

Here interviewing Jack Gelb. This is part two of the interview, and today is the 20th of May, 1996. We're doing this interview for the Holocaust Oral History Project, and John Grant is our producer. You said you would like to begin by making a couple of corrections that you felt you wanted to from the last tape. So why don't you go ahead.

OK. In the first tape, when I told about being moved from I was from city of Lodz to a town in Jaslo and afterward returning to Lodz, I said that-- when I reviewed the tape, I noticed that I said we returned in 1945, which was an error. It should have been 1940. Then, another thing I noticed after reviewing the tape is that I mentioned that I have got three cousins and an uncle survived. But I do have two uncles that did survive.

Would you like to name the other one that you didn't name before?

OK. The other one was Abraham Gelb who was my father's brother and the father of a cousin that survived.

OK. I'm going to also ask a few questions which occurred to me after seeing that tape too. And the first is I was wondering how, as such a young boy when you returned from Jaslo to Lodz to check the money in the attic, how did you know how to get the farmer to guide you across the border and that you probably had to pay for it?

Yeah, I had to pay for it. But the way I knew it, there were other people that were doing the same thing. And we kind of fell together. And the farmer that took me we were going by sled, horse-drawn sled, and there were probably another four or five Jewish people that were going back to the Lodz as I was.

And when you were back in Lodz, again, when it was a ghetto, about how many hours a day did you have to work?

About 10 hours a day.

Was that pretty normal for everybody who was assigned work?

Pretty much so, yeah. It was six days a week. And of course, there was no transportation, so you had to walk to and from work, which sometimes, depending where you lived and where you worked, could take you as much as an hour each way. Especially for people being weak and couldn't walk very fast.

And another thing-- most people didn't have shoes. We were wearing clogs which were wood, cut out piece of wood with canvas tarp over it. And especially in wintertime, you were walking, it would be picking up snow and would build up. Every so many steps you would have to stop and knock off the build up of snow and ice, which slowed you down too.

Did you have shoes? Did you have shoes or did you have clogs?

Well, for a while I had shoes, but after a while, they outgrew them and wore them out too. And I wound up with clogs just like everybody else.

How about warm clothing? Did you and your family have enough warm clothing?

Yeah. We had clothing left from before the war, yes. But the warm clothing only takes you so far. Luckily, also we had, what's that, down covers which were very good because, like I said, the apartment during the wintertime was so cold that the water would just freeze.

And it was just like being inside a refrigerator. So the down feathers, the down comforter, which was filled with 18 inches thick helped quite a bit. In fact, we all slept in one bed to keep each other warm.

Were you ever tempted to sell any of those things to get food?

No because there was so much of it for sale that you couldn't get much for it anyhow. We were selling off some of the

merchandise, the clothes, that we had from before the German takeover slowly but surely.

Were you selling those things to other Jews in the ghetto or to Poles?

Other Jews in the ghetto. There was no contact with Poles.

When you arrived in Auschwitz, did you know German yet?

Yes.

How did you learn German?

I guess I just picked it up. I don't know. It's a real easy step from Yiddish to German. And there were a lot of Jews that came into Lodz that were brought from Germany. We had interaction with them. And all the announcements and so on were in German, and being a young kid you pick up in a hurry.

I imagine that was very helpful to you when you got to Auschwitz to know German.

No, not really. No.

To understand commands, and--

Yeah, if you didn't understand then you learned to understand them in a hurry.

When you were working in that section where you would bring cement to the Polish masons--

When I was what?

You, apparently, you were building a brick wall around--

Uh-huh, yeah.

--and your job was to--

Carry the cement and the bricks and so on.

Did any of those Poles ever help you in any way or were they kind to you in any way?

No. Well, we talked a few words, but there was not much contact, no.

When you were in the camps, was there much of a problem of people stealing food?

Oh, yeah. Yes. If you had food, you had to eat it. If you didn't eat it, somebody else ate it for you.

Was there any punishment among the prisoners if people stole food?

Well, most of the time, there might be a fight over it. But there was no-- authorities didn't care whether you had it stolen or not. In fact, there was one incident that was just towards the end of the war when we were on that freighter being taken from Hamburg to that ship where I was liberated from. [? We were in the ?] hold of the freighter and I had maybe three, four ounces of bread that I was saving for several days.

And finally, I decided that I had to eat it. I took it out and I had a little knife and I started to cut it and this Russian prisoner of war came along and grabbed that bread, and I just even without thinking it, hit him, stabbed him in his hand. That's how much you would-- I would never, ever think of hurting a person like that. But that was life.

Were you able to save your bread?

That's right.

When you were in the camps, did you ever see what I guess people refer to as Muselmann?

