Interview with OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK

PART 1

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: August 16, 2000 Place: Tipperon, California

Interviewer: Peter Ryan

Transcriber: Rene' White

Q. TODAY IS AUGUST 16, 2000. WE ARE AT THE HOME OF OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK AT 94 REED RANCH ROAD IN TIPPERON, CALIFORNIA. MY NAME IS PETER RYAN, INTERVIEWER; AND MATT BINDER IS DOING THE VIDEOTAPING.

COULD WE BEGIN BY MY ASKING YOU WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN?

A. In a small city in Poland. The name is Cieszyn, a border city. One half of the city was on the Czech side, the other in Poland.

Q. IT'S IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF POLAND?

A. Southwestern part of Poland, (inaudible) close to the German border. Population, about 35,000.

Q. 35,000?

A. Yes.

Q. AND OF THAT, HOW MANY WOULD YOU SAY WERE JEWISH?

A. About -- between three to 5,000 were Jewish people.

Q. OKAY.

A. But I didn't live there very long. My mother and

my father parted company when I was 2 years old, and so I was in the custody of a divorced woman who had to leave town in those years. A divorced woman, especially from a very ultra-religious Hassidic background, was looked upon as closest thing to a lady of the evening.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. If not worse.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And to support herself, she left.

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY MEMORIES OF YOUR FATHER, OSKAR?

A. Yes, quite, quite strong memories because our paths crossed again during the war.

Q. OKAY.

A. Now, She then left me in the custody of my grandfather.

Q. HER FATHER.

A. Her father, a very religious ultra-Hassidic Jew who, in a way, acted as my surrogate father, a man that I loved tremendously.

Q. UH-HUH. WHERE WERE YOU LOCATED NOW?

A. In Cieszyn.

Q. SAME CITY?

A. Same city.

Q. SHE LEFT BUT LEFT YOU THERE.

A. She left -- left me there.

Q. OKAY.

A. Soon --

Q. WAS THERE A GRANDMOTHER?

A. Oh, yes, there was a grandmother. My grandfather and grandmother had ten children of their own by the time I arrived on the scene, and so I was the little one in a house full of grown-ups.

Q. WERE YOU THE ONLY CHILD BY YOUR MOTHER?

A. The only child.

Q. OKAY.

A. My father, then, subsequently married and had a child, a little girl, my stepsister or half sister. She -- her mother was my cousin, my father's niece. It was a Jewish custom to marry the daughter of a deceased brother --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- sort of a family obligation.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And then I --

Q. CAN WE STOP ONE SECOND?

COULD WE STOP ONE SECOND?

(Tape stops.)

A. I then met up with my father, his second wife and my stepsister during the war.

Q. HAD -- HAD YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER BEEN MARRIED?

A. My mother and father had been married for two

years.

Q. AND THEN HE LEFT?

A. And then she left, and I went to live with my grandparents.

Q. SHE LEFT HIM?

A. Yes.

Q. OKAY.

A. And it's part of the tragedy because he has never forgiven her and tried to avenge himself even when this was not the time for vengeance.

Q. WASN'T THAT VERY --

A. But we shall come to that later on.

Q. WASN'T THAT VERY UNUSUAL, OSKAR, THAT A VERY RELIGIOUS FAMILY, THAT THE WOMAN COULD LEAVE THE HUSBAND? I THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

A. No, not necessarily.

Q. NO.

A. No, not necessarily. In fact, I would say half and half the woman would leave -- would issue a writ of divorce --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- a get, and hand it to her husband.

Q. OKAY.

A. And leave him.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. The child most of the time going with the mother.

At least that's the way it was in our family.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And so I was brought up part time by my grandfather. After the age of about 10 or 11, I finally joined my mother in that other city, at which time she had already married another man who was of a somewhat different background. ~~He was (inaudible)~~. He was of a German Jewish family; and that all converged together into a very, very painful --

Q. DID YOU LIKE HIM?

A. No. It was mutual.

Q. TELL -- TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR EARLY SCHOOLING. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST WENT TO SCHOOL?

A. Yes. I went to school at the age of 6, grade school.

Q. PUBLIC?

A. Public, all of it public. I went to high school and beyond, ~~high school, real good low high school~~. During the war, which was in 1939 after my second escape, I went over to the Russians and studied at first engineering for one year.

Then I had to move because, according to Russian law, the school, which was in a city called ~~Drokovich~~ Drohobycz in Poland, it was too close to the German border. So I had to move further inland, and I entered another school. And that was an Institute for Slavic Languages. I became a teacher of the Ukrainian and Russian language in one single year.

Q. HUH. WHEN YOU FIRST WENT TO SCHOOL, WERE THE CLASSES MIXED, JEWISH, CATHOLIC?

A. Oh, completely.

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS WHO WERE NOT JEWS?

A. Let me just say, one school was strictly Jewish.

Q. WAS STRICTLY JEWISH.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. WAS THAT THE FIRST ONE?

A. No, that was the second one, when I moved in with my mother. That was a Jewish school. It was called a Jewish school. It was for boys and girls, coed.

Q. UH-HUH. DID YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS IN THE FIRST SCHOOL THAT WEREN'T JEWISH?

A. Yes, yes, most of them were non-Jewish.

Q. DID THEY ACCEPT YOU?

A. Oh, no, no, no. There was no acceptance at all.

Q. NO?

A. No.

Q. JEWS WERE NOT THE FAVORITE PEOPLE.

A. It was an interesting experience. We had Wednesdays. Wednesdays was running home.

Q. RUNNING HOME DAY.?

A. Yes.

Q. THEY WAITED FOR YOU.

A. Because Wednesdays was religion held by a priest.

And following religion school, because the Jewish kids had to be dismissed and sent away, we quickly ran home. Those who decided to tarry, to stay behind, were pelted with stones following religious instructions.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. The priests did a good job.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. We all knew that. It was part of a game we played out.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Jewish kids out of the class on Wednesday, Jewish kids run home if you don't want to get hit by sticks or stones. And so that was -- that was living. That was expected after a while.

Q. NOW, HOW DID YOU -- HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THAT IN YOUR MIND?

A. Painful.

Q. PAINFUL?

A. Painful. I remember it to this day. In fact, I now wrote a -- almost a short story. It's a letter called *A Letter to My Hometown.* I was contacted by a Mr. Spyra in my hometown, a man who is not Jewish, who took it upon himself to write a history of the Jews in my hometown, Cieszyn.

Q. IS HE POLISH?

A. Polish.

Q. OKAY.

A. Ph.D., very erudite. We are corresponding now.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And, in fact, he had just created in -- he's in charge of the Polish Cieszyn museum.

Q. DID THEY HAVE A MUSEUM?

A. Yes, they always had a museum. And that's at the --

Q. THE HISTORY OF THE TOWN, SORT OF?

A. A city of the ~~province~~ town, the country, the area. But now he created a history of the Polish Jews, and I supplied photographs.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And I have photographs of the exhibit now.

Q. DID YOU GO BACK?

A. No. I never did go back. I wouldn't go back.

Q. OKAY.

A. And so in reply or in response to the books that he had written, I wrote my own history which is called *A Letter to My Hometown* in which I describe those Wednesdays.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. They were -- this is in answer to your question --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- do I remember it? Yes, I remember it very, very much.

Q. UH-HUH. NOW, YOU WERE VERY CLOSE TO YOUR GRANDFATHER --

A. Very close.

Q. WERE YOU CLOSE TO --

A. My grandfather ~~on~~?

Q. ~~and~~ YOUR GRANDMOTHER?

A. Grandmothers ~~were~~ ~~[illegible]~~ in that type of a very orthodox relationship. One grew, ~~it was a grandson and~~ were of lesser importance. fond ~~to~~ of a grandfather, ~~not as~~ less of a grandmother.

Q. OKAY.

A. And the daughters, on the other hand, grew attached to their mothers. But sons were the father's ~~responsibility and not a father's~~ responsibility and one tried to walk ~~and~~ into the footsteps of a male figurehead.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Whether it be a grandfather, whether it be an uncle, a teacher, a rabbi; but it was always a male figure.

Q. YOU WOULD SPENT A LOT OF TIME WITH HIM?

A. An awful lot.

Q. WHAT KIND OF THINGS WOULD YOU DO?

A. In fact, my grandfather was a door-to-door peddler. He was a poor man. And it just so happened that within a short time I would ask him whether I could go and walk him every day in the morning to the railroad station.

So here was this little boy walking side by side

with a ~~bandolero~~ bundle carrying peddler, my grandfather, with his beard, his hat, his backpack on his shoulder; and the two of us walked.

My grandfather was a story teller. He was a man that was a walking saga, and I loved him.

Q. I BET.

A. And it was mutual. I was the first grandson. It was a mutual love relationship. At the moment I walked into the door, my mother opened the door and grandfather and I saw each other; and we knew that we belonged to one another. There's no doubt, until the very tragic act when I saw him being loaded into a railroad train along with the rest of the family.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And this I'll never forget. In fact, I'm just writing another poem about it. So, yes, this is a central figure in my life, my grandfather.

Q. UH-HUH. WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

A. Aaron, Aaron Kempler-Klausenstock, a hyphenated name. He, too, had the problem with rabbinical marriages that were not acknowledged by the State.

Q. THAT WAS -- THAT WAS STATE LAW AT THAT TIME?

A. Yes. And at one point, it all converged. My father, his wife, my half sister, my mother, my grandparents, the rest of the family, all herded into one ghetto. And that's the crux of my story which I have written. It's a book called *The Return*. ~~And that~~ It is about 800 pages. But I will tell you more

about it as we go on chronologically.

Q. UH-HUH. SO YOU WERE BORN IN 1922.

A. 1922.

Q. THAT WOULD MAKE YOU --

A. I was 17 years old, short of nine days.

Q. WHEN THE WAR STARTED.

A. When the war began, September the 1st.

Q. BEFORE THE WAR STARTED, WERE YOU STILL GOING TO SCHOOL AT 17?

A. It's a bit complicated because I had to work part time.

Q. WHAT KIND OF WORK?

A. I was a apprentice to a farrier which lasted a very short time. The farrier turned out to have been a communist and --

Q. THEY TOOK HIM AWAY?

A. They tried to arrest him, but he got wind of it and hid.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And then I was an apprentice to a weaver, and I was pretty good at that.

Q. YEAH?

A. And I enjoyed it.

Q. YOU LIKED IT?

A. In fact, I liked most everything I ever did.

Q. (LAUGHS.)

A. Including medicine.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Yes, and now writing.

Q. YOU'RE VERY FORTUNATE THAT YOU'VE LOVED EVERYTHING YOU DID.

A. I -- yes.

Q. YEAH.

A. If you ask me what are the things in your life that you consider a true blessing ~~and~~ it is that I like what I do. I always did. And I always liked people.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And I think this is -- there is no greater blessing.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Look at all the talented people who are miserable because they can't stand another human being or they just half stand another human being.

Q. UH-HUH. NOW, YOUR GRANDFATHER HAD TEN CHILDREN?

A. Ten. Two died in infancy.

Q. AND YOUR MOTHER WAS ONE?

A. My mother was the oldest.

Q. SO YOU HAD A LOT OF AUNTS AND UNCLES?

A. Loads of them.

Q. DID YOU HAVE A LOT OF COUSINS?

A. Yes, loads of cousins. There were, all-told,

together, 39. Of the 39, one survived by having been sent to Siberia during the war and came back as an officer/liberator. Three went to Palestine in the early Thirties, and they're no longer alive. And the rest of them, all of them, perished. I will show you the photographs. All of them perished; and they nearly perished at the same time, same train.

Q. ALL OF THEM.

A. All of them. My father, stepmother -- that is his wife -- and my little sister that -- we loved each other very much, my half sister.

Q. NOW, WHEN YOU SAY YOUR FATHER, YOUR REAL FATHER?

A. My real father.

Q. HE WAS ON THAT TRAIN, TOO?

A. Yes. No, not on that train. He was on a subsequent train.

Q. OKAY.

A. There was -- it's a bit complicated; but as I go chronologically, you will begin to understand how first one contingent went and then a second contingent went at another ~~certain~~ time.

My little sister was never sent away. They send the people down to the train station, but they didn't send children.

Q. WHY NOT?

A. They killed them there, and I had to bury her. I

had to look for her among the dead.

Q. HOW OLD WAS SHE?

A. 9. And I had to put her on a funeral pyre. The only sister I ever had. That was very painful. And that's part of the story. But we shall come to that in time.

Q. UH-HUH. SO -- SO YOU WERE WORKING PART TIME AND STILL GOING TO SCHOOL BEFORE THE WAR BROKE OUT?

A. Before the war, yeah. And --

Q. WHAT HAD YOU HOPED TO DO OR BECOME? DID YOU HAVE DREAMS?

A. Did I have dreams? Oh, I had all kinds of dreams. I was the greatest dreamer you've ever met.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. I was a Zionist. My grandfather was very religious, but that was a time where Zionism was beginning to come in to bloom. It was in the Thirties.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And even though --

Q. (INAUDIBLE) THE PEOPLE, TOO?

A. Yes.

Q. THEY STUDIED AGRICULTURE, DIDN'T THEY --

A. Yes.

Q. -- IN POLAND?

A. Yes. I was destined to go to a Polish agricultural kibbutz, but I didn't make it.

Q. OKAY.

A. The war broke out within ~~that~~ the month when I was supposed to have gone.

I belonged to a rather left-wing Zionist organization, not because of convictions, let me just tell you. They had the best soccer football in town.

Q. (LAUGHS.)

A. One that bounced better than all the others.

Q. AND YOU LIKED SOCCER?

A. Yes. And I was ~~I was always at the~~ the best goalie in town.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And in school. And so I joined because they had the finest ball. It wasn't stuffed with rags. It was really pumped up with air, and you could kick it.

Q. AND IT WOULD GO FAR.

A. Yes.

Q. (LAUGHS.)

A. So idealogy -- no, I was too young.

Q. SO WOULD THEY HAVE MEETINGS, WEEKLY MEETINGS?

A. Of course we had meetings.

Q. TRAINING?

A. We had dances. We had training. We had summer camps.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Colonias they called them. That's where we did get our first bit of training in how to use weapons.

Q. HUH?

A. We did.

Q. WHAT KIND OF WEAPON?

A. Rifles, BB rifles, but something that you know how to place against your shoulder.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Something that you knew how to aim, and something that had a wee bit of a recoil.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. To be used as heavy weapons.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. That was the right time; but it never came, not for me. It came for an awful lot of friends who subsequently went to Palestine and Israel after the war was over. I chose America.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY IMPENDING SENSE ABOUT THE WAR? WERE THINGS TALKED ABOUT AT HOME AND WHAT -- YOU KNOW, THE WORLD CONDITIONS AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN GERMANY?

A. Before the war broke out?

Q. YEAH.

A. Oh, yes, yes. The city in which I lived with my mother, which had different names, called Bielsko, 80 percent of it -- by the first census done by the Poles, 80 percent were Polish people, Christians; 20 percent, registered Germans.

When the Germans marched in, they ~~did~~ took another census.

Q. THEY WHAT?

A. They ~~did~~ took another population census.

Q. OKAY.

A. 80 percent were Germans and 20 percent were Polish and they could prove it.

Q. HUH.

A. There ~~was~~ were such century long ~~12 centuries long~~ intermarriage that each one could prove a grandfather or a grandmother ~~of either~~ of either Polish or German background.

Q. EVERYONE WANTED TO BE GERMAN?

A. Well, when the Germans came in, everybody wanted to be Germans; and unfortunately most of them were very, very adamant Hitlerites. Hitler was the Messiah --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- to come and free them. Of course, it created an equal amount of hate among the Poles; but that's a different story.

Q. NOW, THERE WERE --

A. Before the war, it was a caldron of rumors.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. The Germans hoped for war. The Poles, those that remembered World War I, which was only 20 years before that, were much afraid of it, very restless.

There were those who claimed that there would never be another war, those who read "All Quiet on the Western Front." And there were those who knew that the German, the mighty German armies would come marching in and they we will be reunited with their homeland, et cetera, et cetera, including the people where I worked. They, before Hitler came in, they were secretly greeting each other with an outstretched arm and a "Heil, Hitler."

Q. UH-HUH.

A. On a Sunday afternoon, they would gather at somebody's home, turn on the loud radio, sit there in the living room and listen to the Fuhrer's speeches. And at the end, they would all stand up and with an outstretched arm would repeat the same "Sieg-heil," "Sieg-heil." The Germans who lived in Poland for the last 300 years, they were caught by the disease.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. It infected them by proxy.

Q. NOW, YOU SAY THE PEOPLE THAT YOU WORKED FOR IN [illegible] --

A. In, yes, in the factory.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Were Germans. They were Germans because within a short time after the war broke out, I went back to pick up back to the factory to pick up my last paycheck.

The paycheck was on Friday, and I had already gone off

on the first day of the war and didn't pick up my paycheck. I came back after I escaped and returned; and half of them already had the buttons in the boutonniere, the buttons saying ~~(speaking in foreign languages~~ National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeits Partei. (NSDAP)

By the way, I got a button, too, but for a different purpose.

Q. DID THEY GIVE YOU THE PAYCHECK?

A. Yes. The paycheck was waiting for me. The paycheck was there in full amount. But the factory was owned by a Jew by the name of Mr. Tislovitz whom I met subsequently in the camp of Schindler's List in ~~Blashoff~~ Plaszow. ~~And yeah.~~

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR?

A. Oh, yes. It came expected and unexpected. No one knew that the war would start from a clear blue sky and people will wake up at dawn to the sound of airplanes in the sky. Wars didn't start that way. Wars began by people being ~~by~~ alerted, warned ahead, mobilized.

Q. BELLIGERENT (INAUDIBLE.)

A. World War. ~~First--yeah. But (inaudible)~~ First they called up people to come and ~~put~~ on uniforms, and trucks would come or God knows what.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. But the first day of the war, and the thud of falling bombs was so completely unexpected. And so I woke up my mother and my stepfather to tell them that, "Look out the window. Look at all the cars and the people already walking with bundles

and push carts." It was panic, and it was a contagion.

We decided to hold back, my mother and my stepfather and I. But eventually, we, too, were taken in; and by that -- it was almost a madness. You saw, in each time you went to the window, you saw another one of your friends or neighbors with their belongings.

Q. LEAVING.

A. Leaving with their bundles and rucksacks. We lasted until Friday night, and we had dinner. We left in the middle of eating our gefilte fish. We left it on the table --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- and quickly grabbed whatever was available and joined the madness, joined the crowd, everyone walking to the railroad station to board the train which would go anywhere but away --

Q. EAST.

A. -- but away from the advancing Germans. The rumor was, at the time when we left, that the Germans were already 20 miles or 30 kilometers away.

Q. UH-HUH. WHAT DID YOUR STEPFATHER DO?

A. My stepfather -- (laughs). My stepfather did nothing. He was a classical ~~lufminch.~~ "Luftmensch."

Q. POTATO COUCH, HUH?

A. Well, no. There were no ~~there~~ couches yet to sit and look at anything. He was a soap salesman, sold

soap for a factory for one year. The factory went bankrupt; and all he did was spend his days going to the barber, sitting in a cafe. He was a playboy.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. He fell in love with my mother. She was a very, very beautiful woman. I have her portrait.

And, in fact, I ran into it again here in Berkeley. I came across a young woman who was from the same city. And she told me that when she was a teenager, there was a very beautiful woman who was a role model for her. She wanted to look like her.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And as we got to talk --

Q. YOUR MOTHER.

A. -- it was my mother.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. Who would sit with ~~a quote~~ her boyfriend at the sidewalk cafe having their 4:00 o'clock afternoon tea or coffee.

My mother, even though she was a daughter of a very religious man, was a high-heeled, silk stocking lady who was forever concerned whether the seam in her stockings were straight. And so she would walk; and every 10 or 15 steps, she would look back.

She was an elegant lady, very, very beautiful and a very, very loving mother. We were very much in love with each other. She was a fine lady. And it's a pity because I tried so

hard and to save her and I nearly did. To the very, very end, I nearly did. But that is another story.

There was a young man that helped me, a smithy. I became a blacksmith during the war. I became a welder during the war. In fact, I came to the United States as a welder on a welding contract to some people in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was a good welder.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. I liked that, too, by the way.

Q. (LAUGHS.)

A. Of course, by then I already had three years of medical school behind me, so I didn't go to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Anyhow, what else?

Q. UH-HUH. SO YOU JOINED THE MADNESS.

A. I joined the madness. We went to the train station. It was bedlam. People were pushing each other. People were people who were otherwise polite, people in that town under German influence were still hand kissing and heel clicking and hat doffing people. They turned into a wild, unruly, mad crowd pushing, jostling each other, everyone anxious to get their little bundles, which were the essence of their belongings, into a train, any train that was leaving the station. It didn't matter because the only place a train could leave was to go east.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. West was the front.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And so we boarded the train.

Q. WERE THESE JEWS OR EVERYONE?

A. Vast majority were Jews.

Q. OKAY.

A. Vast majority were Jews. There were some young men already recruited that they already were in uniforms. They already had weapons, Polish soldiers, non-Jews. And they were just as anxious to get into a train as we were.

The train, no sooner did we step in and the train was in motion going faster and faster. The train did not stop at any other station, which was pitiful to see, because all subsequent stations people stood on the platforms with their bundles, raising their hands, begging, "Stop, stop, take us." And the train just ran on gathering speed faster and faster.

Q. WAS THIS BECAUSE IT WAS FULL OR BECAUSE --

A. Full and panic.

Q. AND PANIC.

A. Until the night. It was evening when we came in, until the dark night. The train went on and on. And earlier in the morning, at dawn, the first Stuka planes arrived and bombarded the train. The train came to a halt and didn't go any farther. My stepfather, mama and I and the rest of the passengers left the train. We were in the middle of nowhere.

The middle of nowhere in Poland was scattered

villages among vast fields. Poland was an agricultural country, society. And so we hit the dusty roads and walked.

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE YOU WERE?

A. Oh, sure. We had -- there were always some peasant, very, very wonderful Polish peasants who immediately came to the road with buckets of water to sell you a cup of water for a dollar.

Q. HUH.

A. It was morning by the time we made some headway and -- with all the people, the throng of people along the road, horses, carriages, push carts, baby carriages acting as push carts with babies, without babies when the diving Stuka bombers arrived from the clear blue sky and the road was strifed.

My mother hit the ditch. I did, too. We were trying to cover each other clumsily. When it was over, so many lied dead along the road. My stepfather sat at the side of the road with his feet in the ditch in a state of total shock. He didn't even take cover.

We walked on, my stepfather still wearing his spats. His baggage contained his personal hair brushes and a portable iron so he could have a crease in his pants. He was totally unmanageable and without help.

Q. PRACTICAL HE WASN'T.

A. Totally impractical.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. By the way, he was a wealthy man. He came from one of those interesting German families, German Jewish families, several brothers. One was a physician. One was a woman who was a secretary general to an Italian insurance company in Warsaw. She committed suicide by poisoning herself with gas.

He had one brother who committed suicide by jumping off a ship in the Baltic Sea. Another sister was married to one of the wealthiest publishers in Poland, and she committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.

Q. WERE THESE VERY (INAUDIBLE) IMPORTANT (INAUDIBLE) --

A. It was a terribly degenerated family. The mother, the father was no longer alive. The mother was half blind, continuously threatening to commit suicide. And her children did it for her. The mother didn't. And so there he was with us.

