chased out, nude completely, standing in the snow about four, five inches deep, and just huddling in a circle. And everybody tried to get deeper into the circle and they were fighting among themselves and yelling and crying and, "God, where are you? God, where are you? Where are you?" And this was going on for about two more days and nights. And there were still people left. And there were still like over 100 that were in the huddle. And on the outside of the huddle you could see every, every few minutes another one would fall. That was too slow a process. So they decided at night to kill them. And they marched them one by one to the washroom. And as they were approaching the washroom, some of these *Kapos* were standing, and with a wooden hammer hit him over the head. Two others would grab him, put him head down in a pail of, or they had like big bottles of water.

HG: Of water.

BF: Drown him.

HG: To drown him.

BF: Head down, and then they were putting him outside. Well, that was the coldest night that we have ever encountered. The temperatures then must have been like 30 below. And not only that the water was freezing, blood, from hitting them on the head and so on, the blood was clogging up, and it was freezing much faster. The next morning, the whole camp was red, frozen in red, because the water, with the blood, was running over.

HG: All [unclear].

BF: It wasn't going into the drain because the drains clogged up and froze.

HG: From the blood.

BF: From the blood. And the whole camp was red. That happened in January, 1945, the end of January. It was the last week of January. It was just indescribable. We were still working in the shoe shop. The *Kapo*, one day, I don't remember what it was, and somehow somebody committed a sin, and he took us out, and he was giving us like he was gonna punish us. So, just like a drill sergeant. We were running, falling flat up, down, up and down, up and down, and I was just then maybe a month back from the hospital and I was still weak. And I went, since he chased everybody out, I went, too. And suddenly as he ran by, he saw me, and I could hardly lift myself up. We were already like this running for 10, 15 minutes, up and down, face down, up, run, face down. Suddenly he looks around, he says, "What the hell are you doing here?" I say, "I'm doing everything what everybody else

is doing." He says, "Get the hell out of here!" And he chased me out, and he chased me into the barrack.

HG: Back to the shop.

BF: Yeah. He chased me back, but he took the whole shop out! Everybody from the shop.

HG: Where was your brother?

BF: My brother was also there, but since my brother was healthy, he was taking the punishment, but I was just that I just came back from the hospital.

HG: You didn't have to have the punishment.

BF: So, he like realized that he's gonna kill me there. Here he saved me and he is gonna kill me. So it shows you, with all his murderous instincts and so on, he still had some, he needed me, so he says, "What the heck are you doing here? You get out of here!" He chased me out, but my brother was taking the punishment. That's, that was the way of doing things. One time it was, and we were standing for, *Appell*, and somebody was tearing a cover, like a woolen cover, and they were winding around their feet in their shoes because they were cold. And the barrack was like half and half, half Jews and half other nationalities. And there were every nationality that lived in Europe. We even had two Negroes. And if somebody was a rarity, then they preserved them in camp. They needed a token. So they were treated like royalty, just to have more nationalities. Well, they discovered that one of the covers was torn off, and there was a part missing, so they told us to undress outside and step back. So we undressed, stood nude, and then they told us to step back like six or eight feet, and all our clothing was laying there, and they were going through, they were checking.

HG: On the ground.

BF: On the ground, and they were checking. And they found something. And they didn't find nothing. Suddenly, under the gravel, they pushed the gravel away and under the gravel they found a piece that was missing. And that was punishable by death. Anybody that was caught with a piece of...

HG: Leather.

BF: …not leather, from the, like the woolen covers that you covered yourself, a quilt, like you...

HG: Go ahead.

BF: So somebody...

HG: A blanket.

BF: A blanket, yes. Somebody tore off a piece and was using this to wrap his feet to keep his feet warm in the shoes. So they undressed us all. The shoes, everything else. We stand nude. They called, told us to stand back, and they were searching. And suddenly they found that piece, and it was in the vicinity where we stood, mostly Jews stood there. But we noticed, there was one Yugoslavian that did it. But to squeal on him, that meant that he would be killed immediately. And then, they would say, "See, those Jews squeal."

HG: Yeah.

BF: And let's say, his friends, or compatriots or so, would try to take revenge on us.

HG: Use him for an example.

BF: Yeah. And, so we did not wanna tell on him. So, he says, "Okay, I'm giving you five minutes. The one who did it, step out." Nobody steps out. So he says, "Okay, I know, the Jews did it. Everybody else, out! Step away, get dressed!" And now, there were like 3- to 400 hundred Jews, and they chase us into the barracks. And, as there were like two sides where the bunks were, the bunks were, and in the middle was like a long dividing line where you could walk out and walk either to get your food or so on. It was about six to seven feet wide. And between every bunk, they took one of these Under *Kapos*, those were, you know, like little, those who had 8, 10, 12 people, and mostly they were *Polaks*, Russian, Ukrainian, something like this, and they gave him the pieces of wood under which the mattresses were resting, you know. They armed every one of them, and then they chased us from one end of the barrack to the other. And they just stand there...

HG: And hit.

BF: …and hit. And hit over the head and hit over the head whoever they can. That was before I was taken to the hospital. And by then I was well-fed and I was pretty healthy. And I saw that one of the Polish *Kapos* saw that I ran by maybe five, six times back and forth, and I wasn't hit. I was like tiny, and avoiding getting hit. So he was waiting for me, and he was timing me. And he waited for me and I saw that he wants, just waited for me. Instead of running, or doing like this...

HG: Or covering your head.

BF: I, I just jumped into him, and as he was in that position, like to hit me, I hit him with all my force.

HG: And knocked him out.

BF: And knocked him out. He fell. I jumped over him. There was a window open, and jumped out. And I ran to the shop. I ran to the shop, and I come in, and I was all sweaty and all, and he looks at me, and that was like 4:30 in the afternoon, and we were not supposed to be in the shop. The Jews were working night shift. He says to me, "Freilich, *was machst Du heir*?" [Ger: "What are you doing here?"] I say, "*Herr Kapo*, *die schlagen unsere Leute tot* [Ger: "they are killing our people in the barrack."] He says, "Who?" I say, "The *Blockälteste* and the *Kapos*." He says, "But why?" I say, "I don't know why. Somebody tore a blanket, and he says that the Jews did it. But the Jews didn't do it. We just didn't squeal on the one who did it." Now, he grabbed, the shoemakers had like a pole with an iron top on which we were working. He grabbed that, and he ran to the *block*. And as he came in, whoever he saw, he started swinging. He knocked down about twenty of these *Kapos*.

HG: Oh, all right.

BF: And he says, "*Meine Leute*?--My people? You gonna touch? I'm gonna kill you all! Nobody touches my people!" And he went over to that *Kapo*, to the *Blockälteste*, he says, "You touch one of my people, and you are dead." He grabbed him like this, threw him against the wall, and he says, "You see, I'm giving you a chance. Don't you dare touch my people. The only one who can touch my people is me." If I didn't do that, by then there would have been maybe 100 people dead in that barrack. My brother was still there. My brother was hit once or twice. He was, you know, he was young and he was still healthy, and

he could time and avoid hitting just like I did. But I saw that this one was aiming at me, so I jumped him, threw him over, and jumped through the window.

HG: Let's get back to January of 1945.

BF: Yes.

HG: Go ahead.

BF: Now, by now, the Allies were closing in from all sides. The Russians were coming. They already took Hungary, and they were already approaching Austria. There were some Austrian towns that were taken already by the Russians. They, every day we saw the American planes coming and bombing Linz and all the industrial towns around us. And we slept in the barracks during the day. And the barracks were shaking and that was lulling us to sleep. We didn't mind. We only prayed. I said, "God, if we have to die, let us die from a bomb instead of from their hands."

HG: Did the guards stay around?

BF: Of course.

HG: They didn't run away.

BF: No, the guards stood around. As a matter of fact, one day, two fighter planes, they were not bombers, but fighter planes came.

HG: The Americans?

BF: The Americans. Came down very low over the camp, and they were shooting at the guards. And the guards scattered like, they didn't shoot back at the planes. They just jumped. Some of them jumped from the tower down. And then it was, somehow our luck ran out, because in the beginning they let us in the barrack till about the end of January. And then they built, they built, they took prisoners, and we dug trenches in a field just across from there.

HG: From the camp.

BF: From the camp, yes, and they were going in zigzags, like this, and we built trenches about five to six feet deep. And every time there was an alarm, like a bombing alarm, they chased us across...

HG: The road.