Oh, sure. They were all over. I mean, I would say probably 70%, 80% of the people were Muselmann. And I don't know if I mentioned the occurrence when we went back to Auschwitz in 1945 and we were told that the people were able to go on to go on and march and the ones that feel like they can't just stay there. But most Muselmann would go ahead and stay there because they knew they could make it. And among them was one of my friends.

Well, sometime late in 1945 after liberation, I was walking in Frankfurt, Meine in Germany, and I came across this guy, and he looked familiar. And that was him. And I thought for sure that anybody that stayed was a goner. However, I found out that the next day the Russians came in and that was it.

So if I stayed with the others, I would have been one day from liberation instead of having to go through Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme, and all that stuff. But you never knew.

Were any of the Kapos ever good to you?

Yes. There was one Kapo that really took a liking to me. And that was in that camp in Trzebinia that I mentioned. And he was a German political prisoner. He was a [INAUDIBLE] German. And what he would do, he'd try to assign me like inside, the refinery where it was warmer.

And when he served the soup, he would just dig down a little bit deeper. If there was any leftover, let me have it and try to help me. And that was the same Kapo that when we were going from Auschwitz to that long death march, he was the one that told me to go ahead and help push that wagon. And I'm sure if I hadn't been doing that, I would have never made it.

When he told you to help push the wagon, was he intending for you to somehow get a ride along?

To get a ride? No.

No.

Oh, no. You would never get on the wagon. That was strictly for the supplies for the guards and for the guards themselves.

So what did he think would be helpful to you by pushing the wagon?

The idea that you were hanging on and like I said, tying on the rope was kind of pulling me along.

And you could rest a little bit.

Yeah, it took less effort to move.

You mentioned that you had this friend, so did you usually try to have a friend in whatever camp you were in as a source of support? Or were you more of a loner would you say?

No, we all, like when I came to Auschwitz, I met this friend. But we were friends in the ghetto. And we got together there, and we kind of were helping each other and cooperating like brothers until we got to Bergen-Belsen. Then, when we got Bergen-Belsen, he came down with typhoid fever, and I went on to Neuengamme and from there, on.

And he survived, and after the war, we got together. We were in the same DP camp. Also when I came to the United States, a little later I found out that he was the United States too. And then, for many years I lost contact with him.

I was trying to find him, and I couldn't until about-- that went on for about 30 years. In the middle of, in the beginning or middle of 1980, I that his last address was in New York. So every time I went, I would look into telephone books, ask people there. And his name was Henchenski. And nobody ever heard of him.

Well, anyhow, one time I was on a business trip. I was going to Buffalo, and I stopped in New York for changing planes. I said, well, let me-- I picked up the Brooklyn phone book. And I said I would look under Henchenski. And sure enough, there were a couple names listed there. So I called up the first one and some young lady answered. And I told her that I'm a survivor and I'm looking for a friend who was also a survivor.

And his name was Jack Henchenski. She says, well, I never heard of him, but my father-in-law might know. And why don't you call the other number. I called the number, and this man answers and I told him. He said, oh, yeah. That's my brother.

So he says his name is now Cheslie. And he gave me his telephone number, and so on. And by that time my plane was leaving. So I boarded. On the way back, I stopped over again and I had a couple hours layover. So I called his number, his wife answered. I told them-- and she said, oh, wait a minute. I'll get you in contact with him. He had a limousine business.

She says, I got the radio. Let me contact him. And she called him, and so he called me back. And we talked. By that time, I could not-- I had tickets and I had leave. So a couple of months later, my wife, we were on the way to Israel. We stopped in New York for several hours and he and his wife and some other friends that I knew after liberation came to see us and see us off.

And then, on the way back home from Israel, we spent a couple of days with them and got reacquainted. And we made very fast friendship. And there after, I would visit him every year a couple of times because I was constantly on travel in my job. But then, in 19, he came down with cancer. And I believe in 1988, he passed away. It was quite a shock to me because we were almost like brothers.

And then, when I got to that camp, Neuengamme, then I got together with another young kid my age. And we buddied-up again. And we were together until that day when the ship was sunk. But he never made it.

You had talked about how resourceful you were when you were in the ghetto about being able to get food and get the wood. Could you use your skills like that at all when you were in the camps?

Well, you couldn't even go near a fence, but there was always ways, like maybe go by somewhere kitchen and swiping. But most of the time you had to live on what you had. That's about it. Like I said, I was fortunate that camp in Trzebinia that this couple took a liking to me made life easier on me. And also I got a little bit more than my normal portion of food from him, which kept my health a little bit better than the surrounding prisoners. And he did as much as he could to help me.

Where we left off last time, you were going to a camp which you said I think the name was Fargo?

