Interview with HELMUT KOBLER
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Q: WE ARE INTERVIEWING HELMUT KOBLER FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT IN SAN FRANCISCO. TODAY'S DATE IS NOVEMBER 23RD, 1992.

I'M PEGGY COSTER, AND WITH ME IS JAKE BURN. THE PRODUCER IS JOHN GRANT.

HOW DID YOUR FAMILY GET THROUGH THE DEPRESSION, YOU KNOW, ALL THE INFLATION OF THE DEPRESSION?

A: You mean the depression '38 or '34? '38 or which depression?

Q: THE '30s.

A: Oh, the '30s. Why, I think it was pretty rough on them because they were in Vienna--and I'm just talking from the memoirs of my mother--which, you know, was very difficult for them because my father couldn't get work in Vienna. And she didn't have any work, so that actually was the reason that later on in 19 -- early 1930s they went to Pohrlitzt to the place where my father's family was living and where he was born and settled down there.

My father set up a small auto repair shop. And he was working very hard, trying to make ends meet because, again, it was difficult for him, being Jewish, to find good clients or customers for his work, especially since there was another auto repair shop in the same town, owned by a Czech family.

So this town was in the Sudeiten, as I said before, and it's very difficult to understand, but there were these three classifications of people:

the Germans, the Czechs, and the Jews. And hardly the three talk to each other. So, this town was -- there is a German school, a Czech school. There was a German butcher and the Czech butcher and the Jewish butcher. There was a German restaurant and a Czech restaurant and so on.

So usually the people who were of Jewish origin went to my father to have their cars repaired. And at that time there were not that many cars around, so he had to struggle, and he struggled quite a lot. But he still managed to struggle through the depression to have, in addition to my sister, to have me, my brother Otto, by brother Joseph. He was born in what, 1936. So I guess the depression didn't affect his sexual drives too much because we're still around today.

That's about, you know -- was what the depression looked like in there. Later on I remember after '35 and '36 things started getting much better because the Czechs were building highways and fortifications, military fortifications, in anticipation of a German invasion. And so then it was better. But it was all done by 1938, when Hitler went to Austria, went through Austria, and then took over the Sudeitenland. And then this all came to a halt, and practically overnight the Jews who were living in this little town were gone, including my father.

Most of the Czechs were gone because they were afraid of the Germans, and so practically overnight this town became a German town. And there was nobody else but Germans in them.

My childhood during these years was, I guess -- must have been from the time I was three until the time I was ten -- was just normal, putting up with the same kind of crap, I would say, as anybody had to put up with who lives in a town that is half Jewish, half Christian, half

Catholic, half Czech, half German -- didn't belong to anybody, really -- and was abused by all of them. Not very much abused, but at least not that I could not play with the German boys in the German school -- I was going to the German school. The German school just make me an outcast, and some, there was always: Here the little Jew. The German called me "little Jude." Jews called me a little Catholic, and that was about what I most remember.

But I had a pretty normal life. We didn't have -- starve of hunger. We lived pretty good. We would be what you would call here now lower middle class, you know, lower, low, between low and middle class.

We had it very well in summer because there was more cars driving by through on this road, because there was a road, highway, linking directly Vienna and Brün, and this was just -- this town was about 25, 30, 35 kilometers south of Brün. And the winter was very cold, like every place else, and there was not so much activity on the road. So my father didn't have so much work, so business wasn't so good, so the food wasn't so good.

But these are times I remember as basically my nicest time because we were in a family situation. My father was around, my mother, and my sisters -- my sister, and brothers. So usually we find this situation much nicer when you have a family support around yourself. But basically that answers the question, I think, yeah.

Q: HOW DID YOUR PARENTS GET TOGETHER? I MEAN, IT SOUNDS LIKE THIS SEPARATION BETWEEN JEWS AND CZECHS AND GERMANS WAS PRETTY COMPLETE IN POHRLITZT. WAS IT THAT WAY IN VIENNA? DO YOU REMEMBER HEARING HOW YOUR PARENTS GOT TOGETHER?

A: My parents got together because my father was studying -- well, it wasn't studying. He was getting a trade, learning a trade in Vienna. So, because Vienna was then the main city of Austria, and the Sudeitenland was part of the Austrian empire, so was Brün and so was Czechoslovakia; and they had only the liberty after World War II.

So I guess my father went to Vienna to learn the trade of being a mechanic. And then he stayed on to do -- to work in shops and so on.

And that's where he met my mother. They got married, and I don't know, I can't tell you now whether they had to get married or -- I doubt it because -- no, I don't think they had to get married. Because from reading my mother's memoirs, I can tell that it was very tough. My father was out of work. My mother had to do laundry for other people and things like that to keep us alive.

I understand that my sister, Rosie, was sent from Vienna to Pohrlitzt to live with my father's father's family, my grandfather, for a certain time. And then eventually we all followed, and that's how they came to Pohrlitzt.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER'S FAMILY OBJECT TO THE MARRIAGE BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER WAS NOT JEWISH?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, very much so. Because, again, I'm telling from what my mother told me, that my grandfather offered her money if she wouldn't marry my father, because he did not agree with mixed marriages.

And when my father came back to Pohrlitzt, he was an outcast or considered an outcast between -- in the Jewish community there and, especially with his family, he couldn't go. It was then a continuous battle with my grandfather, who wanted that we should be brought up in the Jewish religion and my mother insisting that, no, we have to be brought

up in a Catholic religion. So, yes, that was difficult because, again, here my mother went to the Catholic church in Pohrlitzt, and my father went to the Jewish synagogue.

And as the friction got worse, my mother always was afraid to be seen going to the church because then they tell my father, and my father creates havoc at home.

I remember an incident where I wanted to go to see my father for some reason, and he was in the synagogue. And I went in there, and they threw me out because I was not a Jew. And I got thrown out. I didn't even get to see my father. They had to call my father out.

So, yes, there was discriminations that is followed us, followed me all my life. Even today it's still the same. I'm not considered to be a Jew, and I'm not considered to be a Christian. It's been around.

That's why I'm very much against mixed marriages. I think it's fine for the people who got married mixed, whether it is now mixed black and whites or Chinese or black, any of those mixed marriages produces, to me produces mixed children. And they have it fine; they have each other. But who has the -- the kids has nobody, because the kids go through life not belonging either here nor there, and that's very difficult.

Q: HOW DOES IT WORK OUT TODAY, THE NOT BEING ACCEPTED BY ANY GROUP? HOW DOES THAT --

A: With me?

Q: TODAY, YEAH.

A: Well, for instance, I applied ten years ago for -- to a Jewish restitution organization for restitution for the time I spent in German concentration camp. And it's been going for ten years. They've been asking for papers and papers and papers, and I supply them. And finally

they ask me, I have to prove first to be a Jew. Well, there's no way I can prove. And I wrote them and told them that I can't prove to you that I am a Jew. You see from my birth certificate that my father was Jewish and my mother was not. So I'm not considered to be a Jew. I was brought up Catholic. Never heard from them, so.

There's other things. Where I get to feel this is from the Jews also. I remember about ten years ago, or twelve years ago, I had to get -- I was trying to get my brother out from Czechoslovakia, and the only people who had an organization who could do that or help me in it was this Jewish organization in Vienna. And I went here to the Jewish community and asked them for help. And they were very, very willing to give me the help until the time they found out that I'm not Jewish and my brother is not Jewish. And they just washed their hands of it and just gave me a phone number and the name of a lawyer I could call who could maybe handle it for me. But until the time that they found out I'm not Jewish, that I'm not Jewish, everything was fine.

And I see it -- not so much now because I don't go out much -- in conversation and so on. You can see it.

They also say: Well, why were you in a concentration camp?

Well, I was in a camp because my father was Jewish.

Oh.

And the whole thing changes, you know. For many years I didn't tell even people I am Jewish origin. And the same thing is for my father and goes for my brother and my sister. My children here, they know that they are quarter Jews, and they don't mind. It doesn't affect them any more, you know. I don't think they have had to put up with any

discrimination or anything like that because they were born here. But it's tough.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE CATHOLICS, YOUR MOTHER'S FAMILY? DID THEY OBJECT TO THE MARRIAGE, TOO?

A: Well, first of all I think at that time anti-Semitism wasn't so bad in Austria. It only came, I think, later on in the late '30s and so on. But my mother's family were -- she was already an orphan. Her mother died very, very early, and then her father remarried, and the woman he married didn't like my mother too much, so my mother was kind of brought up by more strangers. And there was not much closeness with her family, except her sister.

I don't know if I mentioned that, but my aunt, my mother's sister, she was -- she and her husband, Uncle Otto, was members of the Nazi party. So they were on the complete opposite spectrum of it. I understand that they just cut all contact off with my mother. In these ten years, from 1933 to 1938, I remember my aunt came to visit us once from Vienna. Later on when we were in the camp already, my aunt came there once, early on. That was to convince my mother to agree to divorce my father because one of the conditions to get out of the camp was for my mother to divorce my father.

Once, I remember, I escaped from this camp, and it was early 1944. And I worked my way to Vienna, hoping that I wouldn't be able to be caught there because it's a big city. And I remember one evening I knocked at the door of my Aunt Hilda's place, and she was just shocked that I had turned up. When I told her I had run away from the camp, she was just panicking because the Germans had a law that anybody harboring

a refugee or a prisoner -- escaped prisoner -- is sent himself to camp or shot or punished.

So I remember Uncle Otto wouldn't even talk to me, wouldn't even see me so he couldn't say later on that he really didn't see me, that I was there. In the morning my aunt took me back out, sneaked me out of the house and took me to south of Vienna and told me to get back to the camp and never say that I was ever at their house.

So they were such big Nazis. I remember on the night table they had a gun, just lying there, a pistol. And I was fascinated by the gun. I wanted to steal it, and I was asking her what's -- why she's got the gun like that. She explained to me that they have this gun in case they lose the war, so they can commit suicide with it.

Well, as it happened they didn't, and after the war, shortly thereafter, they were going to be kicked out of their apartment -- they had a nice apartment -- and I went there with my sister. We talked the Russians out of it, proved that we were in the camp and my aunt helped us while we were in the camp, and they left, and I asked them: Well, what happened to the big promise about killing yourselves if you lose the war? She said: Well, we decided not to do it.

Q: YOU SAY THEY WERE BIG NAZIS. HOW WERE THEY --

A: Well, they were big Nazis in the sense they belonged to the Nazi-Socialistic party from the beginning, you know, not when it became fashionable to belong. They were one of the few earlier who were part of the Austrian National Socialistic party when it was formed already. And they didn't do anything bad, you know, as far as -- I know they didn't kill anybody. She was volunteering as a nurse, as a Red Cross nurse, in the military hospitals, and he was working as an accountant in a factory.

Q: SO YOU JUST MEANT THEY WERE COMMITTED NAZIS?