BF: …across the road. In the beginning it was open. Just guards stood there. Then they built across the road, like a wire fence with a, with doors. If they wanted to, when there wasn't an alarm, they opened the doors and traffic was passing by. But if it was an alarm, they stopped those doors and the wire fences, and it was overhead, and they chased us into the fields. Now we were spending every day, instead of sleeping like usually we did because we were working night shift, and they let us in the barracks. From the end of January until they took us away on April 22.

HG: They took you away.

BF: They took us on a march, well, we'll come to this. They chased us into those trenches and we stood there, and it was wet. The snow was melting some days. It was unbelievable.

HG: Mud.

BF: The mud was that deep, and sick prisoners used to get stuck in mud and fall down, and the others ran over them and trampled them to death. Every time there was an

alarm there were 30, 40 dead, not from bombs, trampled to death. You know what it means, 15,000 prisoners running through a narrow, let's say six or seven foot path. And everybody is pushing because the guards are standing there and hitting. Now, it got already a little warmer. It was the end of March, the beginning of April, they changed their tactics. And that was supposed to be, what they had planned is that in those tunnels that we built, where the tunnels were, they had in mind and they, the plan was that when the Allies, before the Allies will come very close, they'll chase us into the mines supposedly for our alarm, and then they'll blow it up. And they'll kill all the prisoners, they shouldn't know, be anybody left. Now they started chasing us in there. And every time--it was in April, it was warmer already, the sun was shining--and the American planes used to fly over more often and they were sky-writing, "U.S.A." and they dropped leaflets and some of them landed in camp and somebody got a hold, and they wrote in German like it was like a poem: "In March, *marschieren wir*."

HG: Translate.

BF: In March, in March, in the month of March we'll march. In the month of April, *siegen wir*, that means we, we'll be victorious. And in May, it will be the end, but like in a poem, written in German. And they dropped this.

HG: Some of the prisoners found them?

BF: Some of the prisoners found it, yes. Now, in April 12, isn't it that Roosevelt died? April 12, 1945.

HG: Yeah. Go ahead.

BF: One of the German *Kapos* approaches me and says, "Hey you, Jew. Your Jewish papa just died."

HG: You didn't know who he meant.

BF: I didn't know who he meant. I didn't know exactly what he meant. I said, "Who is our Jewish papa?" He said, "What do you mean? Roosevelt just died." So I look at him, I say, "That's our Jewish papa?" I didn't know. I say, "What good did he do for us?" Just, I just say to a German, you know, what am I gonna say? What good did he do for us? Little did I know, that later on, when I was here in the United States, what I discovered, what I said, what he said about it and Cordell Hull[8] came in and he said, "I can save 1,000,000 Jews." And he said this and this, he would have to give up. He answered him, "And what will I do with a million kikes?" That is today in Congressional Record. You can look it up in Washington. Now later on--I'm coming to that--where we were taken on a march. We were supposed to be exchanged for 10,000 trucks. On April 22, 19-

HG: How many prisoners?

BF: 100,000 Jews supposedly.

HG: For 10,000 trucks.

BF: For 10,000 trucks. Now they needed the trucks like I need a hole in my head now. They could, they didn't have room where to put their own trucks, but that deal fell through and now I'll describe it to you. I didn't know. We didn't know about that deal. On

[8]US Secretary of State 1933-44 under FDR.

April 22, they take all the Jews from Mauthausen[9] and all the surrounding camps, except those who were highly specialized and needed, like they were working for the airplanes, just *Messerschmitt* and *Steyrwerke*. Everybody else from all the camps are going back to Mauthausen. And we are coming to Mauthausen, and we are put in Mauthausen and that was my only wish, that I never see Mauthausen again. And here we are walking back to Mauthausen. And they say that they take the Jews and we're gonna go to Switzerland. In a deal, in an exchange for something. We did not know. And we came out, before they let us out of the camp they took away-- we had good clothes and so on--they took away our good clothes and gave us nothing but regular prison garb. Took away my good shoes, gave me a pair of wooden shoes.

HG: You mean at that point you had regular clothes?

BF: I was working in the shoe shop.

HG: Oh, oh.

BF: I had prison, but I had a woolen. Here they gave me nothing but a, you know, a piece of thin...

HG: A rag.

BF: …a rag and so on and a pair of worn out wooden shoes. They, I had like an undershirt. Somehow we had a sweater or something like it, which was illegal, but we were working in the shop, and we got away with a lot. The regular prisoners didn't have that, but we were the *Prominente*, they called us.

HG: The important ones.

BF: Yes. On April 22 was my birthday, my 21st birthday. And we had the other *Kapo*, which was the shoemaker *Kapo*. And he was a homosexual, but he was the nicest guy that you could ever be. That head *Kapo*, the short guy, that was the killer, he never let his shiners heal up. Whenever they healed up, he always beat him up again and made him shiners again. That guy, his parents owned a shoe factory. And, as they were taking us away, he came over and he gave me the address of his parents, and he said, "I don't know if I'm gonna make it, if I'm gonna survive." That was April 22, 1945. He says, "But you are being taken to Switzerland. If you survive, let my parents know that on April 22 I was in Gusen II." And he said to me, "Freilich, I know this is your birthday." And he made me two fried eggs for breakfast. This was an unheard of luxury in concentration camp, but like I say, the higher echelons, they had everything. Once, he even gave me and my brother a herring, which is something unheard of, but, and somehow he had a premonition that he will not survive. He made us this and he wished me a happy birthday. And then maybe an hour later they took us out of camp and marched us back to Mauthausen. We come to Mauthausen, I had two loaves of bread, I had some cigarettes, I had some margarine and a few pieces of salami. And for the first time in three years I saw Jewish children that were a year, a year-and-a-half, and some that the mothers were breastfeeding. They were Hungarian Jews that were in *Wiener Neustadt* [town in SE Austria, near Hungarian border.], that was like Vienna, Vienna New Town.

HG: *Wiener Neustadt*.

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[9]Mauthausen, already in 1940 was graded in the harshest category of concentration camps. (Enc. Judaica).

BF: *Neustadt*.

HG: New Town.

BF: New Town. Neustadt. And they brought them up there, and there were a couple of hundred with them, and they had families. And there were children a year-and-a-half, two, two-and-a-half, and they were begging, "*Kenyér, kenyér* - bread. Give me bread. Give me bread." Whatever bread I had...

HG: You gave away.

BF: I just gave away. For the last piece, I still had a piece of bread, I bought a pair of swim trunks. They were woolen swim trunks, woven, you know, but if you laid them down they could have crawled away. That's how lice, they were infested with lice. When I saw that, I cleaned them out, but I was so cold, and we were again on top of that mountain and in a, not in the barracks, but in like Boy Scouts have their jamborees, in tents.

HG: Tents.

BF: In tent camp, that's where they put us up. We were there three days and three nights together with these people, and there were 17,000 Hungarians, Hungarian Jews.

HG: But you said that was April twenty-

BF: April 22 they brought us to Mauthausen, and to Mauthausen it took maybe two hours to walk, an hour-and-a-half. And they brought us to Mauthausen, to the *Zeltenlager*, to the, *Zeltenlager* means, no, I just said.

HG: Log cabins, oh, the tents.

BF: The tent camp.

HG: Yeah. The tent camp.

BF: Yeah. And there were 17,000 Jews. Mostly they were Jews that the Hungarian government mobilized into the army. And they were like Seabees [construction battalions, branch of US Navy], *arbeit*, work battalions.

HG: Work.

BF: No, no, Seabees, work battalions. They had their ranks, captain, major, lieutenant, but they never had arms. But even while we were in Poland we once saw a group of them, that they were working on certain things. They were building bridges, Seabees.

HG: Right.

BF: They were called *munkas zaszloalj*, that's *munkas zaszloalj,* M-U-N-K-A-S, and then a separate word, *zaszloalj*. That's like a work battalions. That's the Hungarian word that they were called. I don't know if the spelling is right, but that's what they were called, *munkas zaszloalj*. And there were 17,000 of them. Why were they there? Because by then Hungary was occupied by the Russians. And as the Hungarian army was retreating together with those Hungarian Jewish working battalions, they came into Austria. The minute they crossed the Austrian border, the Hungarian army was disarmed. They didn't trust them anymore. The minute they took away the arms from the Hungarian army, they took the Jews away from their jurisdiction and they threw them into concentration camps. So they brought them to Mauthausen. Now they were there, and now supposedly, they, together with us, were going towards the Swiss border, in an exchange...