Yeah.

What was Fargo like?

Well, basically, it was a working camp. It was set up for the prisoners to go to that naval submarine-- what would you call it, base or something-- where they had a submarine, a dock for the submarines. And over it was a building, about five story building, heavily constructed with very, very thick, like five feet of concrete and so on. And they would bring the submarine into the dock, drain the water, the submarine would be taken apart and put up to the next floors where work would be done.

But at that time, it was already getting closer and closer to the end of the line. And I guess they realized it too. The conditions weren't too bad. Food was scarce, and most of the prisoners were non-Jewish. Mostly French, Polish, Belgian, some Russian prisoners of war. I would say, maybe 5% to 10% of the prisoners might have been Jewish. So there wasn't much beatings or anything. It wasn't-- compared to the others, it wasn't too bad.

Did you have a good sleeping conditions and washing conditions?

Yeah. We shared bunks and so on. And the back was heated a little bit. And there wasn't the usual hours and hours of appeal. It was fairly good compared to all those other camps. The only thing was I don't know if I mentioned when they decided to move us out back to Neuengamme-- I don't know if I mentioned last time-- they lined us all up and then they said, all the Jews step out.

And I don't know why I did it. But I held my friend back. Said, let's hold on. And there were about 30 or 40 Jews in there. And they were loaded on a truck and taken away. And across the road there was a little woods, and about four or five minutes later, we heard machine gun fire. And we never known one of those people again. So I think that this was elimination.

How long were you there in that camp?

Oh, probably about four or five weeks. This whole deal, leaving Auschwitz and liberation was what-- January, February, March, April, May-- well, 4 and 1/2 months, something like that. And in that time was Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme, out to Fargo, back to Neuengamme, back on a cargo carrier that carried us for several days on that ship, and several days on that ship.

So things were happening so fast that I don't know exactly the number of days or--

Where was Fargo, anyway?

Somewhere near Hamburg, but I don't know exactly where. We never were told you are here and so on and so on. You were just somewhere.

Do you know why they sent you back to Neuengamme?

To where?

Why they sent you back from Fargo to Neuengamme?

I guess they were trying to get all the people together. I don't know. They would have explaining. [LAUGHS] You were just like a head of cattle, you know?

So what happened when you got back to Neuengamme.

Oh, we were there but one day and they got us on trucks and took us to that cargo ship, loaded us into the hold, and we were there for about four or five days. Like I said, the time-- without food or water until we got to that other ship, the Altona and then we were loaded from that ship onto the Altona. And--

Did you understand what purpose that was?

Well, they told us that we're going to be taken to Sweden in exchange for German prisoners of war. That was one thing that we were told, which evidently, wasn't true. But we were told so many lies. That was one more.

So what happened when you got on this other ship, the Altona, you say?

Did what?

What happened when you got on that second ship?

Well, we were put down, we were put into a cabin. I mean, there was no beds or anything. We were just loaded with people laying on the floor and so on. And we got a little piece of bread and some water. And we were there probably, I don't know, two, three days, something like that.

And when May 3rd came around and the ship was bombed and strafed and set on fire and that was the day of liberation. And I went already through how I came ashore and all that.

No, talk about that.

OK.

So it was bombed and so how did you survive?

Well, the ship was on fire, we went up to the deck. And the deck is probably 40, 50 feet above water. And I wasn't a very good swimmer at all. I might be able to swim 15, 20 feet, but that's about it. And I didn't know what to do. But if you jumped 50 feet into the water [INAUDIBLE]

And then, I decided it's better to drown than burn. So I took a dive, took my clothes off, took a dive into the water, and I was there. Of course, I went way down and came back up, and within a few feet of me was a plank of wood. I climbed aboard.

I was exhausted, and I just laid down there. And about two, three hours, four hours, I don't know, the tide brought me ashore.

About how far out do you think you were? I think about three, between two and four miles. I don't know exactly. But by the time I got ashore, I could see the ship, the bottom. The water was not deep like out in the ocean, so when the ship flipped over, the bottom was sticking out from the water.

Were others able to get to shore all right too?

Well, from what I understand, there were over 10,000 prisoners aboard and about 300 and some survived because most of the people aboard were hardly able to move.

And then, what happened when you got to shore?

Well, like I said, I was naked, and it was out in the country. I started walking and I walked about a quarter mile or so and there was a farmhouse. I came up to the door, I knocked on the door, and a woman opened up and she slammed the door on me. So I kept walking. I came up to another farmhouse and knocked at the door and there were two or three other survivors on that ship already there. And they told me to come in.