We finally ended up in the small, not small, medium sized city, near the San River bordering the Ukraine. And there we were in the bombed-out or recently bombed city; still the Germans hadn't caught up with us.

And we stood there on the sidewalk. It was the main road leading east, in the center of the city, the road was filled with automobiles and trucks and whatnot. And there we stood, smoldering buildings, mother and I and Arthur, the stepfather.

And a small automobile drove up to the curb where we stood and there inside was his brother who was a physician and his physician's his brother's wife and their mother. They opened the door. Arthur hopped in, the car sped off.

Q. REALLY?

A. He didn't even turn around to look back at us. And that was the last I saw him.

Q. YOUR MOTHER MUST HAVE BEEN IN SHOCK.

A. If she was, her first statement, when I said something, was "Son, we will never talk about this again."

Very soon she made quite sure that I understood that from then on I was the man in the family, at the age of 17.

From then on My mother and I found lodgings overnight with a very nice family. We thought we would never find anyone that would open the door in that city that had just been bombed. To our surprise, the first door we knocked on was a Ukrainian family, husband and wife, who immediately took us in, gave us shelter for the night, gave us directions towards a ~~another~~ village where there lived an ~~was a distant~~ acquaintance of his.

We walked there along the railroad tracks, arrived to find out that the Germans were on our heels. And indeed, they arrived. There was no longer a need to stay on, especially that first night after the Germans came in.

That night ~~And~~ the peasants gathered within the large living room of that farmer, ~~that we stayed~~ each one narrating of how

many Jews they had already killed ~~that night~~ and what they had robbed, displaying all kinds of Jewish things including several wigs that women wore on Sabbath. So we decided to head back.

Q. HEAD BACK HOME?

A. Back home. We walked, again, ~~railroad station~~ station - rail something.... until we came upon a larger railroad ~~station~~ ~~what would you call this, a central --~~

Q. JUNCTION?

A. -- junction. The Germans were there, amazingly very, very polite. They were German soldiers, front soldiers. My mother, of course, spoke classical, fluent German. So did I.

By the way, I spoke English before the war. That's a different story. I studied as a youngster.

She spoke German. And the German -- and some soldiers listened to our plight. My mother, of course, would not tell them that we were Jewish. They took us into a truck to take us back home with a ~~transport leaving~~ convoy going back west from the front. Along with us was my mother's very good friend Emma with her son Emil. And there we drove in the back of the truck going back home.

The truck stopped suddenly. We were in some kind of a small town; and a German soldier came running from truck to truck yelling, "Are there any Jews (speaking in a foreign language) here?" And, of course, my mother and I sat silently. But Emma and her son Emil, my classmate, Emil raised his hand.

They took him out; and he turned to his father and says, "Papa, I'll be right back." They took papa out. Thirty seconds later we could hear two shots. Emma screamed. She wanted to get out. We held her back. And the truck convoy continued until we got home.

The town, our town was beyond recognition. Overnight, well, it wasn't overnight, it was three or four days later, the street names have already been changed. There were buntings and flags draping the major buildings, huge signs across the major streets saying "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer," wherever you look, ~~"ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer."~~ Every third German was wearing the swastika armband.

Can we stop for a second?

(Tape stops.)

A. The truck. We came back to the town --

Q. OKAY.

A. -- that was now completely changed

Q. OKAY.

A. The apartment was ransacked. Things were trampled underfoot. My stepfather had a collection of buttons. By the way, he was a very well-to-do man. He inherited from his sisters all their wealth, those that committed suicide.

And so we had quite a few valuables. We had a Baroque, a fully furnished salon ~~they used to call~~ it and another one called Biedermeyer ~~Betemyer~~ which was very expensive. It's

a German antique, Dutch-German antique ~~of~~ or type of furniture.

Q. TYPE OF WHAT?

A. Furniture.

Q. FURNITURE.

A. Furniture. We had 265-piece Meissen set.

Q. CHINA?

A. Yes, very expensive porcelain. And we had ~~pushkings~~ Pushkin's personal silverware in a leather cabinet, silver embossed. ~~leather cabinet.~~ It was all gone.

Q. ALL GONE.

A. All trampled and destroyed and gone. ~~And as we~~ (inaudible) ~~our eyes, we walked in.~~ Of course, the door was broken in. And each one ~~of us~~ and of us with brooms, sweeping, someone walked in unannounced -- after all, the door was open, ~~and~~ and there stood my friend, my classmate, my age and he was wearing an SA -- not SS -- uniform. Their uniforms were sort of brown yellow.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. And Franz --

Q. NOW, THIS WAS A FRIEND FROM SCHOOL?

A. School, my classmate.

Q. JEWISH?

A. No.

Q. NO?

A. He was wearing a Nazi uniform.

Q. YEAH.

A. Full -- boots, the whole thing. And I looked and I said, "Franz?"

"And I," -- he said, very apologetic, almost stuttering, "I have to -- I came to arrest you. I know you're in town."

People saw us come in. And down below was a small automobile with another SA man in it. And so I got in with him. He would -- he tried to apologize to my mother who turned around and didn't want to look at him because he was like a brother to me. In fact, he was more. I was the goalie and he was first defense. And every time when something went awry, I would yell at him or he would yell at me.

So I got into the car, and we drove off.

Q. YOUR MOTHER, TOO?

A. No.

Q. JUST YOU?

A. Yeah. The car took us past the school that we attended. We didn't say a word. We just looked at each other as the car drove on. And it stopped in front of the City Hall which had a few walk-up steps and a large glass door, ~~at this time~~ a bunting and huge Nazi flags draping the entire front of the building. And I walked up those steps surrounded by Germans watching. There I stood ~~I was~~ on display along with other Jews that were being brought in.

Q. WERE ALL THESE MEN?

A. Men only.

Q. OKAY.

A. One of them a little boy, the age of perhaps 10 or 11. One was a man, with one leg and a crutch. One was still wearing his pajamas. We were all taken in and put into a single cell in the basement, 100 people, only standing room. And there we stayed all night. We stood. There was no place to sit. And some not able to hold their urine or their bowel were so terribly -- well, demoralized is to say it mildly.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. It was meant to be that way. In the morning, they opened the cell door; and they let us out. And to my great surprise, as we walked out, along each side of the door of the walk-up steps, people stood to watch us as we walked down. We were on display like freaks. It was the most painful moment in my life. For until then I thought of myself as just a boy, a clown, happy-go-lucky. I was Jewish, and that was fine. But I was a human being like everyone else.

Suddenly I was on display, ridiculed, laughed at. People were pointing at me. People were pointing at someone who had big stains on the front of his pants because he couldn't hold it any longer. It was a terribly devastating experience. And I looked -- as I walked down the last step around the corner, my mother stood waiting for me. She was informed. And we walked

home arm in arm. Mother never cried. Her crying was ~~she~~ her trembl~~ed~~ing, a fine tremor.

Q. IN THE FACE?

A. No, ~~in~~ her ~~in~~ body

Q. IN THE WHOLE --

A. Her entire body.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. We walked home. Within two days I was re-arrested, taken to a school, which was a former Jewish school; and we were then recruited to do digging ditches.

Within a few days before the war broke out, the Polish government insisted that people make ditches in the back of the houses which were zigzag bombproof ditches. Our job was to fill them up. And so we walked out of that school each day in the morning, shovels and pickaxes, and walked and worked filling them in.

Q. COULD YOU GO HOME AT NIGHT?

A. No.

Q. YOU HAD TO STAY AT THE SCHOOL?

A. Yes. They had bunks. And one of the overseeing SA young men -- they were all young, they were all local kids. He came over, started to berate me as if I did something wrong. It was so artificial. It was so silly.

And he put his hand in his pocket and took out a handkerchief and that's when I found the note that he dropped and

he walked away. The note instructed me to go over the wall at midnight -- it was written by my mother -- and in it she...

Q. (INAUDIBLE.)

A. told me not to be afraid.

Q. THERE WERE GUARDS ON DUTY?

A. Yes.

Q. HOW BIG WAS THE WALL? HOW TALL?

A. Very high. And what my mother didn't know, the wall was covered with ivy, what she didn't know is that the top had glass imbeded shards; and I did. And I'm making this a very short story. It was much larger.

I went over. I cut my hands. I jumped down. What my mother didn't know or didn't tell me was that I will hear two or three or four rifle shots to warn me. That they had to do it. the guards

And so it was in the middle of the night. The city was completely dark. And I heard running footsteps behind me. And it was a most remarkable night. I kept running, hearing footsteps, dodging into a walkway or dodging into a doorway and the footsteps stopping and the footsteps resuming whenever I went back to a run.

And then I suddenly realized whoever it is chasing me, I'm leading him home. So shortly before coming home, I went into the shadow; and then I saw Franz, Franz, my classmate.

Q. THE ONE WHO CAME TO ARREST YOU?

A. Yes. He was following me. He was behind the escape. He arranged it, and he wanted to make sure --

Q. THAT YOU GOT HOME?

A. -- that I got home. And I walked out of the shade, and he saw me. And he wanted to shake hands, but I had my hands covered with a kerchief because they were bloody. And he looked and he said something that he had said a hundred times during the soccer game. "Does it hurt?" Because a goalie always throws himself. And something I've replied a hundred times, "Nah, it doesn't hurt."

And he walked away and I walked away. I never saw him again. I walked home. By that time, mother already had my rucksack ready. My younger cousin who was a year younger --

Q. MALE OR FEMALE?

A. Male, Oskar, too. He was the black Oskar, I was the white one because I was light blond and he was dark. And their two mothers, two sisters, walked us to the railroad station and bid us good-bye, gave us some money. My mother gave me several silver coins to pay the smuggler to take us across the border that has recently been established between the Germans and Russians.

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY IDENTITY PAPERS?

A. Yes, I did have; and so did my cousin. But I had no idea where to go. All I knew was I had to take any available train going east 'til I come to the border. And from then on

He were ~~you're~~ on your own.

Q. DID THE IDENTITY PAPERS SHOW THAT YOU WERE JEWISH?

A. Yes.

Q. DID YOU HAVE TO HAVE ANY DESIGNATION AT THAT TIME (INAUDIBLE)?

A. No, no. That was within the first two weeks of the war. No, that came nearly a year later. But I did have a Nazi (~~indicating~~) lapel button.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. My mother got hold of one. And it came in very handy because the train that I took -- took us to the Krakow railroad station required a paper identification. As soon as I did that (indicating his lapel), I was free to go. I was certainly no longer a Pole. I wasn't a Jew. I was a ~~volks doicher~~ Volks-Deutscher (Volksdeutscher) --

Q. HOW ABOUT YOUR COUSIN?

A. -- ~~which~~ that was different. My cousin was too young.

Q. DID HE LOOK JEWISH?

A. Very, very much; but apparently my identity ~~I~~ sufficed.

We stayed overnight with a family. We stayed in line for bread because we had nothing to eat. It ~~is~~ was terrible, ~~H~~hunger. A terrible ordeal for two or three nights in Krakow. Finally, we boarded the train and went ~~back~~ to the same town in the East where ~~my~~ my stepfather left us ~~me~~.

Q. THAT WAS AS FAR EAST AS YOU HAD GONE BEFORE.

A. Yes. And went to the Ukrainian ~~family~~ family that took us in previously.

Q. SAME PERSON?

A. Same family, husband and wife.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. ~~They~~ The man couldn't let us in because they had a guest who was a German officer. ~~He was~~ The man was a Ukrainian nationalist.

Finally ~~they~~ his wife came out. We were hiding in the greenhouse in the garden behind the house. And ~~he~~ she send us to another peasant with a little note. We had to walk, though; and so we walked through the night.

We went to the peasant who was indeed ~~the~~ a smuggler. And now there's a very nice 30-page story that I wrote about that one day and that one night with the smuggler going across the river at night, the Russians with their machine guns on this side, the Germans with their machine gun on that side watching.

Q. WAS THIS THE ~~BOOG~~ BUG?

A. No, the ~~Sun~~ a ~~the Sun~~ that led into the ~~Boog~~ u. ~~The Sun came into the Boog~~. The ~~Boog~~ u came ~~into~~ LED TO the Vistula. ~~and the Boog vistula on the eastern side the Sun on the eastern side~~ of the Boog ~~on the eastern side~~ was Russia. The other side, on the western side, was ~~a~~ the German occupation.

We made it across.

Q. WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE?

A. Well, it was a bit troublesome; but we didn't get caught by the Germans. As soon as we got out on the other side, the Russian jumped out with their guns. And the first thing they

said was ~~(speaking in a foreign language) which means --~~ ~~(inaudible) is~~ the equivalent of hello or Gutentag, or be well. Rabiata means children.

Q. MEANS WHAT?

A. Children.

Q. CHILDREN.

A. (Witness nods.) For the first time in God knows how many weeks and ~~how many months~~ walking down the steps that I described, I was addressed by a man in uniform as, "Welcome, children."

We were then taken into the first border guard station and brought into a large room. Behind a desk sat an officer. The desk was covered, by the way, with fur, white fur, that looked like a bear rug. And the floor was covered with a bear rug, and the bench was covered.

The man was a Mongol, a tall one. Mongols, ~~two~~ come in several ~~different~~ varieties. ~~One -- some are very, very tall men.~~ This one was very tall. And so we stood there in front of him, ~~the two of us;~~ and the man just looked at us. I didn't know whether he was looking or whether he was sleeping. ~~slant eye.~~

Finally, he turned to one of the soldiers that were in the room and said, "Well, you know what to do with them."

"Against the wall." Well, we stood against the wall where he pointed to. I was trembling.

(Tape stops.)

THE VIDEOGRAPHER: Okay. We're recording. So start with against the wall.

A. Yeah. And so we stood there, the two of us. I was frightened. I was trembling. And the soldier walked out of the room. And in a short time he came back with a tray with two large cups of hot chocolate and a plate of warm bread cut into big chunks and placed it before us.

There was no table, he put it on the floor; and I kneeled down. And I don't know why, but I started to laugh. But soon I realized that I wasn't really laughing, I was crying. I didn't dare to cry until then. It's the first time that I wept, perhaps in years. I was safe. I was safe.

Q. DID YOU LIKE THE SMUGGLER?

A. Oh, the smuggler was a drunk.

Q. A DRUNK?

A. Completely drunk.

Q. (LAUGHS.)

A. And as we were -- as we -- yeah, he absolutely refused to call me by any other name but, "Hey, you, ~~Zidic~~ ZHIDEK." "ZHIDEK" means little Jew. "Move your ass." He used every known epitaph I've ever heard as we were crawling through the high grasses, the Germans not far away with their machine gun ~~and~~ JM placement in the clump of trees.

And he not only addressed me with every epitaph but he addressed the moon because it was partly cloudy. And the

clouds would drift, and we could only move ahead when the clouds drifted over and covered the moon ~~because~~ and it got dark. As soon as bright moonlight --

Q. HAD TO STOP.

A. Yeah.

-- flooded the meadow ~~that~~ we had to ~~[illegible]~~ across. ~~we had to stop~~ fall in.

He was a very interesting but a well-meaning man who didn't believe that the money was real, so he had to bite on the coins that I handed him. He insisted that I give him the coins before we went to the river. And I was instructed by my mother, "Don't give him the money before they take you across."

And I said, "No, I'm not going to give ~~[illegible]~~ you the money until we cross." And he looked at me with his drunken grin and says, ~~"Hitla Zidic,"~~ "KHYTRY ŻHIDEK" -sly little Jew. I had to give him the money anyhow, and he did take us across.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. From then on came ~~Lavolve~~ LVOV, ~~Lamburg,~~ LEMBERG, the largest city in eastern Poland.

Q. ~~LAMBURG?~~ LEMBERG?

A. ~~Lamburg~~ LEMBERG, the city of 700,000 people which by then had swollen to 1-1/2 million, every other person a refugee looking for a place to sleep, piece of bread. It was November, cold, sleet; and there was no place to sleep except IN a doorway, a staircase underneath.

I found a nice school and a nice janitor who allowed us to sleep down in the basement. But after two or three days, we had to leave there because we started to cough. It was nice and warm, but the furnace was issuing carbon monoxide or whatever particles were in the air.

And after, I don't know, two or three weeks of this, my cousin and I remembered that in that Zionist movement we had two friends who lived in a city called Borislav/~~Drohobych~~ (DROGOBYCH) the oil center of Poland. And so that is where we went. And we found them, and they helped us.

Q. HOW FAR WAS IT?

A. 35 kilometers, 40 kilometers. 40 kilometer is only 20 miles. In Poland it's a large distance. It's like the equivalent from here to San Jose.

We got there by automobile. A Russian soldier had an automobile, and for some small change he would take the automobile and chauffeur you around. But they were terribly poor, the Russian soldiers; and they were finaglers of the worst kind, unbelievable.

We got there.

Q. WAS IT GOOD TO HAVE YOUR COUSIN WITH YOU?

A. Oh, the cousin was a pain in the ass.

Q. YEAH?

A. Terrible, terrible. He was a noncommunicative human being who followed in my footsteps always three steps or

four steps behind me.

He was a mathematician. He was great as a kid. His favorite occupation was to sit and write mathematic algebraic puzzles and solve his own puzzles, which is not quite crooked but that's what he liked to do. That's what he did day and night.

We slept at night in the Soviet local militia. What we didn't know, that Soviet militia in that city was the NKVD, which is -- subsequently became the KGB. They took us in. We slept together with -- the two of us, we slept together with the rest of the policemen on duty that day and night.

The stench of unwashed feet -- they didn't have socks. They used, instead of socks, pieces of cloth-like bandages. They called them ~~konutski~~ ONUTSKI. They were no longer white. They were dark brown. And they would unwrap them and hang them on top of the beds or railings near a stove to dry out overnight.

My first experience with food was in the morning. They woke us up and one of them handed me some dark, hard bread and a glass with some liquid to wash it down. And I nearly choked because I took a big gulp. It wasn't just an ordinary liquid. It was vodka. That's what they ate for breakfast, and they took it for granted that is what I would like for breakfast. But it was all done in the good faith.

Beyond that, not much has happened except I very quickly enrolled into the engineering school. The two youngsters

that were our friends from the Zionist movement that we met in one of these summer camps, they were attending the school.

We were living in an orphanage. It used to be a former Catholic orphanage run by nuns; and, of course, it was now run by Russian young people who were going to reform all of these little children and make them into good little Bolsheviks. It was a lovely place. We had food. We also had lice, unbelievable.

We traveled by train every day in the morning from Borýslav to ~~Drogobych~~ DROGOBYCZ and back. That first one year in that school, I ended up with a straight A. I was a happy youngster. I was free. I was free in more than one way.

I was free from being branded as a dirty Jew. Nobody dared to call you a Jew, let alone dirty. It was punishable with 12 years in the Gulag.

I was free of being afraid, from having to look over my shoulder, and I was free of mama and her scurvy husband and his sisters and brothers committing suicide, the pall of mourning in our house. I was free.

Q. WERE YOU ABLE TO HAVE CONTACT WITH YOUR MOTHER DURING THAT YEAR?

A. That was the year where I began writing. My mother and I wrote voluminously. She was a writer. She loved writing. She was -- she also loved reading romance stories, love stories. But she wrote. I was the man in the house now.

Q. (INAUDIBLE) INDOCTRINATION IN THE SCHOOL?

A. Oh, yes, absolutely. Fiery indoctrination including any use of weapons. It was an engineering school and they formed, they built the top of a tank, the turret, and mounted machine guns; and you learned how to turn it and aim the machine gun. You learned marches. We learned singing. We learned the history.

History consisted of the history of the WKPB, the history of the communist party. It was a short history. It was easy to learn because it was only 20 years long. But it wasn't as simple, because learning history was learning what everyone said during each plenary session, including what ~~Tovali~~ TOVARISHTCH Stalin said and ~~Tovali~~ Molotov, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Much more happened. One day I came to school early in the morning because I took the first train. By the way, my cousin and I parted. He didn't want to go to that school. I came in very early. I was the only one in a classroom, looking the window overlooking the large railroad junction. That is where the oil was being shipped, formerly to Poland, now being shipped to Germany.

The Russians were shipping oil to fuel the German planes and the German tanks. Day and night tankers were moving west. It's basic -- it was a trade. We sign a friendship agreement and we give you all the oil that you need for you to destroy the French and the British. Then we're going to get even

with you.

And I entered the classroom, first one. It was top floor. And there was a girl, the only girl in the class of 20. She was looking out of the window. I walked over to her and addressed her but she didn't turn around. Finally when she did turn around, tears were streaming down her face. She was a Ukrainian, Christian. And I said, "What happened?"

And she pointed at a cattle train. "This is my village down there. See these people inside? They rounded up the village in the middle of the night. They took out all the men, put them into the cattle trains to send them to Siberia."

She heard a commotion early in the morning. She ran out of the house, and she walked all the way from the village to school. And there I saw them, the partly open central doors in the cattle train, you know, the door.

Q. AND THEY TOOK ALL THE MEN?

A. All the men. I don't know whether the young or the old. I could only see shadowy figures inside the darkened cattle trains and a Russian soldier sitting in the front with the door open, his legs dangling down. And after a short while you could hear the rumble and the train moving away. It was my first moment of sobering to reality. Then one day --

Q. WERE THESE PEOPLE CONSIDERED UNRELIABLE? IS THAT WHY THEY WERE MOVING THEM?

A. They were local Ukrainians, and Stalin hated Ukrainians. He was going to depopulate the UKRAINE AND REPLACE THEM WITH ETHNIC RUSSIANS, ~~Ukrainian (inaudible)~~.

Q. WERE THEY ~~KULAG?~~ KULAKS?

A. Yes, they were ~~Kulag~~ KULAKS. He considered every peasant who had a piece of land as a Kulak, and they all had a piece of land.

Q. YES.

A. Poland had individual farmers who owned a piece of land that they ~~that was (inaudible) and they~~ OWNED AND worked.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. I came home one day after I had registered to receive a passport. We had options. Either you registered to receive a passport, in which case you become a Russian citizen; or you could register to go home some day when the borders between the Russians and the Germans open up. So many, more than half, more than three quarters of the refugees, refused to take the passport.

Q. THE RUSSIAN --

A. The Russian --

Q. TO BECOME A RUSSIAN CITIZEN.

A. Yeah, they wanted to go home.

Q. YEAH.

A. They had wives, children, brothers, sisters, all they ever worked for left behind; and the dream of some day to be

able to go home was one that you don't give ~~up~~ up so readily. I registered to stay. I was happy.

I came home from school. And usually after coming home from school, I would go to the refugee center organized by the Soviets. It was closed, nobody ~~is~~ WAS there except I saw around the corner one man running away the moment he saw me, IT WAS one of our refugees. ~~And~~ I chased him and I called ~~to~~ him and he told me what happened.

In the middle of the night, trucks arrived.

Q. (INAUDIBLE.)

A. And they took AWAY all those that registered to go home in the middle of the night. They carted them away. Nobody ever heard from them until after the war. More than half of them died in various Soviet camps. That was my second awakening to ~~the~~ reality.

Q. YOU WERE GETTING AN EDUCATION, HUH?

A. Yeah. I too had to move at the end of one year. There ~~was~~ WERE other complicating things happened there. But that is beyond what the Holocaust was all about.

I had to leave because my passport had a clause. I could not live within 100 kilometers from the German border, so I had to move. And I moved to another city called ~~in~~ BRZEZANY, now called ~~Borijoni~~ BEREZHANY. ~~In Poland it was called Bzerijoni.~~ It was a nice city.