Tape seven, side one:

HG: This is tape seven, side one of Bernie Freilich's story, Helen Grossman taping. Go ahead.

BF: Now we are in the tent *Lager*, the tent camp. T-E-N-T, not...

HG: Right, the tent camp.

BF: In the tent camp in Mauthausen, and after three days we are taken on a march to the Swiss border. There is over 17,000 people, among them a couple of hundred women and some children and even infants.

HG: 17,000?

BF: Yes. As the march starts, there are many people who are sick and could hardly to drag themselves. On the first day they brought wagons with horses and they loaded the people on the wagons, helped them out, and they say, "You are going to be free. Hold on. Time is near for your freedom."

HG: These were not the guards.

BF: The guards! Yes.

HG: Oh, the guards!

BF: Yes! The guards helped them on the wagons, and whoever cannot walk anymore they picked them up and put them on the wagons. And we are just beside ourselves. We don't know what's happening. What is this? It's, is it real? At night we stop on a big field where there was like a pasture for cows, and it had a fence around it, maybe four feet high. The guards took up posts along the guard, and we laid down on the snow, dressed, to sleep. On the field, on the open field, who could sleep? Mostly as you laid down the snow started melting and it started freezing. You were freezing to the ground. We made it through the night. We start getting up the next morning, we start walking. There are some people that are sick, that cannot, after that night especially. Whoever slows down, the guards go over, and just shoot, blank.

HG: To kill?

BF: To kill! Yesterday they treated us like royalty, and here the next day something happened. Whoever cannot keep the pace, they don't just, let's say, before like normally they would hit you or so on, they were just shooting. Whoever slowed down, they were shooting. We didn't know what happened. That day a couple of hundred were killed. Comes at night, again they put us up on a pasture.

HG: And they just left the bodies there?

BF: On the side of the road. Maybe later on some other ones came and took them, or whatever, but we were just marching by and we didn't see. They just killed them, and just kicked them off the road into the ditch. We slept over another night, and then we are nearing the mountains. We are approaching Alps, and it's getting colder and we are going higher and higher. We are passing by some little towns, and we see some like foreign workers that were on forced labor in Germany--Frenchmen, Italians, and they are motioning to us, "Hold on! It's not long! Freedom is here! It's soon! It's soon!" And yet we are marching, we don't know where to or what. We passed by little towns and there was like merchants that had like *sauerkraut* [pickled cabbage] outside and he was, had like a fruit

store, but that was winter time. He didn't have fruit, so he was selling like *sauerkraut*. Well, the people that are hungry and cold and so on they just jumped, grabbed whatever they could, ran away. The guards started shooting. It was a melée.

HG: The guards were walking with you?

BF: With us, all the time. The guards were walking, but they were well-fed and well-clothed. They had long, woolen coats, woolen underwear, sweaters, and so on. It was on the fourth day that we were walking. It was a Saturday, and it was hailing. And the hail was coming down straight into our face. And we were on an open road, and there was nowheres to hide or so on from that.

HG: From the weather.

BF: And, yeah. And I was cut in the face a couple of times and was bleeding. It was so sharp. The pieces of hail that were falling. It was sleeting. It was really raining with sleet. And it was just, this day I just, I, I never cried no matter what happened to me in camp and so on. That day I was walking along my brother, and we were always trying to stick together and some of our friends that were still, I met a friend of mine that I didn't see for about eight, nine months, and I met him in Mauthausen, and he was taken to another camp. And he had a broken leg in a cast, and we were helping him walk. And me and my brother we were holding onto him from both sides. And he was just in a cast limping along, and he said he couldn't make it. I said, "No, we won't let you." He is today in Baltimore. I said, "No, we will not let you. You are gonna make it." We took him, and we brought him with us. Finally, towards the end of the day, we are marching along a highway, and suddenly there is like a narrow path into a forest, and we are walking into the forest, and we keep on walking about three to four miles into the forest. And we come, deep in the forest. There were five barracks made out of raw, round wood like cabins, like Lincoln cabins, but long ones. And they chase us in, 3,000 people into one barrack. There is nothing. No floor, no bunk, just the cross bars that support the roof.

HG: Beams.

BF: The beams, yeah. The cross beams. And there are windows, little windows, and they made like between supporting beams and the window 100 people, and that was maybe the size of this kitchen, which was maybe eight or nine feet wide and about 15 feet deep, 100 people had to be in that space. There was no room even how to supply the food, so they told each group of 100 to elect a few leaders of that group, and they were taking the food to distribute it among the people. My brother, and that rabbi's son, that is the rabbi in Connecticut, they were made the leaders of our 100 group, and they stood by the window, and they took the food, whatever was given to us. What was given to us then, this was, we went through a lot, through the whole thing, but this was the worst. I have never seen cannibalism before. But there I saw where an SS man tried to shoot one of the Hungarian prisoners, a Hungarian Jew that was so starved, that there was a dead body laying and he ran over, and, knives we were not allowed to have, but everybody had a spoon. And usually the spoon, the edge of the spoon, we were sharpening on a stone to be able to carve a piece of bread or so on. So with that he tried to slice off a piece of flesh from a dead body that starved to hunger. And that SS guard caught him. And he wanted to shoot him. And as he was pulling the gun to shoot him, somebody called him, like an officer, and he just threw him

into the mud, and he ran because the officer called him. That was hell on earth. That was the worst seven days that we have made through in our lives.

HG: The march was seven days?

BF: No, the march was four days. Then we were there seven days.

HG: I see.

BF: Some people, to avoid the crowd, it was so crowded there was no room to sit, you just had to stand, and how long can you stand? So people used to just like faint and fall and so on. Some of those that were a little younger and healthier tried to jump up, caught the cross bars, pulled themselves up and were sitting there. Now the stench and the, what the perspiration from everything was going up high.

HG: The heat on.

BF: The heat and everything, and that stench from the human bodies, you know, 3,000 in one barrack. There were no toilet facilities. There was like an open latrine, like an open thing that you used to go, but if you go to there, you have to go through that deep of mud. And people, some gave up, some of these that were on the cross bars, they were fainting, falling down, fell down and killed two, three people, because, you know, a body is 10 feet high, 12 feet high, and suddenly he, there are people just hanging on for dear life hardly breathing. He falls down on top of their head.

HG: Kills them.

BF: And kills them. It was hell in there. One day, out of nowhere, through all my time in camp or so on...

HG: Is this what [unclear]? That you were in already, you were going to the Swiss border.

BF: No, but that's where they...

HG: You weren't there yet.

BF: No, we'd never made it to the Swiss border. They led us into that camp. Like I say, on the second day they started shooting and behaving cruel and so on. We didn't know what's happened. And then they, four days we were marching and then they marched us into that camp, and the name was Gunskirchen, G-U-N-S-K-I-R-C-H-E-N, Gunskirchen. And that was, there were five barracks and a kitchen barrack where they supplied. And they had like another barrack where they held their supplies. And maybe on the third or the fourth day--we had never seen Red Cross packages, American Red Cross--they started calling out that all women, children, and teenagers should stand near the kitchen and they're gonna distribute Red Cross Packages, American Red Cross. During all the time that I was in camp or in ghetto or in concentration camp, we had never seen a Red Cross packages. Suddenly we see they have stocked up barracks full of Red Cross packages, and they are prying them apart, and they are giving everybody a little bit. I stood in line. Like I said, I was 21. But I was so pale. I didn't shave. And I looked like 15, 16 at the most. Before me stood a Hungarian boy. He was about 6'3", 6'4", and the guard that was standing there watching came over to him and asked him, "How old are you?" He said, "16." When he said 16, I could have said that I am 12. He never asked me. But he asked him, "You are 16 and you look like this?" And he had like a little reddish beard growing out, but he wasn't, he, maybe he was 20, but anyway...

HG: He could have been 16.

BF: No, he wasn't.

HG: Oh. All right.

BF: No, he was, no, no, he was much older. But he said 16. When he said 16, I felt, "I have a free ticket. I can pass by for 12." Nobody bothered me. I came to the line. I got a few metal boxes, you know, like I got...

HG: Tins.

BF: …tins of condensed milk. I got a can of flour. I got a can of flour. I got a can of mixed fruit like the soldiers used to get in the C-rations. There was pineapple and pears and grapes even, the mixed fruit like they have here, a fruit cocktail.