And they said that the war is over, and that there will be somebody to pick us up pretty soon. In fact, I think they even gave us something to drink, I forgot exactly, I think. And about 15 minutes or half an hour later, a German ambulance rolled up and a couple German soldiers with the red cross armbands came up and said, OK, come on, let's go.

And I didn't quite believe what I was told was true. And I thought, here we go again back to camp. Anyhow, we got inside and we do over about several miles and we came into a city, Neustadt Holstein, which is up in north Germany. It's on the bay. And when we came into the outskirts, we saw the British tanks lined up on both sides of the road. And we realized that-- that's when we realized that the day has come.

They brought us to a military hospital, and we noticed all the German wounded soldiers, six soldiers, were out in the

yard laying around on the ground. And they took us into the hospital and put us to bed. Next day or day after when we felt a little bit better, they would only give us bullion and some white bread, but very little food. And we were just famished.

So we kind of sneaked out, got in the city, and broke into a bakery. The Germans were-- there was a curfew for the German civilians. We broke into bakery, got a couple loaves of bread and got into a butcher shop and got a big ham. And boy, we really had a feast. And afterwards, we thought we're going to die.

Diarrhea?

Yeah. Oh, boy. But I was saying, oh, I'll never eat again. But after I got better, we hid that bread and the ham and we went back at it. And after that, they put stamps on us into a German [INAUDIBLE] which they turned into a DP camp where we were another week or two. And then finally, I wound up with a couple of older fellows.

And somehow, they arranged to move in to a German civilian place. It was a butcher shop downstairs. And the owner of the butcher shop, they had the apartment up above. And they put us up, and we had plenty of food. And we stayed there for about four or five or six weeks and really recuperated. After a couple of weeks being there, I saw a bike that didn't seem to belong to anybody, so I kind of adopted it.

And I started doing a little travel with the bicycle. Like I rode in into Liebeck, which was about 15 or 20 miles away from the town where we were, and there were more people, survivors in camps. I was looking for family. And nobody there.

And then, one day, somebody told me that my Uncle Abraham Gelb and his son survived and they were in a camp near Rostock. So I got on my bicycle, which that was probably about 50 miles or so away from where I was in Neustadt. And I was going to go there to see if I could find him,

But I was about halfway there and I found out that the American army was-- or the British army-- whoever had it was pulling back and the Russians were taking over because that was the agreement that the Soviet Union would control, it would be part-- so there was no-- all the people, the survivors, were moved. So I came back again.

Then, I found out that in Bergen-Belsen were a lot of survivors. So I just went ahead and I-- I forgot how I got there. Anyhow, I went to Bergen-Belsen and I met some friends from camps I was with together and from the ghetto. And I moved there. I remember the first time I got to Bergen-Belsen was in the evening, and they had a curfew. And I was already out after curfew. So the first night I spent in the local jail for breaking the curfew.

The following morning, they let me go. And I became a member of that DP camp. A few days after I got there came a truckload of people and among them was my uncle and cousin. And my uncle was very, very sick. And he wound up in the hospital there. And I got together with my cousin.

And we were living there for two, three months, something like that. My uncle got a little better. He was moved from the hospital. While he was in the hospital, he met this lady and they got married. He had the wife, son, and a daughter. The wife and the daughter perished. So he married this lady who lost her family too.

And we heard that in Frankfurt, an American zone, things were much better and so on. So my cousin I got aboard a train on top of the train-- that's the only way-- and we rode--

Outside on top of--

Yeah. And we rode from Sella, which was the nearest town to Bergen-Belsen to Frankfurt. We went all night, if I remember right. And when we got off, we got into the train station, walked to the bathroom, and we changed. We became Black.

Anyhow, when we got there, we found out that they are opening up a DP camp outside Frankfurt in the city of

Sulzheim. So we went over there and we registered with the camp and stayed there. Then, my uncle and his wife, new wife, came. And what happened, the authorities appropriated some homes in that town. And they just let us move into one of those homes.

And we lived in there. And we would get our-- they had a not a restaurant, like a soup kitchen where you went in and you got your food in the camp. And lived there. What I did, I went out, I saw them advertising for drivers. So I went and I took a drivers course just from a German civilian firm.

And what you did, you went through a couple of weeks where you were taught about automobiles, how they work, and the laws driving. And then, for a week you went out every day. The driver would take three or four of the students and took turns driving that little Opal. And after a week of that, I took a test and I got a driver's license.

And with all that experience in driving, I applied for a job with the US Army as a truck driver. Well, I came in, they put me in a big tanker. And they said, drive. That thing had something like 10 forward gears and [LAUGHS]

Well, evidently-- you know. But what they did, they had a training course for prospective drivers. So what they'd do, they took about three of us and an experienced driver, put us on a truck, and we would go out for a whole day, take turns driving. And that was about two weeks. And finally, they decided I was good enough to go ahead. And so I did truck--

While I was doing that, I was permitted to eat in the army mess hall with the soldiers, which I just about broke the army with the food that I was eating. Like seven, eight, eggs and 10 pieces of toast for breakfast and stuff like that. I was building up.