It was a city that had the abode of the Polish

marshal who ran Poland before the war. He had his private home there, very elegant. I know. I worked in there later on for the German ~~christhautman~~ KREISTHAUPTMANN after the Germans came. And there WAS AN ~~the~~ only school ~~that they had~~ and I was ~~so~~ anxious to go back to school.

Schools, by the way, ~~was~~ HERE more than just the matter of getting an education. While you attended school, you received a stipend, 100 rubles, just about enough not to die from hunger but never enough to fill your stomach ~~to satiation,~~ to be sated.

Q. NOW, WOULD THEY ALSO FEED YOU AT SCHOOL?

A. Yes. They had ~~there had~~ a kitchen, ~~which~~ Most of the students were Ukrainian lads, ~~And they had a kitchen~~ and the lads would bring in all kinds of grain to make good, thick kasha soup and potatoes. And that was good.

And I attended that school while at the same time I also became a cooper. So I had the double income. In the mornings I would work in the cooperage making barrels. I was pretty good at that; and I liked that, too, by the way. They gave me a good introduction of how to work with a plane and other work tools.

In the afternoon, I would go to school and study. The school was a pedagogical institute that was to MAKE TEACHERS OF US ~~take us~~. ~~But~~ The SOVIETS ~~Canadians they~~ had a very fancy name, NYEPRODUCTIVENAYA ~~unproductivenaya~~ inteligence, unproductive intelligence, "inteligence." We were rabbis, priests, teachers of ancient classical Greek, TEACHERS,

psychologists.

Q. WHAT WERE --

A. Shopkeepers, bookkeepers. Nobody needed them, but they were people who had an education. And so they were going to make them into teachers in one single year. And I attended; and that's when I learned Russian and Ukrainian quite fluently, quite fluently. I was pretty good at languages. But then I already had the five -- I knew five including Yiddish and English and German and Polish, et cetera.

Q. DID YOU ONLY PICK UP RUSSIAN AFTER YOU WENT EAST?

A. Well, the school was to make you into a teacher of the Russian language.

Q. I SEE.

A. And a teacher of the Ukrainian language.

I received a diploma at the end of the school, and I received an assignment to teach in a Ukrainian village. Fortunately for me, as I was told later on, the war broke out two weeks before I was to head into that village for the assignment. Fortunately, because had I arrived there with -- being a Jewish youngster to teach kids my age, because I had the qualification to teach high school, being not only Jewish, a youngster, from Poland, they would have hung me on the first tree off the railroad station. So I didn't go there. Instead, I was back in the soup. The Germans attacked.

Now, would you kindly turn it off?

(Tape stops.)

THE VIDEOGRAPHER: Recording now.

A. The Russians left in the most chaotic manner I've ever seen. ~~They tried~~ As soon as the war broke out, German planes arrived. It was a replay of 1939.

Russian soldiers were scattered through the city. They were in the back of a student dormitory trying to fire their rifles. The ammunition didn't fit. They were half drunk. Others were meandering around trying to sell a few items that they had collected while they were stationed there.

A girlfriend of mine who was the wife of a Russian pilot somewhere out in ~~reserving~~ the far East, near the Chinese border, we loved each other. She nearly was responsible for my demise later on. But I'll tell you that part.

She left, too. They wanted me to go with them, ~~but they didn't want me to go with them.~~ But I decided I would march ~~going~~ along retreating going east with the Russian soldiers.

By then I'd made friends with another young man from Krakow, a Jewish boy, a former law student from the Krakow university. And so we walked. By then ~~however~~ the city had been bombed, ~~Berlin~~ including the school that I attended --

Q. UH-HUH.

A. -- the language school. And I went into the bombed-out school because I was recruited by ~~the Germans who came into this -- no, I was recruited by the --~~ some local officials

to help cleaning the sidewalks.

I walked in and found the place where they kept the student cards, and I wanted to find mine. Instead, I found one that looked just like mine, almost the same face except his name was LEVKO BUDAREK ~~Lefco Budaric~~ and he was a nice Ukrainian lad living in some God-forsaken Ukrainian village. It was, THE ANSWER TO MY ~~my~~ prayers, ~~I guess~~, the thing I wanted so badly; ~~I mean~~ that is to be able to masquerade as a Christian Ukrainian lad, LEVKO BUDAREK ~~Lefco Budaric~~. And by the way, this is to this day my e-mail -- what do you call the --

Q. ADDRESS?

A. Not address but, you know, the thing that --

Q. YEAH. DID YOU FIND YOUR CARD?

A. No, I didn't find my card. I had an old card but not the student card. I wanted a recent one. I pocketed it and left. THE ~~And~~ friend of mine and I decided to go. And we walked. We walked all day long. We just walked east.

It was easy to know where east WAS because the roads were filled with retreating Russian troops in whatever manner or fashion they could find. No tracks, no trucks anymore, no longer tanks. Any peasant wagon, any cart with horses, bareback horse riders, Russian solders.

Q. ANYTHING THAT MOVED, HUH?

A. Anything that would move. And it was dangerous to walk along the ~~main~~ dusty main road, so we tried to use ~~an~~ THE ROADSIDE embankment. And towards the end of the day, my friend was

limping. He developed a blister.

We came to the first village in the distance called Koslova. And standing IN FRONT OF one of the first huts -- as you approached the village, ~~on that embankment~~, was a hut. And standing in front of it was a man with a beard, a red beard, big red beard. And he was wearing a hat. Ukrainian peasants didn't wear beards; certainly not hats.

Q. WHAT KIND OF HAT?

A. It was an ordinary black hat.

Q. OKAY. (INAUDIBLE.)

A. And he recognized my friend because my friend looked Jewish, and he addressed him in Yiddish. "Are you Jewish kids?" And he said, "Yes."

And he said, "Now, where in the world are you going to stay? ~~This is~~ the night coming. Here are all the soldiers. It's dangerous, two children like you ~~who~~ TWO" -- we HERE ~~are~~ 19 years old then -- "please, come and spend the night with my family."

So we walked in. There was food, there was a family, there were children. There was a bed bunk. The bed bunk is a bench with a lid, straw inside for the night. You lift [redacted] the lid, put the straw on top, you slept on it.

Our job was to sleep but wake him up if we hear a commotion on the other side of the kitchen wall, the stable. And there was a cow that was about to calve. And it was a cow and a calf that decided that night my entire future because in the

middle of the night, I did hear a very unusual type of moaning. And we went and woke up Hirsch. That was the Jew, Reb Hirsch.

And we all crawled in through a window because you couldn't walk outside. You couldn't use light. We went through a window. We crawled into the stable, and we helped to deliver the calf. That is Hirsch delivered, and I was yanking Hirsch. And it was a holiday. In the middle of the night was a family holiday. A new calf. They had two cows and a new calf. Well, nobody slept that night.

The next day in the morning, there was a family powwow. They all got together and they called Hirsch -- they called my friend and me; and they said, "You know, our family got together. We decided that you should stay here, that you should not continue. We've been in this village since I don't know how many generations, and those Ukrainians are old friends of mine. And no matter what will happen, they will not touch you. You are protected here. Stay." Well --

Q. WERE YOU ACTUALLY IN THE UKRAINE THEN?

A. Yeah.

Q. OKAY.

A. THE ~~Old~~ Ukraine. And my friend decided he wanted to stay. I made a very, very half-ass attempt at walking ~~off for a few hours. But~~ I was so hungry, I was so tired; and it was the prospect of staying with a family. I haven't been with a family for so long, and a warm loving family. It was so enticing, I

turned around and I went back.

The next day while we were in the field helping the farmer, bullets began to fly. ~~Bullets~~ THESE were not German bullets. They were Ukrainian ~~bullets~~. The Ukrainian militia, self-created militia, preceded the German troops like a front, just spraying the territory. We fell. We hid. We heard the Ukrainians come into the hut, leave the hut. We heard the Germans come in. A few of them had horses, ~~and~~ they were CAVALRY ~~calvary~~.

And while we were cowering and hiding between the rafters in the attic, I could loudly hear one German galloping on, yelling to the others, Johann, (speaking in German.) He noticed straw falling from the thatched roof to the ground. We must have stirred the thatched roof, and he noticed that somebody was up in the attic.

And they came into the house; and the woman, Hirsch's wife, a sweet woman, she said, "No, there are no soldiers here. There are no men here. There's nobody here." And she pointed to the ladder leading up to the attic; and she says, "Go, please, Mr. Soldier, help yourself. Go up. Look for yourself."

And they walked away, and we came down. We were back in German hands. The soldiers came. Most of them just wanted something to drink or to stretch out for a few hours ~~between~~ before marching on. ~~The -- of course~~, They wanted milk and they wanted eggs; but that's a different story.

One of them took the horse out of the -- no, it was a Russian who took the horse out, which was a family disaster because it was a plow horse. And we were there for about two or three days.

And then poor Hirsch, almost weeping, ~~he~~ came to us and said, "Children, I have some bad news. The Ukrainians came; and they said that it's okay. We know who you are. We will do you no harm. But those two youngsters that you have, for all we know, they are communists. They are members, ~~of~~ former members of the ~~[illegible]~~ "KOMSOMOL", which is the communist youth organizations, "and you're hiding them. Send them away. Send them back to where they came from."

He ~~says~~ SAID, "You have to leave. I have to protect my family." So I left.

Q. THE LAWYER, TOO?

A. The lawyer, did he leave? ~~He~~ Yes, he left with me. Except I went into the city, and he left. We parted company before we reached ~~Berijoni~~ BRZEZANY. He lived on the outskirt. And this is where I nearly died, trying to look very much like ~~Lefco~~ LEVKO Budaric, not only did I wear boots and the woolen pants but that one ~~[illegible]~~ EMBROIDERED Ukrainian, ~~to~~ THE Russian woman gave me a present, a beautifully Ukrainian embroidered shirt. And I wore this.

And blond, blue eyed, I came back to ~~Berijoni~~ BRZEZANY on Sunday at noon. There was no one ON THE STREETS. It ~~is~~ HAS an empty town. Everybody was in church. In front of the walk-up steps towards

the church was a German army truck with two soldiers standing, smoking, waiting.

The bell began to ring. The church door flew open. The Ukrainian men started to run down the steps. The priests stood there overlooking the entire scene, flowing robes, you know, the Greek orthodox with the domed hat and the flowing black robe and the long beard and the big staff except that the men were carrying hatchets and knives and they were running to kill the Jews. And I tried to run away, but all the doors had already been locked. And so I had to run with them.

Q. RUN WITH THE CROWD?

A. Right. Somebody grabbed me and yanked me over and was pointing at me -- with me, and I saw what they were doing. And I ran into houses hoping that this is where I find refuge. And the men, the old men, the children were already slaughtered, blood everywhere, screams, women being raped, being slaughtered like pigs.

Somehow it quieted. Yes, two rifle shots ended the CARNAGE. The Germans were instructed to give them only until 4:00 o'clock or 3:00 o'clock. I've lost count of time. And they all went back to where they came from.

And the only place for me to go now was -- there was a large lake overlooking the city. It's an artificially made lake to protect people from the Mongol invasion 700 years ago. It was my favorite lake to sit and swim. And I had my favorite

stone there, and I sat there. And then I saw things bobbing up and down in the waves, and I realized they were slaughtered men. I WEPT AND NOTICED BLOOD STAINS ON MY SLEEVE. And then I came home and I tried to wash off the blood stains and they didn't want to come off and I still think they are there. That's something -- part of the book that I wrote called *The Carnage*. And it was the shirt.

Q. DID YOU GO INTO HOUSES AND SEARCH FOR PEOPLE OR DID YOU ACTUALLY PARTICIPATE WITH THEM (INAUDIBLE) --

A. I didn't participate in the killing.

Q. YOU DID.

A. No. But I had to run in and out of houses.

Q. YEAH.

A. Otherwise --

Q. (INAUDIBLE.)

A. Yeah. I WAS one of them. It's an unforgettable nightmare.

Well, the Germans came. They took over. They established the arm bands. They established a regional Hauptman, which is a governor. He lived in that mansion that used to belong to General RYTZ-SMIGLY, the Polish Marshal.

The man in charge was KREISSHAUPTMANN ENSBACH from AACHEN, Deutschland. A big, fat man, tall AND mean. He established THE JUDENRAT, which is the Jewish council. They immediately took 12 hostages who disappeared after a few days. You know why. And they

established the Jewish police.

Q. NOW, WERE YOU APPROACHING AS A UKRAINIAN?

A. No. I was a Jew then.

Q. YOU WERE?

A. Yeah.

Q. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

A. Well, I didn't want to be a Ukrainian if I didn't have to. Now we had a Jewish community. The people that I lived with before had returned from hiding. I lived with them. I had to have a place to eat, to sleep, the Bernsteins. So I stayed with the Bernstein. Bernstein was a member of the ~~utinrat~~ JUDENRAT. Bernstein came to me one day and says, "Why don't you become a Jewish policeman?" I says, "What do we do?"

He ~~says~~ SAID, "You have to just see that people are not unruly as they stand in bread lines; and in return you get a double ration of bread."

Sounded reasonable, so I joined until I got into a spat with one mean little man who slapped me and I slapped him back. And then I suddenly realized I slapped somebody that was my father's age. And that afternoon I handed my badge.

Bernstein asked me, "You know, you speak perfect German." Over there they didn't speak German. They spoke Yiddish. Few spoke German. "The ~~christhautman~~ KREISSHAUPTMANN wants to have a shoeshine boy that speaks German. Besides, we would like to have somebody in his house. Maybe we could find out ahead of time

what was happening or what is about to happen. Would you go up there?"

So I went. And I was the shoeshine boy; and I was the boy that would greet him every day in the morning when he would come from his horseback riding, to take off his boots and shine them, to help him back in his boots the next day, to do all kinds of errands.

Hauptman was very fond of Bloodwurst. It's a German delicacy, "~~blood wurst~~ BLUTWURST." And I had to show him the butchers and where he could buy cattle, et cetera, et cetera, a wonderful time. And I --

Q. DID YOU LIVE THERE?

A. No, no, I just walked -- came to work in the morning.

But I had food. The two Polish women who cook~~ed~~ ED ~~for~~ saw to it that I ate well while I worked. I did other things, other chores in ~~the house~~ and around the house, chopping wood for the kitchen stove, et cetera, et cetera.

Q. WERE YOU ABLE TO HEAR ANY NEWS ? (INAUDIBLE) --

A. I tried to. I tried to, but other than just drinking, joviality, they talked of nothing except they joked about bloodwurst. The ~~chief~~ KREISSHAUPTMAN ~~Hauptman~~ had a secret formula for bloodwurst.

Here people were dying by the tens of thousands ~~s~~ ON ~~The~~ THE eastern Russian front. ~~I~~ The first reports were already coming

~~in where the~~ DF Germans ~~were~~ dying by thousands ~~of people~~ every day. And the ~~christhautman~~ KREISSHAUPTMANN was busy joking ~~with~~ over his bloodwurst, and they were coaxing him to tell them ~~what~~ the formula. And he would pretend that he would give it to them or he would just give them small little items, evening after evening.

Germany was already being bombed, not a word about that. And I was listening because the kitchen had a very narrow passage between the kitchen and the dining room. And I would help the two ladies carry the trays. The ~~christhautman~~ KREISSHAUPTMANN and his other German officer entourage had three sets of uniforms, the ordinary ~~velma~~ WEHRMACHT, the SS and the SA. So they could be either one.

That lasted for ~~close to a year~~ SOMETIME. While that lasted, the ~~christhautman~~ KREISSHAUPTMANN decided that ~~he's~~ WAS going to take the entire center part of the city, the Jewish section, and have the Jews raze their homes to the ground. He was going to make a park out of it. So the Jewish people would be standing there with a pickax taking the houses apart brick by brick.

And then one day came the order that half of all the Jewish people were to assemble. They did. They were to go to an adjacent village. My cousin, who was still with me, in the meanwhile got married. He was 18, married a 15-year-old one, they had a baby. He went WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILD. Except no one arrived in that village at the end of the day.

Only one person arrived. He was somebody from my

hometown who brought me my first letter from my mother. He came back insane, muttering, "The fire, the fire, the fire." He apparently managed to detach himself as they were leading them into a clearing. And he saw what was happening. His son and daughter were killed there. And he managed to crawl away and came back, and that's when we realized what happened.

That happened again, and that happened again. And that's when I said I will no longer sit, hide, no longer crawl into basements whenever I heard footsteps that sounded like HOBNAILED ~~[illegible]~~ boots. It's better to die on the road running.

So one night I said good-bye to the Bernsteins. Oh, there was a very interesting woman that worked for the Bernsteins, a Ukrainian old woman, Christian, who adopted the family even though she was sold to that family as a young girl. She adopted them; and she was the one that tried to salvage them but didn't succeed.

Said good-bye to all of them and I set out on my way going east, didn't care where, just go, better to go.

Q. WAS IT EASY TO GET OUT OF?

A. Yeah. Took off my arm band, the Jewish arm band, stashed my ~~[illegible]~~ LEYKO BUDAREK paper in my pocket and went. And I --

Q. THEY DIDN'T HAVE FENCES OR GUARDS?

A. No, not yet. Not ~~at that -- not~~ in that town. And so I walked and walked, didn't know where I was walking.

Whenever I saw a fork in the road, I went eenie,

meanie, mine, moe, go this way. I was afraid to even take rides offered by a peasant driving his cart, suppose he will start asking questions. Suppose I tell him who I am and he knew the family. So I walk till I collapse, hunger, probably disease because --

Q. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK YOU HAD BEEN WALKING?

A. I don't know, must be two, three days maybe. Because one point I gave up. I just lied down the side of the road. And the next thing I knew, somebody was ~~pushing~~ jostling me. And I sat up and there was a peasant who stopped the cart and wanted to know who I was. And I told him and he looked at my papers I handed him and he said, well, I could use somebody like you in the field. And that's when I became ~~Leco Budarik~~ Levko Budarek. And that part is a book called *Silence* because I was the most silent ~~Leco Budarik~~ Levko you've ever seen.

Q. YOU DIDN'T TALK ABOUT YOUR FAMILY, WHERE YOU CAME FROM?

A. Worse. I talked about nothing, nothing. The only time that I talked was at night. My job was to sweep the large living room that they had. A gathering place for all the surrounding peasant, he was a well-to-do man. They would gather in the evening. My job was to sweep the floor and ~~put~~ spread new sawdust at day's end.

And in the corner he had his little altar with his icon and his candles and kerosene lamp. My job was to dim the lights. And the man in the icon looked just like my Zadie. So

my Zadie and I had a nightly conversation except I just moved my lips and Zadie just listened silently.

Q. WERE THEY --

(Phone rings.)

A. Judy will take it.

Q. WERE THEY INQUISITIVE ABOUT YOU?

A. No, except one thing. The daughter-in-law was pregnant. And after I'd been there for, I don't know, maybe two months, three months, she came -- I was walking out of the barn. I learned how to repair halters for horses and plowes and whatnot.

And I had my own little bench; and I sat there in the living room in the evening fixing halters, listening to the most rabid antisemitic talks, that you'd have thought that all of the war was a war against Jews including the German -- including Rosenfelt, the Jewish president of America. Roosevelt was Rosenfelt, a Jew.

And then she stopped me one day. She knew who I was, I'm sure. But she stopped me as I was walking out of the barn. We were in the doorway and she said, "Lejko, next time you go to the water hole for a swim, try and wear something." She knew. I was going naked. I had no swimming suit. I had one pair of pants. I couldn't take it any longer.

In the meanwhile, trains had been established back to that part of Poland, Krakow, et cetera, et cetera; so I could

now take a train, go back to that part of Poland where my family was, mother. And now I'll tell you how they got there.

Q. BUT THIS WOULD BE GOING BACK INTO GERMAN OCCUPATION, WASN'T IT?

A. It was already German occupation anyhow.

Q. OH. OKAY.

A. ~~A~~ Le~~Y~~o ~~Brdaric~~, my escape, my walking away, my pretending to be a farm boy. And other things happened in the village. They burned down the synagogue. They killed the Jews in the village. ~~I~~ Terrible things. I didn't even want to go into that.

I was working in the fields and in the distance -- I think I was raking -- we saw smoke. And the farmer had two sons and they were helping, you know, gathering and they saw the smoke, too.

They stopped; and one of them said, "Ah, they're finally burning it down," the synagogue. And the only comment that they made was, "And all the good timber."

And I couldn't take it much longer. Besides, I was afraid after she told me about the bathing suit and about not going [illegible] into the water all naked, every time I heard footsteps, I was already frightened again. I didn't sleep at night. I had an open latch on -- because I didn't sleep in the house. I slept in the little wooden shed that was tacked on to the barn. It was a lean-to. So I kept the window open so that

if they would come for me, I could run again. But it was terrible.

So I ran. One night I said good-bye to the dog because the dog followed me all the way down the road, Blackie. He was such a lovely animal. And I walked back, and I came back to where the Bernsteins lived. They were gone. Everybody was gone.

On the way, I stopped by the house where Hirsch and his family lived. They were gone, too. Good Ukrainian peasants didn't protect them very much. Maybe they did, but the Germans didn't.

I came to the Bernstein's house, empty; but the Ukrainian woman was there. She saw me. She quickly pulled me, yanked me into the barn. They had a little barn there. They had a goat. And she tried to tell me -- I didn't have to hear the story -- what happened. They all got killed. The Germans murdered them. And she says, "Wait." So I waited.

She came back with two bundles. One was a big one with food and bread, cheese. And the other was a small kerchief with ties. All the corners were tied together. And I touched it; and it was hard, jewelry inside and money, paper money. And I said, "What is this?"

And she looked at me and said, "I can't take it. They are your kind. They're not my kind." This woman spent her entire life -- she was an old woman -- her entire life as a

servant, and she couldn't touch that money because it wasn't her kind.

She loved them. They called her for everything. The children adored her. But she wouldn't touch that money. I was their kind; and, therefore, in her own logic, a child that was sold at one time into service to Jews, in her own logic, she was not their kind and they were not her kind. But I was the kind because I've lived there for a few months. So I had some money to get back.

Well, there's a long story to getting back. Thank you.

THE VIDEOGRAPHER: This is a perfect time to stop.

(End of tape.)

Interview with OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: August 16, 2000

Tape 2 of 3

Interviewer: Peter Ryan, Ph.D.

Transcriber: Julia A. Kohnke, CSR, RPR

(Begin Tape 2 of 3.)

A Strange, that trip from the Ukraine back to a city on the outskirts of Krakow called Bochnia, B-o-c-h-n-i-a. It's not a big city. It's an ancient city, about 40 kilometers away from Krakow.

It was a somewhat eventful train ride. Twice I had to get out of the train because I didn't like the Germans that came in to check the papers, because I didn't know that you needed special papers to travel. I was on a farm. And finally I sat down. And I didn't notice two German officers entering the train just as the train started to move. And there I sat trembling because everyone was pulling out papers, and I had none.

Sitting next to me was a young woman with a child, maybe two years old. And she looked at me. She leaned over and said, "Here, take ~~(a kinishka)~~ AGNIESZKA (from Agnes in Polish)." And she hands me the sleeping child and whispers, "My name is Stella. What is yours?" So I said, "Levko." And she shook

her head. The Germans came over, and she handed them her papers. And the Germans looked down at that sleeping child, and she hushed them, "shhhh". And they walked on. They walked away. They left at the next station. And we rode in silence.

We got out of the train when we finally reached Bochnia. And we hired a drosky, which is a horse-driven -- how would you call it? I forgot the name.