A: Pardon?

Q: BY "BIG" YOU MEANT THEY WERE COMMITTED TO NAZISM?

A: Yeah. They were committed. They believed in the Nazi ideology. After the war I talked to them, and they told me that they didn't know what was going on in those concentration camps, you know, that there was no gassing of people, killing and so. But then everybody -- after the war you couldn't find one who would tell: Yeah, I was a Nazi, and I knew about the camps. They all said: Oh, we didn't know about it.

So both being intelligent people, I'm sure they knew about it, and they closed their eyes to it. I'm also convinced that they didn't know the enormity of it. But I'm pretty sure they know about it.

They're both dead now. After the war I used to go visit them -- they have no children -- and talk to them, trying to find out more about my family background and so on. But, you know, they just grew old and died. Nothing changed.

Q: THEY STAYED IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

A: No, no, in Vienna. They were in Vienna.

Q: OH. OKAY.

A: They were the Austrian part of my family. They were in Vienna.

Matter of fact, the last time I seen my mother was in 1963. It was just the day before President Kennedy was assassinated, so just about this time now. I was in India working, and I got word that the Czechs allowed my mother to go out to Vienna and visit with my aunt for a week. And so I flew into Vienna. Matter of fact, we stayed at my aunt's place.

Q: DID YOU LIKE YOUR AUNT?

A: Yeah. Yeah, I did like her. You know, she was younger than my mother, and she married well. And she was a cultured lady.

Q: DID SHE EVER ACTUALLY HELP YOU? YOU REMEMBER YOU TOLD THE RUSSIAN SOLDIERS THAT THEY'D HELPED YOU DURING THE WAR. DID SHE ACTUALLY HELP YOU EVER?

A: Well, she did. As I said, she was the once in the camp, and then she sent every Christmas a parcel, a food parcel or something like that. Until the end of the war, you know, she couldn't send anything because they didn't have anything neither to send.

So, yeah, I would say she did her best she could, you know, without upsetting the Nazis, without upsetting her husband. She said she thought about us at least.

And I think she was put out about my mother, who would go and put the life of her family on line just because she is a Catholic, and she does not believe in divorce. Because there was no reason -- we could have been out of the camp in 1939, if my mother would have agree to two things. She would have had to agree to a divorce, which was just a formality, and also to say that the children, us, were not fathered by my father. In other words, she'd have to say she is divorced and say she was a whore. And my mother wouldn't do that.

But my mother I would say suffered even more because of it, and since these camps, or this particular camp where we were, started out as a Jewish refugee camp in Czechoslovakia for families and for elderly people who escaped the Nazis from Austria and from the Sudeitenland, from other places. And then when the Nazis took over Czechoslovakia, then they took over this camp and made it a concentration camp, guards and closed it up and so on.

And so in this camp there was only one more family like us, the Niessel family. They were five children, too, and Mrs. Niessel was their mother. The only thing different was their father was in a concentration camp in Mount Hausen because he had a double -- what you would say -- a double whammy against him. He was a Jew, and he as an active Communist.

And he later on got executed in a town in Mikolov. We drove by, and there is a plaque now on there where he was executed, but they didn't know that during the war. They thought he was still in Mount Hausen.

And so, again, that was the only other mixed family, we and the Niessel family. And the children's age was approximately about the same as ours.

And my mother was a very quiet person, a very religious -- everything she can't handle, it was God's will, and even she couldn't go to church, she was praying and made us pray, taught us religion, and so on.

The rest of them were all the Jewish people, and Jewish people are very, very clan oriented, I would say. They stick together. But they also can be very nasty to people who are not of the Jewish faith, and they were, especially women. And so my mother suffered from this kind of persecution, just as badly as she suffered from the persecution of the Nazis.

How did that show? Well, I tell you, it's good food for children. Usually they give a little bit better food for the children. She didn't get that for us. Clothes, same thing. We got the worst clothes we could get in the camp for children. She had no friends, except this Mrs. Niessel was an outcast, too. And then she was always -- I heard them say she was a schikse whore. Schikse, you must have heard that word, did you? Yeah.

Okay. I never know what it really means. All it mean is that, you know, it's a derogatory term to any woman is not of the Jewish faith. And we were quite often called the little goyims.

So I think that my mother has suffered even more than we did. Our suffering during that time was really not so bad. It was when you look at it the way I looked at it. I was ten years old when I got into the camp. As a child you pretty quickly forget. I'm sure within a year I couldn't remember another life than the one I had in the camp.

In the camp you had to fight for your food, and you had to fight for work, fight and work, work to get the food and fight to keep it. That's basically was what it was. And that was all the preoccupation of the day. The rest of it was that you get some freedom, some place to maybe play or run, which was very seldom. So this kind of was the situation in this camp.

That's why I didn't find it very hard to escape. I didn't find it very hard to get beaten up. It was practically a day when I didn't get beaten up, I thought there was something wrong, something -- they would do worse things to me like kill me or take me away from my family. But beatings, I got so used to it that it just didn't matter.

And naturally while we were in this camp this is how we grew up. We were no angels, neither. We stole from other prisoners food, and we stole from the kitchen if we could. We did all kind of things. And so quite often we got beaten up by the inmates, too, not only by the Germans, but by the inmates because of these kind of things, you know. You steal a blanket or a towel or steal some cigarettes. I didn't smoke at that time at all, so cigarettes were the most valuable thing in the camp, and they were the easiest to steal. So we used to steal them, and we could trade them for

other things, for bread or things like that. We learned how to survive in this camp.

But as I said, looking back today, I say all this is terrible things they did to me, but at that time, it really wasn't so bad. I was used to it.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU GO ABOUT STEALING CIGARETTES? WHO FROM? LIKE GUARDS OR FROM --

A: No, from the inmates. I never got close to a guard to be able to steal. From the inmates. We used to sleep some -- such great big -- this camp used to be a leather factory, and it had this big pools of concrete. And there were cots and people in bunks and so on, and it was very easy when sometimes a hundred men sleeping in there. And some of them would go and roll up their jacket and put everything they have, they own, like cigarettes and maybe some pieces of bread, still they save, or an apple, or anything like that, and even sometimes money and roll it up and sleep under, use it as a pillow.

But in the winter it's very cold, and they didn't roll it up. They used it as a cover, as a blanket, and so they had the stuff in the pockets, and so it was very easy for us to sneak in and steal something.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE -- WHEN YOUR FATHER WAS RUNNING THIS AUTO SHOP, AUTO REPAIR SHOP, IF THE JEWISH PEOPLE KIND OF REJECTED YOU, AND THERE WAS AN AUTO SHOP FOR THE GERMANS AND THE CZECHS AND THE JEWS, WHERE DID THIS BUSINESS COME FROM? DID THE JEWS STILL PATRONIZE HIS BUSINESS?

A: Well, yes. Because, again, this is -- if you have a situation like that, the Jew, or the German or the Czech, before he would go to a Czech or a German, he would go to the Jew, even if he didn't like him. It's one of

these situations like that. That doesn't go just for the Jews. It goes for the Germans, too, and even for the Czechs. If he had -- even if you don't like the guy, you would rather go to him than go to a German.

As I said before, his business was more from going through, for cars who broke down on the road, on the highway, and he would bring them. That's where most of his business came. And he was a very skilled mechanic, no question about that.

Q: WHAT WERE YOUR FAMILY'S SECULAR ACTIVITIES BEFORE THE WAR?

A: Secular?

Q: SECULAR ACTIVITIES, YOU KNOW, NON-RELIGIOUS.

A: Oh. My non-religious --

Q: YEAH.

A: -- or religious?

Q: BOTH, ACTUALLY.

A: Well, I was not an atheist. I was brought up as a Catholic and going to church every Sunday with my mother, getting Catholic instructions in the school and also at home from my mother, and the rest of the kids got the same.

My father went on his own to the synagogue. Matter of fact, I think we were lucky in a way because we got to definitely observe two holidays. We got Saturday, for sure, nobody works, and we got Sunday as another holiday, too. So I think this is what I remember as definitely, not having to do anything on Saturday or anything on Sunday.

But, again, like as it used to be in these little towns, Sunday is usually the day of rest. People go to church; that's about all they had to do for entertainment. They go to church. They dress up children. You have

two sets of clothes. One is for Sunday, and one is for working day. You usually put your Sunday clothes on to go.

And we, as kids we used to skate on little frozen ponds, and we used to skate on frozen rivers and even ski. We had little hills around there. As I said, I don't remember that time as being a very bad time. My bad time I remember is from 1938 on, to 1945, and even a little bit after.

Q: WHEN DID YOU FIRST SEE OR HEAR OF THE NAZI PARTY, OF HITLER?

A: I would say about when I was aware of something very bad going on was somewhere around 1936. People became, in this town especially, very, you know, very split up in definite camps, like. We know about Hitler already because the Czechs were very derogatory about the Germans and Hitler and so on. They were starting to arm and building fortifications on the border because we were very close to the border.

And mostly I became aware of it is that there was a number of songs, Czech songs, against Hitler which guaranteed you, if you sang them, you get into a fight with the Germans in school. And that's what I did quite often. So I remember these songs, and I would say that's when they came.

Matter of fact, I remember when Hitler drove through this little town, you know, after it was. And I remember all this people yelling and screaming and welcoming him. And I seen Hitler in his Mercedes-Benz, standing there and of people throwing flowers.

And there were other things also. I remember that there in the school the Germans were -- not all of them -- but some German children or girls started wearing white socks up to here (indicating), knitted socks, and long braided hair, you know, two. And that seemed to have been

designed that they are -- come from families who belonged to the Nazi party, secretly at that time. And I remember that one day we went out and we caught a couple of those girls, and we cut their -- what do you call these things --

Q: BRAIDS.

A: -- the braids off, and big fights developed. And that's when I started remembering these differences between, in between the Nazi, and they were very pronounced. And then, when Hitler came though, then you could see who really was. There were quite a few you thought not; they were just normal Germans. They were not Nazis. And out there they were really welcoming Hitler.

I am pretty sure shortly thereafter all contact between the German people and my mother just stopped.

Q: YOU WANT TO TAKE A BREAK NOW?

A: No. We can wait another 15 minutes, if you want to.

Q: WAS ANYONE WHO EVER PARTICIPATED WITH LIKE WELCOMING THE NAZIS OR, YOU KNOW, WHEN THEY WERE SECRETLY NAZIS AND YOU COULD BEGIN TO TELL WHO WAS, DID ANYBODY YOU KNOW OR WERE A FRIEND OR CUSTOMER, WERE THEY IN THAT GROUP?

A: That I know of? Yes, quite a few. But after the war I never met up with them, and during that time -- you got to try to imagine that you live in a little town, I think about five thousand people in there. And, as I said, the grocery store was for the German or for the Jews, or the butcher was a German butcher, Czech butcher, and Jewish butcher.