Then we're told, who wants to-- also while I was in the [INAUDIBLE] somebody told me that another uncle that they saw him and that he was living in [PLACE NAME], which was near Munich. So again, I got a pass from work and I went up to Munich, and I looked him up and I found him. And then, he told me that another cousin survived and he was in Landsberg, which was also near Munich.

So I went up, and I saw my other cousin. We got together again. And I went back. Anyhow, sometime, in February or March of 1946 I was asked where I would like to go. And I said, I would like to go to the United States.

Had been thinking about that already?

Well, I always was infatuated before the war-- most of the movies were American movies, and I saw all the cowboy movies and all that. And the United States was the place that I was dreaming about. All these wonderful cowboys. And so I said, I want go to the United States. And about a month later, they called me to the consulate. I had a physical examination and they interviewed me.

And then, about beginning of June, I was told I was going to the United States. And in fact, about middle of June, I was put on a train, taken to Bremen, to a camp where they kept the people that were ready to immigrate. And I got aboard a troop ship, the Marine Flasher, and beginning of July, I believe, '46, I came to New York with a children transport. There was a-- if I remember, there was a committee, they called it the US Committee for European Orphans. I guess they were the sponsors.

They brought me to New York. And they had a house where they kept children awaiting transfer to wherever they were going which was in the Bronx on Cauldwell Avenue. I still remember that. And I stayed there for a couple of weeks. While we there, we were getting classes in English. And they took us several places in New York. I did not like New York at all. It just threw me off completely.

In fact, if somebody had told me, you can go back, I would have gone right back. That's how-- I was disappointed with New York. While I was there, they asked me where I would like to go. I said, well, I wanted to come to the United States. I'm here.

Do you have anybody here? I said, not that I know of.

None of your relatives had come?

No. And they said here's a book of San Francisco with pictures. See if you like it. So I looked at the pictures of San Francisco and it looked nice. I said, yeah, it looks nice. I'll go to San Francisco. Well, a couple of days later, I found out that my uncle and cousin came to New York. They also got in.

And I saw him. And my uncle said, well, why don't you stay with us? And I got one son, you can be my other son. I said, no. I already made a commitment. And I figured if I stayed in New York, I would never really Americanize. And so I said, no, I'll go on to San Francisco.

And then, a few days later, a couple young ladies that were among the group with myself were put the board a plane with the lady that was escorting us, and we went to San Francisco. We got to San Francisco, and there was a man waiting for us.

And we were taken to an orphanage Homewood Terrace. And there I stayed for a couple of years. At first, well, my language, English language knowledge was very limited to yes or no. And I never thought I'd be able to learn how to read and write and start all over because I was already going on 18. I was no baby anymore.

So they asked me what I wanted to do. I said, well, I want to go to work. So what they did, they arranged for me to go on to the continuation school in San Francisco on Mission Street. And there was a class for newly arrived immigrants. And that was half a day.

And the other half a day, they had me enrolled in Samuel Gompers, which was a trade school. And since I was working in the woodworking factory in Lodz during the ghetto, I was supposed to learn woodworking. But I wound up mostly carrying wood. That was my education.

And I told the director of the home, hey, I'm not doing any good there. I don't understand what they are telling me to do, and all I'm doing is just spending a few hours carrying wood around or doing nothing. So somehow, he arranged for me with the job at the Royal Showcase Company on McAllister Street. The owners were Jewish, but the guy that ran the outfit, the foreman, was a German.

And I worked there for about two months, half a day. I think it was getting something like \$0.65 an hour. And there were 18 guys working there, and I had 18 buses. Everyone would say, bring the wood, do the sanding, do this, do that. And after a couple of months they let me go. They said I just couldn't converse with the people.

I couldn't pull my load. The world was coming to an end for me. And I came back from work and I was living in this house where there were about 20 kids in each house and a house mother. And the house mother saw me walking, and she said, what happened?

Said, oh, I lost my job. She said, oh, don't worry. Anyhow, there were two girls that came with me. They started school right away. And they were doing pretty good. They kind of looked at me and said, dummy that I can't learn. And they kind of throw it up to me. And I said, OK, I bet you I can go to school, do as well as you do.

And I told the director, I want to go back to school. So I think it was something like January when the second semester would start. I think the first semester would start in September, and I think January, they enrolled me in Balboa High School in the ninth grade.