Q LIKE A CART?

A Yeah.

Q OPEN SEATS?

A Yeah. Yeah. Upholstered seats.

And I said -- and she said, "You're not Levko." I said, "No." She said, "I knew it. The way you trembled, I knew you were not Levko. So you're safe now."

We drove up, and as we were approaching the town, the train station being somewhat on the outskirt, I finally recognized the place where they were creating the ghetto. And she tapped the driver and said, "Stop here." And I took my bundle. I was wearing a sheepskin, my pants, woolen pants, boots. And she said to the driver, "Drive on." But before I stepped out, she said -- I don't remember whether it was Paul or whatever. She said, "Remember to come home for supper. And be on time." She wanted the driver to hear it.

I never saw Stella again.

But I knew the road to Bochnia. And I knew the city because that is where my father lived.

Now, right next to Bochnia is a small village, typical shtetl, where the vast majority of people who lived there were Jews. No railroad leading to it. You had to either walk from Bochnia to Wisnicz -- that is the name of the shtetl. It's an ancient shtetl. It goes back to the 12th Century. Or you took another horse and wagon. No electricity, no running water. But that is where my father's grandparents lived and my mother's parents lived. So as boys they were friends.

One day, after they had left the shtetl, they decided, ~~I have~~ one had a daughter of marriageable age, and the other ~~one said, and I have~~ had a son of marriageable age, and he's got golden hands; he's a watchmaker. Why don't we get them married?

And so these two old men married off my mother and my father in that little village. And that's the village, and that's a marriage that lasted only two years.

My mother left, ~~back~~ went back to her grandparents' ~~home~~ with me. My father stayed in Wisnicz for a while and felt very, very ashamed that his wife and child left him, as if he ~~was~~ were unworthy of being a husband. Besides, in that ~~town~~ shtetl, they referred to my mother as "the

princess". "She was too good for us. She was too elegant. We were too dirty for her." Because my mother was in the habit of ordering two pails of water in the morning instead of one from a water carrier.

Now, when the war broke out and they all were expelled from their home town, the families gathered to where they originally came from, in and around Wisnicz. My father by then had already moved to Bochnia. And my mother followed her parents to Wisnicz. So now they ~~is~~ WERE all together, Wisnicz, the whole family, and Bochnia, the city within walking distance from Wisnicz.

Q NOW, HAD YOU VISITED YOUR FATHER THERE?

A Throughout the years, on summer vacations, I would visit my father both in Wisnicz and in Bochnia. And I knew ~~this~~ it. This was my, like, second home.

And now the war brought them in to close proximity, the whole lot of them.

My mother first came to Wisnicz from her city where we lived, but the only way the whole family could survive was my mother selling various items of value. And that was very difficult to do by third person, an intermediary, so she moved to Bochnia, too.

And here I am on my way to Bochnia, into the ghetto, where my mother lived, my father and his second wife, and my little sister, ~~(Sija~~ SYDIA). My grandparents and the

rest of the family -- uncles, aunts, cousins galore WERE residing in that God-forsaken village, shtetl, called Wisnicz.

And I walked into the ghetto still not fully aware of the depth of resentment between my father and my mother. All these years. In 1942 I was 20 years old. All these years it smoldered. It burned.

Q HE WOULDN'T TALK ABOUT HER BADLY WHEN YOU WOULD VISIT HIM?

A Always. Always.

Q HE DID?

A He never referred to her by her first name, which was Ruth. He always referred to her as "she, the princess".

My mother didn't speak very kindly of him, either. I wanted to know what happened, and she would refer to him with her own epithet, "the liar". Whatever. He had a tendency to lie.

Well, I entered the ghetto, and there I was immediately greeted by policemen with nails between their teeth and a hammer, hammering away, building a wooden slatted fence with barbed wire crowning the tops. The Jews were fencing themselves in, totally unaware of what it meant. And I stood there. What ~~is~~ WAS going on? Here I've just come back from this utter disaster, and people were

walking down the street, smiling, laughing, joking. A little boy was walking down the street with, I think, a violin case. Another one was ~~--~~ through an open window, I could hear the teacher telling him, "Eins, zwei, drei." You know, teaching him to play. It was like ~~--~~ it was just utterly incomprehensible.

Finally, I recognized my father's store. He was the only watchmaker in the ghetto now. It was a walk-down store off the sidewalk. And there it was easy to recognize him. He always sat at the same high table with his chin at the edge and the loop in his eye and a face that is squinting because he is a watchmaker. And there is always a little watch between his tweezers and a little spindle.

And I walked down. And he nodded to a chair. And I sat down. And he still didn't recognize me. I was a little boy when he last saw me. I was 20 now. Finally, I told him, "Papa, it's me." Well, there was a lacrimal scene for a minute, and ~~I am~~ was still waiting for him to tell me where Mother lived. And he ~~says~~ said, "Oh. She. She's here."

And so he walked out of the store to show me the directions. And that is when I suddenly realized how things have changed. My father was wearing a white armband with a Star of David. He was a Jew. Until now, he was not a Jew. Up to now, he was my father; he was a human being. And now he stood there bedraggled, leaning against the crumbling wall. ~~Even~~ He

looked gray and aged. There were folds in his chin and baggy eyelids; and he looked sad. And he didn't even look at me. He didn't want to look at me, as if he were ashamed to look at me.

Finally, he showed me where she lived. And I walked up. It was a little, small knoll, where there stood a little house. This was a part of the town that belonged to the Christians, to the poorest Christians. They were ordered to move away and to make room for the Jews. And that house was now occupied by a spinster and ~~her two~~ one brother and one friend of the brother, Sam and Asher. And Mother had moved in with them.

And so I knocked on the door, and Clara, the spinster, a former high school teacher in Krakow -- her brother, Asher, was one of Poland's famous journalists for a Polish daily. And Sam was a professor of philosophy at the Jagiellonski University in Krakow. My mother just fell into this because there was a vacancy. So they put her in. And here again I tried to say something, and everybody looked at me.

Well, when I came, Mother wasn't home. She was working. And Clara bid me to sit, and would I want a cup of tea? A cup of tea? I hadn't heard somebody offering me a cup of tea since before the war. They were still living in the old, before-the-war, mode of existence.

And so I waited. I walked out, and then I saw at the end of the afternoon my mother coming. And again I was beside me. A middle-aged woman, this young, vibrant, gorgeous, beautifully shaped woman with high-heeled shoes was walking in flat-heeled shoes, and her hips were wide, and her waist full. And I sat there and waited for her to come up the stone steps. And she stood before me, and I said, "Mama?" It was three years from the day that she brought me to the railroad station and handed me the coins. And she didn't look at me, as if the voice was coming from some far-off distance, as if it wasn't me that was saying "Mama". Then finally she recognized me, and we hugged and kissed. And it wasn't until we sat down behind the house that I recognized my Mama, because one of the first things she did was she took my hand and said, "Dirty fingernails." That was my Mama.

And I had to reconcile myself to the fact that these people, not only that they didn't know what happened, they had no inkling of mass graves, of mass lime pits where people were thrown in to be shot. And if they had an inkling, they didn't want to know. And every time I tried to say something, they hushed me. They didn't want gentle, sweet Clara to hear it. They didn't want to frighten her.

One day Asher took me for a walk. He knew my dilemma. And we were walking in this crowded ghetto where

people are milling, elbowing each other off the crumbling sidewalk because there wasn't room for so many people. And he pointed across the street. And there ~~is~~ was a young woman sitting, and there ~~is~~ was a little infant at her breast. And ~~he~~ ASHER said, "Look. Look, Joshua." They called me Joshua. That's my Hebrew name. "They couldn't live knowing what you know. It's an impossibility. You cannot exist fully ~~knowing~~ realizing what might happen to you tomorrow and to that little baby." So they had to go and pretend that they don't know.

And that was as good an explanation from a former famous writer as any. And I shut up.

~~I got~~ Through these two men I found a good job in a German army encampment. They called it Kasserna, a training camp for German soldiers, formerly for Polish soldiers. ~~Their~~ The job was to repair shattered, broken trucks and convert them into ambulances. And so there was a whole bunch of craftsmen Jews. We walked out of the ghetto. By then there was a gate and a policeman. Each morning we walked out to work, and at the end of the day, we came back. And I became by then the assistant to a young Polish man by the name of Bolek, which is short for Boleslaw. He was a blacksmith. And he ~~plays~~ played a central role in what happens subsequently.

He was a pimply lad, my age, maybe a couple of years older. A face full of acne, always red because he was perpetually drunk. Completely drunk. He came in the

morning drunk; he drank during the day; he drank at night. He was an excellent blacksmith, though. When he looked at a piece of glowing metal -- and we had to have a lot of metal because we were creating springs for the ambulances so that it would drive softly, ride softly -- he never failed to burn a piece. He taught me a lot between his epithets of calling me every name ~~and him~~ while spitting and forever scratching his groin. I think he had crab lice, a severe case of it. I learned a lot.

And there I worked until one day on my way to work -- we were assembled at the gate to go out -- somebody said, "They're sending Wisnicz away."

Q THEY'RE SENDING WHAT?

A Wisnicz away.

Q THE MAN YOU WORKED WITH?

A Wisnicz was the little village, shtetl, where my whole family lived.

Q OKAY.

A I had visited the family by then. And I knew the squalor in which they lived, the poverty. ~~I knew the day that they sort --~~ They were not the same people. They were once elegant people, who now sat and spent most of the time squabbling with each other.

And there was my grandfather, the man I loved. His beard was shorn. They were not allowed to wear a beard.

His face was slapped by a drunken German soldier. And he still had the same habit of combing his nonexisting beard with his hand. There was none.

He and his friend always stood somewhere at the end of a street, still debating. They always debated. They were both Talmudists.

He saw me, and we had nothing to say to each other suddenly. This was a man who was a teller of tall tales, Hasidic tales, other stories. And finally we warmed up to each other. But the day after that, I had to leave. Now they were sending them away.

And now came the great tragedy, because my mother was visiting them while I heard the news that they're sending them away. And she wasn't supposed to be back until three days hence. It was Friday night. Friday day. And I walked to work with our commando, working, repairing trucks. And I --

Q SO THEY WOULD LET PEOPLE OUT OF THE GHETTO?

A Yeah. A commando each day. We walked out, about 20 of us.

Q AND THEY LET YOUR MOTHER OUT TO GO TO THE VILLAGE.

A Yeah, she was there.

Q SO THEY WOULD DO THAT.

A Well, no, my mother went to the village to be

with her parents for a visit.

Q YES, BUT THEY WOULD ALLOW HER TO VISIT.

A Yes.

Q THEY WOULD ALLOW THEM TO BE TOGETHER.

A They would give her a pass.

Q OKAY.

A It was a written pass.

Q OKAY.

A And I was frantic. The eviction to be the next ~~And it was that day, not~~ and I was at a loss of ~~knowing~~ what to do. I finally turned around to my colleague, the drunken Bolek, and said, "Bolek, could you go and get them?" He ~~says~~ said, "Get what?" I ~~says~~ said, "Get them." He ~~says~~ said, "Your grandfather (sic) wouldn't happen to be one of these rabbis, would he, ~~with~~ one of these the Jews with ~~the~~ dirty long beards?" I said, "Yes. But mainly, get my mother out. You probably would know the way. Instead of going through the main road, perhaps you would find a way going around through the fields."

Q YOU'RE TALKING TO THE BLACKSMITH?

A Yeah, to Bolek.

Q OKAY.

A "Maybe ~~you~~ I could" ~~--~~ he ~~says~~ said, "And what do you want me to do with her?" I ~~says~~ said, "Just hide her for a couple of days until this is over. And then I will take care" -- "I will bring her back" to the ghetto in Bochnia."

Bolek just did what he always did when he was perplexed. He was spitting twice as fast, scratching twice as hard, sniffling all the time, and wouldn't reply. Not a word. He wouldn't say yes, and he wouldn't say no. And I says, "Bolek, a bottle of 'wyborowa wodka,'" which means first-choice vodka on the market. I could buy one on the black market. He still didn't say one word.

The bell rang, and we had to go home. And Bolek was silent. I went home, ~~with the whole group~~ frantic. I thought I had lost her for good.

Well, the next day, she came back. And a good part of the story is now her story in the book that I've written, about what happened that night.

Q SHE DESCRIBED IT TO YOU?

A Yeah. Crying.

It was dark. It was close to midnight when somebody knocked on the door. And she opened. Grandfather came out, too, you know, wearing his ~~(long gish~~ overcoat). And Bolek stood there spitting, holding a horse whip in one hand, and not too far away was a cart and the horse. And he said, "Hey, lady, you are Joshua's mom, yeah?" And she ~~says~~ said, "Yes." He ~~says~~ said, "Get your ass in there. I'm taking you out of here."

Well, she was perplexed. She ~~wouldn't~~ didn't want to go. And she said, "Did ~~he say~~ Joshua tell you anything?" And that's when Bolek remembered that he put my note that I gave him, and he put

it in his boot, because before he left, he said, "How will she know that it's me?" And I said, "Here, I'll write you a note." And I wrote a note in the latrine before the day was over, and I gave it to him. He handed it to her.

And now Mother described one of the most painful and at the same time most tender scenes in her life. Because Bolek was instructed to take Grandfather and Grandmother, too. They all lived together. And so Bolek wanted the old man to come and the grandmother to come. And the grandfather said, "No. We ~~too~~ cannot go. We cannot travel. It's Friday night. It's Shabbes. And on Shabbes, you're not allowed to travel." And as Mom was telling me the story, I was getting mad. I said, "Mama, he had an opportunity to save his life, and he didn't because of that damn Shabbes. Because he had (~~halla~~ Khalah) and some food at the baker's, keeping it warm at Shabbes. And Mom says, "Son, he too was at the horn of a dilemma. I had to choose. Do I go with my parents and stay with them and go with them to the train the next day in the morning? Or do I go with my child? Do I go a alone with Bolek? Is the daughter's duty to go with her parents or to go with her son? I've studied the Talmud, too. There is nothing mentioned in the Talmud or in any books that tells you what to do. They had the same dilemma. Do they go with me, the daughter, or do they stay with the rest of the family?"

There were other daughters, and there were oodles of grandchildren, and son-in-laws. And she cried, "God, what have we done? What have we done to be so punished?"

And she tells ~~of~~ the story of what the shtetl looked like on the night before they had to leave to go into oblivion, of what they said and what they did. And perhaps some day you'll read it in my book. But Mama came back.

Shall we stop now? I need to.

(Break taken.)

A Mama came back. Dirty, caked-with-mud boots. Mama never wore boots in her life. She was covered with dust. Dirty fingers. She even tried to whistle through her fingers to show me that she's now a peasant and told me the story. This is the story of her decision-making, the story that perhaps I haven't told you yet. Have I?

Q ABOUT HOW SHE MADE THE DECISION?

A About her having to make the decision. I told you that.

Q YES.

A Well, Bolek took her through the night, as she said. He took her; he showed her the various places that he knew very well because he slept with the daughters of these various farmers; and he hid her in a loft of the barn. He brought her some food, and he brought her some blankets. And Mother went to sleep as much as she could.

She told me that the one thing that kept her from running back was the piece of paper that she was holding dear to her chest. She says, "I don't know whether you remember what you wrote, but among other things, you said, 'Mama, if you don't go with Bolek, I will join you at the train station the next day.' You left me no choice."

Well, she ~~came~~ went with BOLEK. She slept that night, and in the in the hay loft morning, she heard a noise. And there, a chicken flew up into the loft. And following the chicken, she heard footsteps of a woman climbing up the ladder, saying, "Here, chicky, chicky, chicky." And the woman, Bolek's mother, Wanda, climbed up, and suddenly these two women were facing each other. And Wanda said, "What the hell are you doing here?" And Mother had to tell her. And Wanda took over.

She took her clothes away, put her own dirty stuff, brought her into the house. And my mother stayed in the house. Wanda would go and try to hide my mother in the potato field because by that time potatoes were high. But Mother was so clumsy with a hoe, she was a giveaway to the farmers, to the peasants. So she hid her in the bedroom. And as she stayed in the bedroom, she heard the commotion down the main highway, the main road, leading from Wisnicz to Bochnia. And there she saw the entire shtetl of Jews, the entire caravan, walking, the men carrying the backpacks, the bundles, a few horses with wagons, some pushing baby

carriages, some carrying crying children. And there she knew that her entire family was going. And she had to restrain herself from running out and joining them. But they walked by.

After a day Wanda told her that it's time for you to leave. And it was early morning. And Mother was packing and stepped outside, and there standing by the outside water pump was Bolek's brother ~~in his underwear naked to the waist~~, bare to his waist, washing in a trough. And he sees her and wants to know, "Mama, who is this?" And his mama had to tell him, "She's a friend of ours. And you will not address her as 'she'. You will kindly address her as Miss Kwiatek," an impromptu name that Bolek's mother gave to my mother. Kwiatek means "flower" in Polish.

Q FLOWER?

A Yes.

Q MISS FLOWER?

A Yeah, Miss Flower.

"And you will address her with respect."

And as Bolek's brother was stammering, "But, but, but, but, but, but, Mother," she ~~said~~ added, "Besides, you brought her here during the night. You brought her here. In fact, I have ways of showing that you brought her here. You gave her a pair of nylon stockings to come with you to sleep with you. She has those nylon stockings in her

bag."

The man got terribly angry. He threw something to the ground and quickly left the house.

That morning, Wanda and Mother went to the road and said a tearful good-bye, Mother dressed as a peasant, Wanda keeping all the good stuff because if they catch you on the highway and the patrols are going back and forth and you have all the silks and all the expensive items in your bag, they'll know who you are.

And so Mama left. And halfway down, before the road turned, she heard a loud whistle. She turned around, and there was Wanda with a horse hitched to a wagon, coming at a fast gallop. She stopped, picked up Mother, and she said, "We're going to ride back into the ghetto together. You take the reins."

And here I describe my mother, the latter-day Ben Hur, charioteer, whipping the horses. She enjoyed that. That was her moment of triumph. She was going back to her son. She was alive.

But I knew that she was alive before I saw her because on the day when I found out that they are sending Wisnicz, the shtetl, away and I didn't know whether Bolek would come to take her and I knew that they had all arrived at the railroad station, I went to the railroad station myself. I took off my Jewish star. I put on my sheepskin,

my boots. I was Levko (~~Bodarek~~ BUDAREK) again. And I walked all the way down to the outskirts of the city to the railroad station. And the scene that I saw haunts me every night. There was all of Wisnicz, all the Jews. Wives, little children, hats, wigs, Hasidic hats, caps, bald hair, all sprawled on the dirty little market plaza in front of the railroad station where the farmers would bring in the cattle to trade. There, in all the horse droppings and cattle droppings, there were the Jews waiting for the train to arrive. And I sat at a distance, concealed by some low brushes, trying to find out whether Mama was one of them. I was ready to join if I'd found her. And as best as I could see, she wasn't there. And I knew she wasn't there because one of my friends was a Jewish policeman who looked up and noticed me and immediately knew why I was there. He was a German Jewish boy, a nice boy, and he shook his head. ~~He shook his head~~. So I knew she wasn't there. But what I saw was the train arriving, the cattle train. And I saw how the train stopped and how they opened the doors, cattle wagon after cattle wagon. Ten, twelve. I didn't count. And how all the people suddenly rose from their squatting or sitting position, took whatever baggage they had. Some of it they left behind. They weren't allowed to take carriages, baby carriages, so they had to push them all aside. And how they congealed into one single mass towards the ramp leading to

the cattle train and how they were being ~~helped in~~ goaded on, with the rifle butts of the SS soldiers, ~~to whom~~ if they weren't moving fast enough, and how they smashed a rifle butt into the forehead of another man because, the last minute he turned around, said something, and made an attempt not to go in. And how one person, one woman, died right in the square, and how they all surrounded her. And then how the doors closed. And there was nothing left on the square except discarded bundles, empty baby carriages, and empty rails.

And the train disappeared in the distance. And I knew that they ~~are~~ were going to die. And they did the next day. They went to Majdanek.

Now, another ~~the~~ tragedy that also occurred, my little sister ~~Sija~~ Sydia got wind of what was happening because she and I would see each other throughout the weeks that I worked there -- ~~that~~ while I lived in the ghetto. And she said, "Why did you go to the train?" And I said, "How did you know?" She says, "Papa said that you're going to go to the train. You're going to go with her." And I said, "And Papa didn't try to stop me?" She says, "Well, you know my Papa; comes Saturday afternoon, he always goes to sleep."

Q GOES TO SLEEP?

A Um-hmm. Takes a Saturday afternoon nap.

So my father knew what I was about to do and never tried to stop me. To him I was once allotted with her to

live; he now alloted me to go with her to die.

And that hurt me much. I never spoke to him after that.

When Mama came back, Mama went back to the same work. And life -- after the episode with Wisnicz was over, life went on. Bochnia was still intact. Oh, here and there a few hundred people had to be handed over, allegedly to work. Mainly men. But they never came back. And consciously, or subconsciously, we tried not to talk about it. They went east, and they're working somewhere in some labor camp; they will come back when the war was over.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: You were going to repeat the story about Bolek and how he decided -- why he decided to come.

A One day I came to work, and Bolek came; he came earlier than usually. This time, instead of simply veering from side to side, he was actually holding on to the anvil; he was holding on to the chain that we used to stoke the fire. And finally he turned around, and I saw tears in his eyes. And I said, "Bolek?" He said, "Don't -- don't ask questions." I said, "What happened?" He had a little package that his mother gave him for my mother, because this Wanda really grew fond of my mother, and every so often he would bring a piece of cheese or something. He said, "They killed him." I said, "Who?" He said, "We don't know yet why, and we don't know how, but the Huns killed my brother.

But I don't want to talk about it." And then he said, "How's your mom?" "She's fine." He says, "You ever wondered why I went for her?" I ~~says~~ said, "Sure." He ~~says~~ said, "You think it was the bottle of ~~vodka~~ of vodka?" And I said, "Wasn't it?" He says, "Shit, man, no. You ever go to church?" I said, "Bolek, I go to a synagogue. You know, my kind. He ~~says~~ said, "No, no. My, -- my kind." I said, "Yeah, I've been there once or twice." He ~~says~~ said, "Well, in my church, right next to the entrance, they have a cross, and Jesus is almost life-size," he ~~says~~ said, "looking skinny, almost blue, and there's blood all over the place, running from his head, down his chin, on his chest, sad." He ~~says,~~ said, "You son of a bitch, you," he said, "that is the way you looked that ~~Saturday~~ Friday afternoon when you asked me to go and get your Mama. That's just the way you looked. Now, hurry up and get the fire going." That was Bolek.

And then one day, it happened. We thought the war will be over. It was 1943. German armies were reeling in the east. We were getting all kinds of clandestine radio news. They were freezing by the tens of thousands. It won't be long, everybody was convinced. And then one day, we woke up early in the morning to the clanking sound of rifles and ammunition cases. It was a gray dawn, and we looked, and the ghetto was surrounded by the SS, young men. I ran out. I tried to show off with my Ukrainian, and they

shook their head. Finally one yelled, "Estonia!" They were Estonians who volunteered to do the murdering for the SS.