And there was quite Jewish community. There is a Jewish cemetery for many years. My great-great-grandfather is buried there. My great-

grandfather and his wife are buried there. So there was quite a big Jewish community, and all of a sudden, overnight -- it appeared to me overnight -- they were gone. And next day the Nazis were in the streets, and they were there, you see.

And most of the shops they left behind. Some of them left, you know, but most of them left everything behind.

Q: ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY RIGHT NOW?

A: Yeah, because they escaped, but as I said, they stayed there until the last minute. And maybe it wasn't the last minute. I assumed they knew that it was going to happen, but they were hoping that it wouldn't happen. So what I remember, like the Jewish butcher, the Jewish grocery store where we used to go and buy our groceries, and all the other Jewish stores, they were all plundered, you know, or set to fire. And so there was no more Jews in them, definitely.

And there was quite -- only a few Czechs stayed on. People who really stayed on were the Nazis. So overnight what was a very mixed kind of cosmopolitan town where people got on with each other for centuries with different beliefs, different religions, all of a sudden they were gone, and all they had is Nazis.

And as being with my mother we were living in this little, tiny place. There was not even a toilet in there and cold when we were there. She was afraid to go out on the street or do anything because of the Nazis. And people who were friends from the German part won't talk to us, wouldn't, just completely ignored us.

Q: DID THEY EVER EXHIBIT EMBARRASSMENT ABOUT HOW THEY WERE TREATING YOU?

A: No.

Q: HOW COME YOUR MOTHER DIDN'T LEAVE WITH YOUR FATHER WHEN HE LEFT?

A: Well, my father was inducted into the Czech army already about five, six months before. You must understand that the Czechs mobilized the army, and everybody was conscripted in the army to defend the country against Germans. Then came Munich. They were betrayed, and there was no fight.

And even today I hear that if it would have come to a fight between the Czechs and the Germans, that the Germans would not have been able to invade Czechoslovakia because they were not ready at that time. And this fortification, which stands still today along that old border, were tremendous fortifications. The experts say that the outcome would have been quite different if it wouldn't have been for their betrayal in Munich by -- what's his name -- Lord Chamberlain. The outcome would have been completely different then.

What was your question really? I guess I didn't answer it.

Q: WHY YOUR MOTHER STAYED IN POHRLITZT.

A: So my father was in the army, in the Czech army. And when the Germans came, he retreated with his unit to Brün. And my mother stayed with us where we were, hoping, I guess, that this was just going to be a temporary situation, you know. Then my father got demobilized in Brün.

And I was like a refugee, and then I had this infection in my ear, where I was taken to this town by ambulance in order to be operated on. And they threw me out when they found out that my father is Jewish. And so my mother had no choice but to take me across then now. The

border has shifted from where it was originally to the other side of the Sudeitenland. In other words, it was between Pohrlitzt and Brün.

And so my mother took me across there, and I was put in a hospital there. And then she took my other brother, took him across, smuggled him across at night. And I think then she came with my sister, and we were living in Brün as refugees, again, until such a time when the Germans advanced into the rest of Czechoslovakia. And that's when Brün fell and that's when my father escaped, just the day before that, to Poland and then out to England.

So we could break now, I guess.

Q: YEAH, WHY DON'T WE.

(Pause in interview)

Q: WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT THE PASSAGE OF RACIAL LAWS?

A: By the Germans or by the--

Q: DID THE GERMANS DO IT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA SINCE THEY WENT IN?

A: Well, what I know about that was that, first of all, I think it started that all the Jews have to go and report to the Germans. Then they have to wear the Jewish star. And then they were going to be deported, or not deported just resettled, that's what the word was, resettled. That's about all I know about it.

When they were really laws coming out, I didn't understand it. It was the laws. All I knew that the Germans had the power. They could do with you whatever they felt they wanted to do, and all you got to do is try and keep your nose clean and stay alive. I really don't know when these

laws were passed or when they were passed in Germany. So I don't know anything. I didn't know anything about that at that time.

Q: DID YOUR MOM -- WHEN THEY WERE PASSING THIS LAW, DID YOUR MOM GO REGISTER OR DID SHE CONSIDER IT OR DID SHE --

A: Oh, no. When they were passed in Czechoslovakia we were already in a camp. So you mustn't forget we were already refugees. In other words, we were not in our home town. We had no home, so we were just in a refugee camp. Again, the main interest we had was to survive, to get enough food, and not get beaten up too much.

You know, I know the times when, for instance, when it was the turn for the Jews to be resettled, full-blooded Jews. At that time, it was resettling. We didn't know what -- the concentration camp was going on. We knew Auschwitz was a tough concentration camp. We knew Dachau was bad camp, and we knew Theresienstadt was not so bad. So we knew that, but we didn't know what was going on in these camps.

And what we later on heard from people who heard it through third people and so on that this was going on. I knew, for instance, that after this camp was closed down and all the other people went to Theresienstadt and various concentration camps, Auschwitz and so on, except these two families, my family and the Niessel family were left and were put to work as slave labor in the mine, but we were not considered for resettlement, as they call it.

But in '44 it came out that all the mischlings and mixed marriage and products of mixed marriages and mixed marriages will have to be resettled or will be resettled. And that's when I got taken to Theresienstadt and sent to work on this airfield as a slave labor and my

brother, too. And that started in '44. I guess if the war would have lasted another year or so, then all the mixed marriages and mixed children would have been killed, too.

Q: I'M A LITTLE CONFUSED. CAN I CLARIFY SOMETHING HERE? YOU WERE IN A CAMP IN 1939?

A: Yes.

Q: BUT YOU SAID THE MISCHLINGS WERE NOT PUT IN UNTIL 1944.

A: Well, we were a different species as far as they call it. We were in this Jewish refugee camp.

Q: SO THAT WASN'T THERESIENSTADT?

A: No, that was Ivancice. That is the first camp I was in.

Q: OKAY.

A: And this camp was originally a refugee camp, and then in 1938, late '38 or summer '38, when the Germans took over Czechoslovakia, this camp was taken over by the Gestapo, by the SS, by the Germans and was made into a concentration camp. Not a refugee camp no more.

What's the difference? Well, refugee camp you don't have guards, and the people can go and come as they wanted. Concentration camp you have guards, and you can't get out. You are just locked in, and you have to work. So that's the difference with this camp.

And in that camp we were in from 1939 until 1942.

Q: OKAY.

A: That camp then was canceled, and people from that camp, I remember, who we were living with were sent with their two suitcases or their belongings, mostly to Theresienstadt. And from Theresienstadt then they were sent to various other camps, like some went to Auschwitz,

some went to Belsen, some went to Dachau, and so on. And the Nazis came, and two years later I was sent to Theresienstadt also to be sent to another place.

Q: SO YOU WERE SENT TO THERESIENSTADT THEN, EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE A MISCHLING?

A: Oh, yeah, because by that time it was already 1944.

Q: I'M SORRY. I THOUGHT YOU SAID 1942.

A: No. From -- let me just straighten it out the record. From 1939 to 1942 I was in this camp called Ivancice, the Jewish concentration camp Ivancice.

Q: HOW DO YOU SPELL THAT?

A: Let me write it down for you.

(Note is written and handed to interviewer)

Q: AND THEN IN '42 --

A: And in '42 we were -- I was put to work in slave labor camp in the coal mine, which is very close to Ivancice.

Q: OKAY.

A: And there I worked for two years.

Q: UNTIL '44?

A: Until '44.

Q: AND THEN YOU WERE SENT TO THERESIENSTADT?

A: But the family, my mother with the rest of the kids, we were housed in Ivancice. In the same place where the camp used to be we were housed. We were getting some real substandard housing. And these two families I was talking about, they were housed in this housing, and the eldest had to go and work in the mine. So that's where I was for two years. But I was still with my family, together.

Then in '44 I was sent to Theresienstadt.

Q: AND YOUR FAMILY WAS ALSO SENT THERE?

A: No. My family was left, except my brother was put to work as a slave laborer in a factory, makes -- textile factory.

Q: OKAY.

A: Also close by in that area. And so basically from '44 I was the one who went to this Gestapo prisons and the camps so on.

Q: OKAY. THANKS.

WHEN YOU WERE IN THAT -- YOU KNOW WHEN THEY TOOK YOU IN THE AMBULANCE TO THE HOSPITAL AND THEN BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH YOU RETURNED TO POHRLITZT BY BUS, WHO DID YOU TELL THAT YOU WERE JEWISH TO?

A: This hospital was for German soldiers who got sick or who got wounded or so on. And I told it to -- I was in there, and I remember I was being prepared to go into the operation theater, and I think it's the doctors who were going to be operating on me. It was just in a conversation like you talk to a kid, you know: Where's your father and where's your mother? You know, and so on.

And I told him my father is in Brün, and: What's he doing in there?

Since Brün then was Czechoslovakia, was not in the Sudeitenland, and I said he had run away, you know.

Why did he run away?

Well, because he's Jewish.

What? Jewish?

So all this conversation was going on in German. Don't forget I spoke fluently German, and nobody could tell from my accent that I didn't belong.

So that was it there. They decided not to operate on me, and they put -- they gave me back my clothes and put me on the bus back home. I remember this vividly, this, but it was a very innocent conversation. At that time I didn't know I'm not even supposed to have said that, you know. I was a ten-year-old kid and didn't know any better.

Q: DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER TELL YOU -- LIKE WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER TELL YOU ONCE THE GERMANS CAME IN, DID SHE GIVE YOU INSTRUCTIONS HOW TO ACT OR WHAT TO SAY?

A: No. The instruction I remember was: Stay off the streets; stay at home; it's bad times, you know, things like that. Don't give me much trouble, your father isn't home, and I got it bad enough as it is with the kids and things like that. But as far as political orientation or anything like that, no.

The same thing when we were in Brün, you know, still as refugees. We were housed in a kind of a tenement, like here the projects and so on, which was terrible. It was right next to the Jewish synagogue, which was bombed at that time. By the way, I came back there 42 years later. It's still there. The ruins are still there. They didn't even bother cleaning it up after that. And so that's where we were housed.

Then my father -- the Germans came. My father escaped, and we were eating in soup kitchen and living in this place. And that's where the Gestapo used to come and look for my father and beat my mother up, trying to force her to tell them where he was or where he has gone to. Because he was what they called "on the list." They had a list of others

they were looking for. And we were in this kind of situation where nobody was helping us. The Salvation Army wasn't helping us. We could go every day and get some food from the soup kitchen, and I remember carrying it home in a bucket. And we were left to ourselves, my mother expecting a fifth child.

And this was a terrible time. And then we were put into -- late in '39 we were put into this camp, the whole family.

Q: HOW DID YOUR FATHER ESCAPE FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO POLAND?