HG: Yeah, fruit cocktail.

BF: I, I don't know. I had five or six cans. I grabbed it, and I just ran back to the...

HG: How were you going to open them?

BF: Oh, we had the spoon that had a sharp edge. That was [unclear]. We had. We were already. Well, this was a treasure. Now, what do you do with flour? Flour? The milk, okay. So we drank the milk. We opened the fruit cocktail. I had a box of, a can of like, it was Spam.

HG: Canned meat.

BF: Yeah, canned meat. So we had this Spam, it was Spam. But in our, later when I came to America I knew that that was Spam. I didn't know that. Tasted so delicious, it was so good. My. Well...

HG: It's a wonder you didn't get sick from that, the first food you'd had in so long.

BF: I didn't eat it all. Don't worry. There were 20 of us for that little can of Spam, so I had maybe a half an ounce.

HG: Half a mouthful.

BF: Yeah, so, well anyway. And I remained with that can of...

HG: Flour.

BF: …flour. What are you gonna eat flour? Dried flour? I opened it up, it's flour, so I just put a piece of paper in there it should not pour out, fall out, and I just left it. And like I say, we were there seven days. The last day was, we came Saturday, and then Saturday, we see like around 3:00, we hear like from the road, because I knew the direction, I always had a good sense of direction, and I said to myself, "If I ever get liberated and the truck passes me by, I'll never stay here or never go with the army from, I'll always go back in the other direction." Because I had the experience, where in my hometown, while I was still in my camp, they brought Jews that were with the Russians for 10 days, and then the Germans pushed the Russians back, grabbed those Jews, brought them to us, and none of them survived. So we made up our mind...

HG: That was in the first store.

BF: That was in the first store?

HG: Go ahead.

BF: Yeah. So now we hear machine guns, we hear artillery, and it's getting closer and closer, and suddenly even the branches and the upper branches of the trees, you hear bullets hitting them.

HG: Where were the guards?

BF: Wait. That's where I am coming to. Suddenly we look around and we figure, the safest thing is to be in the barracks. At least you have something that will protect you from a...

HG: From bullets.

BF: …from a machine gun. Artillery.

HG: Right.

BF: It's a different story. But we were so far away from the road. Evidently from one side we were like an open field. We didn't know it, but it must have been like 2-, 300 yards away, but these woods were beyond our wires, and we couldn't go there, because in the woods we were surrounded with guards, towers and wires. So we see shooting and suddenly we see that the guards are coming. One guard comes to the next one, calls him down, then the two of them go to the next one, calls him down, there are three of them going to the next one, pulling him down, and they are going around the encampment, and they don't go one by one, but they are like...

HG: In a group.

BF: …in a group, because this way they are pulling back. Now we realize that the guards are pulling off. But what did they do? Two days before, the SS guards disappeared. They took all the Germans that were in the *Luftwaffe*, the Air Force, and they were like let's say in their 60's or so on, and they put them up as guards. And there were only two or three officers remaining in the camp. And they figured, in the last moment they'll run away. But now we see these guards one pulling on the other, one pulling on the other, sudden, and they all go away. So now we figure, it's around 4-, 4:30 in the afternoon. It's the 4 of May. And we figure, "We are free." So, what do 17,000 starved people do? There is a kitchen, and there is a warehouse. So a mob runs to the warehouse and they try to grab whatever they can. Now these Hungarians that were officers and so on, and they had the rank, they didn't have arms. Somehow they grabbed a few arms somewhere, and they tried to keep order. Now can you keep 17,000 starved people ordered? They tried to shoot in the air, and who is listening to them, and who obeys them? And me and my brother we stay, and we say, "Now, the time is, life is too dear to lose it in the last few minutes." And we say, I say to my brother, "We are not going nowhere now. We don't know which way, and somebody can shoot us. We can run into the guards that pulled back, and they'll, they'll be afraid of us and they'll shoot us. I say we stay here." And some of our group--as a matter of fact, I have a friend who has a shoe repair shop on the next block, on Castor Avenue, and he was together with me in camp and he remembers my father--he runs into the kitchen and he gets with that mob. And the Germans had *kunst* honey, which meant, artificial honey. And that artificial honey was as hard as Swiss cheese almost, that kind of texture. But it was lumpy and it was so sticky, like black pitch. You could hardly break it off. It was like stringy and so on, but it was like glue. You could not, if you grabbed a piece there, I don't know, must have been like 5, 6 pounds heavy. And with this he runs out. And he wants to

run to us, because we did not want to run to the kitchen, so he wants to bring us something. He was one of the daring ones. As he runs out with this, 200 others jumped on him and tried to wrestle it away from him.

HG: He could get killed.

BF: Of course! Do you know what starved people can do who didn't see food for months and months, hungry and hungry and hungry, and suddenly you have a chance to stuff your belly. So they jumped him. Now, here in his desperation, as much as he could, he stuffed into his mouth. The rest they grabbed from him. And he comes to us and he is like from here to his hair, through everything, full of that smeared up up to here with that *kunst* honey.

HG: With the honey.

BF: With the honey. But the honey was like pitch, thick and hard and gluey. You could not dissolve it. And suddenly he starts to, "Over there!" He says, "Over there!" Pointing to the kitchen. And suddenly he turns pale and he turns purple and he falls down and starts waving his arms. He cannot breathe. Now at that time, like I told you, I had a can of flour, if you remember. The guards pulled off of there, and they had like little booths made from wooden planks. Now this was wood that we could start fires. So we ran out, broke down the tower, ripped off a few...

HG: Planks.

BF: …planks, and we started fire. Water we don't have, so we took some snow, melted the snow, and I had just water boiling. And I tried to put it in the flour there and to cook up like a cereal. I'm almost ready to put in the flour there when he comes in. And suddenly I see he starts waving his arms, he loses his breath, turns purple and falls down. And he cannot breathe.

HG: He's choking.

BF: He's choking. And I don't know. I was a kid, yet, I had so much wisdom, I grabbed the hot water and I puts a little bit of snow it shouldn't burn his throat, to cool it off a little, but yet hot. And as he, I pried his mouth open and I started putting in hot water in his mouth. And I could hear like in a sink, bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop. And it dissolved a little bit...

HG: The honey.

BF: …and it went down. Yeah, the honey dissolved.

HG: From the warm water.

BF: The warm, yeah, the hot water, warm water. And I gave him more and more and more. And suddenly he wakes, he said, "What happened?" I say, "You idiot! You almost killed yourself! What did you do?" He said, "Why? What happened?" Five minutes later he disappeared. That night we didn't see him. He ran through villages. He brought a chicken. He brought some potatoes. He brought, we stood there the whole night in that place. I say, "In the night I'm not going nowhere." I said, "Now we are alive. We'll see what happens in the morning." In the morning it's quiet. We pick ourself up and start going in the road.

HG: Was everybody gone?

BF: No! There were still...

HG: Still a lot of people.

BF: …like 5-, 7-, 8,000 are still there. Half of the people are there, milling around the kitchen and so on and so, and I say to my brother, "Let's get out of here. We'll get to the road, we'll turn left. We are not going right, because right we came, and we made a left turn. Now when we're going out we have to make a left turn and go behind the lines deeper." As we are coming out, we come to the main road, where two big trucks stand, German army trucks. And we take a look. There's a German sitting in the truck. But we try like to talk to him, and he doesn't move. So one guy jumps up, and it was a pretty big truck, all tied up with canvas, you know, open, but with a canvas thing tied up tightly. He opens up the door. The German keels over. He was shot in the throat. Goes to the other one. The same thing. Two Germans shot dead in the throat. Open up the truck and they fall out. Now we have our spoons. We try to, we don't try to open up the truck like this. We just cut through the canvas, take a look what is there. Brand new woolen uniforms--*Panzer* division, German *Panzer* division. Now we are full of vermin, full of lice, and cold and so on, and here everything is clean. From underwear, beautiful underwear. Woolen socks, woolen pants, a black jacket going like this with the...

HG: With the insignia.

BF: …no, insignias we tore off, yes. But it had, the buttons are silver buttons. And we get dressed like-- the hats we don't take. They had hats, but we didn't take hats. And we go without hats, because here we had a stripe that was shaped out like two inches wide, a stripe.

HG: A strip of your hair had been shaved.

