Interview with OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK
Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project
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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?

(Sp) 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

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 ~~and~~ as 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~~ 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 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 then 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 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 MOLDASCHL (Moldeshoe). Tony Moldaschl (Moldeshoe)

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 (Sp) all kinds of names for them. He called them the (~~He-nays~~) Chinesen, the Chinese, or the Marmaladnigger because of the coupon that said when it says Butter, you could only get marmalade in Vienna, hence the Marmaladnigger.

(Sp) Tony (~~Woldesh~~) 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 (Sp) 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 ~~faster bafougy~~ (sp)? let us ~~take into the side kick~~ 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.

* 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~~ TODT 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 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.

(sp)?

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 opened 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 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 thugs ~~police~~. 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~~ away to under the care of my parents, grandparents. And I lost site of Itzik ~~Jitzak~~ and I lived with my mother. 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 was ~~am~~ in Flossenberg in southern Germany in that murderous camp. And the gates opened again and again and the ~~this~~ band struck ~~strikes~~ 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 ~~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 ~~Izzik~~ 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 ~~pails~~ 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~~ cave. 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~~ie~~a~~k sooner. Bunjie~~a~~k was in the camp where I was giving him food that I would scrounge ~~and~~ as a welder in the mountains. And Bunjie~~a~~k 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 Bunjie~~a~~k 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 Bunjie~~a~~k 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 a 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, flattened 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 ~~an~~ 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~~ids 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 my father 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 ~~your~~myself scarce. There ~~was~~were several people who immediately took care of me, volunteers. One was ~~a~~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, ~~thinking~~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 ~~s~~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 ~~Bridge~~ bridges in the near-by river -- and I don't remember the name of it -- ~~they'd~~ had been blown and they were throwing ~~ponton~~ 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 ~~you~~ us who wish ~~can~~ could walk towards the river, it ~~is~~ wasn't not far from here, only a few miles. And ~~you~~ we ~~can~~ 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 ~~you~~ them. But all I could see ~~is~~ 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 ~~are~~ were afraid of me. For God's sake they ~~are~~ 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 ~~tall~~ 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, ~~He~~ 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 ~~is~~ was marvelous. This ~~is~~ 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~~ 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 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 one outfit.~~ 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 ~~take~~ 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 ~~comrades~~ "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 (so) 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 ~~to be~~ 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