A: Well, I guess he knew what was coming, and at that time that was the only escape route you could take because Poland at that time was still free. So since he was in the army, he was an officer in the army, he knew what escape routes to take, and that's what he took. He went to Poland and from Poland to England, and in England he joined the army and was there.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HEARING ANYTHING ABOUT WHEN HITLER BEGAN LIVING IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND TAKING PIECES OF IT AND STUFF, DO YOU REMEMBER THIS AND HEARING ABOUT THE POLISH PEOPLE LOOKING AT CZECHOSLOVAKIA, KIND OF WANTING THEIR SHARE?

A: No. No, I was too small at that time, you know. No. I only knew that the Germans were bad period, you know, and to look out for them.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR ESCAPE TO BRÜN LIKE? HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

A: Well, several ways we did. By the way, coming back to that time when we were in Brün on our own, like we used to go begging. We were stealing in the market place. My brother and I were singing, going and

singing from apartment house to apartment house, and people used to throw pennies down at us. Most of the time we were singing Czech songs, which were prohibited by the Germans, Czech national songs, so we got more money for that.

And this was we were practically for a year left to our own, no supervision, nothing. And I remember also at that time that I was, I got a job for to sell newspapers on the street. And I found out these newspapers I was selling was a Fascist newspaper. And that was even before my father still escaped. He caught me once on the street corner, selling this Fascist paper. To me it was the same. I was selling papers to get so many pennies for each paper I sold. So he told me I can't do that because that's a very bad paper to sell. So I didn't do it any more. But that shows you how innocent I was as far as how political things are going.

What was your question?

Q: WHAT WAS THAT ESCAPE TO BRÜN LIKE? HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

A: From the camp?

Q: NO, WHEN YOU WERE SENT BACK TO POHRLITZT THEN YOU ESCAPED TO BRÜN.

A: Oh. That was basically very simple. My mother took us to the border, took me to the border. She arranged with my father to meet us at the border. And it was just a matter of crossing over, crossing over the border at some place where there was no border guard, which was previously arranged with my father through other people sending messages. And you knew which location at the border was not watched, so you just crossed over. And my father took me from there to the children's hospital in Brün.

Q: NOW, YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW YOU USED TO SING THESE SONGS THAT WERE NOT THE CZECH NATIONALISM SONGS, BUT THEY WERE FORBIDDEN BECAUSE THEY WERE LIKE ANTI-NAZI SONGS?

A: No, they were not anti-Nazi songs. They were Czech national songs. When the Germans took over in Czechoslovakia, as I told you, they knew that there were so many Czech songs which was derogatory of the Germans, that they had forbidden all these nationalistic songs. Just as they had forbidden to read certain books and so on.

So these songs we were singing were normal Czech national songs, not agitating for anything else. But there was Czech sentimental songs about the homeland and things like that, the love of the homeland. But these songs were on the forbidden list, you see. But as singing them, I remember because we had the courage to do that. We could run faster then any German soldier could chase us.

Q: WERE YOU CHASED?

A: Oh, yeah, sure. I was always chased by some SS, or I was chased by the super of the apartment building, who by that time already were German sympathizers and so on, you know.

Q: DID THEY KNOW WHO YOU WERE SO THEY COULD REPORT YOU?

A: No, no, no, nobody knew. We were like rats. Nobody knew where we came from, what we are doing. We lived in this god-awful tenement. Matter of fact, I was there this year. It's just terrible.

Q: PEOPLE STILL LIVE IN IT?

A: Oh, yeah, gypsies live in there now.

Q: WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

A: Oh, it was -- it was about six-, seven-story tenement with a yard in the center and small apartments around it. And we got into it -- again this was from the Jewish culture center -- from the Jewish refugee organization. At that time Brün was free still, and so they had bought this tenement, or that's where we got in first after my mother crossed the border. My father got a room in there.

There was four other families in this one-bedroom apartment like, you know. And then this other families got out, too, and finally we were just left in there, in this one apartment. That's been my sister, who at the time was 14, my mother was expecting, and us three others.

It was a god-awful tenement at that time, and it wasn't any better at this time when I went there.

So people, nobody, knew where we were living. Most of the people even thought, you know, we were just German kids because we talked German between ourselves. Nobody knew my mother couldn't even speak Czech. Us children could speak already then so by that time we were already bilingual.

So they chase you, and you run away, but they didn't go to try to find out because there were so many, you know, so many children running in the streets, abandoned, without parents and so on.

We had this routine. We used to go to the marketplace in Brün where every day there is a big marketplace with vegetables and all kinds of things. And we would there and steal, and we knew we would get caught and so. If we get caught, we get beaten up and let go, you know. The merchants themselves went after us. Pretty soon we couldn't even show our faces there because they all knew us already. We used to have to stick with -- my brother would have to go and engage the lady merchant with

asking some question on one side, and I'd steal it on the other side of her stand.

So we went to the Salvation Army and begged there, got some food, things like that. But all this ended when the Germans took over because there was nothing. There was only still this tenement, and once a day there was a soup kitchen set up, you know, where you go and you get a bucket full of soup. And that's what you live on.

And what -- we then started implementing (sic) our income by selling papers, stealing, singing, and so on.

Q: NOW YOU SAID THAT THE GESTAPO USED TO COME AND BEAT YOUR MOTHER UP. DOES THIS MEAN THEY CAME PRETTY OFTEN OR MORE THAN --

A: I would say the first months of the occupation they came maybe twice a week, and then it was less and less because they must have thought that my father was hiding some place or so.

Q: AND THEY USED TO BEAT HER UP EVERY TIME?

A: Well, as far as I can remember, it was most of the time, yeah.

Q: NOW, WHY WAS HE ON THE SPECIAL LIST THAT THEY PICKED UP RIGHT AWAY?

A: First because he was Jewish, and he was a Czech officer, you know, a Czech army officer, reserve officer. And he was anti-Nazi, very anti-Nazi.

Q: HE HAD ACTUALLY CAMPAIGNED?

A: Oh, yeah, Pohrlitzt. He was known about it. He made no bones about it. And so that's why he was on that list. He was actively being against Nazis.

Q: WHEN HE LEFT, DID HE INTEND TO SEE IF HE COULD GET YOUR MOTHER AND YOU KIDS OUT?

A: Yes. Yes. Matter of fact, I think he got -- at that time we were waiting to get visa to go to England to join him there. And I remember my mother saying that she's been notified that they have the visa. My father arranged for the visa for us to go, but now that we have to get from the Germans an exit visa. And we were waiting for the exit visa, and that never came. The Germans never gave us permission to leave. After the shooting started there was not question about it.

Q: WHEN DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU HAD THESE ENTRANCE VISAS, AND YOU JUST NEEDED THE EXIT? WAS IT BEFORE OR AFTER THE WAR WITH POLAND STARTED?

A: Oh, I think was definitely before the war with Poland started.

Q: SO THERE'S NO WAY YOU COULD HAVE LIKE -- SO DO YOU KNOW WHETHER -- DID SHE TRY TO THINK OF ANY WAY TO TRY TO ESCAPE THROUGH POLAND OR ANYTHING?

A: No, no, no. I was too young to even know at that time how to get to Poland or who to contact or even guess at the fate we were going to have with the Germans. To me I hardly always still thought eventually everything going to be all right. We are going to go back to Pohrlitzt and my father is going to return and we are going to live like a family. I never knew about what was going to happen.

Q: SO YOU NEVER HEARD YOUR MOTHER TALKING ABOUT TRYING TO ESCAPE EITHER TO POLAND --

A: No.

Q: -- TO USE THOSE VISAS?

A: No. And I think it would have been impossible thing to do for her with four children or five children already then. No. I think she -- knowing her she must have even found it hard to think that she goes to

England to live there. It was, every time was -- you must remember there was no war yet. There was no shooting. There was just occupation. First the Sudeitenland was occupied, then the rest of it was taken over. But still no shooting. There was no war, normal diplomatic channels. And then when the Germans attacked Poland, then the whole thing collapsed and everybody was trapped.

But there were a lot of people, I understand, and I know some who bought their way out during that period in there who were able to buy exit visa and get out. I know some of my family from Vienna, from my father's side, they go, they went, one went to China.

And this is also very interesting. He was a young psychiatrist. I never knew him, but his name is Fritz Kobler. And he went to China as a doctor, married a Chinese doctor, too. And then after the war he went back to Austria, and then he emigrated here to the States.

Only a couple of years ago I get this phone call from this Fritz Kobler. And just before my father's death -- they have talked on the telephone together after all these years, you know -- and got together and found out that they are part of the family from where my father comes. And he tells me that he has a son who is going to come and visit us, who is going to visit San Francisco. I said, tell him to come and see us, come out and get in touch with us. I'd like to meet him.

And so I get a phone call, and it was this Ben Kobler, his son, Fritz Kobler. And he says he's in the area and can he come and see us. We were just celebrating Fourth of July. Sure, come ahead. The whole family's here. So we gave him directions how to get there, and he got there. And out comes a fellow, Oriental, obviously, shaking hands with me, saying: I'm Ben Kobler, and this is my family. And his wife was from

Burma, and children were about my son's age, and he says, this is Brian Kobler. And my son has a son, also is Brian's name. Except they were Asian background, and he was Anglo-Saxon background. It was funny, you see.

All these fates, these different fates. Now his father is about 84 years old, and he is still trying to find his sister who died in one of the concentration camps. So there is a lot of people, a lot of people went to South America. A lot of them went to Chile, Venezuela, wherever. Every country took them, welcoming them, because they were people who had money and were educated. So any of those countries who took them were assets, you know, doctors, engineers, things like that.

And so a lot of them escaped, but a lot of them were thinking at that time: Well, it's not going to be so bad. Before we go and give everything up and go and become a refugee, displaced, we better stick it out here. We got our families here. The Germans aren't going to do us so bad.

But they are not here today. They are dead.

Q: WHEN THE GESTAPO USED TO COME AND BEAT YOUR MOTHER UP, WOULD THEY COME AT NIGHT OR DURING THE DAYTIME?

A: No, during the daytime. I don't remember anybody coming at night.

Q: WERE YOU THERE WHEN THIS WOULD HAPPEN?

A: Yeah. Most of the time I was there.

Q: HOW DID YOU -- WHAT DID YOU DO AS YOU HAD TO WATCH THIS?

A: Oh, I fought with them. I remember this guy had boots on, and my mother was on the floor, and he was kicking her, standing over her and

kicking her. And I grabbed this guy's boots. He had riding boots on, nice polished riding boots. I was hanging on to him, hoping, wanting him to kick me instead of my mother. And so I got beaten up, too. That happened about two or three times.

And most of us kids were there. We were all screaming, you know, and all that. They usually came in two's, and I think as a consequence of this beating is that my brother was born a complete cripple. I think -- did I mention that, that he was born a cripple? Yeah. Those were tough times.