BF: A strip of, every week they shaved our strip. So here it grew taller. It already grew here because we were already like two, three weeks, two weeks away from Mauthausen, and there they didn't shave us. They didn't have the time. Every rigor of camp was gone. They just kept us there. So we run, and there is a little stream coming and there is snow. It's the 5 of May, but we are in the Alps. And there is snow on the ground laying. But the stream is clean. We strip ourself completely nude, grab some of the underwear and we use it as towels. We wash ourselves clean, put on the underwear, put on the uniforms and start going left and we are going towards the American line. Out of nowhere suddenly two jeeps come with machine guns. And two *Schwarze* [Blacks, African Americans] on each, and, "Stop!" So we stop and we lift our hands, and they come with the machine guns and want to take us. They think we are Germans. So we shout, and that Avigdor, that rabbi that I told you, he always told us, "If you get liberated, the first thing you scream, 'I am a Jew!'" And to me, "I am a Jew" was one word. "I-am-a-Jew!" "I-am-a-Jew!" "I-am-a-Jew!" And I'm yelling, "I-am-a-Jew!" And the American soldiers, they were Negroes, they look at us. He said, "What kind of Jew in a German uniform?" So we show him, we are concentration camp, concentration camp. And we still had like metal numbers on our hands.

HG: Like bracelets.

BF: Like bracelets with a metal number here. And we show him the number, and we show him the stripes here. And he looks, and he doesn't know what to do. And he still holds the gun. And the other one tells him, "Come on, Joe! Don't you see these are concentration camp prisoners?" he said, and he starts taking out K-rations, cookies, and

throwing, and cigarettes and chocolate, and giving us. And we just jump and poke him and start kissing him. And, you know, it's hell broken loose. And there are hundreds of people coming up after us, and he runs out of this, he doesn't. So he says, "C'mon, get going this way. This way." We walk out about a half a mile. We come in, and there were German supply houses, like for the army. We were approaching a town called Lansbach. L-A-N-S-B-A-C-H. That Lansbach was like a, what they called, *Lazaretten* town, *Lazaretten* hospital, army hospital town. The whole town was full of army hospitals, and all the wounded soldiers and so on were brought there.

HG: Was this Switzerland? No, you never made it to Switzerland.

BF: No, we never made it to Switzerland, no, that's why I'll tell you later, yes.

HG: You were still in the Alps.

BF: Yeah, yeah, no, no, we were in Austria.

HG: Oh, Austria, all right.

BF: Yes. That was still not, about 90 kilometer or 100 kilometer from Mauthausen, closer to the Swiss border, but they never took us to Switzerland.

HG: It was Austria.

BF: No, the deal fell through. And we walk in, and there are supply houses, hangars, you know, like you build for airplanes.

HG: For airplanes, yeah, [unclear].

BF: They are stocked in the middle like five, six stories high, full of food. Everything canned or boxes. Now from the thing, from the truck, I had a German gas mask. So I threw out the gas mask. And I take a look, and there is a square box, 25 kilo, which is like 55-60 lbs. of butter. We had no strength to pry it apart, so we just picked it up and let it drop. And as it dropped, it opened up.

HG: It went all over the place.

BF: Now, with a spoon, we load up the…

Tape seven, side two:

BF: And there are crackers, and all kinds of things. And my brother, I don't know. He was usually a *Nosher* [one who likes to nibble on food]. Are you on?

HG: Yeah, it's on. Go ahead.

BF: And he like says to me, "Don't eat meat,." he says, "You're gonna kill yourself." And just like this I just look at him and I, "Okay. So I won't." There was plenty of other things. We found like a few biscuits, anything you wanna think of, but in such amounts you cannot imagine. Then across from there stood German trucks that the Americans now wanted to take off the fields. So whatever was on the trucks they just put up the thing, everything fell off the trucks, and then they took the trucks off on the roads, and were taking them because they were still using them. There was still three days of war going on. So they were taking the German trucks and using them for supplies and so on. And they didn't know what's on the trucks and they didn't need it. They need it for other reasons. So they dumped everything on the fields. There were truckloads of bicycles, of motorcycles, and the trucks were just rolling through that, breaking it up, didn't mean a thing. The farmers from the farms, and they don't use horses. They use oxen in that there. They used to come with their flatbed like wagons with eight wheels, load up cartons. Every carton had 24 cans, load them up five or six high, tie them around with ropes, and take them to their farms. And they were just going back and forth. Here we are a bunch of people that hardly dragged their feet and don't know what to do. Here you discover this so you pour out the sugar and you take the butter. Here you see this, and you, how much can you carry? You don't have the strength to carry it. Finally we made it to that little town. We come into the town and we come in. We spoke German-- there was no problem-- so we ask, "Where is there some place where we could rest our bodies, lay down?" So they say, "You know what? Go down this street." There was like a big farm that was employing 450 forced labor people from Poland, from Russia, from Yugoslavia. From all the occupied countries, they brought men and women that were working on that farm. The farm had 600 cows, maybe 1500 pigs, geese, chickens, anything you wanna think of. They had their own vineyards. They had their wine with a wine cellar. We come in there, and what do we know? We wanna take a bed. So, there was a place where these people that worked there--and we spoke their language, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian--they say, "Right there, there is a bed." They had a big water heater and they were boiling, and the water was coming out, and there were like two bathtubs, and we went to take a bath. We took a bath. And what aspiration do we have? We go up on top of the barn, and there was hay on the hay loft, and lay down to sleep. We have eaten something and so on, and there was the tragedy. Some of our people just started eating those cans of that meat and so on. And we met one of our--a shoemaker, a Hungarian, he was in his 50's, late 50's--in the first World War he was a prisoner in Italy--and he was an experienced man, and I don't know how in the world. He was so hungry. He was always a very big eater. In camp, thank God, that he came into the shoe shop and there he had enough food, otherwise he would have never made it. He caught in camp once a dog, ran into the camp, he caught him, and the *Kapo* gave him permission. He killed him and cooked him, and the *Kapo* and him ate up the dog.

HG: So what happened to him this time?

BF: This time, we come over, and here are those big fields where we see him sitting under a tree. And we approach him, we take a look. He had a bottle of whiskey, a quart. There was maybe one-third of it left. He drank that. There were two cans, which were four pounds a can. So he had eaten a full one and then half of the other, about six pounds of meat. And right there and then he got dysentery, and he fell asleep. But the stench was so bad that--we tried to lift him up and wake him up-- the stench almost killed us. So we called over an American jeep and they took him away. And they took him to the hospital. The hospital, the whole town was full of hospitals, so they, from the camp, from that *vuntskirche* [phonetic], the whole day they were taking people, thousands of them, into that little town. And they filled up a few hospitals full of our people that were sick, that couldn't walk out. So we took him to the hospital, and he was in the hospital about two, three weeks. He came along and he felt better. And we visited constantly. He was on his way to recuperation, and he felt good and so on. And he had a hernia. And the doctors there told him, "What do you have to have the hernia? You are anyway in hospital. Let us operate on you." They operated on him and he died.

HG: They didn't know what they were doing?

BF: No. It just so happened, I don't know. He got an infection and he died. And so did hundreds of our people that just started to eat. Now, we woke up, like I say, on the hay loft, where we went up on the barn. We fell asleep on the hay. We woke up. It must have been around 3:00, 4:00 in the afternoon. And we take a look, and there are people running from everywhere and dragging things and so on. And one boy comes running. And he says, "Why don't you boys go to the station? On the railroad station there are all kind of trains, and they are full of things, good things and so on." We slept most of the day. And we, you know, there was things to take and so on. So we made it our way to the station, and we come in, and most of the trains were already cleaned out. We still found one train, where it was like one carload that was like there for post office, let's say, mail. And they were mailing to the soldiers, or the soldiers were sending home from Norway, from Denmark or so, packages home. And mostly there were either cakes, fruit cakes, or cookies. Now, my brother had like a straw sack, which was like a thing for a mattress, you know. He filled it full practically with that, couldn't lift it, and he was dragging it like this behind him.

HG: On the ground.