And immediately, almost instantly, there were the sound of rifle-shooting. And the Jewish police were running up and down the street, announcing that everyone is to assemble to the square. There was a square in the ghetto. It was a little park, dilapidated. ~~Square, And so~~ I lived in the men's quarters because men and women were already separated in the ghetto. That is, separated to sleep at night. So I got up in the morning and quickly ran to Mama. And there she was in her little house with Clara. And they were packing, and I walked over and said, "Mama, can I help you?" She was bent over a suitcase, and the first thing she was putting in was a huge pack of letters tied up with a ribbon. And I said, "Mama, letters? Suitcase? How about a pair of heavy shoes and a warm sweater?" And reluctantly she let me take the bundle of letters out, put that aside, and she put in heavy shoes. And we went. Clara went. But Asher wasn't there. And --

Q WHO WASN'T --

A Asher wasn't there. Clara's brother, the writer, the journalist, was not there. And he should have been there on a morning like this to help Clara. After all, Clara was his sister. And Sam wasn't there.

And I asked Clara, "Where is Asher?" And Clara

said, "He was here very early in the morning. It was still dark. And he told me to pack, and he'll meet me on the square."

And there we were as soon as people assembled. There were coils of wire already, barbed wire waiting, and they closed it off with coils of barbed wire. And there was the entire ghetto of Bochnia assembled. Men, women, little children, old people. Strange enough, there was an eerie silence except for a cry of a child. It was a silence as if they had known that this would happen and there was no great surprise.

And then the head of the Judenrat, and Asher next to him, stood up on the table. And right next to them was the SS Kommandant, Muller, and they had a list in their hand. And they started to count off names that are to step forward. Those called ~~are~~ Were to stay behind. The rest must go.

And so alphabetically they read. They called Klausenstock. Only Joshua. No Ruth. And so I said, "I'm going to go stay here, Mama." And Mama grabbed me and pushed me to the exit. "You go. You go. We'll meet again."

Q NOW, WHO WAS TO STAY?

A The people that were being called out from the list.

Q WERE TO STAY?

A Yes. The rest --

Q THE REST OF YOU WERE TO GO WHERE?

A To the train station. To the train station. All were being shipped away.

Q AND THEY DIDN'T CALL HER NAME TO STAY?

A No.

Q OKAY.

A And so here I sat with a hundred other people. More than a hundred. A hundred and forty or so. We sat there separately in a little back yard facing the square with all the people there still waiting till the list was read. And Asher was sitting there, and Sam was sitting there, and the woman whose son got killed in the truck, Emma, was also there. She, too, was on the list.

And after the list was read, they opened the gate. They pushed away the coils of barbed wire and created an exit. And they marched them away in five, in front of me. And I watched them walk by.

My father walked. My little ~~Sija~~ SYDIA, my sister, walked by, and she looked at me. And she was trying to say my name, but she clearly couldn't. She was wearing high-heeled shoes. They wanted her to appear older than she was.

And then other people walked by. My friends

walked by. Mama walked by. And all she could do is throw me a kiss. And she tried to smile. Until the last people walked by. And I sat there, and I watched. Then after a while, I couldn't watch, so I put -- we had to sit with our heads on our knees. I couldn't look. I closed my eyes till it was silent. No more footsteps, no more tromp-tromp of people walking by. And then there was silence.

And then we sat there for a while longer, maybe an hour. It was a hot day. And then we were told to stand up, to line up, and walk over to the main street.

Q Was there any rhyme or reason for the people on the list that you could comprehend?

A Yes, there was. There was. The story that will follow will tell you what we had to do.

And so we stood there, the hundred fifty or hundred sixty. I never counted. I never liked to count people. And the entourage of officers came by to look at who this was that was left behind. And the chief officer, an SS, a tall man -- I later on found out a pediatrician in civilian life -- he had a riding stick. They all liked to walk with a riding stick, you know. And he would point at people that had to step forward. And there they stepped forward, maybe 30, maybe 40. And standing next to him was the butcher, a fat, squat enlisted man, SS, with a machine gun. Clearly, the Malach-Amowes, the Angel of Death, as you

always imagined he would look like, the man to do the executions.

They walked them away. And we saw them walk to the end of the street and turn right, where there was a bend, and then walk some more. And then a volly of machine gun and screams, and they were dead. Most of them were children. Most of them were mothers with children. And I'll never forget that scream.

And then there was silence again. And we were told to go into a wooden barrack, which was very close to that empty square, and stay there until further instructions. And there we stayed the rest of the day.

Early in the morning the Jewish policemen were part of the group left behind, and even they were decimated, too. Not all of them were left behind. They came by bunk ~~bunk~~ by bunk, pulling young men, powerful men. Come, come, you, you, you. And our job was to go from house to house to find those that had been shot, most of them in the back yards, lined up with neat German precision. All naked. All of them shot. The back of the head blown off.

And just when I thought that I could do it, there was a small one, and I turned her around. It was my sister looking at me. And I wanted to pick her up to bury her, and Asher was following me. He wouldn't let me. And so he pulled me away, yanked me away, and sent me someplace else.

And he took her.

And there on this little knoll right behind where Mother lived was a huge pyre of people, ten across, a layer of wooden picket fences and another layer of corpses and another layer and another layer. And then I heard the swishing sound of gasoline poured. And then I heard the roaring and the crackling of the fire.

And that happened again the day after that. And there were more to be found the day after that. Until they all were found and burned. Hundreds and hundreds of them each day. They tried -- they tried to hide, but they found them.

Can we --

Q YES?

A -- take a break?

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: THAT'S A PERFECT SPOT.

(Break taken.)

A The days of finding those who were killed, those who were hidden, were over at last. Now came the unpleasant chore of going from house to house to collect what Germans at the time considered collectibles. In their own minds, we didn't eat out of any other ~~Porcelain dishes~~ utensils except Porcelain, ~~and except~~ Royal British or Meissen. As far as they were concerned, Jews didn't eat on ordinary beat-up, chipped plates.

So we had to collect all of the beat-up, chipped --

Q ROSENTHAL, TOO?

A Rosenthal, yes.

Q OKAY.

A We didn't eat with any other utensils but silver. So we had to collect the rusty knives and the bent forks. We only slept on satin linen. We only wore furs. No one wore moth-eaten blankets made into coats.

So we had to collect that, too.

And so we went house after house, empty, with food particles decaying, and collecting in pairs, in threes, alone, with a basket, finding things that we never suspected existed.

There was a violinist there with a famous name. There was a circus clown. There were rabbis who never wanted to admit that they were rabbis. But we found it all. Open books on the tables. Painful. Painful. Suddenly we all felt that we are living on a cemetery and all these empty houses were gravestones.

And then one day, I walked into a house, and I was rummaging just to while the time away. And I heard a creaky sound. And it came from the ceiling. There wasn't supposed to be a creaky sound from above the ceiling. In fact, there wasn't supposed to be any sound at all. By then we had

gotten accustomed to the silence of the empty houses. It took me two days to encourage whoever it was hidden up there to ~~make~~ show his face. And when he did -- when he did, I was confronted with a young man my age, give or take a year or two, an ultrafanatic Hasidic young man who lived up there, hidden in a very cleverly contrived bunker. The entrance into the bunker was very clever. ~~because there~~ It was a huge box of sand. Nobody would have thought of moving the box because it was filled with sand to the top. What no one realized was the sand was only about an inch thick, and underneath was an empty case and a door, an opening, leading into another compartment between two walls. His name was Nathan.

Nathan was the most mean, difficult, quarrelous young man I've ever met. He immediately started to berate me. He only referred to me by the plural. "You and the other people, the sinners, aren't you ashamed?" There was a man and a woman, and she was wearing short sleeves, and they were standing by the fence over there -- because he was watching from the attic -- and they were kissing. "How can you be kissing? How can you be laughing on a cemetery, amid the dead people? Sinners, all of you." This went on whenever I came up to see him. Of course, I had to assure him that the only food that I brought him was strictly kosher. I had to swear to it.

How did he get there? They didn't build a bunker to hide people. His father was a sofer, a man who wrote the Torahs. A writer. And this man was preoccupied with the cleanliness and the purity of the holy writing, as he called it. And he was afraid that some day, after they had been taken away or whatever might happen to them, it might fall into unclean hands. And so they were prepared to hide these in case of emergency.

Q And that's what the bunker was for?

A Right. And there was on that last day, when they surrounded the ghetto -- the father suddenly remembered that he had left some written folios in a little house of prayer not too far away, and he quickly rushed to retrieve them to hide them. But he was a bit too slow. And his wife, ~~this~~ Nathan's mother, wouldn't let him go alone. So she went with him. His sister that he loved -- and he loved her dearly -- she was waiting in a doorway, anxious for them to come back so that they all could go to the square as ordered. By then there was machine gun fire all around them.

And so she stood in the door when she saw them in the distance, and she ran out and right into the line of fire. And she and the mother and the father were murdered right in the middle of the street. And as soon as it was quiet and they stopped searching -- he was hiding now in a

bunker -- he went out, retrieved the bodies, and dug three graves in the garden, in the back yard. And he buried them in the middle of the night, each one a separate grave. They should each one have their own grave. And there he was.

Q DID HE RETRIEVE THE OBJECTS THAT THEY HAD GONE TO GET, THE FATHER?

A I'm sorry?

Q DID HE RETRIEVE THE OBJECTS THAT --

A Probably. Probably. I'm not sure. I didn't ask him. I know -- he finally showed me the hiding place. It was within the bunker, another wall that you had to lift by two nails. And there were all the utensils and the inks and the quill feather and the eraser that you needed.

And there he was with his books, with his Cabala, arguing with me that all of this wasn't an accident; the Germans didn't do that; it was baschert, God's will. Messiah is about to come, and it says in the Cabala that on the day before Messiah . . . .

And this went on every night when I came to bring him some more food, because he was so sickly. He was coughing, and he didn't look well. And each time we had this debate. And there's about 40 or 50 pages of our conversations. ~~It was~~ Eventually we warmed up to each other. That is, I learned to disregard his jibes and his cynicism about anything that was not his variety of a Jew.

You either were on his side or you were against him. No compromise.

So that was a good part of my evening entertainment, so to speak. Nathan.

By that time, Emma, the mother of Emil, became the cook, and she knew about it. And she supplied the food. And she had a niece. And the niece and I were carrying on a little juvenile love affair. And life went on and on with the usual thing.

One of the people that was part of the group that I mentioned -- that is, Sam and Asher -- was another man, a friend of theirs. Heinrich. Heinrich was a German Jew who lived in Hamburg, a very wealthy merchant who had a son and a daughter.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I'm going to put this right here because your hand is making a lot of noise kind of right near the mic.

A Thank you.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: There you go.

A Heinrich was home in Hamburg during the Kristallnacht. And he witnessed what was happening. They were right outside his window. He was Geheimrat Heinrich, so, so, so, and so. And that night they came into the house after they've thrown all the books out of the window and made a fire, a bonfire, outside.

They took his son and they took his daughter away. And Heinrich and his wife, who was not Jewish -- she was the daughter of a German pastor -- they left to go to Poland because there was an edict that Jews who came to Germany before a certain time and came from Poland had to be sent back to Poland. So maybe his grandfather or his father, or who knows what, had -- they had to go back. They had an uncle in Bochnia. An old man. And he joined the group. Heinrich one day received a letter from a housekeeper, a letter informing him and his wife, Inga, that the son died of pneumonia in one of the concentration camps. The next day they received almost a carbon copy letter that his daughter died of pneumonia in a different concentration camp. And gradually -- Inga, by the way, was sent away. Heinrich was on the list. And one by one we watched Heinrich losing his marbles, becoming insane, living farther and farther back in the past, beginning to write letters to his dearest Inga, and when is she going to come home? He knew that she just went shopping, and it's time, you know. It's going to get cold outside, and she should have gone shopping with a warm coat. Inga, who ~~is~~ was no longer alive. And he would leave the letters. And those of us who knew about the letters would go and

remove them.

And then one day, Heinrich, during the morning line-up -- there was a new Kommandant that replaced the old one -- stepped forward and smartly saluted. He was such a ridiculous figure of a man with baggy pants, scuffed shoes, frayed pants at the heel, pudgy, how he stood there and saluted to duty, reported to duty. He recognized the new Kommandant as one of his co-officers at Verdun, a man whose life he saved. All in his fantasies, of course. And ~~remember how you and Inga and your~~ wanted the Kommandant to wife -- how we went boating? And remember the time when ~~we~~ he had the Kommandant's ~~cave-in~~ they at the front? Et cetera. Et cetera. And the Kommandant, of course, dismissed everyone, kept Heinrich; and that afternoon Heinrich disappeared, completely reverted, became completely insane. He thought that ~~I was one of his son~~ I was his son. And for a long time, he had that delusion, that I was the son, but for some strange reason, I was masquerading as someone else. After all, I spoke "~~hochst~~ Hoch Deutsch". I spoke a fluent German.

So we lost him.

And then one day, ~~—~~the head of the Judenrat, ~~—~~ somebody knocked on his door, woke him up from a sound sleep, and told him to go to the Kommandant's adjutant, the adjutant, a sickly, skinny man, apparently somebody who may

not have been quite fit to fight on the front but he was fit enough to kill Jews. The Kommandant's adjutant wanted to see him. And so the Judenrat, head of the Judenrat, came in the middle of the night. The man was sitting in his apartment nearby, totally drunk, with one bottle in his hand and a glass in the other, muttering to himself. And when he saw the ~~Kommandant~~ JUDENRAT, he told him -- started to talk drunkenly. ~~Everything he said,~~ "Everything," he said, "is shit." He just received news that there was a direct hit on the building where his entire family lived. And they ~~are~~ were still there in the rubble. He also received news that his son, who served on the eastern front, the Russian front, got his head blown off. "Everything was shit. We are all going to go the same way, like the rest of the Jews. Oh," he said, "you don't know what happened to them, do you? Well, I will tell you because I know." And he started to tell the head of the Judenrat how they were all being killed in chambers, shot, pouring himself more drinks as he talked. Finally, the bottle and a cup fell out of his hand, and he began to snore.

This was the first news that we received or that anyone received of what really happened to the people that were taken away. ~~He~~ The adjutant knew it. He even mentioned how he knew it. He said his cousin or something was serving there. He ~~says~~ said, "I don't care any more what they do to me." He referred

to the Kommandant as "that pervert". "I don't care what they do to me. What more can they do to me?" And then he conked out.

Well, now the ~~Judenrat Kommandant~~, head of the Judenrat, came to his friends, Asher. He says, "Asher, what do I do now? Do I tell them, the hundred left? Do I tell them? Do I take the last bit of hope away from them? Because what happened to them will happen to us." And Asher says, "You have to." Oh, he got now mad at Asher. "Yeah, a reporter, you have to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. You must not" -- and they go into this long debate and finally, Asher said, "I will tell them." And he ~~tells~~ told everybody what happened.

Not long thereafter, there was a repeat performance. We all woke up early in the morning. Four trucks and SS men loading us onto the truck, 25 men in one, 25 men in the other, 25 women in the third, 25 women in the fourth. And the gates opened. We were not told where we were going.

They opened the gates, and standing on the street, leading to the ghetto, standing thickly, were the townspeople. They knew about it. They stood there with brooms and pails, waiting for us to leave so that they could sweep it up. And we drove by, and the head of the Judenrat lost his temper and yelled, "Sons-of-a-bitches, they knew.

They knew, and they didn't let us know. They knew. Look at them. They can't wait for us to be taken away."

And it wasn't until we hit the main highway that somebody said, "We're going west. Hurray! We are not going east." All of the trains always went east. That's where the main killing camps were. And somebody said, "Well, west, east, how long have we been here?" And somebody said, "I counted. We've been here six weeks and three days." End of the story. P.P.

Now comes the next story, which is called Darkness. Darkness is the story of concentration camps.

The four trucks arrived on the outskirts of Krakow to the old Jewish cemetery, ~~which~~ called Plaszow. And now we had the first glimpse of prison, the first glimpse of a large area, hilly, surrounded by several rows of barbed wire, snaking pathways in between, some with ceramic heads, which would indicate that some of the wires were electrified. And we entered the camp. We entered ~~the~~ and ~~camp;~~ everything was taken away from us. ~~And~~ we were sent to showers and to the delousing station. It was another frightening moment. Very frightening because we were all convinced that when the doors closed, instead of water, gas will issue from the showerheads. That was the rumor of Auschwitz by then. And there was a very nice Jew, an older man, who was the bathmaster. And he suddenly realized how

frightened we were. And he says, "Yes, don't be afraid. This is not gas. It's water. In fact, I'm going to close the door, and I'm going to remain inside till you're finished." And he did.

And from then on came that camp, a murderous camp. The ~~That~~ Kommandant of that camp had the habit of entertaining himself by just aiming a gun or a pistol for no good reason and shoot people at random.

There was hunger. I was very hungry. I was ~~still~~ suffering from enormous quantities of lice. No matter how many times every evening I would go to the disinfecting station, where they had high heat, steam, ~~in these tanks,~~ sterilizers, where you put your entire clothes in, I couldn't get rid of them. ~~That~~ The same night, going to my bunk, I would be covered with them again. Terribly demoralizing to feel things itching and crawling on you.

Q WHAT WAS THE CAMP YOU WERE IN?

A Camp Plaszow. Called Camp Plaszow. And indeed ~~soon~~ I worked on the night shift as a blacksmith, doing the most idiotic work making small little L and T plates that a machine could have done. It was clearly just to make work. The disheartening thing was that every so often new people would arrive just like we did. As ~~they were coming~~ the front would approach from the east, they would evacuate more and more ~~and empty out~~ Jews, more and more small towns and bigger

cities, and they'd either come to us or they'd go to Auschwitz. And they would tell us the terrible stories of what was happening, leaving fewer and fewer illusions that this eventually may not happen to us. Or will happen to us.

And then one day, we were told that our camp was too full, that a contingent will be sent away. It will be sent to a concentration camp in Germany. And I welcomed it. Believe me, I welcomed it. Strange as it may sound now, I welcomed going to a German concentration camp where I will be a prisoner among prisoners of all nationalities, not a Jew only among Jews. Until now I was confined for years as a Jew among other Jews, as if we, the Jews, were the biggest culprit in whatever misery faced the world. Suddenly, I looked forward to the prospect of being along with a Frenchman and a Pole and a Czech and German prisoners. And I welcomed it.

Q DID YOU KNOW THAT THAT EXISTED?

A Yes. We knew about German camps.

And so the lineup came in the morning, and by barracks, we were lined up. I was in Barrack -- I don't remember whether it was 8 or 16 or C or D. I don't remember. It's been 50 years now. And they again had a list with people to step forward. And so from our barrack, about 25 or 30 people stepped forward. They were called out. And we just stood there in the cold morning.

Q You were one of them called out?

A No.

Q NO.?

A And -- but I was in the front row.

And there was an elderly man. And standing in front of those that had been called out was one of the kapos, a Jew. And that old man was berating the kapo. "Joel," he kept saying, "how could you do this to me? I'm your uncle. I am your flesh and blood, and you are sending me out to God knows where? Maybe to die?"

And the poor kapo -- a nice boy, by the way -- kept squirming. He wouldn't even turn around to listen. And I listened to this patiently, and finally I got an idea. I stepped forward. I tapped the man on the shoulder. And I pointed towards the front row. And he couldn't believe that I'm doing this, but eventually he caught on. And he stepped into my place, and I stepped into his.

The next day, I was sent to Gross-Rosen, one of the most murderous camps in the entire history of concentration camps. That's where they started out by sending all the political prisoners, the German political prisoners, long before they sent Jews. In fact, when we arrived there, the head kapo gathered us together and welcomed us. "Liebe Juden, you are the first Juden that arrived in this camp; and, boy, just you wait. We will show

you what it is to be a Jew here!" And they did. The beatings, unbelievable.

So we arrived in Gross-Rosen. But you know what? I'm tired.

(Break taken.)

A I'll try for a cheerful face in a rather sordid, sad story from now on.

I think -- you're not recording, are you?

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Yes, I am.

A Yeah?

The last time I believe we stopped somewhere in Gross-Rosen.

Q YOU HAD JUST GOTTEN THERE. LET'S PICK UP FROM WHERE YOU CAME FROM TO THERE.

WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

A Came from Plaszow by sort of an internal escape, where I changed coats --

Q THAT'S WHEN YOU TRADED PLACES.

A -- with the elderly man.

Q UH-HUH.

A And I stood there in line until the order came for us to disperse, all of us except we who have been selected to go, to be sent away.

And strange, that man; he really couldn't believe that I truly changed coats with him. He walked away

backwards, looking at me, and finally he realized it's -- it's real.

Q YOU CHANGED COATS?

A Yes.

Q YES.

A He was to stay, and I was to go in his place. And he waved. And it was --

Q HE THOUGHT YOU WERE GIVING HIM A GIFT?

A Yes. He waved, and I couldn't hear, but I could lip-read the word "thank you".

That night we stayed in a barrack within the Plaszow camp. For some reason they call it a quarantine barrack. And that was only for those who were about to be sent the next day to a concentration camp in Germany. We didn't know where it was going to be.

Q YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHERE YOU WERE GOING?

A No. There were vague rumors. We all lived on rumors in those days. And strangely enough, with this total isolation, most rumors turned out to be correct, true.

Q WHAT KIND OF RUMORS WERE CIRCULATING?

A Rumors of the war, rumors of the terrible defeats in the East, rumors of the landing of the Allied troops. ~~the allied.~~ No one wanted to believe it at first, but somehow we knew what was happening.

And so that night as we sat there -- and, of

course, I was quite content of getting out.

Q YOU WANTED TO GET OUT?

A I wanted to run. I wanted to be on the move. I was always -- I always had that desire to move, to go someplace else. The perennial optimist that somewhere on the horizon, things have to be better than they are here. I was obsessed by it.

That night, the camp gate opened again, with the usual inscription, Arbeit Macht Frei, and a bunch of young men and women were marching through. They were clearly Polish young people. They were arrested. And they were being marched up the hill, not towards the barracks. And it was a little knoll, sort of a mountainous area -- we called it (hooyefska gorka), which means, for some reason, penis hill where most of the executions took place. And I looked with this strange feeling as these young men and women were walking towards the summit of the hill, arms waving, legs tromping in a proud march, Poland, soldiers, brave, unafraid. And I wondered, did they know? Did they know where they were being led to?

A man in front of me, an elderly man, whom I subsequently met and became close to, a German Jew, he too sat there on the steps, and we watched them walk by. He was a smoker, and his favorite pasttime was to blow rings. And there he was sitting right next to me a little bit in

front of me, on the step below, smoking, and tapping his cheek. And the only thing that stopped him was the sound of the machine gun firing, executing all these young men. His fingers stopped in midair. And only a single ring came out of his lips. It was such a sad scene to me. And yet it was also a happy moment. We are leaving. We are getting out of this terrible place of executions.

Well, we were taken to a cattle train, and the usual thing, thrown in as many as would fit into a single car. And we arrived so many not making it. We arrived two days later and two nights later in a place called Gross-Rosen.

Q DO YOU KNOW WHERE IT WAS LOCATED?

A Gross-Rosen was Eastern Germany, not too far -- I believe not too far away from former Breslau, which is now the Polish Wroclaw.

A strange, strange experience. Those of us who could get out of the train still on our own lined up on a ramp, and we were marched off. And we walked through the town of Gross-Rosen. It was a town that looked its name. Roses. Everywhere you looked were roses. Hedges were roses. Gardens were roses. Even the paintings on the walls were roses. And I remembered the buoyancies of our steps. What could possibly go wrong? Here we are in a town of roses. At last, finally, we are -- like we are walking

towards paradise after the terrible, grim Plaszow, which was a former Jewish cemetery.