Q: THE GESTAPO WAS FAMOUS FOR MANY FORMS OF TORTURE AND FOR SWITCHING, YOU KNOW, LIKE FROM AN ATTITUDE OF CONFIDENTIAL FRIEND AND TO HELPER TO BEATING. DID THEY -- HOW DID THEY TREAT YOUR MOTHER? WOULD THEY DO THIS SWITCH OR HOW WOULD THEY BEGIN? HOW WOULD AN ENCOUNTER PROGRESS?

A: I can't remember. I couldn't really tell you more about it because I can't remember what was said or how. What sticks in my mind is this beating, but as far as the Gestapo, you saying that they are, they tried to be good with you and then bad, I have no experience.

In later years I was in Gestapo prison, and in Gestapo there was no, how should I say, nobody trying to be nice to you. They wanted something out of you, they beat it out of you and, if they wouldn't, they kill you. There was not subtle way of trying to gain information. Oh, no. They'll beat it out of you or, if they can't, they'll kill you. And I've seen that, and experienced that myself many a times. Not even did they torture, which I understand that they used it on freedom fighters, where they were using electrical prods and that.

No, they were -- the cruelest way of interrogation was to beat you up, kick you and beat you and torture you. But they were not concerned that they mark up your face or have bruises, show bruises. That didn't matter. So my experience was the Gestapo was nothing subtle. Nothing. They were just a bunch of animals, and they acted like animals and behaved like animals, and they were animals.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE POINT IN TIME UP TO NOW?

Q: (By Mr. Grant) IN IVAN, IVAN --

A: Ivancice.

Q: YOU WERE TELLING US ABOUT ALL THE DIFFERENT THINGS THAT YOU DID. DID YOU HAVE FRIENDS THERE? DID YOU HAVE CHILDREN YOUR AGE WHO YOU WERE FRIENDS WITH, WHO YOU DID THESE THINGS WITH?

A: The only friends I had was the oldest son of the Niessel family, who was about a year older than I was. His name is Franz Niessel. He's dead now, too. The other friends I had was my brother Otto, who was about 11 months younger than I am, and most of the things we did with him. And his friend was, again, the second from the Niessels. So there were no other friends.

Q: JUST THE FOUR OF YOU?

A: Well, we had -- our family had five children. Their family had five children, too. My youngest brother was friend with the youngest daughter, Lily, who is now in Vienna, has her own children and so on. And she's like a sister to me. Two of her brothers already died. Franz, the brother I was friend with, he died about seven years ago, and Herbert died now, couple of weeks ago.

Q: AND SO WHEN YOU DID THESE THINGS TOGETHER, DID YOU STAY TOGETHER WITH THESE PEOPLE FOR A LONG TIME? DID YOU WORK TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE MINES?

A: No, not in the mine. But we stayed together practically all through the war, except me of course. Because we were housed in this little tenement house. And there were these four families in it, two of ours, our two families, and they brought in another, no, three families. They brought in another family, mixed marriage from other place.

And this was a very, very old, dilapidated house, practically crumbling. Show you how old, there were mushrooms growing on the walls. It was -- nobody lived in that for many years. Then, when they closed the camp out, that's where we were put in.

And daily you couldn't go any place, except I could come home on the weekends from the mine whenever there was a day off. And nobody could travel because we had no travel document, no ID's or anything.

And everybody in town didn't dare to talk to us. The Germans didn't perceive us as being dangerous to them because five kids and the beaten-down woman is no big danger. But still we wouldn't get any identification so we could go from one place to the other. Everything had to be done on the sly, like.

So these two I mentioned, Franz and Herbert, were put with my other brother into as forced labor. And I say "forced labor," is like they had to work there 12 hours a day and didn't get paid. If they would miss a day for something, then they would be sent to a much stricter camp. Again, in this textile factory, but since I was the biggest of them -- they were much, much smaller, you see -- and so I was put in the mine to work.

This camp where we were, later on there were slave laborers who were working at that same mine I was at. Later on they built barracks right at the mine, so when they build the barracks, you couldn't get out. That was it. It was barbed wire around it.

Q: WHEN DID THEY DO THAT?

A: End of '42, '43. But, again, this didn't bother me because I was in that area. I knew that I could always escape or get out of there, go home to my mother, and then be back at work in the morning. But I did not do that officially. It was get under the wire of any of those ways.

Q: EARLIER YOU SAID THAT YOU KNEW THAT CERTAIN CAMPS WERE BAD AND CERTAIN CAMPS WEREN'T AS BAD. HOW DID YOU COME TO KNOW THAT?

A: Well, mostly was from people who came to work as slave laborers in that mine and who either heard it or had already -- again, these were people from mixed marriages like I, or it was the Catholic husband who was married to a Jewish woman. They were not bothered until about '43, '44. Yeah, '43, '44.

So they were collected all over Czechoslovakia and even part of Austria and were sent to that mine as slave laborers. So they heard it from other people, and I don't think there ever anybody came back out of there to be witness to it, but we knew that these camps are bad.

How, I don't know. But like, for instance, how did I know my uncle was supposed to be in Theresienstadt with his family. I knew that he was, way before I got there, that he was digging graves for people who died in Theresienstadt. And after the war I found out he was taken, he and his family, the wife and the little baby, was taken to Auschwitz. And because of his experience of digging graves and burying people in Theresienstadt,

he was put under the Sonderkommando, which is the people who help the Germans cremate the bodies and kill them and take their teeth away and so on. So that I found out after the war.

But this I knew, that he was in Theresienstadt digging graves, for year. How did I know? It just gets around.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF THOSE CZECH SONGS?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ANY PARTICULAR PARTS OF THEM?

A: Oh, I play them. My brother sent them to me. I got them on a tape.

Q: (By Ms. Coster) CAN YOU SING THEM NOW?

A: I'm not going to.

Q: (By Mr. Grant) CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THE LYRICS SAID?

A: This one is called (speaking in Czech), "This is our Czech song."

(Speaks in Czech)

"So as on a meadow of flowers blooms our song." It's about -- these are the words: (Speaks in Czech).

The other one was: (Speaks in Czech). It's a little log cabin under the mountains, and that's a Czech song about the Tatra Mountains. And these were basically the two we were singing.

Q: SO NONE OF THE SONGS YOU SANG HAD ANYTHING --

A: Political? No, no, no.

Q: -- POLITICAL?

A: No, not the ones we were singing, but the ones I knew I learned in Pohrlitzt.

Q: (By Ms. Coster) YOU DIDN'T SING THE ANTI-NAZI SONGS?

A: No, we didn't sing these. These songs were playing mostly on the sentimentality of the Czechs because, like in this song, this song ends

(speaks in Czech). "So when once we won't be able to sing this song anymore, then we are going to be dead."

So it plays on the sentimentality.

(Pause in interview)

Q: (By Ms. Coster) OKAY. NOW, I HAVE A LOT OF QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT THE CAMPS.

A: Okay.

Q: SO I'LL START WITH THE FIRST ONE YOU WERE IN, WHICH IS IVANCICE?

A: Ivancice.

Q: IVANCICE?

A: Ivancice.

Q: OKAY. NOW, HOW DID YOU GET THERE? WERE YOU NOTIFIED AT THE TIME TO GO OR WERE YOU TAKEN OR HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

A: Far as I remember we were still living in this tenement, and by that time my mother was already out of the hospital. My brother was born and baptized, and we were told to be ready next day, that we will be taken to a camp. And we were taken to this camp the next following day.

Q: AND WERE YOU ALLOWED TO TAKE ANYTHING YOU WANTED WITH YOU, OR WERE YOU LIMITED HOW MUCH YOU COULD TAKE?

A: We were allowed to take usually two suitcases, but we didn't have two suitcases between all of us.

Q: TWO SUITCASES PER PERSON OR PER FAMILY?

A: Usually -- I remember two suitcases per person, or, in other words, what you could carry. But since we didn't have anything, you know -- for

instance, you couldn't take dishes with you because most of it, what you could carry, would be food and clothes. So I remember we didn't have any suitcases or so. We might have had a few boxes with some clothes in it, and that's how we came in the camp.

Q: AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

A: I don't remember. Either by train or by car -- by bus. I couldn't tell you.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST DAY LIKE? DO YOU REMEMBER THAT?

A: In the camp?

Q: YEAH.

A: Yeah. It was surprisingly nice. It was a nice feeling, because what I remember I seen a lot of children in there, you know. Discipline wasn't so hard, you know. And it wasn't bad. Basically I was very pleased that we wouldn't have to go and shift for ourselves anymore, you know. We'd be getting regular meals and so on.

The fact that I couldn't get out didn't bother me very much because, as I said, I wasn't -- I remember we came there just when the evening meal is being served, you know, and what we got to eat there was better what we had on the street. It was not very good, but it was a warm meal. It was more than we had many times when we were just left to ourselves.

By that time I was eleven years old, so, as I said, there was a lot of children there, a lot of games to play, and so it wasn't --. Maybe it was a -- harder for my mother. It's only later on when --

Don't forget that this camp was administered at all times by the Jews. The Germans, just like in any other concentration camp, were on the outside margins of it, you know. There was a camp commander

which was German and maybe two or three guards, SS guards, but the rest of them were all Jewish. The administration inside the camp was Jewish.

Like in all these camps, you find German Jews being the administrators, and they sometimes were worse that the Nazis because you didn't have so much to do, unless you really did something bad, then the Gestapo and the SS camp guard or camp commander would take over. But as long as you didn't -- so the whole thing was administered by the Jews themselves.

And only something they couldn't handle, they would pass it on to the Germans. Naturally there was a lot of spying on each other and a lot of reporting going back and forth. And the German Jews were -- most of them were very well-educated Jews, you see. So they looked down on some of the other Jews because there was also Polish Jews, you know, and Czech Jews in there. So they themselves looked down on the Polish Jew or unorthodox Jew, you know.

And especially in the camp, German Jews, they had the best position. They were the master. The guy in charge of the electrical department was a German Jew. The guy in charge of the mechanical department was a German Jew. The camp administrator was a German Jew. The camp hospital was in the hands of a German nurse, German Jewish nurse. All the trusted people who work in the office, they were all German Jews.

And it stands to reason, because that is the only ones the Germans, the Nazis, could communicate with. They couldn't talk Polish, but they could talk to the German Jews.

And they received orders and carried their orders out and carried out beatings, too, sometimes. I remember once I got beaten up by the camp

administrator -- I don't know what I did -- and they were four of them holding me, and this guy was beating me with a stick. And really beating me, much worse than I ever got from the German.

They were also administering the punishing cell. There was a cell which was underneath the stair and nothing. You couldn't even stand up in there. And I got that quite often. All dark, you can't see, and the punishment was three, four days and sit there in the cold, rats running around. And they did, once -- usually when I escaped and after I give myself up I get taken back to the camp, I go right underneath the stair in that cell for a week or so.