BF: On the floor, on the ground, mostly cookies and fruit cakes, and brought it up to that hay loft, to that barn. Then we went back. We come back, and there is a *Panzer* train, which means a, fighting train, a train that had tanks and so on. The train itself was a fighter train. And there were signs, "Don't approach. Danger." Go tell, you know, people that were just out of concentration camp, "Don't go there." And one of our boys from Boryslaw, he was then maybe 18 or 19, a young kid, got into the train, and somehow he found a jewelry box in that train, and it was filled with gold rings, hundreds and hundreds of diamond rings, and so on. And he takes that out, and he carries it out. As he carries it out, and he opened up, took a look, covers up, some Russians that were there also, also either prisoners or forced labor, you know, they were pilfering things and so on, they tried to jump that kid. Now we saw that he is one of ours, so we jump them, and we started fighting, and that kid in

meantime took off. That kid was later the richest displaced person in our region, where we were later. He had, unbelievable what he found. A half an hour later somebody else went into the same train and the train blew up. It was mined. He was lucky he didn't spring the, you know, but there was a mine and it blew up the train. And maybe 20 people got killed. Before that train exploded, there was on the side a train that had big bottles of wine, but a bottle had a few thousand gallons, you know, the wooden bottles, and that took a whole box car like it was on a box, just strapped in. And there were like three of these and they got stocked there.

HG: On one car.

BF: Yes, no, and they were stocked there on that train. Now, there were Russian prisoners that were released, P.O.W.'s and so on, and they were just looking for some. And a Russian goes over there and smells. He says, "*Vino*--wine." So he takes out a knife and he had like a corkscrew and he starts to drill and drill and drill.

HG: He just happens to have a corkscrew with him.

BF: Yes. And he makes a hole, and the wine starts shooting out. And he stands there like this and drinks himself to death. Now another one comes along and sees that. Now he gets restless. He's not gonna drill a hole. He takes a piece of rail that was laying there with a bolt and he hits and breaks...

HG: The barrel.

BF: …a barrel, one plank.

HG: Yeah.

BF: Now it doesn't come, but it comes out with a gush. And before you know...

HG: Like a wine fall.

BF: …there is a lake on the station between the rails...

HG: Of wine.

BF: …of wine. And now hundreds and hundreds of Russians come running and they are laying on the ground...

HG: Drinking the wine.

BF: …drinking the wine. Within a half an hour they almost drowned in the wine. That was unbelievable.

HG: There has to be a funny part to this.

BF: This, yes, those were scenes that were unbelievable. Now we make our way back to our hay loft there, and it was already getting dark. And we were so happy. We went down, we got some milk. There was wine they were drinking. We didn't touch the wine. To me, wine even today, they had sour wine, you know, that dry wine.

HG: Riesling.

BF: No.

HG: Yeah.

BF: No, no, it was white. It was all, but we were not, up to today I'm not a wine lover. I like a little Manischewitz wine, but that's a sweet wine, but nothing like this. And they, they were playing music and dancing, those people that were there on forced labor, and now they took over the whole thing, and it was theirs. Now the administrator of that whole farm was an SS man. And he was wounded.

HG: Of what place?

BF: Of the farm where we...

HG: Was a what?

BF: He was the administrator, like the owner.

HG: Yeah.

BF: He was the head guy who was overseeing these guys that were brought there. They were paid minimum wages.

HG: To work. Yeah.

BF: And he was, he was like the owner of that.

HG: Yeah.

BF: Maybe the owner was somebody else, but he was the administrator.

HG: And he was still there?

BF: He was still there. Now he threw away his uniform. And he was a disabled guy, one hand completely, he was probably wounded or so.

HG: Paralyzed.

BF: Paralyzed and so on. And he had a beautiful like one-room apartment on the ground floor. Now the next day we are walking out, and we are going around and looking in town. We got in town and there is the headquarters of the N.S.D.A.P., the Nazi party, the headquarters. We walk in there. All the doors are open. We take a look, and there are some pots, pans.

HG: Yeah.

BF: So we pick it up. We take a look. There are a few valises, empty valises. We threw the pots and the pans into the valises and tried to take it. We walk into the last room, and there is a vault built into the wall, ripped open, and there is German money laying in a heap like this. And on top of it, probably a Russian or somebody else, they went and made number two on top of it.

HG: That's all it was worth?

BF: No. We thought so, that's all it was worth.

HG: Yeah. Yeah.

BF: Little did we know. We had with us one older man, and he was a business man. He was in his 50's. And he worked with us in the shoe shop. He was a shoemaker like I was an astronaut. But he had, he had, he was the typical survivor. He made everybody else work for him, and he survived. But he had a lot of experience, and he was a bright man. Before the war he supplied wheat and ham to Austria. He was exporting it. And he had a lot of wisdom. He said, "Hey, boys, let's take some of that money and staple it up and put it in a rug." So we were laughing at him, "Some money, what is this worth? You see what the Russians did. That's all that's worth." He said, "Never mind. Let's have it." So we piled up our valise, and that weighed maybe 200 pounds, you know, it was still...

HG: With the bank rolls.

BF: …with the bank rolls.

HG: Yeah.

BF: Round. You know, tens and twenties.

HG: Papers?

BF: Paper. But tons of it.

HG: Yeah.

BF: We took one of these valises, and we brought it back. And there was a bicycle standing. We took the bicycle also. That bicycle was our downfall. I'll tell you that. Now, we discovered that one of those Polish guys that was working there, he said, "Hey, you boys, why do you have to stay there in the hay loft? You take this apartment. He is an SS man. Kick him the hell out of here." So we went in there. And we said, "What are you doing here? You are an SS man." And we start beating him and he ran away. We still took over his apartment. He never saw it. He ran away. We are staying in his apartment. We had a bicycle. We had money. We pushed it under a bed and there are 12 of us living in that room. It was a beautiful, like you call a one room, what do they call it here?

HG: An efficiency apartment?

BF: …an efficiency. A beautiful efficiency. Beautiful furniture. A big radio. But beautiful furniture. Luxurious. With a rug, you know, a Persian rug in the middle of the room. And now we are living it up. We are staying there. Like a few days later that Polish guy tells to us, "Why are you staying here? There are all kinds of committees that are helping. They are helping Jews. They are helping Poles and so on. Why don't you go to the Jewish committee?" So we walk over where he told us, and there was a Jewish committee. We didn't know. It was an Austrian woman. She herself wasn't Jewish, but she was one of those that her husband was killed in concentration camp, also for political reasons, and now she tried to help. So we came in there, and we said, "We are 12 Jewish boys and we are there and there." She says to us, "Well, what are you capable of doing?" I say to her, "Me and my brother, we are shoemakers." She says, "You are shoemakers? There is a shoe factory. Why don't you take it over? A Nazi had it. You stay here. You boys will have it made." I say, "We are not staying here. We don't want to stay in Austria. We just want to stay here a few days till we recuperate. We want to, we have to get back home." Our father's last words when they separated us, he said, "If we survive, we'll meet in our home town." Now this is starting to gnaw on us. And I say to my brother, "Sam, we have to get back." We listened to the radio, and the radio said every day, "Those from the Eastern countries, from the Iron Curtain, please do not return home. Stay here. Stay here. Don't go. It's not safe yet. We'll tell you when. In meantime, the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] will help you." The American made all kind of committees to help the refugees and so on. "Stay here. Don't go home." One day, that Polish guy that was friendly with us, he says, "Hey, boys, will you lend me the bike? I wanna go to the Polish kitchen. They are giving out like three times a day food. It will take me 20 minutes with the bike and I'll be back." And that was about two or three weeks later. In meantime, they brought out proclamations that everything that was pilfered or taken or so on illegally should be returned. Otherwise the law will be severe, and it will punish the pilferer. Now, what do we know? We took the money from the bank. We were afraid to put it back, so we let it lay there. It laid under the bed. We didn't touch it. If you wanted to go out, let's say, and they had rations, so there was like a company that was making bottled sodas, like a little seven or eight ounce bottle, that was 10 *Pfennig*, 10 cents. If you wanted to give him 100 *Mark* for one additional one he wouldn't give you. Just the one that you had the coupon for, the ration

card. So, money was no good for awhile. So we let it lay there. That Polish guy, Stashik, took the bike and he went to his camp to bring some food. And on his way back he encountered a procession. There was some kind of a holiday and they were a procession there, like a...

HG: Train.

BF: No, no, no, no, a procession was going like from a church, they were marching with the ornaments and so on.

HG: Banners.