Well, I would go to class. But after one semester, I started getting grades of B and A and so on. And in 1948, I finished high school. Well, not quite. I had a few units that I needed, but they knew I had enrolled in City College. And the few units I finished up at City College. And then in 1951, I from City College.

And what I was doing after I graduated from high school and I started a City College, I got a job with United Airlines working loading, unloading cargo, mail, and doing ramped service. And that was a swing shift which I was working

from four in the afternoon till 12:30 at night. And I was commuting from Ocean Avenue here in San Francisco to the airport.

And usually, I would get home by-- I had to take a Greyhound bus to Bayshore and so that's where the Cow Palace is on Geneva, and then transfer to a bus which took me to Ocean Avenue where City College is, and then the [INAUDIBLE] bus [INAUDIBLE]. By that time, was after 1:00 or 1:30. Then, I had to walk the rest of the way.

And I usually would get back about after 2 o'clock, and I had to get up about 7 o'clock in the morning or 7:30 to make my class. And then, as soon class was over by 2:00, I would run back, change clothes, and go back to work.

When did you get your homework done?

In between, weekends, and sometimes I stayed up after I got home. But it was done.

You must have learned English pretty fast.

Yes, I did. And well, when I-- another thing that happened in the home when I got there, well, most of the kids, the children that lived there, American children, would pretty much shun me because I couldn't speak English and I was a foreigner and different, except one little girl. She was about 12. And she always was nice to me.

And she reminded me of my sister. Anyhow, we became real good friends. And later on, we became more than friends, and this is my wife of 43 years.

What's her name?

Lorraine. At that time, Lorraine Ruth, and her maiden name was Weiss.

So she, too, was an orphan.

Well, no. She came from a broken home. Her parents divorced, and she wound up in the home. Most of the children in the home were not complete orphans. Some of them were, but most of them either had a mother or father and a lot of where the mother couldn't take care of them or the father couldn't take care of them.

But when she got to be like 16, 17, we started dating. And then, in '51 when I finished City College I wanted to go on to university, but I thought I'd take a few months off where I just work and save some money where I could maybe not put in so many hours at work and just go to university. But as soon as I stopped, I got a little letter from my friends and neighbors who wanted me to join the United States Army.

So in June of 1951, I became a private in the US Army. I went through basic training at Fort Ord. What was it? About November. So I graduated from basic training, and I got orders to go to Germany because my MSO, which is military occupation status, and MOS, was interpreter.

Had you become a citizen of the United States meanwhile?

Well, that's another thing. As soon as I came to the United States, I went out a week later, two weeks later, and I applied for citizenship. But it took five years. So when I got my orders to report back east for shipment to Germany, I also got a letter from the court to come in and get my citizenship.

And I didn't want to leave the country before I got my citizenship, so I went to the adjutant general office and I told him that I'm not a citizen right now, but I got a letter from the court to report something. I was supposed to report several days after I was supposed to be shipped. And I would like a postponement.

They went ahead and canceled the orders. And in fact, all the men in my outfit thought I was crazy because everybody else was being shipped to Korea at the time because that was the Korean War going on. They said, you'll never go to

Europe again. You'll wind up in Korea.

Well, I said, that's the way it is. So anyhow, I went back to San Francisco, went before the judge, and one of the questions was would be willing to serve in the United States Armed Forces? And I was in uniform. And he said, well, I guess you would.

And asked me a few questions, and of course, I was pretty well up on the answers because I took history and civics and so on. So there was no problem for me passing. And I became a citizen of the United States. I went back, and a couple of weeks later, I got orders again, this time again to go to Europe, to Germany.

From there, I went to a camp in New Jersey, army camp awaiting shipment, then, went to New York, boarded a ship and wound up in Bremen. From Bremen, they sent me to a center where they reassigned people. And I wound up for a while in Berlin with the international patrol where I was an interpreter for them. Than about seven weeks later, I was reassigned to a camp, to an ordnance depot in Pirmasens Germany, which was on the French border.

And that was where the old Siegfried line used to be. And what the Germans did when they built a Siegfried line, this was a hilly area. What they did, they dug out the hills and they made tremendous storage areas inside. But if you look from above, all you saw was hills. And each storage area was many, many acres.

However, after the war, the French, of course, took over that area. That was a French zone. They went ahead and they blew all that stuff up. But in '51, we started building a second front wall as that was Cold War was pretty hot at that time. So that if the Soviet Union broke through, that would be a second front. So the United States decided to restore all these storage areas and store war material there.

And I myself when we first started, there was about 30 other GIs that started that. And we were finally located in a ex-German [INAUDIBLE]. And again, I was the interpreter. And eventually, our outfit became something over 100 men and officers. And I was the one that was doing all the negotiating with the civilian authorities. I was the one between the camp command and so on and the civilian authorities because I was the interpreter.