It was beating. Much of the beating was done by the Jews, not by the Germans. Because me running away, I made it tougher on them, and so it was. That doesn't mean that it always was, but it happens.

Once I was put into that cell with my hands tied in the back and hang up on the wall like that. And that's why today I have trouble with my elbows and my shoulders. I was hanging on there like, you know, on my, yeah, on my toe. And so that was the camp life in there.

But every concentration camp was administered by trustees or most of the trustees, I mean the first few years, were German Jews. And don't let that be told anybody different. This is how the Germans were able to manage even to kill six million people.

Q: (By Mr. Grant) HOW DID THOSE GERMAN ADMINISTRATORS COMMUNICATE WITH THE POLES AND THE CZECHS IN THE CAMPS?

A: Believe it or not, Yiddish. Yiddish is a universal language, which is very similar to German, and most of those Poles, even Russians, Russian

Jews and Czech Jews and German Jews, they spoke Yiddish. And that's how they communicated.

Q: (By Ms. Coster) NOW, AT FIRST, THIS IS THE CAMP THAT YOU SAID WAS AT FIRST A REFUGEE CAMP?

A: Right.

Q: WHEN DID IT CHANGE FROM REFUGEE CAMP TO CONCENTRATION CAMP?

A: They had changed before I came in there.

Q: SO IT WAS ALREADY A CAMP?

A: When I came there, it was already a camp, and I couldn't get out. It also was -- I was just home now and went through the photograph pictures of my sister and mother had, and I came across some photographs in the camp. And there was one picture with my -- was the camp Jewish administrator posing there with about eight girls, young girls, 16, 17, beautiful girls. My sister was one of them. And I said: I forgot completely that. I never seen them taking pictures in the camp.

All of a sudden I found in my mother's things several other pictures, which were taken in the camp, and these were taken at times when the Gestapo and the Germans from Brün brought Red Cross representatives. And they took the pictures in there, but I say: I can't understand that, Rosie. I don't remember. You have street clothes on, very well, nice.

Yeah, she said. Don't you remember that whenever they came from the International Red Cross, we were able to wear normal -- we were able to wear our normal clothes, and then we got a picture of all the children in that camp all together.

And there was I and my brother and the Niessel family. They all were completely differently dressed than what I remember from the camp. And my sister told me: Yeah, that this when the Red Cross came to inspect.

So that's when they took pictures.

Q: SO WHAT DID YOU NORMALLY WEAR?

A: Some rags. You know. A very -- I usually wore short pants and socks and some clogs, old shoes, and so on, but never a tie or anything like that. And I got a picture from there with a tie on. And in the back of that picture says, "Children -- Group of children working in planting a garden in the camp." You know, that was the occasion in there, now I remember, was planting a garden.

Q: DID YOU ACTUALLY PLANT THAT GARDEN?

A: Yeah, just before they came. And afterwards it never went any further because, you know, the ground where it was, was behind the camp, and was nothing, no good to plant anything in there.

Q: WAS THIS THE CAMP WHERE YOU WERE SAYING THAT YOUR MOTHER GOT THE WORST CLOTHING, EVEN THOUGH THEY WOULD USUALLY GIVE THE BEST FOR THE CHILDREN?

A: Oh, yeah, that's the one.

Q: SO DID YOU FIND A LOT OF DISCRIMINATIONS IN THIS CAMP AGAINST YOU?

A: Of course. We were in the minority.

Q: IS THIS THE SAME CAMP WHERE THE OTHER WOMAN, MRS. -- YOU KNOW, WITH THE FIVE CHILDREN?

A: Niessel. Yeah. She had the same problem, and I talked to her daughter just recently in Vienna, to Lily, who was ten years when the war

ended, eleven years old. So she was about five years younger than us, and she can remember.

Q: DO YOU RECALL ANYTHING ELSE?

A: Out in that camp?

Q: YEAH. LIKE ABOUT, ANYTHING MORE ABOUT HOW YOU WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY, THE DISCRIMINATION.

A: Discrimination, no. You know, it's just what you feel at the time. It didn't even register at that time to me so much for the simple reason because I was so used to it. I was a kid, and as it became really obvious that, you know, when --and, again, mostly other children were calling us "goys." And so it was all right, didn't matter so much.

But when it came to calling us really dirty names, the fights started. And they usually started between kids.

Q: AND DID THEY CALL YOU ANY DIRTY NAMES?

A: Oh, yeah. Well, dirty name, what do you mean? Dirty Christian or dirty goy. Yeah. But, as I said, it didn't register very much, and I think I was just as much prejudiced against them as they were against me.

Q: DID YOUR SISTER, DID SHE RECALL ANYTHING THAT SHE HAS TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT?

A: From the camp?

Q: YEAH.

A: No. We've talked about people we know, you know, if we remember from the camp. Like I remember a lady, a German Jewish lady, who was in that camp. And she was from Germany, but she was in Palestine. And she came back, and she was practically sent to this camp on her request or by the Jews from Palestine, to train the girls. You know, to train them in, in the Macabees.

Q: MACABEES?

A: Macabees. That's a Jewish defense organization or something. I don't really know.

Q: LIKE THE BOOK IN THE BIBLE?

A: Macabee, yeah. That's the name I remember.

Q: DID YOUR SISTER ATTEND THOSE CLASSES?

A: Well, they were not really classes, they were just, that she was looking after them. You know, teaching them ways of life and maybe even teaching them, since there's no school, teaching them history or something like that.

I know the boys had it, one guy like that, which I know he was sent from Palestine also to organize the boys in the camp. And it's only, it went so fast that when that camp was taken over, they were there. They stayed there, and they were sitting there and wondering what happened to them.

Q: OKAY. SO THIS WAS BEFORE AND THEN THEY WERE JUST CAUGHT THERE WHEN IT CHANGED FROM A REFUGEE CAMP?

A: And they stayed in the camp, and I guess they were -- the Gestapo didn't know them, that they were, you know, organizing anything. But they kind of kept the discipline between the children.

And this one guy I remember very clear today. His name was Louis Polack (phonetic), and he would teach history. He would talk to us about Palestine. Matter of fact, he was more like organizing to go to Palestine after the war was over and telling us about the Jewish homeland and the whole situation.

Q: DID YOU START WANTING TO GO TO PALESTINE?

A: Yes.

Q: WHAT WAS THE FOOD LIKE IN THIS CAMP?

A: Terrible. Food was, like say in '39, it was very substandard camp food, but not that bad. It was, you know, you get maybe twice a week you get -- that's in the first year, you get enough ration. Let's say you might get something like 1200 calories, and twice a week you get a little piece of meat in the soup. Mostly potatoes and bread and soup, vegetable soup, substitute coffee, things like that.

I don't remember that we ever had chicken or fish or anything there. When I say the meat, it was mostly put into the soup. And they prepared it, and it was fairly tasty, but every year as the war progressed, the food got worse. And pretty soon there was no more meat, maybe just then on occasion when there was a Christmas or something like that that you'd find some meat in there, in the food.

In the springtime, the summertime, the soup was pretty good because you had fresh tomato, fresh carrots in it, fresh vegetables, and so on. In the middle of winter, it was tough. The potatoes were rotten and were bad, and the vegetables were frozen, and so then they thawed out and they were rotten. But by boiling, just boiling it down. Very little salt in the food. Potatoes, you got so many peels. And, as I say, by the end of winter, they were all rotten, so you could hardly eat them.

Bread was the same type of bread, you know, kind of a dark rye bread. And you get a ration of it, which was about four inches square and about one inch thick, for the whole day. And that's about all. It was not enough to starve on -- I mean, not -- it was enough not to starve on, but it's not enough to fill you up.

Q: ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR PEOPLE IN THIS CAMP THAT YOU REMEMBER THAT REALLY STAND OUT IN YOUR MEMORY?

A: For being good, bad, or indifferent?

Q: EITHER, ANY.

A: No. No. What I can remember is that several, not several, a few of these people in the camp got -- were -- got mental. In other words, they went crazy. They had to be restrained, or, you know, they tried to commit suicide and things like that. I remember that.

It stands out that I was working in the carpenter shop, and for all those people who died there, I had to make, myself and other carpenters, had to make their coffins, the boxes to be buried in. And most of them died of suicide. And I don't remember anybody being beaten to death in that camp.

Q: SO THEY ACTUALLY BURIED PEOPLE WHO DIED IN THIS CAMP?

A: Oh, yeah. They buried them outside in the Jewish cemetery.

Q: WERE THEY ALLOWED TO HAVE SERVICES?

A: I don't know. I know there was a rabbi in the camp with us. If you think of service where the inmates can go, no, because they couldn't get out.

Q: WHAT ABOUT GRAVESIDE?

A: Graveside, that's what I mean. They couldn't get out to have a graveside there, but this rabbi may have gotten out with the body, because the body was put in the coffin in the camp and then wheeled out to the Jewish cemetery.

Matter of fact, I got to ask my sister on that because, you know, like again all this little towns had their Jewish cemeteries. So this town -- Ivancice had a Jewish cemetery way before there even was a camp because they had a Jewish population. Yeah, they were taken out and buried.

But this camp also had a hospital, you know. It was a Jewish doctor in it, and I think they had a four-bed hospital. And most of the people who were there were old people, were just dying.

Q: DID THEY HAVE MEDICINES?

A: Well, what kind of medicine? Penicillin and that didn't exist at that time.

Q: EVEN BASIC ASPIRINS?

A: Well, they must have had aspirins, yeah, but, you know, you couldn't go and say: Give me an aspirin, I got a headache. That didn't exist. But I'm sure they had some things in there. They didn't perform any operations. Again, if you had, like I had a bad operation on my appendix, they took me out and put me into the hospital, to the nuns, in Ivancice.

Pretty soon I was able to fake some kind of sickness and get a few days outside in the hospital with the nuns. And they always fed me well and gave me a lot of food to take back in the camp.

You know, there were good times and bad times. Never were there very bad times and never very good times. The good things was we were together with the whole family, was together. We were not beaten every day, you know, and we were worked very hard. But they didn't go out of their way to torture you or anything like that, no.

But I know the older people who were, who knew better times than I and who were rebellious, they were not very long around. They usually ship them up to another camp. Basically this camp was for families. Then it was split up, half side was families, half side was slave labor for the mine. There they brought in all the people, all the young fellows, able to work from all over Czechoslovakia to work in this one mine.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S JOB, AND LIKE HOW OLD WERE CHILDREN WHEN THEY WERE REQUIRED TO WORK? I MEAN, YOU CAN'T MAKE VERY YOUNG CHILDREN WORK, THEY JUST CAN'T DO IT. SO HOW OLD WERE THEY?