BF: Yeah, and so on. It was a religious procession. So he couldn't ride the bike. And he went off the bike, and starts to like through the crowds against the stream. They were going this way, and he wanted to go this way. And one German, an Austrian, recognized the bike and says, "Wait a minute. That's my bike." And he grabs the bike. Now, with a *Polak*, who was oppressed five years and worked there as a slave laborer, is gonna give him the bike? So he grabs, there was a pump in the bike that you blow up the thing. He pulls that pump and hit him over the head with the pump. Had he had enough room, he would have escaped, but there was a procession, and there were thousands of them. There was a crowd, a mob. He couldn't escape. So they grabbed him and they held him. And the American military police came about and they say, "What's happening here? [unclear] come to the station." They come to the station, so, he says, "They wanted to take, he wanted to take my bike away, but that's not my bike. The Jews that live there gave me that bike. They loaned me it. I'm not gonna give him the bike." So the military policeman goes over, and every bike had a registry number and so on. And it was on the bike, beside the number that was on, there was a registry...

HG: To identify the bike.

BF: …like to identify the bike. So he covers this, and he asks the Austrian, he says, "You say it's your bike. What is the number?" So he pulls out his owner's card and he shows him. He opens it up. It's the truth. It was his bike. Yet he was a Nazi. He left it in the Nazi office.

HG: Right.

BF: But we were not there, so we didn't know who he is. Now, he doesn't ask him where the bike came from and so on. He says it's his bike. He has the owner's card. He gives him the bike and he says to the Polish guy, he says, "You better behave yourself because I can arrest you for it." You've hit him and so on. He said, "Well, it's not my bike." He says, "Well, where is the bike?" He says, "The guys over there." And he gives him the address. Little do we know. We are in our room, and a jeep pulls in with military police. It pulls in, a truck, like a jeep truck, backs up to our door, and two military policemen come in and say, start talking English now. What do we know English? We didn't speak English. There was a little Austrian boy, a German, as you know, that was living on that farm, and he spoke English. So he called him over and he tells him to interpret. He says, "You have 10 minutes. Pack your things. You're going to a DP camp."

HG: How many of you?

BF: 12.

HG: Oh my.

BF: Yeah.

HG: Back to camp.

BF: No, that was a displaced persons camp.

HG: Oh. All right.

BF: It was a camp where they fed you three times a day. They gave you American food. They gave you rations and so on. Here and there they had some cultural evenings. They played music and so on. The sick ones had a hospital and so on, but what do we know? He takes us on the highway. He takes us, and that was like 30 miles away. We take everything but the valises with the money. We are afraid, what are we gonna incriminate ourselves? So we let it, he doesn't look, we let it lay there. We walk out with our things that we had, and he takes us. We had cigarettes. We had other things. So you know, our mind works just like a prisoner, you know. You are so long.

HG: Certainly.

BF: Yeah. So we start to hide things. We put something in our pants and we had pants like this. We put something in our sleeves. And little did we know. We see these two military policemen. They are falling apart laughing. We take a look, and they had a mirror just focused on us. As we were sitting in the bedroom, they saw everything that we did. And they were roaring.

HG: A rear view mirror.

BF: In the rear view mirror. They saw everything. And we thought that we are hiding. We come to camp. Comes into camp and he says, "Okay. Get off. Stand here in line. You register." And he takes off, doesn't even say a word, takes off, leaves us in camp. We register. They assign us to a room, and they give us like two rooms for the 12 of us, six and six. There were bunks. It was clean. They were giving us food. But there is nothing to do. There were a lot of Hungarian Jews, very few Polish Jews. They didn't suffer as much as we did. They didn't lose their whole families like we did. Some did, but not such, they were not as long in camp. We just look at them. Comes in the evening, they start playing the *czardas* and dance and so on. We just look at them, and I look at them. I talk to my brother, I say, "Are they sick or are we sick? There is something wrong? How can you rejoice when we went through so much? We lost so much. How can they dance?" And we just look at them and I say, "I don't know. Somebody is crazy. It's either us or them." And I say, "This is not a place for us. This is just not a place for us." And I say to my brother, "You know, we have a mission. Remember what Dad said. We have to meet in our hometown if we survive. They give us here to eat. They give us enough food not to starve, but you are again in a camp." And later on, some of the camp inmates used to like go out in town and steal something and so on. Suddenly they put up guards, and they don't even let us out. I say, "Uh oh. I was in camp enough. That should be the liberation?" After we were liberated, again in a camp? I say, "We have to go home." So, there was only one way to go home, was in the Russian, there was like a Russian mission working. It said that all these that were under Russian rule can now return if they come to the Russian mission. So we went to that town in Linz, and we said, "We wanna go to our hometown, which is to Drohobycz."

HG: How did you spell that?

BF: Drohobycz. D-R-

HG: Oh, that's your old home, oh.

BF: Yeah, my hometown. Drohobycz. D-R-O-H-O-B-Y-C-Z. Yeah. So, I say to my brother, "The only way to get home, the shortest way, the most direct way now is if we go to that Russian mission." And from 1939 to 1941 we were under Russian occupation, and we belonged to West Ukraine, which is now also under Russian rule. "The only way we'll make it home is this way. Let's go there and register, and we'll get home." That was the biggest mistake of our lives. Now we go to that Russian mission, and they register us. They did not even give us a medical checkup, nothing. They put us on a train. And suddenly they say, "Now you are in the Russian army." Would it be, in the army it would be all right. They bring us to a place, and they say, "Well, from now on, you know where you, your, you'll be mine sweepers." And they say, "There is a proverb that a mine sweeper makes only one mistake in his life. He steps on a mine and he is finished. But we have a second proverb. The first mistake a mine sweeper makes is when he decides to become a mine sweeper." So I stand there, and my brother, and next a friend of ours. I say, "You see? They asked us and we decide. A lot did we have to do with our decision." You know, when he decides, he says, "The proverb says the first mistake is when he decides to become a mine sweeper." I say, "You see, they asked us if we decide." Now our troubles started. As mine sweepers they were usually in the background, when they came, you know they were not in the front lines.

HG: Yeah, go ahead.

BF: So, the Russians that occupied Austria and took part of Austria, the front lines, when they came, those who take, who took let's say the war, *Trophäe*, war bounty, whoever grabbed, that belonged to them. Let's say, so these units that came the first, they grabbed some food supplies. They had these supplies. The ones who came later didn't have nothing. And, you know what our rations were. Concentration camp was nothing in comparison. We…

Tape eight, side one:

HG: This is the story of Bernie Freilich, and he is in the mine sweepers unit of the Russian mission...

BF: Of the Russian army.

HG: Of the Russian army now.

BF: The war has ended.

HG: Right.

BF: But. But.

HG: And you got in in May?

BF: In June.

HG: In June of-

BF: In Austria.

HG: In June of what year?

BF: In June of 1945 I got in. They just took us with that.

HG: All right. Go ahead.

BF: And our mission was to clean up the Danube River from all the mines that were left there by the Germans. We were 22 boys from our hometown. They split us up. They gradually split us up. Now I used my old tactic: I am a shoemaker. I said, if I survived Hitler, I don't wanna die from Hitler's mines which were left there. And me and my brother made our way into the shoemaker's shop for the *Generalstab*, for the General Staff.

HG: It was a Russian army now.

BF: For the Russians, yes, but we had no uniforms. They don't have even uniforms for us. We are working in civilian clothes. Our boys are taking on training, and they train them to become mine sweepers. Me and my brother become shoemakers for the General Staff, and we work for the high echelons of the Russian occupying army. At the same time we come to Vienna, and we stay on the outskirts of Vienna, and I learned that in the Rothschild Museum in Vienna, the Americans were just trying to divide the city into four zones, and the Americans had established a Jewish, Joint Committee has established a center for helping Jewish refugees, Jewish survivors, and I wanna make my way into town. And I go over to the general himself. I made him a pair of boots and for his wife the day before and I say, "I have to you a personal favor to ask of you." He says, "Yeah. What is it?" I say, "As you're familiar, I am a Jew. I am a survivor of the concentration camp. I tried to get to my hometown. I never made it. My father was with us in camp. I'm trying to find him."

HG: Was your brother still with you?

BF: My brother was with me, and was with me taken there, and we are both working for them, and making shoes just like before we were making. Now he says to me, "Okay. I'll grant you that permission, provided you can put on, you can by tomorrow morning you can get a hold of a Russian uniform, and you come to me and then I'll give you permission for eight hours to take the trolley and go into center city. But you have to go, only one of you. Not both. One of you." So I say, "Look, I came here on my own free will. Nobody forced me. I was coming over." I had to build him up a little bit and talk their

language. I said, "I was freed by the Americans. I could have remained on the American zone. I came here on my own free will. Now what, are you holding me prisoner?" He says, "That kind of talk is dangerous. Don't talk like that." I say, "Why don't you do something about those who killed us, while the German, which most of them are now in your army and under your command? The Germans just let them do their dirty work, but the dirty work they did." He says, "You cannot talk like this." I said, "Well, that is the truth. Don't you want me to tell you the truth?" I say, "Yes, but I also wanted to go and see if my father is alive. Is that too much to ask?" So, he says, "If you can get a uniform, be here tomorrow morning, 7:00. I'll give you." I lend a uniform from one of the soldiers there and I came in.