And well, anyhow, I remained there for almost two years. During the time I bought an engagement ring, sent it to my present wife, and we got engaged.

How was it for you to go back to Germany?

Well, it was a weird feeling. In fact, most of the time I was kind of leery about wearing weapons.

Why was that?

In case some nasty remark from some ex-Nazi or something. Having a weapon ready, I might have been a little careless. So always had tried to be not armed except when I had to be armed.

Were you able to deal with the local Germans?

Oh, yeah. I did quite a bit of it, yes. Like I said, I was the one that did all the negotiating between the local populace and so on. Also, we had about-- well, we were only 100 military US soldiers, but we had about 3,000 civilians working for us restoring all that area and doing all the work. We also had about 400 company of Polish.

They were semi-military. They were wearing American uniforms only dyed blue. What they did, they did most of the guard duty, all the driving for us and so on. And they had their own officers and NONCOMs. And I was the one that would pass on what they were going to do, when they were going to do, and so on.

So then, you were speaking Polish and German.

Yeah. Well, Polish, of course, was my native language, and German I spoke, I was pretty fluent with it. So I did both.

Also after the war I was getting pretty good with Russian. No reading or writing, but I could speak and understand.

How did you get the practice in Russian?

From the other prisoners there. I guess I was a quick learner at that time. And so for example, I was in international patrol. I would do-- I was in the headquarters. They brought somebody in for interrogation. I would be the one to do the job.

Right after the war, did you give any thought to going back to Lodz?

No. No. Well, for one thing, it would be impossible even if I wanted to. But I realized there wasn't much for me. So even when I was in Germany in '51 to '53, well, I guess it wouldn't be possible for me being a member of the US Armed forces going back to Poland. I don't think I would have been allowed.

But while I was in Germany, I had my own car. And I did a lot of travel all over Germany, France, Belgium-- all over Europe.

I wanted to ask you, when the war was over, you said eventually you were taken and put in the hospital for a while. How was your health besides being starved? How much might you have weighed at that point?

Probably between 80 and 90 pounds. Also when I first came out, I was like 5 foot 1". So in the next year or so, I grew something like four inches because my growth was stunted. My father was just about 5' 10" or 11". He was a tall, strong man. And my son is 5' 10", 5' 11".

Well, how was your health in general besides--

Other than being starved, I guess I was all right.

You didn't have any other health problems?

No.

Did you have any religious point of view at that point? I mean, did you believe in God or Gods or not?

No. No. No.

No. Had not a religious point of view before when you--?

Sure. I came from a-- not the ultra conservative family, but we observed Sabbath, holidays, kept a kosher kitchen, went to shul, and Shabbat, and holidays. Yeah. But it was kind of hard to believe when you look there and saw what was happening.

Of course, now, with time, especially when my children were born and started growing up, I want to make sure that they got a Jewish education and so we joined a temple.

How about throughout the rest of your life? Do you feel like-- you said you felt your growth was stunted. Did you have any other problems that you felt came from your war experiences like nightmares?

Oh, yeah. That never went away. That still is there. You know what they say, yeah, wounds heal, but scars are always there.

How about any physical problems or any fears or other kinds of things that you would associate with your war experiences?

Well, one thing I think I already mentioned is I have one eye was damaged from beatings. And I got bleeding behind and under retina. Other than that, the scars and so on, but other than that, I guess I'm not bad health.

So you sounded like you made a pretty good adjustment in your work for the Army in Germany. But also it sounds like you knew that anger was still in you.

Oh, of course. Never go away. I mean, not just to everybody, just if there was somebody that I found out that was a Nazi or somebody that would say something inadvertently then it would bring out the anger and the hatred.

Did you find any anti-Semitism in those years in Germany?

Well, the Germans were too afraid-- if there was, I think they would be too afraid to say anything or do anything. In the army I only had one incident of one of the fellows coming out. And at that time, I was pretty well able to take care of myself. And he was always picking on me, picking on me, just snide remarks, until one day it was his day off. He went out and got drunk, and then came in during mid-day to eat his lunch in the mess hall.

And I was coming into the mess hall to eat lunch. I was walking by, and he said, oh, this goddamned Jew boy or something like that. And I just walked over and I grabbed him by his lapel, picked him up and knocked him down with one punch, picked him up off the floor and knocked him over several times over. And his face was pretty well swollen up for a while. But the funny thing was after that, he was trying to be my friend.

And this was an American soldier?

Yeah. Oh, yeah. But that was-- another thing that really turned me off was just the last few months before leaving Germany, there were a couple Puerto Ricans assigned into our outfit and assigned into my room. And I was very helpful to them, and I thought they were my friends.