A: Usually everybody had to work from about ten years on upwards. Now, whether it was just cleaning up or picking up garbage in the barracks, you know, kids used to do that, or working in the laundry, like my mother was working in the laundry while most of the other Jewish ladies were working in the kitchen. There's a difference.

And again, the laundries were not something like you have here. The laundry was a big, big containers with water boilers and put the laundry in boilers and wash it up and hang it up outside to dry. You collect the laundry.

But I basically started working when I was 12 years old, first in the electrician shop and then in the carpenter shop. There was also the tailor shop. Our tailors worked from 12 years old out, and they started the tailor work, you know, make the clothes and things like that, uniforms.

And that doesn't mean that all the kids work all the time. But they always had a few kids in their group to do the lighter work, like tailor work. Everybody wanted to work in the tailor shop because you sit down. You didn't have to -- everybody wanted to work in the carpenter shop because it was nice and warm in there. There was a stove in there. You could work. Nobody wanted to work outside in the yard or in around outside, you know, where it's really cold. And nobody wanted to work in the laundry. That's really bad. You never get dry. And I can't think what other work there was.

When I was 14, I worked in the coal mines.

Q: HOW DID YOUR MOTHER TAKE CARE OF YOUR YOUNGER BROTHER WHO WAS CRIPPLED WHILE SHE WAS IN THE LAUNDRY?

A: She carried him around. She wasn't working eight hours in the laundry or ten hours in the laundry. She might have worked six hours in the laundry, and the rest of the time my sister looked after him. Or he had a little cart, and they dragged him around in that cart. And the laundry was separate from the camp, the laundry building, so in summer he was outside, and she was working inside. But most of the time my sister was looking after him when she was working. And since she had five children, she did not have to work full time. It was very organized, well organized.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHY THE GERMANS HAD THIS CAMP FOR SO LONG? I MEAN, BECAUSE AT SOME POINT WHAT THEY DID WAS THEY JUST SIMPLY STARTED IF YOU HAD CHILDREN OR IF YOU WERE TOO YOUNG, THEY WOULD JUST SHIP YOU TO AUSCHWITZ AND KILL YOU.

A: I don't -- I think at the first time in 1939 they didn't know what to do with them, you know. They had a bunch of Jewish refugees sitting in their camp, which have to be fed, and so I think that is why they took it over and started running it like a concentration camp. Basically I don't think they knew what to do with it.

It's only in 1941 and '42, where their policy started applying to Czechoslovakia. They were saying: Now you have to start sending all the Jews from Czechoslovakia. We got all them from Germany. We got them from Poland. We got them all from France, and so on. And now it's Czechoslovakia.

So that's why they start out with the purebred Jews, families with children, you know, older people who can't work. Basically they had the question of survival, of whether you could work or not. When you can't work, you died. They were not going to feed you for nothing.

Q: WERE THERE SHOWERS THERE, AND WERE YOU ABLE TO -- WHAT WERE THE FACILITIES LIKE?

A: There were no showers. No showers. I don't remember.

I'm wrong. There were showers in there, but I don't remember ever taking a shower, so it must have been for some other people. I think it was for the people working in the kitchen and around there, you know. The more trustees and so on had showers. I remember, but where I was with my family, there was not showers.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ENOUGH WATER FOR DRINKING AND COOKING -- WELL, YOU DIND'T NEED TO COOK, BUT KEEPING YOURSELVES CLEAN?

A: We had enough water because there was a creek running through the camp. And they build a house over it, and so you could wash in the creek, which was quite nice in the summer. In the winter it was cold. I really don't recall having a bath in a bathtub or having a shower during all that time until I started working in the coal mines, because there they had showers. We needed them coming out every evening, out of the mine. But nothing in there.

Q: HOW ABOUT FACILITIES?

A: Facilities were there, you know, toilets and water flushing toilets. No seats on it or anything like that and not enough.

The same thing was the heating of it. This was a great, great big building. I took a picture of it now, and the one whole floor was always --

had about five, six floors, and it's long floors, with all the inmates in it, you know. And they had all the bunks and so on through it. In the middle they had one stove.

And there was always a fight to get around that stove. That one stove wasn't any bigger than the one I have now in my ranch to heat about 50 times bigger area, so everybody was cold. And you were not around during the day to lay in your bunk or on your bunk, and so everybody tried to get around the stove, you know, as close to the stove. And there is always fights around.

Q: NOW, DID THESE BIG QUARTERS -- THEY WEREN'T JUST SEPARATE APARTMENTS? THEY WERE LIKE BIG BUNK ROOMS?

A: They were big bunk rooms. The way they were separated, we were on the top floor. That's where there were families, you know, no single men. So mostly -- I don't think there were any men. It was mostly, it was women there, was maybe a few old men around in there.

There were bunks and double bunks, and there was kind of a partition when there was a family, you know. It was you hang a blanket over a string, and that was a partition between one family and the other one. And in the single men it was just bunks. And then it was just dining area, you know, where there were just tables, like picnic tables now you have, but much longer. And so that's every floor had that. You were eating and sleeping in the same area practically.

Q: WERE YOU WARM ENOUGH? DID THEY GIVE YOU ENOUGH BLANKETS?

A: I was always cold. I couldn't wait until spring comes in there, because in this part of Europe, the winters are miserable, really miserable. So I was always cold.

I don't think you could ever get enough blankets. I slept with my brother in the same bunk, so we would have two blankets covering us, but I was still cold. No, I don't remember a time I was warm in there.

Q: WHAT WERE THE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS?

A: Well, there were bunks.

Q: HOW MANY TO A BUNK?

A: Well, usually in this family there was one to a bunk, grown up, but children were two and sometimes three to a bunk. And so I bunked always with my brother. My mother slept with my sister, and my other brothers slept with my -- the two little brothers slept together in a bunk.

Q: DID YOU HAVE LIKE COATS?

A: No. No, I don't remember coats. Most, you know, just heavy work coats. Parkas or jackets at that time didn't exist. There were jackets out of cloth and sweaters. And these sweaters were nice and warm because they were knit by the women in the camp, you know, hand-knit. That's another thing my mother did. They gave her the wool, and she knitted the sweaters for us.

But coats, long jackets -- pants were, up until when I started in the mines, I used to get short pants. And I remember a big celebration when I got my long pants when I was 14 years old.

Q: IN THE LAUNDRY, DID THEY WASH EVERYBODY'S CLOTHES IN THE LAUNDRY, OR DID YOU WASH YOUR OWN CLOTHES?

A: No, they washed in the laundry. Everybody washed his own underwear and so on. Your underwear and socks you take care of that yourself, and everything else was washed in the laundry I think every two weeks, every two, three weeks, every month or so.

Again, that was split up because sheets had to be washed in the laundry. They were not white sheets, but just sheets over the straw. We had kind of mattresses out of straw in there. And over that they have kind of a sheet, which you lay on. They were washed quite often.

And the hospital had sheets that went to the laundry, so the laundry worked every day.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY ROLL CALLS HERE?

A: Roll calls? Yeah, we had roll calls. Towards the end we had them practically every week. And they were the standard-type roll call. You had to assemble in the yard, stand at attention, wait until the camp commander comes. And the various people in charge of the whole floor, they reported on their people.

And that's where also when you did something wrong, not to their liking, where the punishment gets meted out. If it was very serious, that's when the SS came, and they were very brutal, making you run in circles for hours and hours and beating you, running the gauntlet where they stood there and kept hitting you with a club.

Q: WHAT WAS SERIOUS ENOUGH TO CALL THE SS IN?

A: Well, for instance, I remember once that some letters got smuggled out. I used to smuggle letters out, too, and bring letters in, but it wasn't because of me. They found some letters being smuggled out, and then they started investigating and searching out between the belongings in the cells, in the blocks, and found, I don't know, some knives and things like that which wasn't supposed to be. And that's when they got in and really created holy terror for four or five days, among the women and men and everybody. Then they left again.

Basically I think was when the camp commander asked for help.

Q: AND THE CAMP COMMANDER WAS JEWISH?

A: No, the camp commander wasn't Jewish. I'm talking about the SS commander from the camp, the German part of the camp. I differentiate between the camp commander and the camp administrator. The commander, or kommandant, is usually German, either belongs to the SS, or he might of belonged even to the army, but he was a uniformed guy. And most of the camp guards were SS who were wounded on the front, and so they got light duty in the camp.

And this camp I was in they had about three or four camp guards in there, and they knew everybody, you know. It was not a big camp. But when there's something like that, where they found some letters going out or caught somebody with some letters, and describe the camp conditions -- that was their main worry, you know, because they were showing this camp like being a very beneficial camp where they were very nice to the inmates.

And so one day I think they caught some letters describing the horrible conditions. So the camp commander called for help to the Gestapo men, and they come there and raise hell and so on.

Okay. I guess we're finished now.

MS. COSTER: YES. IT'S ABOUT TIME TO FINISH.

MR. GRANT: I HAVE GOT A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS.

Q: (By Ms. Coster) YEAH. WHAT TIME IS IT?

A: It's quarter past, twenty after.

Q: I STILL WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR ESCAPE ATTEMPTS AND ESCAPES HERE, BUT WE'LL DO THAT NEXT TIME. SO WE'LL JUST FINISH UP.

FIRST YOU CAN ASK YOUR COUPLE QUESTIONS AND THEN I'VE GOT A FEW.

A: Okay.

Q: (By John Grant) YOU TALKED ABOUT THE PHOTOS AND WAS THAT IN IVANCICE?

A: In Ivancice, yeah.

Q: IT WAS THERE, NOT IN THERESIENSTADT?

A: No, not in Theresienstadt, no.

Q: OKAY. I HAD HEARD ABOUT THE PHOTOS BEING TAKEN IN THERESIENSTADT.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD YOU ESTIMATE WERE THERE IN THIS CAMP?

A: I would say about, running anywhere between three to six hundred people.

Q: HOW MANY PEOPLE, HOW MANY GERMANS WERE THERE?

A: How many were German Jews or German guards?

Q: GERMAN GUARDS.

A: About three, four and the kommandant.

Q: AND THE THREE OR FOUR GUARDS MANAGED TO MAINTAIN ALL OF THESE PEOPLE?

A: Oh, yeah. As I say, the administrators were the -- all these guards were doing really is to make sure you don't escape, you know. And there was all sort of people, like me, who could escape. But really nobody wanted to escape from there because they had no place to go. They had no papers. They couldn't speak the language. They'd be caught. And besides that, there was German police, Czech police, in the town and out of town. And it was so you couldn't move without having an ID card.

So everybody would, just by smelling you, they know where you are coming from, you know. It's not -- you'd go in a store, and the guy just looks at your and knows you are coming from the camp because the way your hair is cut, the way you smell. So that's it. You can't escape too far.