HG: Did he keep your brother?

BF: My brother was...

HG: With you?

BF: No, my brother remained in our, where he was, and I had a pass for eight hours. Now, like I said, they kept splitting up our group. And every time, from the 22 boys, there were only six already left in my unit. And the others they constantly kept splitting up. And if the unit didn't march, well, they said, "The Jews don't march well." And in the unit of 400 there were four Jewish boys, because me and my brother we didn't take part in it. We were working in the shop. If the unit didn't sing well, they said, "The Jews don't sing well." Finally I had it up to here. Well, that day I went to Vienna. And I came to the Rothschild Center, and I came into the Jewish Committee. And there were all kind of people--Polish Jews--working there. They see me coming in in a Russian uniform and they clam up. They are afraid to talk to me. I tell them, "Look, I am a Polish Jew. I come from Drohobycz. Talk to me about anything you want to. I was in concentration camp. I made a mistake. I wanted to go home because my father was with me a couple of months ago in camp, and those were his last words, to meet in our hometown." I say, "So I, the fastest way to go there was to register with the Russians. And they without anything they took us into the army." And I say, "We don't wear uniforms yet, but to come here, I had to get a uniform because they don't trust us." Nobody wants to listen to me. Finally I see one guy, and I ask him, "Where are you from?" So he says, "I am from Przemysl. Przemysl was one of the big cities not far away."

HG: Spell Przemysl**.**

BF: P-R-Z-E-M-Y-S-L. Now Przemysl was like the big city, where my mother came from, a little town about six miles away. And there was a little town that was a Jewish town and it was and I say, "You are from Przemysl?" He says, "Yeah." I say, "Well, do you know Radimna?" That was my mother's hometown. My brother was born there, and he was a year old and then we came to Drohobycz. And I was born already in Drohobycz. So he says to me, "Yes. You know Radimna?" And I tell him my mother's maiden name. I say, "Do you know such and such? My uncle had a bakery. My other aunt had one of the biggest, let's say, like groceries, and she was the wholesale, the wholesale store of that town. She was the, for groceries." So he sees that I know a little bit, you know, more details, that I am not a Russian Jew. And I say, "Look, I was a Zionist. I am a Betari. Please help me. This is not me. That was forced on me today because I wanted to come. I am looking for my father. You have the lists. Look in the list if my father is alive." That guy took some

interest, and he went, and looked and looked over the lists, showed me the lists. They didn't have my father on the list of the survivors there. But they couldn't tell me positively that he is not alive. He said, "Maybe he made it home like he told you." So I say to him, "Is there a way out?" I say, "This is worse than concentration camp now." And I tell him about the 22 of our boys that are now mine sweepers, and any day they can take me also do the same thing. I say, "I'm looking for a way out." So he says to me, "There are," takes me into his confidence, he says, "Look, I'm risking my life, but I am taking your word. I think you're telling me the truth." I said, "Look, my brother is there. They are holding him hostage. I have to be back in a few hours. How is there a way out?" He says, "The only way out from here is back to Budapest." In other words, going east. And he says, "Any time, you can come here. Every evening, 9:00, there are trucks going from here to Budapest. Once you come to Budapest, you register yourself as a Greek Jew. You register yourself anything you want to, under any name, you can go anywhere. Here we are limited. We cannot do nothing. But if you come without this,"

HG: Without-

BF: Pointing to the uniform.

HG: Meaning the uniform.

BF: The Russian uniform, "then we can help you." I came back to my brother, and I told him. Little did I know that the next day, our unit takes off, and is going on foot to Poland, which is 600 miles. Now we are forced to go on foot. On top of this, I have to make shoes for a pony that was born to an officer's girlfriend, and that's her pet, the pony, and he is too young to be horseshoed with metal, because his hooves are too young. And if he'll walk on his hooves, he'll walk and walk and...

HG: That will be that.

BF: That will be that, and they cannot take him in a wagon. So I was making shoes for a horse. I made 12 pair of shoes, and he came barefoot to his destination, and he broke her, her boyfriend's collar bone, because later on they were putting him on a wagon, and they lifted him up and lifted him up. Once he started kicking, he kicked him here in the collar bone and broke his collar bone.

HG: So you marched 600 miles?

BF: So we marched 600 miles.

HG: Back to Poland.

BF: Back to Poland. The minute we came to Poland, I said, I went into the Polish army, I said, "I am a Polish citizen, and if I'm gonna serve, I wanna serve my country. I don't want to serve to Soviet Union. They have no right to hold me." And they said, "No, they have no right." So they said, "Okay. We'll give you. We'll take you out of the Russian army, but you have to be drafted into the Polish army." I said, "Fine. I have only one thing. Give me two weeks. I want to find my father. My father, for all I know, is still alive." So, they released us from the army and gave me a notice that in two weeks I have to register to the Polish army. I took that. I left that place, went to Lodz, started looking again on the survivor's list in Poland. I couldn't find my father. I met my wife. And we tried to go back to...

HG: She was not then your wife?

BF: No, no. I just met her.

HG: Yeah. In Lodz, in the...

BF: In Lodz. Yeah. She just made her way back from, she made it to her hometown and she was...

HG: On her way back.

BF: …on her way back, and she came to Lodz. And there we met. And I knew her a few weeks, and we tried in December to get back to Munich, to West Germany, to the American zone. And we could not make it. Everywhere we went, a group before us that was then the illegal *aliyah* [coming of Jews to the Land of Israel] was working. There were Palestinians, *chalutzim* [pioneers], that came to Poland. They were working underground, shipping Polish Jews out of Poland.

HG: To shipping them to-

BF: Shipping them first to Germany, because there, from there to Italy, and from Italy to Israel.

HG: Right.

BF: To Palestine. Wherever we went, somehow, a group before us was caught. We were already next to go, the border, stop, return, stop, return. And we were like this, about six weeks. And the whole month of December, and most of Janu-, and maybe two or three weeks in January. 1946. We were trying to cross the border to go back to West Germany. And we couldn't. So we returned back to Poland, back to Lodz, and we got married, February 2, 1946. There were three weddings together, my brother, me, and one of our friends.

HG: This was February 2, 194-

BF: Six.

HG: Six.

BF: Yes. We got married, and it was a horrible winter. A very severe winter. We tried to cross those borders many a night. We could not. We were on the way to...

HG: You were trying to get to Munich?

BF: Yeah, and we couldn't, so we returned to Lodz, we got married. We lived in Lodz until April. And in April, the end of April, 1946, we made our way to Berlin, to the West Zone, Schlachtensee was the camp, Schlachtensee.

HG: S-

BF: S-C-H-L-A-S-T-E-N-N-S-E-E [actually spelled S-C-H-L-A-C-H-T-E-N-S-E-E]. That was a DP camp. In Poland I was living under an assumed name. When I didn't register to the army, I took a name of a friend who, a friend of mine who died, and I took his name. And I was afraid every day that, you know, the draftboard will find me because I didn't register to the army. So...

HG: But you were looking for your father?

BF: Yeh, but they gave me two weeks. I was there four months.

HG: Four months.

BF: Four months. And finally we made it, it wasn't so easy, we made it to Berlin. And from Berlin we made our way to Munich. In Munich my wife had a cousin who

survived, two cousins, no, one cousin, one she met, we met him in Lodz. He is today in New York. Both of them are today in New York. And then we came to DP camp Feldafing.

HG: Oh, that's right, yes. Spell that again for me.

BF: F-E-L-D-A-F-I-N-G. And...

HG: And you were there how long?

BF: We stayed at Feldafing till 1949 till we emigrated to the United States. And my wife was by then pregnant. She flew, and I came on the SS General Hahn. And I arrived in the United States on St. Patrick's Day of 1949, 17 of March.

HG: That was a fantastic, absolutely fantastic story that you told. I, I appreciate this, and I, I want to thank you so much for this. It's so important that you did this for me, for us. I appreciate it.

BF: I feel a lot better now.

[Interview Ended]