But, strangely enough, no one paid the least attention to us as if people in Gross-Rosen were accustomed to seeing people covered with grime and dirt and feces and urine, hungry, emaciated. It was if -- even the children paid no attention to us. Only the dogs barked. And then as we passed the city, or the town, I saw the looming disaster. There was a sign saying ~~granit werk~~ GRANIT WERKE, which is granite quarries. Granite quarries was a place to murder people.

And so we marched on, no longer with all that pizzazz and gladness. And in the distance we saw the camp. But there was something very strange. At first, as I looked at the camp looming in the far-off distance, I thought it was my vision that was defective. The barracks were the proper size, but the people were like midgets. And instead of wearing striped suits, they wore Hitler Jugend outfits. They were boys, wearing short pants, straps across the breasts, straps, belts, little daggers, and they were surrounded by barbed wires. And between, very soon we realized, our camp of big people in striped suits, there was nothing except rows of barbed wires. And the children were open to see what was happening in the real concentration camp.

Q YOU MEAN THEY CAME TO VIEW?

A That was the entire idea, to create a generation of Hitler jugend that would see and grow up to the idea of what Nazi Germany was all about and how you treat your enemies.

We passed the Hitler jugend camp, and for the longest time, I thought it was a dream, it was part of being cooped up for two days and two nights in a cramped car. But they were real.

We walked into the adjacent camp. The usual, the sign, wrought iron, Arbeit Macht Frei. And for the first time, I came across music. The band played a jaunty march as the gate opened. That was, later on I learned, standard procedure in all concentration camps. It's Germany, and it was also in Auschwitz.

The music played. And something magic happens when the music played. Even though we were walking towards what looked disaster, music did something. We began to march with animus. We walked in there, and the first thing we were greeted by a German kapo, a handsome tall man. He was the superkapo, Oberkapo, (kapo de tutti kapi), and he gave us a speech, and the speech was held -- he stood on the podium right next to gallows. That was the greeting. And he greeted us. "Unsere liebe Juden." Our dear Jews. "For four years, we have been

waiting for you. You are the first Jews in this concentration camp. It was created for us, the good German socialists and other nonbelievers. Now that we have you, we shall show you what it is to be a Jew in Nazi Germany." And the murderous beating began. Prisoners themselves, they became Nazis, strangely enough.

That was also the first time when I got terribly beaten up. But it was my fault. I was snooping around where I shouldn't have been snooping. I went into a barrack that was for the German prisoners.

Q FOR THE GERMAN PRISONERS?

A Yes. They had separate barracks. Barracks impeccably clean. The table -- the furnishings were scraped with shards of glass to cleanliness.

And that's when I made my first friend, (Buniek). We were finally led to a shower again. There were little pieces of soap that we were allowed to take. And as the water was going, my soap slid out of my hand, and another prisoner, a young boy, younger than I was, he made a dive for the soap. And it kept on slithering out of his hand into my hand and from my hand into his hand. And while we are there on the ground, I asked what his name was, and he said it was Buniek. He was from Krakow. He was the son of a rather well-known attorney, a lawyer.

Q HE WAS FROM WHERE?

A From Krakow.

Q KARKO (sic)?

A Yeah.

Q RUSSIAN?

A No, Krakow was Poland.

Q Oh, KRAKOW.

A Krakow. And Buniek and I -- that was like an opening of a friendship -- became very much attached to each other and stayed with each other to nearly the end, when I lost him. He was young. Wonderful disposition. Always humor. Always laughing. No matter how bad things were, Buniek was always there to cheer me up.

Q WAS HE JEWISH?

A Yes.

Q YEAH?

A All of us were Jewish.

Q OKAY.

A Then I came across ~~right there~~ another person who I never saw before even though we were together in Plaszow; we were together on the transfer. We called him Frenchie. His first name was George. I don't know and I don't recall his second name. He was from Paris. He was a lawyer.

Q HE WAS WHAT?

A A lawyer. An attorney.

Q A LAWYER.

A He was married. Apparently his wife was not Jewish. His two sons were still in Paris, either in hiding, but they were not arrested. George was. And George was the most remarkable human being that I encountered in the entire sojourn of my camp life.

Q WHAT WAS REMARKABLE?

A He was a self-appointed morale-uplifting person for all of us. While we would just stand there or sit there against the barrack wall, hungry, destitute, depressed, most of the time very, very hungry, Frenchie would walk. He would pick one or he would pick two of us, and he would want to talk to us. He wanted to know who we were, where we came from. "Talk. Don't be silent."

Q COULD YOU --

A "Tell me about your mother."

Q COULD YOU UNDERSTAND FRENCH?

A Oh, he spoke -- we all spoke German.

Q GERMAN?

A Or Polish to each other.

Q AND HE COULD SPEAK GERMAN?

A German. It was a highly French-accented German, but it was German.

His whole idea was speak; don't sit and brood. Walk; don't sit.

Q MOVE.

A Move. But more than anything, talk to me. Tell me who you were. Talk to each other.

Whenever he saw somebody depressed, he always had a story to tell us. He had -- he was an emaciated, ~~gaunt~~ gaunt human being, ~~all~~ all of it was vertical dimensions, a narrow face, a narrow body, but the biggest smile on a human being. And whenever you thought that things were just falling apart, somehow or other Frenchie managed to arrive from somewhere to talk to you.

There was no bread that he could share with us. We all had the same four pieces of bread a day. That was it. But his morale-uplifting, his care, it was as if all of the things that were happening were happening not to him, to us, and it was his duty and his job to keep our spirits alive.

Q WERE YOU INCLINED TO TALK TO HIM?

A Oh, very much so. He and I became very good friends.

Well, we didn't stay in Gross-Rosen very long. It was only five, six days, perhaps a week. Days had ceased having numbers. They began to flow into each other, like rippling waves. You couldn't tell where one stopped and the other began. Days were so difficult to take, full of trepidation. Will we be beaten? Will they do away with

you? Nights were terrible because you couldn't sleep. You were hungry. You were infected with lice.

Q TELL ME ABOUT THE TIME YOU WANDERED INTO THE GERMAN BARRACK.

A For some reason, I decided I have to see, who are those prisoners that were there for years? And, of course, we knew that they were German, French, Poles, Czechs because we saw them coming back each day at the end of a day. They came back from the quarries, still covered with dust.

Q NOW, THESE WERE POLITICAL PRISONERS?

A These were all political prisoners, with the exception of kapos.

Q OKAY.

A Who were criminal prisoners.

Q YES.

A With green triangles.

I already had received my number and my red triangle. And strangely enough, most of my friends to this day remember the number. I never could remember mine. It was as if I erased it the instant they sewed it up.

And so we knew they were foreigners, and my dream -- that is, the dream that I don't -- that I wished to be -- if I have to be a prisoner, the dream to be a prisoner among other prisoners, not just Jews. It was there; they were there; and I wanted to visit the barrack of these,

quote, other prisoners. And there was --

Q YOU FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING IN COMMON?

A We had something in common.

It was an afternoon. All of them had still been out at their commandos, in the quarries. And, by the way, most of the time when they came back, they carried on a -- you know. What do you call those?

Q WHEELBARROW?

A Not wheelbarrow. A -- for somebody who got killed.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: A STRETCHER?

A A stretcher. On a stretcher. That's right. Thank you.

Dead or severely wounded.

So in the afternoon, I walked there, and there was one prisoner in the barrack. I don't know why he was allowed to stay there. He was a healthy man. And we shook hands. He knew who I was. They all knew who was who. And --

Q HOW WOULD HE KNOW YOU, BY --

A Oh, yes. I was a political prisoner, and my -- of course, with me, it may have been difficult to tell because I spoke clear, good, unaccented German. But he knew.

And I wanted to know something about him, and we

started a rather awkward conversation. Always -- he was always looking over his shoulder, even though there was no one in the barrack. And then I realized why. Because the door opened, and another prisoner came in, he wore a green triangle. And before I realized what was happening -- oh, by the way, the political prisoner -- I don't remember his first name -- wanted to give me a piece of bread.

Q THE ONE WHO WAS IN THE BARRACK?

A Yes.

Q OKAY.

A The gift, one prisoner giving another prisoner a piece of bread was a supreme gift, a sacrifice, because there was so much hunger that to give someone the piece of bread was taking it away from your hungry mouth into his.

Q DID YOU TAKE IT?

A I don't remember. I think I did.

But then from somewhere a door opened, and another prisoner with a green triangle came in.

Q THAT MEANT A CRIMINAL?

A A criminal, yeah. Professional criminal. That was the essence of concentration camps. Hitler emptied the prisons of professional criminals, habitual criminals, sadists, and put them in charge of political prisoners. That was his way of breaking the morale. And I must say,

quite successfully.

And the beating began. Over the head, face, kicking. I fell to the ground.

Q TWO OF THEM?

A No, just one.

Q JUST THE ONE?

A Yeah, just the green.

Q THE ONE WHO OFFERED YOU THE BREAD DIDN'T PARTICIPATE?

A No, he didn't participate. No. He stood there, as much as I could see him, rather helplessly. The other one was meting it out. Finally I rolled aside. I covered my head. And I made a dash for the door. And that was the end of my visit and my attempt at making contact, with, quote, "the world of non-Jewish prisoners."

Q WAS THERE ANY RATIONALE OFFERED YOU AS TO WHY YOU WERE GETTING THIS BEATING?

A Why I was beat? No. Beating was --

Q A GREETING?

A Beating was the order of the day. People who were -- and I realized it later on -- people who were professional sadists were given free rein, and to them, beating someone was the equivalent of perhaps today we playing golf or to playing a game of tennis, or relieving

our tension in one fashion or another. You go and you beat somebody.

I also learned, in that one short lesson, how to roll with punches, as the English language says it nicest. Roll with the punches.

Q YOU MEAN LITERALLY.

A Literally roll with the punches. Try not to cry, try not to strike back or beg for mercy. Just roll with the punches and roll away and get as little hurt as possible.

I came back, and Buniek was waiting for me, as usually Buniek was always waiting. And he saw I already had ~~an~~ a swollen instantly I had a black eye, suffused with blood.

And that was the unforgettable episode at Gross-Rosen. We didn't stay there very long.

They loaded us on a open lorry, a truck. I think there must have been about 30 or 40 in the back of a lorry, sitting within each other's ~~crouch~~ crotch, or lap, squished together. And so we drove on through Germany, from Eastern Germany into the southeastern part to a region called Silesia. ~~But~~ It was Upper Silesia. And mountains called Riesengebirge, which is "giant mountains". But the most amazing thing, here we were driving in an open lorry town after town, and nobody paid the slightest attention. Ladies were walking along the streets with their shopping bags. Children were going hand in hand to school. Ladies in the

windows were watering their begonias.

Q LIFE AS USUAL?

A Life as usual, as if our arrival or travel, emaciated, striped pants, striped jackets, striped hat, terribly looking people, was part of Gross Deutschland. That was reality.

Q WHAT -- WHAT --

A Gross Deutschland is the large Germany.

Q WHAT MONTH ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?

A We are talking now about March or April.

Q OF?

A 1944.

Q OKAY.

A And so we drove all day long and all night long. Many of us fell asleep. I fell asleep, only to wake up finally in the middle of the night into another -- well, it wasn't a nightmare, but it was another episode of total unreality because here the trucks came to a halt. We heard the creaking sound of gates opening, German guards, a few dogs barking, in the distance the flashing lights of guard towers. And suddenly we were surrounded by Hungarian-speaking people. And, you know, in this complete amazement or sense of unreality, I wasn't so sure whether we are still in Germany or had we traveled day and night and are now in Hungary.

Q DID YOU SPEAK HUNGARIAN?

A No. Not at all. Not a word.

And so we finally were discharged, taken down, and then I realized very soon why Hungary. It was a camp that was primarily for Hungarian Jews out of Budapest. The vast majority were out of Budapest. They were the upper 10,000. The elite, the intellectual elite, (illegible) Some came from other bigger cities. But the majority

And so we had high government officials. We had poets. We had the chief tenor of the Budapest Opera with us.

We also had one of the most notorious safe breakers of Budapest, who had to his pride the break-in into the vaults of the National Bank of Budapest, the International Bank of Paris, et cetera, et cetera. He was a very entertaining young fellow because of -- evenings after -- evenings after --

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Okay. We have to change the tapes now.

(End of Tape 2 of 3)

Interview with OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK
Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: 8-16-00 Place: San Francisco,CA
Interviewer:
Transcriber: Leslie Koons

Tape 3 of 3

A The bank robber. It was a very strange camp. We used to entertain each other at night to break the monotony and the hardship.

Q TELLING STORIES?

A Well, whoever had something to tell. A rabbi would teach the Talmud. There was a chief rabbi of Budapest. A politician would talk about history, political science. The bank robber would use a chalk on the barrack wall to show us the latest intricacies of pins in the locks, and how to get around the pins and the modern locks to break into a vault.

Q NOW, COULD YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT?

A They spoke German. Technically all of them spoke German. The opera singer sang the most rueful tunes; arias, operas, folk songs. It was a respite. It was a true respite.

Q WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE CAMP?

A It was in a town called ~~(Viestagilden)~~ Wiestegierden or something very similar. It was one of many many camps in that area. Different nationalities. Some were Russian camps, some were

(sp)

Yugoslavian people.

Q WERE THEY SEGREGATED?

A Some were separated. Some were mixed, scattered through the hills. Our job was to dig tunnels into the mountains. The tunnels then to be enlarged into bomb-proof factories. And so there we were digging like moles.

Q WHAT KIND OF TOOLS?

A They were good tools. The German's provided good tools. They wanted the work to continue at a reasonable pace because everything else was being bombed and vulnerable to air attacks.

Q DID THEY HAVE POWER TOOLS?

A They had power tools. But most of it of course were our hands. Especially the making of roads into the mountains to build small trains that would bring in supplies and take out supplies. It was dangerous because the supports within the tunnels and the supports within the holes were very, very flimsy and things would fall on your head and kill people.

The other bad part about that labor was the supervisors of that work. Most of them were German civilians. Mean people who stood all around us with sticks, canes. And if you didn't hurry up enough they let you have it across the back or across your neck. A cane. Very painful, very debilitating.

But to go back to the camp. At first there was tremendous hostility between the Hungarians who had already been there for a few months. They wouldn't talk to us, even though they spoke German as well we did. They would see to it that we get the smallest portions of food. Until we realize why. We were Polish Jews, most of us, and they had just gone through Auschwitz before they were shipped out to labor. Those that did not get killed in Auschwitz were shipped out to labor. And this was one of the shipments. And in Auschwitz all of the kapos were Polish Jews.

Q SO THEY HAD BEEN MISTREATED BY POLISH JEWS?

A Oh, I don't need to tell you what person volunteered to be a kapo in Auschwitz. Only the worst, the dreg of the human species. And whether they had to do it or they wanted to do it or they were compelled, let's not go into that. Let he be the judge who has not gone through that.

After a while they realized that we were not kapos, we were Polish Jews as smitten and as persecuted as Hungarian Jews. And worse then that, they had been at it only a few months. Remember, the German's did not enter Hungary and ship them until 1944. We had already been at it in one form or another for years. Not only did they learn to get along with us and accept us, but to many of them, we were the symbol of survival. They were convinced that

the world had ended, that no one could possibly survive Auschwitz and the likes. And there we were telling them we had been at it for years and we made it.

And that's when I also made some very, very fine friends. Good friendships. Especially with a bunkmate of mine. Did I tell you the story about (~~Raja-knee~~ VAZONYI (VAZONYI))?

Q NO.

A (~~Raja-knee~~ VAZONYI) was a bunkmate of mine. We slept, on the second tier. Poor man. He was older then I. And it wasn't then but later on that I realized that (~~Raja-knee~~ VAZONYI) was the son of a minister of justice. The only Jewish minister of justice in the history of Hungary. And (~~Raja-knee~~ VAZONYI) kept scratching himself like mad. And so one day, late in the evening I said (~~Raja-knee~~ to him), "Do you know why you itch?"

"Nein."

"Do you want me to show you?"

"Bitte."

And so I asked him to take off his shirt and he did. And I inverted the collar and showed him a nice parade of lice. And he looked at it and he was silent. And then I looked at his face. His head was down and tears were running down his cheeks. And he only said, "Du lieber Gott." Dear God. "Ich habe Läuse." ~~He never complained, I have lice.~~ He never complained of hunger. He never

complained of sometimes bitter cold or ~~very~~ a very strong sun up in the mountain. He never complained. Except for the worst thing that could happen to ~~(Raja-knee)~~ VAZONYI (Sp) is to have lice.

Last year by the way, I did go to Budapest to find ~~(Raja-knee)~~ VAZONYI (Sp) but that is another story. I didn't find him. He didn't make it.

Q WERE YOU STILL WITH YOUR YOUNG FRIEND FROM GROSS-ROSEN?

A ~~William~~ BUNIEK and I had slept on the same bunk. I will go back to that because I managed to help him survive for a little time.

Yes, ~~(Raja-knee)~~ VAZONYI (Sp). One day we were confronted with a tragedy that was awaiting all of us. We were walking home to the camp out of the mountains and saw a huge column of Russian prisoners of war. They too were wearing prison clothes but they were a bit different from ours. Theirs was entirely made of paper. They were walking skeletons. People who had no meat on their bones left, only skin. I spoke Russian by then and I managed to slow down and lag behind and speak to one of them. And they told us, "We are all prisoners of war." And I said, "That many?" He says, "Only a small remnant. Most of us died." And we realized then that they were bringing in what here we would term seasonal workers. That is people who would last one season

without food and hard labor. Without food -- practically no food -- to die at the end of one season. You could not work in the mountains in the wintertime in the snow. So people would be killed with labor. Strange, the mountains had no barbed-wire fences and we soon realized why.

Q YOU DIDN'T NEED THEM.

A There was nowhere to run. The townspeople had no interest in us whatsoever. They were part of the entire system. Germany we realized was one huge concentration camp where the people were the guards, the people were the caretakers. There was no place to run, to hide. And yet it did happen to me. But that comes later on.

Well, we finally did get out of there but not before I was assigned to a different commander. That commander was no longer in the mountains. And again, I made friends with a Hungarian gentleman who was a teacher of languages and he was a kapo. And he assigned me to a different command which was working in a military depot. That is like a quartermaster depot. That one was run by a different army branch, like our CB's. They were called Organization (sp) TODT (~~Torte~~). Not death. They had some national or Nazi hero by (sp) the name of TODT (~~Torte~~).

Q THEY WERE A PRIVATE COMPANY, WASN'T IT?

A Yes, sort of. But they wore military uniforms and they

had pistols. And our job was to work in a railroad spur where they would load and unload ~~rails~~ trains with supplies. And it wasn't too bad because every so often you could go and hide in one of the tents where they kept furnishings and supplies and nobody would find you. And you could catch a little sleep and get out of the rain.

But the one day I saw a tall officer. We had just unloaded a series of cast-iron field stoves. Stoves that you could put in the front of the army barracks or tents. And they were all, or most of them, were cracked because the train in which they had arrived had been bombarded. And the man walked with a hammer. A Tall young man. And I followed him. And finally I walked over to him and I said, "Would you need a blacksmith or a welder? Because I could do it." And he said, "You can?" He ~~says~~ said, "Yep. I could use one." And I instantly realized the man was Austrian and he spoke with a very strong Austrian/Viennese accent.

In no time at all a truck arrived with all the supplies for a barrack. And we built the barrack right there and then, put it up. And here I was with my master fixing stoves. The barrack was cosy and warm. We had a stove. We were trying to weld cast iron which is not so easy to do. It requires a special skill. I didn't know how to weld. (Sp)(Sp) And Tony, his name was Tony ~~(Moldeshoe)~~ MOLDASCHL. Tony (~~Moldeshoe~~ Moldaschl)

must have suspected that I didn't know how to weld because he did at first most of the welding and I was only holding the parts.

And then one day for some reason he handed me the torch. And he told me, "Go on, take over." And here I was and I didn't know what to do. I had this wonderful cushy job inside with a warn stove nearby. And Tony -- who hated by the way the Nazis -- and brought me food. His packages from home he would divide. And so I took the torch. And he was still watching. And I directed it against my forearm. And of course I dropped the torch. The thing fell on the ground. Tony grabbed me by the collar and called me, "You damn asshole. Why didn't you tell me you don't know how to weld?" And yanked me over to the dispensary and put salves and whatever, and bandaged my forearm. And from then on he taught me how to weld the right way. And that is by the way how I arrived in United States as a welder. Tony was a good teacher.

Q HOW MANY PEOPLE WORKED THERE WITH YOU?

A Just one other person who worked as a carpenter. But it was only Tony and I. The carpenter was only there when something needed to be done.

Q AND WHERE WOULD YOU STAY AT NIGHT?

A Oh no. We would come in the morning from the camp with the guard, SS guard. And he would be outside watching the

other people and I would be inside.

And Tony had this wonderful habit. I would stand there and work at the workbench, my hands greasy, dirty. And he would roll a cigarette because he had cigarettes, and lick the cigarette. Put it into his mouth. And then did the same thing for me. Lick mine, put it in my mouth. And each time he would put the torch to my cigarette he would say, "Heil Hitler." This was his way of getting even. He had all kinds of names for them. He called them the Chinesen, the Chinese, or the Marmaladenigger because of the coupon that said butter, You could only get marmalade in Vienna, hence the Marmaladenigger.

Tony was a wonderful person who helped me to survive the war. He died, by the way, while we were working. One day after we had finished with our cast-iron stoves. It became known that we were good welders. All around in those mountains they had kitchens for the prisoners and those large kettles in which they would cook for the prisoners -- after all we had to have something. Those kettles would leak. And so they would call on Tony and me to come and fix it in the mountains. And Tony got a very nice motorcycle with a side kick. The side kick was for me. Tony got a special permit to carry a gun so that I could go with him in the mountains and he would be my legal

guard without an SS man to accompany us.

One day towards winter Tony came in and said, "We have another call to go into the hills. But you stay here. It's cold, it's raining and for all I know there might be sleet in the mountains. So I'll go without you."

Going into one of those kitchens was a boon because after we finished welding we would make little deals with the local German in charge. The ~~master sergeant~~ let us ~~take into the side kicks~~ the faster we would finish the job and you will have your kitchen ready.* And that is how I would bring food into the camp each day and feed Bunjek and friends of mine.

Well anyhow, Tony left that morning and didn't come back. The next day another man came in, another officer. His first name was Walter. Tony, while in Vienna, was a street car conductor. Walter was a repairman of the Viennese streetcars, and they were close friends. Tony was tall and gaunt. Walter was short with a big belly and an alcoholic nose and a jovial man. And he introduced himself and said, "Now we have a job to do. We have to bury Tony. So you and I will go to the cemetery and we will dig a grave. You will be the grave digger." They were short in that. And this was one of the most amazing war stories that I have experienced and that I ever told.

(Sp)?

The faster

* It was our way of bribing for food or stealing it outright from the supply room.

After we finished digging the funeral took place. A woman arrived draped, veiled in black. Tony's beautiful wife. She came from Vienna to attend the funeral.