And usually the punishment, if you were caught, you were shot. The only reason I didn't get shot and that was because I was too young. To them I was just a kid. And most of the time it was more like running away than escaping, and I was with my brother.

And we usually go and run away, maybe once, twice a year. And after two, three weeks, we give ourselves up. We go to the nearest Gestapo headquarters and give ourselves up. We know we get beaten again, and they take us back in there and hand us over to the Jewish administration.

Q: WHY DID YOU GIVE YOURSELVES UP?

A: There was nothing I could do. The people who were, I was with, they would be willing to hide me for a week or so, you know, but any longer they were scared themselves because, if they get caught, they lose everything and they go to jail at the best. At worst they get shot for harboring an escaped prisoner. So there's no joking about those things.

And naturally, when you give yourself up, the pressure is gone on the others. Pretty soon they figure out anyway, you know, where you could have gone to. There were not many people ready to stick their neck out for a kid.

I ran away one time and run in the opposite direction where they expect me to. I went deeper into the country and went to a farmer because farmers usually have cows and chicken and eggs, and they have good food. They are known for that.

And I went to him, and I asked him if I could work for him. I was about 13 years old. And that's another: Oh, yeah, sure. And he worked me worse than the Germans did and didn't give me anything to eat and so no pay, nothing, very little food. He treated his dog better than he treated me, and I had to work really hard. And he was abusive on top of that, kicked me and slapped me because I didn't know farm work so well. I didn't do it so fast. And I had to run away from him because he had me practically locked up. So I was very happy to get back into that camp.

So, you know, it's not so easy. Now, so you run away usually in the summer, so sure there is woods you can sleep in, parks you can sleep in. You can steal your food for a while but pretty soon run out of places to hide or go.

And the people in Czechoslovakia were terribly poor. Unless they was a really patriot, or should I say, a real guy who loved his country, you know, nationalist who wouldn't mind to stick out his neck for you. The rest of them, they report you. They call the police and they get you.

And the first thing they will do is -- and this is what confused me the first time -- is pull down your pants, and they take a look and see if you are circumcised or if you are not circumcised. And if you are circumcised, you practically had it because you go to the next Gestapo prison. If you are not circumcised, well then, let's find out where he comes from, you know.

So that's what saved my life quite a few times, that I wasn't circumcised. Because at that time in Europe, the only people who were circumcised were with the Jews. It's not like here in America, every person practically is circumcised. There the Germans caught you outside without proper ID and so on and you are circumcised, you have had it.

Okay. Anything else?

Q: (By Ms. Coster) HOW MANY TIMES DID YOU TRY TO ESCAPE FROM THIS CAMP?

A: From this camp, four or five times.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU GET OUT? DIFFERENT WAYS EACH TIME?

A: Different ways. I got out twice through that creek which runs through the camp. You know, they had steel bars on both sides of this building, so you had to go underneath it quite deep to miss those bars and come out. So that was twice we went through that.

Once we went over the back wall. Once we went out when they were taking a lorry out. We went through the gates hidden in the lorry. Yeah, that is about it.

Q: DID YOU EVER GET CAUGHT OR DID YOU ALWAYS TURN YOURSELVES IN?

A: I never got caught. I had to turn myself in. The worse thing was the traffic to get into Brün from Ivancice. Ivancice is really only 25 miles, nothing at that distance, but the train would take from there to Brün two hours, and so you couldn't take the train, because you couldn't buy a ticket. And so what we used to do, a couple of times we were sitting underneath the train on the brakes. They had some brakes, the wheels, axle, around, so we sat on one side and put our legs on the other side, like that (indicating) for two hours.

The first time we do that we got into Brün, we got off, and we went to this one family where we knew we were going to get hidden. And the woman couldn't recognize me: Geez, what happened with you? There was my face all black and bleeding, pock marks in it from all these rocks the wheels threw up and the dirt. But it was warmer because the Germans

never checked underneath the trains. And so we did that. That was one way.

The other one was just going walking. And then you couldn't use the road, so you had to walk through the fields, you know, the orchards and so on on the side where nobody could see you work your way this way.

Q: AND BRÜN WAS ALWAYS YOUR DESTINATION?

A: Yeah. That's about as far as we got, Brün. Well, because that's where we knew. We knew people there and so on. And we knew also that my father was in the beginning writing to this one family because we didn't have a place to write to him so he was writing to them. We were hoping we might get some mail from him, so we went there.

Q: WAS ANY MAIL THERE EVER?

A: I think there was one once. One once from, through, the International Red Cross mail. I seem to recall there was one.

Q: AND THEN YOU WOULD TURN YOURSELVES IN WHEN --

A: After we get fed, well-fed. Basically our biggest concern was the hunger, was the hunger. Food and that was getting worse because towards the end of the war the people had none themselves.

And also, but we went to this one family who picked us up in '38 out of a children's refugee camp. They picked us out, me and my brother, and took us home for over Christmas and New Year, and they were our friends, a well-to-do-family. Also very Catholic, very Catholic oriented, and they did their good deed. And we stuck with them, you see.

And they had a son in England, also. He was a pilot fighting against the Germans. So they were already exposed, you know, because of the fact

of that they were always very nice. They always fed us, and the Gestapo didn't know about it so they didn't look there for us. So that was good.

Q: WOULD THEY HAVE BEEN WILLING TO KEEP YOU, BUT YOU JUST DECIDED YOU DIDN'T --

A: Oh, no, no, they couldn't keep us, you know, not for any length of time.

Q: DID THEY ENCOURAGE YOU TO TURN YOURSELVES IN?

A: What?

Q: DID THEY ENCOURAGE YOU TO TURN YOURSELVES IN? WHAT WAS THEIR SUGGESTION?

A: Oh, yeah. It was about time to go back, you know, yeah.

Q: AND WHO WOULD YOU TURN YOURSELVES INTO?

A: Right in Brün, at the Gestapo.

Q: HOW DID THEY TREAT YOU? WHAT WERE THEY LIKE?

A: Well, first thing you say is I was from Ivancice. I run away from the Ivancice. Oh you did? Bang, bang, bang, you get beaten up and then they take you to the cellar and beat you some more. And next day you get beaten again. Matter of fact, when I say beaten, it's more like whipped like. And then they take you back. And sometimes then you get it from the administrator. Sometimes then you feel like going back to the Gestapo where it wasn't so bad.

But, you know, there we had then, too, if there was any letters we smuggled them in our shoes and socks and things like that.

Q: LET ME GET THE SPELLINGS FROM YOU. THIS IS FOR THE TRANSCRIBER. POHRLITZT IS THE TOWN --

A: Pohrlitzt.

Q: POHRLITZT.

A: Pohrlitzt. German is P-o-h-r-l-i-t-zed-t.

Q: AND ZED IS A "Z"?

A: Zed is a "z", right.

Q: BRÜN?

A: Brün, B-r-u-n.

Q: IT'S NOT B-E-R?

A: No.

Q: OKAY.

A: And the German is Brün.

Q: BRÜN?

A: Brün, yeah.

Q: BRÜN.

A: Yeah, but the "u" has two --

Q: The umlaut?

A: -- umlaut on it.

Q MIKOLOV?

A: Mikolov, which is M-i-k-o-l-o-v.

Q: NIESSEL, THE FAMILY?

A: N-i-e-s-s-e-l.

Q: SCHIKSE?

A: Schikse. I don't know how you spell schikse.

Q: MAYBE S-H-A-K-S- --

A: I think it's s-h- -- S-c-h -, I think. Something like that. -- i-k-s-e.

Q: OH. OKAY.

GOYIM IS G-O-Y-I-M?

A: I think so.

Q: MISCHLIHNG? M-I-S --? MISCHLIHNG?

A: Mischling is m-i-s-c-h-l-i-n-g.

Q: IVANCICE?

A: What?

Q: THE CAMP.

A: Ivancice?

Q: YEAH.

A: I-v-a-n-c-i-c-e, and is like a umlaut or hook over the "c".

Q: OKAY.

A: About the second "c." Here, let me show you.

Q: IT'S VERY BADLY SPELLED SOMEWHERE DOWN HERE.

A: I'll just write it here.

OKAY.

A: I have some certificates where all these dates are written out, and the names are written out, so maybe next time I bring them and you can show them on the screen.

Q: YEAH, THAT WOULD BE GREAT. ALSO, ANY PICTURES.

A: Okay.

Q: ESPECIALLY LIKE THE ONES YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT IN THE CAMP.

A: Okay.

Q: OKAY. NOW, THERESENSTADT IS T-H-E-R-E-S-I-E-N-S-T-A-D-T?

A: Right.

Q: SONDERKOMMANDO IS S-O-N-D-E-R-K-O-M-M-A-N-D-O.

NOW THE NAMES OF THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN SONG YOU SAID?

A: Oh, I'll write it down for you. "Songs."

How are you getting home?

Q: BUS.

A: Bus? Let's take a taxi.

Q: OKAY.

A: Can we call the taxi from here?

(Speaks in Czech)

And the second song was (speaks in Czech).

Q: OKAY.

A: And Ivancice is right here.

Q: OKAY.

A: See?

Q: OKAY.

A: Let me write in the coal mine I was in. It was in Sosloinney (phonetic).

Q; OKAY. I'M GOING TO SPELL THESE FOR THE TRANSCRIBER.

A: Okay.

Q: SO THE FIRST ONE WAS T-A- -- WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS CALLED?

A: I don't know. It's in Czech -- it's just hooks above.

Q: OKAY. T-A WITH A HOOK ABOVE IT. N-A-S WITH A "V" ABOVE IT - E. THIRD WORD IS

P-R-S-N-I-C WITH A "V" ABOVE IT - K-A. FOURTH WORD C-E-J-K-A?

A: C-e-s-k-a.

Q: AND THE SECOND ONE WAS C-H-A-L-O-U- --

A: Oh, "u," yeah.

Q: -- P-K-Y. SECOND WORD P-O-D. THIRD WORD H-O- --?

A: Yeah. H-o-r- --

Q: -- A-M-A. AND THEN THE LAST WORD WAS -- DO YOU WANT TO PRONOUNCE IT BEFORE I SPELL IT?

A: Oslavany.

Q: AND THAT IS O-S-L-A-V-A-N-Y.

AND THE TATRA MOUNTAINS, T-A-T-R-A.

THEN MACCABEES OR YOU PRONOUNCED IT MACCABEES.

A: Maccabees, yeah.

Q: M-A-C-C-A- --

A: I don't know with the "cc". I think it's just one "c."

Q: M-A-C-A-B- --

A: M-a-c-a-b-e-e, yeah.

Q: M-A-C-A-B- -- IT'S IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

ERSATZ, E-R-S-A-T-Z.

IVANCICE?

A: Ivancice. That's the same one I gave to you here.

Q: OH, OKAY. THAT'S IT THEN. THANKS A LOT, VERY MUCH.

A: You're welcome.