I had no idea what was about to transpire here. But here the officers from the TODT ~~[illegible]~~ organization were all assembled with the band playing and all the flags to be held in the front row at the funeral. And the wife waved onto me. According to Tony's wishes and according to custom, the wife of the deceased is to be accompanied by the deceased's closest friend. And Tony had written to her that I was his closest friend. And she now insisted that she is escorted behind Tony's coffin by Tony's closest friend. But the most ridiculous part was, according to the same protocol, no prisoner would be allowed to walk without the escort of an SS man. And so here ~~is~~ was the coffin. Here ~~is~~ was his wife on the arm of a prisoner. And walking behind us ~~is~~ was an SS man, his gun pointed at my back, proscribed 6-feet distance. The band playing the funeral march right behind us. The flags lowered. The officers marching and singing, "Ich hatte einen Kameraden, der im Kreig gefallen ist," which is a classical German song, I had a comrade who fell in the war and whatnot. And that was a funeral in Nazi Germany. An SS man walking behind her and me. She was beautiful. Every so often she would tighten her arm around mine and look at me

though the veil with a twinkle in her eye. It was her way of showing me that she was Tony's wife and she he hated them as much at Tony did.

Walter took over where Tony left. Except Walter was not as generous as Tony. But Walter was generous in another way. One day he said to me, "Oskar!" in his Viennese way of speaking, always with a little twinkle. He said, "I have to go outside and smoke." That was unusual because we always smoked inside.

He left the barrack, and I sat alone and the door opened and two other TODT (sp)? officers walked in. One middle age the other a little younger, and they were clearly uncomfortable. They were hesitating to speak, and didn't know how to start a conversation. Finally one of them said, "We would like to help you to run away." Both of them were from Vienna. Both of them were friends of Tony and Walter.

By that time I was quite an experienced running-away prisoner, and knowledgeable prisoner. I had by then ran three or four times in different parts of the world under different circumstances. And so I started to probe. "How do you plan to get me out of here? Do you have extra clothes? Do you realize what would happen to some of the prisoners that were with me on the commando that might very well get shot in the reprisal? How are you going to get me? Do you have a

truck? Do you have papers to haul the shipments?" And I realized that these were two lovely men with the finest intention. But that they had never done it before and had no idea how to do it. And I thanked them. One even as they left came over to hug me. And they left. And Walter had just finished smoking his cigarette and came back into the barrack. And I never saw them again.

This was pretty much that camp. There were terrible other things that happened in that camp. The Kommandant was a drunk. One of the Hungarians -- I forgot his name now, a father -- was arrested with his son. And the son was insane, schizophrenic. And one day the gate was left open before they managed to close it, after the people walked out to work. And this poor boy who was maybe 17, 16, just walked out of the gate. He saw an open gate. He never realized where he was. And so they caught him and the Kommandant insisted on hanging him. And so we had to build a platform on the parade grounds in front of the barracks and build a scaffolding to hang people. And we had to stand at attention. And worse then that, the father had to stand in front of his son as they put the noose around his neck. Such sadism. Such cruelty.

Another interesting thing happened one day. The Kommandant wanted to be entertained so he called upon the

camp in the mountains. And they were all Greek Jews. Some were from Athens, some were from Saloniki. I don't know where they were from. They all spoke Greek, very few of them spoke German. And so they arrived. Again skeletons of people, wooden clogs. And we used the same platform for the hanging for them to sing, to play and to dance. And so there we all stood in the yard, the front yard of the barracks, the Kommandant sitting in a comfortable chair.

The Greeks had instruments consisting of nothing more than combs wrapped in paper so that they could sing. You have seen this, singing into a comb. And so they were singing while the others were on the stage dancing. The classical Greek dancers, arms entwined, legs kicking up in the air. And we all got caught up in the rhythm of dancing. And I looked -- I will give you an example of who was George -- and I looked for George. Couldn't see George. And so I walked back to the barracks. George was lying on his bunk. And I said George, "The Greeks were dancing, there is music." And he said, "No. I do not wish to be party to that. This is not art. This is not dancing. This is not music. A dog when he is very hungry will get on his hind leg and wave his paws begging for a piece of bread or a piece of something or a bone. This show is getting on the hind legs and begging for a bone. This is not art. This is not

dancing. This is not music." This was George.

I never saw George cry except once and that was in the subsequent camp in the mountains. They had just announced that Paris was liberated. And George was talking. Every opportunity he had he talked about his past. He talked about his grandchildren and ice skating on the pond. And there in the middle of talking somebody else was humming -- da dum dum dum dum dum da dum. And George cried. It was such a moving scene. We all cried with him. Paris was free. And he was telling us a story that this was the time of the year where he would take his grandchildren to the Tuileries. They had a frozen little pond there and he would tell us in French about how they would glide and yell, "Grandpa look at me. Grandpa look at me." In French. And he cried. There were many many such scenes.

Finally one day, early before dawn they woke us up and half of us were lined up to leave the camp to go somewhere else. The Russians were advancing in the East and whether it had something to do with the Russians coming near, whatever German reason I could never figure out.

Half of us were given a loaf of bread, were given a wooden -- not a wooden -- a paper sleeping bag. Things that they gave to pilots so that if they had to bail out and they had to sleep they could wrap themselves into a paper

sleeping bag. And we walked. We walked. And we walked. We finally did get to a railroad station and we finally ended up in another camp.

Q WERE YOU STILL WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

A Yeah. Bete was still with me and George was still with me.

The Hungarians did something that was not the nicest thing. They had the say of who should stay and who should go. The vast majority that were selected to leave were Polish Jews. The Hungarians protected themselves. Unfortunately they did not realize that practically all of those that were left to stay, perished. We were not. And from there on came about four more camps.

Q LABOR CAMPS?

A They were all concentration camps. Concentration camps in Germany by the way would be like one major camp like Gross-Rosen with numerous daughter camps. We were only in one of the Gross-Rosen daughter camps, the place where I was. But there were others all over the mountains and all over the region. Dauchau had one major camp but had numerous, quote "daughter camps". If they were daughter they were all terrible stepdaughters. And so did all the other major camps. Auschwitz...

Q SEPARATE CAMPS?

A Yes separate camps. And after a while, I had been in each only for three or four or five weeks. We ended up in one where they had no barracks. They had dugouts in the ground and out of wood covered by sod roofs to keep you out of the rain. And that is where we had to sleep. We worked in enlarging the runways of an adjoining airport.

There was an airport, a runway where they were testing their first jet planes. And we watched them go get up in the air. It was jets before we had them in the United States, before the allies had jet planes. And these things took off like mad. Each one of them on landing would nose dive because they couldn't get the thing down yet.

That was also the time that we found out that Roosevelt died. How did we find these things out was always a mystery. There were German pilots, there were German construction workers, who in a clandestine way would leave a paper behind, a newspaper behind. Or they would talk to someone close by, a prisoner and knowing the prisoner would relay the news. They were German people, German workers.

Q CIVILIANS?

A Civilians who were so terrified. They wouldn't dare to do anything that was too visible because the punishment was swift and immediate execution.

There was a time when we were lying and Allied airplanes came overhead, the first reconnaissance planes to take pictures. Within the hour the British came with their Spitfires and in all the peripheries of the airport, the runways were bursts of fire and smoke. They were German planes camouflaged behind nets and they picked them one by one. Except the Germans in charge, the guards, and the German civilians immediately left for concrete bunkers along the peripheries of the runways. We prisoners had to stay there and so there we were lying on the ground face down and hoping it won't last too long. A few of us got killed. And we were just lying there and praying. Thank God they are finally giving it to the Germans. Dear God make sure none of us gets it.

Those where terrible days. Terrible days. And one day even there, they called us in the morning and ~~they~~ said, "We are going on a march." And so we went on a march again. Walking the roads.

Q WHEN DO YOU THINK WE ARE TALKING ABOUT NOW?

A We are talking now early 1945. At one point we ended up in a camp called Flossenburg. Flossenburg was probably one of the most murderous camps. That is where they kept Stalin's son as a war prisoner. Stalin's son was captured and Stalin would not exchange him. His order was that no one was to be taken prisoner of war. If you are about to be

taken as a prisoner of war you are to commit suicide. And that included his son. The only son he had was a prisoner there. He did not survive the war.

The head of the German Communist party was in Flossenburg. Ours was a camp within a camp. Again one of those murderous places. They called them -- they had this euphemistic name -- they called them quarantine S. C. camps within camps. Allegedly because they couldn't be sure that we were not carrying typhoid. It was another terrible disease. Of course most of us didn't die of typhoid. We died of other things, ~~inanition~~ inanition and dysentery.

And there a terrible thing happened to me. I had a friend, a childhood friend, a little boy, aged four or five. We were friends in our little shtetl. His name was Isaac. We called him ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik. ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik was my age but he was a head shorter. Sickly, pale. Always terribly frightened but as bright as can be. He sat next to me at ~~Haggadah~~ Kheyder when we sat down and recited the Talmudic texts or whatever Torah texts.

Q WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?

A Yes. Aged four, five, six, seven, eight years old. And I was his protector. I was the big boy. Nobody dared to make fun of him when we were together. I was the boy that could make magic. We were very very close. It was a typical example of the attraction of the very opposite. I

was boisterous, I wasn't afraid of anybody. So if I got beat up, I got beat up. One day I gave it, the other day I received it. Itzik ~~Jitzak~~ would never step out of his hut. He would always stand ~~out~~ in the doorway and look up and down down the street if there were some ~~police~~ thugs. Or to see if I was around, that is when he dared to come out. And then of course I moved ~~out of the shtetl under~~ away to the care of my parents, grandparents. And I lost site of Itzik ~~Jitzak~~ and I lived with my mother. ~~And~~ Itzik ~~Jitzak~~ remained very religious. I think his father was the butcher in town. Not the butcher, the slaughterer. The slaughterer was the closest in rank to a rabbi. We parted company when we were 10, 12. And here I ~~am~~ was in Flossenberg in southern Germany in that murderous camp. And the gates open ed again and again and ~~this~~ the band ~~strikes~~ struck a jaunty march each time and new prisoners arrived.

This is one of those huge camps with -- I don't know -- 12,000, 15,000. Some claim a hundred thousand people. You couldn't really see the end of it. ~~It~~ was almost in the ~~farthest~~ distance rows and rows of electrified barbed wire. The gates opened and you could see who was ~~paying attention~~ who ~~was~~ arriving. And then suddenly a group ~~was~~ marched through and into our camp, and I noticed Itzik ~~Jitzak~~. He was easy to spot. Itzik ~~Jitzak~~ had huge ears. And the sun broke out and it shone ~~shown~~ against -- it highlighted Itzik's ~~Jitzaks~~ back of the head. And his

ears where aglow. Just like two ~~Iyzik~~ Itzik red rabbit's ears. And I looked at him and you know, another one of those moments of unreality. What is my little ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik doing here? Of course ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik was by then 19 years old and I was 22. And there he was terribly emaciated, terribly thin. Just as pale, even paler then he was as a kid. He was sickly. He walked by and we didn't see each other, but they put him into two barracks down the road. And I went to see him and it was one of those terrible painful scenes where he looked at me and he wasn't sure that he could recognize me. Except he recognized my voice when I said, "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik, remember me? ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik, remember me?" And then everyday ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik would come to visit or I would go to visit him.

One day I saw ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik walking with his hands in his pockets. Our prison costumes were either too short or too long. And if they were too long they were always muddy and frayed and the clogs were always wet and muddy. But he walked with his hands in his pocket which I had become accustomed and became quite knowledgeable how you held your hands in your pockets. If you put them separate down against your legs that was O.K, but if your hands were forward that means you were clutching your belly and you were clutching your belly because you had the dysentery. Dysentery was the angel of death of a prisoner. So finally I said, "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik, do you

have the shits?" Well he wouldn't use language like that, he was too delicate. Finally he admitted, and in the middle of conversations he had to turn around and go to the latrine.

And then one day ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik told me that he doesn't eat the soup. I said "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik for God's sake, why don't you eat the soup? He says, ("~~Trave~~ TRAIF") I'm not going to eat ~~(trave)~~ traif." And I ~~says~~ said, "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik but you will die. You only have this much food and part of it is soup. There is some vegetables in there." He got very adamant. Little shy ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik almost yelled at me, unheard of. "I am not going to eat ~~(trave)~~ traif." I ~~says~~ said, Jitzak, "I was afraid to tell ~~them~~ him, you would die." It was so obvious. Well one day Jitzak came with a smile on his face. I said, "What is it, ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik?" He ~~says~~ said, "I have something for you." And he handed me two or three potatoes. He said, "I traded theses in with some other prisoners and I gave them the soup." And I looked at it and said, "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik, those are frozen potatoes dug out from the garbage ~~pail~~ mound, pile. These would kill you if you eat them. This is death if you do that. No, no, no. It's no good for you."

And one day he came and he could barely walk and I said, "What happened now?" He said, "The bully took my bread." Well the bullies. There were Russian prisoners with us who had the most terrible habit. They would bunch up on a

prisoner that was very weak and couldn't defend themselves. And they would stay and watch him receive his bread ration and then they would surround him and they would push and yank and push and finally they grabbed the bread out of his pocket and so he was without bread and without soup for days now. I saw him, and even George was helpless. He knew what was going on. George was with me in that camp.

Well one day ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik arrived. It was raining. I said, "~~Jitzak~~ Itzik let's sit against the barrack." It didn't quite protect you against the rain because it was such a very narrow ~~eve~~ eave. So we sat together, and I was trying to cheer him up by telling him some of the magic that I did as a kid. And he nodded his head and suddenly I realized he was leaning against me very heavily and his head was no longer nodding. And I looked down and his eyes were open and rain was running down his face and his hands were open. Totally inert. He was dead. And I realized that he died. And I pulled him over a little closer. And George walked by and I will never forget that. He looked and said for the first time in three years, he said, "~~(Munge), (Munge)~~ Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu." (sp) My God, my God. So ~~Jitzak~~ Itzik died.

These were things that happened. I'm taking one in isolation. There were other people who died that I watched. There were beatings. There was forever getting into wet

clothes which was the striped paper suits that reeked so terribly of mildew. You tried to have them dry overnight then they chase you out of the barrack at four or five in the morning with a whip.

There was so much hunger. So much dying. And then one day that came to an end. There was another camp that was not far from Stuttgart which was a former huge tunnel. Two levels, above and below. Two levels. And they converted -- they closed the tunnels off, front and back. Huge tunnels, miles. And they converted it into a factory of rivetting Messenschmitt wings. And so I became a riveter for a short time.

Q HOW LONG?

A For a short time.

Q FOR WHAT?

A Riveter.

Q O.K.

A That was terrible because there was no air in there. And if you tried to take a whiff of air from the pneumatic hammers they beat you. And that came to an end one day. And in the middle of night came the alarm that the Russians where near. And everybody helter-skelter run out. And the guards, of course the guards were running out too. And into the tunnel. And that was the most frightful moment

of my life because by then we already knew, because we saw the German army men mining the tunnel. We saw them drill the holes in the walls in each section of the tunnel every few hundred feet, and the wires coming out for detonations at ~~some~~ each stage.

An here we ~~are~~ were all inside the tunnel. Must have been 2000 people, prisoners, ~~w~~ walking very slowly. We heard the rumbling of the huge metal door behind us and I was sure they were going to blow us up with the tunnel. Well they didn't. We managed to get out of the tunnel into another train. Terrible melee, terrible confusion. People running, stomping on each other. And that is where I lost George. Got separated. Never found him. Never heard from him again.

I lost Bun~~j~~ak sooner. Bunjak was in the camp where I was giving him food that I would scrounge ~~and~~ as a welder in the mountains. And Bunjak began to cough. And by then we knew chronic coughing, especially if your sputum was blood tinged, what it meant to have a And one day Bunjak could not get up in the morning and asked me, "Just don't, don't" -- urged me to go to work. "I'm going to report in sick." And of course two days later he disappeared, he vanished. He must have died somewhere. So I lost Bunjak and then I lost George.

In that camp that we were building Messenschmitt. One day I stood in the same line in the same row of five that I had stood for at least two weeks and a fellow, fifth or fourth behind me, looked very familiar. And one day I turned around and he looked at me and he smiled and he said, "You are Oskar." I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm Norbert." Norbert was a friend of mine since we were seven years old. We couldn't recognize each other. We had become so thin.

Norbert managed to survive all the things that I survived. But he was lucky. His father survived and two of his uncles survived, too. So they were all there. And Norbert helped me that night after we recognized each other. His father was a former butcher who always managed to get into good graces with the cook in every camp. And so he had some extra food that Norbert gave me. I think it was his. And then we became inseparable, Norbert and I. And we are to this day. He will be here in nine days from now. He lives in New York. He is a docent in the New York Museum of Tolerance. Norbert and I eventually went from camp to camp.

Q THOSE FRIENDSHIPS WERE VERY IMPORTANT WEREN'T THEY? IN TERMS OF SURVIVAL TO HAVE FRIENDSHIPS LIKE THAT?

A Friendship to me, they were very important. To many, I don't know. Many became very very lonely people. I think

you are probably right. In their hunger and in the pains and all the terrible things that were happening to them. One of the very terrible things was that they were once upon a time fathers of children, husband of wives, sons of parents, and it was all lost, it was all gone. They were alone. Very alone. And they carried that loneliness with them as part of the curse of an inmate. Everyone was gone.

Q I KNOW THAT IT MEANT A LOT TO YOU TO LOSE YOUR FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY. BUT I AM STRUCK BY HOW YOU CONTINUED TO CREATE NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

A Create, yes I did that. Running and creating. Running and creating new friends. I don't know. Perhaps others did the same thing. I'm sure they did. And that's a pure coincidence.

Anyhow, one day we ended up walking. Thirteen hundred of us or maybe twelve hundred of us walking, walking. And it was a strange walking. Obviously we were not walking through the main highways in Germany. We were walking through the country lanes. But every so often ~~the roads were crossed or they would merge~~ at some cross-roads there were other columns of prisoners walking, walking. As if all of Germany, wherever we went, was filled with ~~walking~~ columns of walking corpses because all of us were on the verge of dying from hunger and starvation. But our column had some beastly

guards and thugs. One who was just looking to kill, ~~one guard~~ And every time someone couldn't just make it and kept failing behind, and eventually who would trip and fall, he would grab him by the collar, yank him over to the ditch and shoot. And so one by one the column was thinning out.

And then one day I tripped. I fell forward. Fortunately the guard didn't see it. I scrambled. I got up. Continued walking. That night we slept in some kind of a barn, the doors closed from the outside. The guards outside, they clearly had a mandate or an order that no prisoner is to be delivered into the hands of the advancing allies, ~~and troops~~ The Russians were coming in from the East, Americans and British were coming in from the North and the West. And we could hear the cannonade. The skies day and night were droning with flying fortresses. You couldn't hear so well the cannonade but every so often the horizon would flash red and pink and yellow. It wasn't far. And I said at night to Norbert who was sleeping ~~on~~ in the hay loft right next to me, I said, "Norbert I can't make it anymore. Tomorrow I will probably fall again and they will kill me. Bury me in the hay. Bury me." And he said, "Bury you?" I said, "Yes, you can breathe in the hay. I've done it before. Remember, I used to be a farmhand." And before I found my way into the farmers grace, I slept in the hay

stacks. You can breathe in the hay stack. And so I made a big hole with a lot of hay and I went all the way to the bottom and Norbert covered me with hay. I wanted him to go with me but he wouldn't because he had his father and two uncles and he wouldn't go without them and they wouldn't go with me. And the last thing before he completely covered me, we shook hands. I extended my hand and he extended his down. And of course I stayed there for the night and in the morning I heard the opening of the door and the guards with their usual, "Los, los!" (Come on!) yelling. Dog barking. They all left. They didn't bother to search. And I subsequently found out that I was not the only one who used this kind of way of escaping.

Q IN THE BARN?

A Some in the barn. Some in other ways. We ended up by hiding.

Q IN THE BARN?

A Yes. And listening as they all trudged away. And there was silence. And I was able to undig myself. And then I had this strange feeling of being free. And so I ran. In between I tried to escape but was recaptured. That was only a brief episode.

Q YOU WERE RECAPTURED?

A Yes. The march broke up and then reformed again. It's

not an important episode.

Not far from the farm where I managed to get away by hiding was hilly country. There were mountains in the distance, hills in the distance, the forest not far away. And there was a good place to stay and wait for the war to end. Except I was very very hungry. I could barely walk. I was in the woods. Slowly I went out into the clearing of the woods to the edge. And there was another prisoner who had managed to get away -- a Frenchman -- eating. I think it was a turnip that he had dug up, because down below was farmland, like a dell valley. Lots of farms, flat land, something was growing everywhere. It was the month of April. No, it was the end of April. So we shared this meager food. I asked what he intends to do. He said, "Well I am going to wash my hands and I am going to go home." Home was Paris. And I remember my naive question, "How will you know where Paris is? We are here in Bavaria." He says, "That is very easy. West. Over there where the sun is setting." This was in the afternoon. So he left. And I looked down and suddenly I saw a row of soldiers walking in single file. They were wearing khaki uniforms and I couldn't tell whether they were Americans. I knew they were prisoners of war because walking somewhere in front or on the side was a German soldier with a rifle. An old man.

But I couldn't tell what prisoners of war, whether they were Americans or British or Frenchmen or Italians. They all wore a similar-color uniform. Unlike the Germans who had a deep green uniform, the others had the khaki uniform.

And I knew that that's where salvation was. There has to be food somewhere up here. I would just be free but die of hunger. Couldn't move. So slowly I made my way down -- it was a narrow path -- and caught up with a line of soldiers. And the German guard didn't bother to look and I tapped the last person in line -- they walked in a narrow lane, potatoes and something on the other side growing -- and he turned around. That is when I realized they were Americans, and I saw the button. The button had the American eagle. It was still cool and they wore topcoats at the time. My first English word uttered to me by ~~a~~ that American was, "Holy shit." And he quickly took off his tunic and threw it over my shoulders to conceal my identity and put him in back of me, between him and the soldiers in the front. We sort of marched into the camp. I think the guard noticed who I was but later on I asked ~~him~~, "How did you handle it?" And he said, "Yeah well." Fritz started to say something and all ~~he~~ I did was point to the sky and the sky was filled with the drone of every kind of airplane you could think of." It was the end practically.

And I walked in. The Germans were still there, the Kommandant and his helpers, they were still there. No sooner did I enter ~~that~~ when somebody yanked me by the collar ~~of~~ or ~~the~~ by the shoulder. The camp consisted of two adjoining farms. ~~that the people farm.~~ Either the owners were evacuated or they were sent away or ex-appropriated. And the barns and stables all served as a war prisoner camp for American prisoners of war. Somebody yanked me and pulled me into a room. It was a pigsty. And in the middle of the pigsty was a trough, and before I knew it there was somebody who was bringing in pails of water to fill up the trough. Other hands were pulling off my uniform and other hands were helping me to step into the water.

I was a skeleton. I was covered with ~~verma~~ vermin. I must have looked more miserable then I ever imagined I ever looked in my life, even when I was sick. And there ~~was~~ were other hands that were soaping me. And when I finally opened my eyes, I stood there and there were other hands that held towels. All of them soldiers, Americans, ~~K~~kids my age, a few years older, one or two younger. And they were wiping me and one or two were crying. And then I looked, and along the wall lined up were extra pairs of shoes, pants, shirts. American uniforms, all of them stamped with the black triangle. That is how the German's marked American

prisoners of war. And the photographs that I showed you, the uniform has the black triangle on the pants and on the shirt. That is what they gave me. Somebody even helped me to dress.

In no time a young man arrived and there was a milking-bar stool. He was a barber. And he shaved my head because my ordinary hairdo consisted of two finger breaths shaven off from an ladder we called it. We called it the "Läuse Promenade." The German's did it to all concentration camp prisoners. It was very difficult to escape and be anywhere with your hair short but then two finger breaths shaved off in the middle. And all the way from the front to the nape of your neck.

So we did away with that. And I was told to make myself scarce. There were several people who immediately took care of me, volunteers. One was very quiet, soft spoken. A most taciturn man. They called him either Sarge or they called him Tex. He was a Texan. And I remember standing outside now, blinking my eyes in the bright light. The sky was nearly dark, and he looked at me, the quiet man. And he took his hat, he had one of those woollen hats that -- remember the woollen hats that the soldiers wore beneath the helmet? The rounded woolen hat. And he threw one to me and says, "Hey wear it kid. You look better that way."

Because my head was shaven. And I made myself very scarce, as much as possible.

And then with the best of intentions they did something that nearly destroyed me. They were receiving Red Cross packages and they were saving some of the best parts to trade with the surrounding farmers, like chocolates and peanuts, things that went into these nice little Red Cross boxes. Remember they were black, flat boxes with a big red cross on top?

And the errors that they made with the best of intentions was feeding me. My belly got bloated. I developed diarrhea. I couldn't see, it was impossible to even look at the light. I was sitting most of the time in the darkness of a barn. Much of the time I even slept and I don't know how many days I was there. It couldn't have been very many days.

But at one point, I think on my way to the latrine, the Kommandant walked right over to me as if he knew all along who I was and called me into his office. His office was the farmer's warm, commodious kitchen. And I thought that was the end. But he said, and he handed me -- and I will never forget, it was a package of Raleigh cigarettes -- and handed me a cigarette. And I couldn't. I tried to light it, but I couldn't. My hand shook so much. And he lit it for me,

with my hands. And he sat down and he said, "Be at ease. Nothing would happen to you, I just wanted to know whether it's true." I said, "What is true?" He said, "Concentration camps. What did they do there?" And I said, "You really want to know?" And he said, "Yes."

So I told him. He listened. Didn't say one word. He listened. And finally I finished and all he could say, in German of course, "Dear God what will happen to us when all of this is over?" His father was a priest. He was a sadist. I found out from the other prisoners, they all hated him. His name was Schultz. Another Schultz. He left me alone. He left me in peace after that. I still didn't dare to show my face too much. I was beginning to gain weight, but it was the wrong weight because my legs where were getting swollen. I was accumulating fluid.

We knew the front was approaching. Every night the skies were getting redder and redder and the cannonade in the distance was getting louder. And some of the American kids could clearly recognize this is a such and such a howitzer, and that and that is such and such a caliber. They knew it or they thought they knew it.

And we waited. And then in the middle of one night we all woke up. He heard the revving of the trucks, the slamming the doors, the opening of the gate. And zoom. All

the Germans left. The gate was opened. It was dark. It was drizzly. We all ran out. I don't know why we ran out. I think we ran out because it was an open gate that we couldn't go out before unless under escort. And we stood there, and there were a few trees at the entrance of the farm near the fence. And we all sat there and waited for the tanks to come. And it wasn't until very early at dawn, just the first light. Between the hills and the forest there was a narrow lane, it wasn't a real road. And there we saw something. A jeep. A single, single jeep in the distance. And it slowly kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger as it was winding its way towards the entrance to the farm. And of course we all ran forward, and everyone was holding on to the side of the jeep, everyone that could get to it including me. So there was a feeling we are bringing them in, nothing else. The jeep had an American major and a driver who was the sergeant and the lieutenant sitting in the back. Those were the jeeps that still had the mounted machine gun on the hood.

And of course we brought them in and we surrounded them and we hugged each other. And by then it was daylight. And the major and the lieutenant, they called for everybody, "Line up. Everybody in formation." It was a strange formation. Everybody was lining up, smiling. And you

should have seen the faces when the major said, "Attention!" It was the first time somebody said attention and not Ach-tung. And then he introduced himself as Major Schultz. And I stood there with some other soldiers and they said, "Hold on, not another Schultz." And then we noticed something very unusual. The major was stuttering. We didn't know why until we realized that Major Schultz was crying. That sadist Schultz that just left couldn't find more ways to make ~~the~~ life miserable. And this Major Schultz at the sight of us was crying. And you see. After, he gave us instructions to stay put and wait because the tanks didn't arrive yet. The ~~Britsh~~ bridges in the near-by river -- and I don't remember the name of it -- ~~they'd~~ had been blown and they were throwing ~~pontoon~~ pontoon bridges across. And at this point they ~~are~~ were only letting through the most important weaponry, the tanks and so on. But they should be here next day with their trucks to take us back. It was safe to stay. But those of ~~us~~ us who wish ~~can~~ could walk towards the river, it's ~~not~~ wasn't not far from here, only a few miles. And ~~you can~~ we could then walk across the ponton. And then he said, "Any questions?" And there was silence. Finally one of the soldiers raised his hand and you would never guess. His one question was, "Sir, who won the pennant?" And the major didn't know. And he turned around to the lieutenant and the lieutenant didn't

know, but the sargent knew and he said St.Louis. And there was somebody there who yelled, "Yeah!" This was America. I think that is when I fell in love with America. With the trough, the water, the towels, the uniform I wore, the simplicity, the kindness. And of course I spoke English which was something they all admired.

Only six of us out of several hundred decided to walk to the ponton bridge, and I was one of them. I couldn't wait to be free. I just couldn't wait. And I walked. One of the soldiers who was particularly -- how should I describe him? Like a nursemaid to me. He saw to it everyday, "How you feeling? How are you doing? Hey kid, you want something more to eat?" And so on and so forth. He was one of the people in the walk and he was mad seeing me lining up to go, to walk. He says, "You are not going to make it. You ~~[illegible]~~ son of a bitch, you." Every other word of course was, "You are not going to make that fucking track", and so on and so. Everything was "fucking". But I insisted on walking and ~~he~~ we walked.

It was a strange feeling, to walk through a German town. It was a small town, completely empty. All the Germans were hiding. It was a no-man's land. The Americans hadn't come in yet, the German troops had already left. And the townspeople didn't want to go out into the street or into

the town square. It was a typical Bavarian town square with cobblestones. In the center of the cobblestone square was a fountain with a Madonna and some other saints and so on and so on. And there the six of us, or seven of us, walked in and I was waiting for people. to come out I wanted to show somebody that I was free. That I am no longer afraid of them. But all I could see was an occasional window and the little flutter of a curtain.

Q YOU WEREN'T AFRAID OF THEM, THEY WERE AFRAID OF YOU?

A They were afraid of me. And I was so -- I can't tell you the sense of power and joy. They were afraid of me. For God's sake they were afraid of me! And I wasn't anxious to do anything. I was so happy to be alive. And we finally went beyond, towards the river. And we had to go up a steep hill and then down below was the slithery snake-like river. And just about near the top of the hill my legs gave out and the young soldier who befriended me, gave it to me. "You see you son of a bitch? I told you you are not going to make it." And he berated me. "Now you are holding up the rest of us here." And he put his arm around my shoulders, and he sort of half carried me up and then down the hill until we came to the ponton bridge. There were the columns of tanks coming across. The noise. The smoke, exhaust smoke. Soldiers everywhere bringing things across. More tanks

lined up on the other side of the river. This was marvelous. This was America. And he did something very nice, this soldier friend of mine. He took me up to the bridge, to the ponton (pontoon) bridge. There was a railing made out of this thick wire, twisted wire, what you call cable. And he waited for me to put my hand on the cable. And then he says, "Come on, you can make it across." And he let go of me. He wanted me to cross into freedom by myself. Of course he walked right behind me.

And by myself, my own wobbly legs, I made it across the moving ponton bridge. And waited. Actually within hours the others arrived by truck. Because it took us nearly a full day to get there. And there was a bitter episode. They put us into some kind of a backyard that was lined with fuel barrels, these fuel cans, made very tall. What do you call that? Oil?

Q OIL CANS?

A Yes.

Q OIL DRUMS?

A Oil drums, yes, drums like that. And there was one officer with a little stand and he went and assigned each one to an oil drum and handed each soldier a questionnaire to be filled and a stubble of pencil. According to some crazy Geneva law, prisoners of war liberated, freed, must be

interviewed immediately and must be transported as soon as possible back home and next of kin must be informed. So the questionnaire was to be filled so that they could immediately inform the next of kin.

Q SO YOU WERE BEING TREATED AS A PRISONER OF WAR?

A Yes, absolutely. I got my questionnaire. And there we all stood. And I stood in front of my questionnaire. I didn't know what to do. I had no serial number. And then I suddenly realized well, everybody else was filling out the questionnaire. Some smiling to themselves, so happy. I had no one to inform. And suddenly I realized there was no one left to tell. No one. No one survived. I suddenly knew it. No one left to tell that I was free. And that was so painful I nearly collapsed. And then I took over the questionnaire and unfilled. I said to the man, "I have to tell you..." He said, "I know who you are. I just wanted to know." And there was another word I just learned other than holy shit. I learned the word hanky-panky. He wanted to know whether I was going to pull some hanky-panky here. But he said, "You will be well taken care of."

My friend, the soldier, helped me. Just beyond into another yard was the Red Cross station and inside were two nurses. And I just staggered in. He sort of helped me and left. He said, "Good bye, see you kid." The nurses started

to look at me, ask questions. Then they said, "Well let's weigh him." They put me on the scale, and that is when I realized how bad I was. One turned to the other -- one had to help me to stand because I was ~~leaning~~ veering -- and she turned, and I don't remember now what her first name was, Sophi or what not. And she said, "How much is 40 kilos?" And the other one knew, ~~this is~~ that it was 80 pounds. And they wanted to help me to undress and I wouldn't let them. That was the first woman's touch in so many years now and I felt I was so dirty and they were so clean in their spic and span uniforms. I was afraid I would dirty them by just letting them touch me. And they pulled a little curtain in a little nook and there was an army cot, one of these wooden cots with the canvas cover and pillow and blanket. They allowed me to pull off my things. And the last thing I ~~know~~ knew was ~~is~~ silence. I was so tired. One of them was saying, "Do you think he's going to live?" And the other one said, "Look at him, he's smiling." And from then on I became the interpreter. And that is the end of the story. That's how I became a free man.

Q YOU WENT ON TO GO TO FRANKFURT, YOU WERE TELLING US AT LUNCH?

A No. I stayed on with the army as an interpreter for practically another year. The war was over May 8th and the university didn't open until the Fall of '46. So between

May 8th, '45 and '46 I worked for various troops, as long as outfits. They called themselves outfit, infantry outfit, anti-aircraft outfit, tank outfit. As they acquired sufficient points to go home, and I think it was 85-points -- I don't remember now it's 60 years later -- they would start sending them home. But they would never disband the entire unit. So when the unit would dwindle down and ready to join another unit, they took me along. So I was sort of being handed from one to the other. It was nice. They were lovely, lovely people.

One man who befriended me was a fellow who was in charge of the PX. Now if you really wanted to make friends with someone in the army, American army, in post-war Germany, it was somebody in charge of the PX who had cigarettes galore and coffee galore and things galore. Because you could always get your rations or more and then trade it in for something that you needed with the Germans. Cigarettes were lingua franca so to speak. It was the going currency.

And then there was a very very nice man. He also took over for a while and little did he and I know that four years later I would be a medical student in Boston and I was assigned to the polio ward on Commonwealth Avenue. It was a small hospital. I arrived there as my next six weeks' assignment. In the morning before heading out for the

individual wards the chief resident would hand out charts and he started reading out charts, this one Smith, this one Goldstein, the patient's name. And this one was (Desroaches). And I said, "No, it's a French name, (Deroche)." And I said what's his first name? He says Ernest. And I said, "Can I have Ernest (Deroche)?" And he said, "Sure, take it." And I went to see my patient. He was in a ward, polio stricken, with about 15 people. And there was Ernie (Deroche) my PX man. He saw me. He tried to sit up in bed but he had partial paralysis of one thigh. He started to cry. So did I. Here I was the refugee, the survivor kid that they liberated. And now I was his doctor.. Very touching.

It ceased being fun, working for the army. New troops arrived. They no longer knew what it was all about. They were completely unaware. Until then they called me by my first name. They called me the way they called each other. But then there were young punk-like kids who arrived just recently drafted into the army and they would talk to me, "Hey Kraut". They thought I was a German working. "Shine my shoes", or "Press my pants", or something like that. Then I realized this was not my America. And so I quit. I quit before medical school opened already. I went to Frankfurt.

Q THAT'S HOW THE HUNGARIANS FELT WHEN THE POLISH JEWS CAME INTO THEIR CAMP?

A No. No. The Polish where despised. Both frightened of and despised by the Hungarian Jews. To me the newly arrived American kids were just plain ordinary soldiers that mistook me for Germans. And some were very nice. But there was enough -- that glue, that initial thing, that first-grade love was gone. These were not the same people that washed my face and helped me into my first uniform and saw to it that I was safe. These were different youngsters. No longer fun to work for. I didn't despise them. They were just ordinary soldiers.

And all of this that I was telling you, the bathing in the trough, the drying, the soaping, the washing, the helping me, and I wasn't the only one that was helped by the American troops. They helped everyone. That was the time when the Russian soldiers on other side of the demarcation line between the Americans and Russians would rape every woman from the age of eight to 80 several times a day. And they didn't dare to tell anybody after it was over because some day they wanted to be married and not carry the stigma of having been raped by a bunch of ~~(rusky) mongrels~~ Mongols or "Ruskis", or whatever they called them.

Those where terrible days. What a striking difference there was between the Russian soldiers and the Americans. Sure, perhaps you may find a reservoir of hate among the Russians much greater then among the Americans because there was hardly a Russian soldier who hasn't seen so many of his kind murdered and raped and killed and hung by the German invaders.

I started medical school and that in itself is a story.

Q WHAT DID YOU NEED TO LEARN?

A Medical school. I was in my third year of medical school, and being rather anxious to go, I started with research, writing, doing research -- a (reveres) of a medical student. And I had to go to look up some data in the morgue, Institute of Pathology, Boston University. The Institute of Pathology is called the morgue because it deals with dead people. And I was looking up some files with a friend of mine who was a coworker and there was a young lady bent over a filing cabinet and I said to him, "Al, look at those legs." He said, "That's Judy. That's my cousin."

"Introduce me."

"Everybody knows Judy. Just go ahead and tell her you are Al's friend, Al sent you."

A few weeks later I proposed. She was a medical photographer working in the morgue taking pictures of

specimens, pathology, slides, etc. And we have been married since 1953, since 1952. It's a long time. It's a long time.

If my wife ever thought of divorce, I never did and she never told me. Been a very very content, happy marriage despite years and years of a tragic childhood, motherhood and fatherhood. But it somehow never separated us.

Q DID YOU EVER GO BACK HOME?

A No. I went to Poland over night only to have one look at the first town, and meeting up with people who were telling me how they were beaten and how they were called names and some who were killed. But they weren't killed they just told me who was killed. There were pilgrims in Poland after the war. People would arrive asking for nothing more -- Jews going home -- "But can we just walk into the rooms? Not to take them from you, those are your apartments, but just to see where we used to live." Just to refresh the memories. Just a bit of nostalgia. ~~Some murdered.~~ Some were murdered before they even got there. God forbid they might demand what was stolen from them in their absence. They might have to return it. What terrible moments. The Russians stood by. The Russians stood by. Never never protected a single one. And so I left Poland. In addition I left Poland because I was afraid. I had a terrible distaste long before the war was over for me. It was

painful to be in a ghetto and later on in a camp. And to see my former fellow schoolmates, my former neighbors, either avert their eyes, pretend they didn't see what was being done. Or stand there and actually looked at what was happening to us with glee. The Jews are finally getting their due. This sort of attitude. The Jews had been riding on the nape of our backs long enough. Now they are getting what is coming to them. This sort of an attitude.

And you know, very often it wasn't so, but at least I though it was so. And many times when I was behind barbed wires and fences, hungry, it was so easy for somebody to take a half a loaf of bread and just toss it over and walk away. No one ever did. There were one or two episodes when that was so but then I had to toss back something like a warm overcoat or a fur coat for half a loaf of bread. But nothing on a voluntary basis.

There was one episode. Remember I told you the story of George who wept finally when they sang the Marseillaise? We were up in the mountains digging, shovelling, whatever it was. And the news had just come up that Warsaw rebelled. When Warsaw rebelled they expelled the Germans. There was one schoolteacher who I never quite knew his name -- I don't remember even his first name now -- and he was from Warsaw. We looked at him and we says, "Well aren't you going to

celebrate? Aren't you going to smile? Warsaw was free. They got rid of the Hans." And he said, "Free? You want me to be joyful? How many times have I and my wife and my two children walked by the fence and seen the well-fed, reasonable satisfied Poles on the other side between the slats, hoping maybe one of them would throw a piece of bread, a potato. Not even that, a chunk of coal, one little chunk of coal to heat the stove in the freezing winter. No one." And he said, "And you want me to be joyful? No. There is nothing to rejoice."

So you see, being imprisoned in your own land makes you bitter, even though the bitterness may not have be shown. But you were still plunged into being what the German's would call 'Übermenschen' and 'Untermenschen'. Suddenly you found yourself to be a less-worthy human being. It was looked down upon by your former friends and neighbors. And that creates bad blood. Very bad blood.

May I take a break now?

Q YES. I WANTED TO ASK IF YOU THOUGHT THERE COULD BE ANOTHER HOLOCAUST?

A Yes. Yes. I for one do not believe that history ends with any particular thing. There could be another Holocaust. There could be another fascist reign here in America, in South America. I don't think that human nature

changes in short terms. I think for human nature to change so that men will act differently towards each other may require hundreds of thousands of years or longer. Not a century or half a century.

What happened in Europe, and although it happened to the Jews mainly, it happened before to the Armenians. It nearly happened again in Yugoslavia had NATO and whoever else had not stopped them. And a Holocaust is not by my definition, is not necessarily something that requires millions because so many died. If you kill 50,000 or 100,000 of any ethnic group because their religion differed or their color of the skin differed. This constitutes a Holocaust if so many of them get killed for that junk. And I think it can happen again and it can happen here.

I'm worried about our society. It's much more fragmented now then it ever used to be. When I arrived there were no African Americans, Latin Americans, Chinese Americans. We were all Americans. I now see a terrible fragmentation now in our society, in our way of teaching children to speak their individual languages. In your own town where you live they try to give birth to a new language, Ebonics. Another way of separating one group from another group.

You know, I think that much of what the writer Kosinski

wrote -- Jerzy N. Kosinski -- the one who wrote The Painted Bird. You may have read the book. Oh I know which one you may remember. They made a movie of it called Being There, or Being. Remember? With the comedian? Jerzy Kosinski wrote a book called the Painted Bird. It's a story -- and some doubt whether it's truly accurate or real -- of a young boy at the age of five during the outbreak or at the outbreak of the war. His parents told him to go, try it on your own. And he starts out by saying the boy could have been Jewish or could have been a gypsy. And he describes the tragic things that happened to that boy in the Polish countryside. Among other things, he gets into the hands of a peasant who has an unusual hobby. He's a birder. Collects birds and sells them on the market but has a sadistic hobby. He would take one bird of a flock and he would paint the wings in different color. And then let the flock loose with the painted bird and then watch in glee how the others would peck him to death. I think this is a story of the human race. We cannot abide by painted birds. The Jews in this Christian world are painted birds. The Muslims at one time were painted birds and now the Christians among them are painted birds. Whatever the color of the paint was among those in Africa, they were painted birds and had to be murdered.

Painted birds are those of people who have different ideology. If you ~~are~~ Were a city dweller you ~~are~~ were a painted bird among the communistic ~~Cambodia~~ "cadrs" who murdered one-half of their kin. No. I didn't think as human beings we are going to get rid of our painted-bird instinct and painted-bird desire to kill. So sorry. But we must try to see that it doesn't happen.

Q HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THE HOLOCAUST SHAPED YOUR LIFE?

A I don't know because I can't fathom it. And with a whole heart I try and I can't fathom what I would have been without it. I could just let my fantasy loose, fancy free, and imagine what I would have been. I really don't know. Would I have been a happy-go-lucky little weaver? Or a furrier sitting somewhere in a furrier shop bent over a piece of smelly fur? Who knows? I don't know. I don't know.

Q HOW HAS THIS INTERVIEW HELPED FOR YOU?

A The interview? Parts of it were very painful. Parts, especially the parts about my little sister. A child for some reason is always the epitome of victimhood. To murder a child was about the worst crime and the most painful to endure in my own perceptions. Children are the most vulnerable of us. To see a little child clutching to a mother while she is undressing her ~~before all are dressing it~~,

and crying and begging because soon they would have to walk over to the ~~room of the~~ pit to be shot is the most heart-rending, most painful thing that any human being could have devised or any human being could possibly endure watching or seeing. That was very very painful. It was very painful to lose my mother. I must admit very frankly, not my father. My father, I wished he could have lived. But my mother, I so much wanted her to live. And I nearly did it. I nearly did it with the help of my drunken blacksmith friend (~~Bolok~~ BOLEK). I nearly did it.

People of my ilk, of my kind, are all beset by what is called the survivors guilt. I have no survivors guilt. And I think their survivors guilt is a misnomer. They are not guilty really because they survived while others died. That's sort of a facile explanation. Easy, but not the truth. They are guilty because they are playing with images of the past. They saw their kin, their mother, their children, the dear ones killed. And they did nothing. They stood by. They were even afraid to cry because crying might bring them to the attention of the executioner. Might bring you to the attention of the executioner and you might be killed too. And then time and human nature plays a dirty trick on you.

Suddenly you think that you were Samson. Capable of fighting a lion with your bare hands. You became all

powerful. You became the proverbal Superman. And you think that you could have at least wrestled the German soldier, wrestled the gun out of his hand and shot him. You could have taken your mother or your sister or your father or your child and run away. But you didn't. You blame yourself. You forget how vulnerable, how frightened you were at the time. You become other then what you really were. And now you are guilty that you didn't do anything. That you didn't carry it out. You think that you may have been Samson. But you were the Samson that was already blinded before the war started. And that your hands were tied to the pillars of the pagan temple long before the Germans marched in.

If you were a Jew you were forever brought up abhorring violence. That is the Jew in Poland. I'm not talking about the Jew that fought the Syrians 4000 years ago. I'm not talking about the Hasmoneans and the Maccabees. I'm talking about the Polish Jew living in towns and shtetls. Always a victim. You accepted victimhood with your mother's milk. You didn't know how to fight back. You never had to. You never dared to. Because any attempt at fighting back for as long as anyone could remember always ended up in more death and destruction.

We were a very tiny minority in the Christian world that despised us. And I don't want to go into the reason why

Christianity had to go on despising the Jews. It is the essence of their religion. God. God. The God figure and the death of the God and the murder of the God is so intricately involved with the story of Christianity versus Jew that it isn't even funny. I wonder whether the Popes even know it. And so yes, I still think that many of us live in a Christian world. We are still in too many countries and too many of us are still the painted bird.

Q OSCAR, ON BEHALF TO THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT I WANT TO THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR SHARING YOUR STORY AND FOR GIVING US SO MUCH OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR YOU.

A Thank you.

Q AND IN SUCH DETAIL.

A Thank you.

Q AND WITH SUCH COMPASSION.

A Thank you.

Q WE REALLY APPRECIATE IT.

A I hope to see you the next time. As they say, in simkha (Sp) (~~insimba~~). Which means for you Jews who don't know a word of Yiddish or Hebrew, enjoy. Thank you.

End tape 3 of 3