And so when I came home, I had a mirror that was used. I opened it, I turned it over, and there was a scratch and a [INAUDIBLE]. And while I was in the army, I had my car there and I was pretty well established officers. Although my rank was corporal, but I was very well in with the leadership. And I helped those guys whenever I could, but--

How about in the United States? Did you run into anti-Semitism?

No. No. I would say not much at all. Not that I can think-- not-- what would you say, openly with a-- except one time oh, about 15, 16 years ago when my son was in high school. My wife and I took a trip back east. We came home and while we were gone, somebody painted a couple swastikas on the driveway.

But I think what it was was some of my boy's friends at school where he got into a fight or something. That was probably more against him than against us because we never had any problem with any neighbors.

So when you were through with your duty in Germany, I presume you came back to San Francisco and you must have got married fairly quickly?

Well, yeah. I came back to San Francisco and got back my job with United. And I got out the army end of May of '53. And then, September, my wife and I were married. And my wife had an uncle that owned several car washes. And he got after me. He wanted me to manage one of his car wash. I said, hey, I got a job and I want to go on to school and all that.

And he kept on pestering me. Finally, he said, oh, OK. I'm going to open up a new one, and you can be the manager and after a while, I became part owner. And he finally talked me into it. And I quit my job, and I went to work for him.

And I think that was about seven, eight months and it closed up. So I was without a job. I went back to school using my GI. And after that, I got a job with the Navy in electronics.

What did you study in school? What was your--

Electronics.

Electronics.

And I was working for the Navy for 34 years.

And so it was in that job that you did all the traveling?

Yeah. Well, in the beginning I just was an electronics technician, and later, when I finished up, I was the Naval representatives over at Lockheed and Westinghouse on the fleet ballistic missile system. And I had a very responsible job.

Sounds like it. And I know you have three children.

Right.

When were they born? And what are their names?

OK. My first born we named her Priva Naomi. And like I said, she was named after my mother. And she was born in 1957. Then, in 1959, our second daughter was born and her name is Dorothy Rebecca named after my sister. And then, in 1964, my son was born. And he's named Leon, and he's named after my father. Leon Marx-- named after my father and my wife's grandfather.

And they're all married?

Yeah, they're all married.

Do you have some grandchildren?

Yes. I have two grandchildren from my oldest daughter.

And what are their names.

[LAUGHTER]

It's OK.

OK, Tamar is Tamar Elena is the oldest one. And Iain, I-A-I-N, is the boy. And then, my son had a boy born in 1974 in April of '74. He just turned two. And--

He just turned two?

Pardon me?

Your grandson turned two?

Yeah, he just turned two last month.

So he was born in '94.

'94. Is that what I said?

No, but it's OK.

So what's his name?

Travis Arthur. And my son and daughter-in-law are expecting a daughter in July.

So you will have four grandchildren.

Right. Well, not yet.

Not quite.

No. Three and one on the way.

And as your children were growing up, did you talk to them about your war experiences.

No, not much. They were aware that I was in Europe, and they were aware that there was a war, but I could never really sit down and tell them what I'm telling you.

Were they asking questions at all, or?

Yeah, they ask questions. I would kind of answer, but I never I really-- like I told you, I go to schools and universities and go ahead and tell the experience. But I can't do it with my kids or my wife there.

Were you talking with your wife, when you got married did you talk with her about your experiences?

Kind of superficially, yes.

How about your grandchildren? They're young still but--

Well, again, just very superficially. I never sat down with them and tell them what I just told you about what was happening. They're aware of it. Like when my granddaughter just had bat mitzvah, and when she gave her speech she talked about her grandfather being a survivor of the Holocaust and all that.

And it's an unusual thing. I was liberated on May 3, and her birthday is on May 3. And I consider May 3 my second birthday. So she said this was quite a tie between the two of us.

Were you talking with any other people when the war was over about your experience? Did people feel open to hearing it or not or--?

Right after the war like in the '40s and '50s and '60s, people weren't too much interested in Holocaust survivors. Not just myself, but I think most of the survivors were just too busy starting a new life and raising a family, just not thinking much about it, except maybe at night.

Have you ever gone back to Poland?

No, in fact, last year when we went back to Germany, I had planned-- what I did, I made arrangements to pick up a car in Berlin and we were going to drive into Poland and spend another 10 days, go to my hometown. And mainly, I wanted to see if I could find my father's grave and maybe put up a headstone if possible and so on.

And the night before I was supposed to leave Germany, pick up the car, leave, my back went out. And I just had to cancel everything and come home. But I'm making plans to go ahead and do it anyhow because I just feel like there's unfinished business.

Have you ever gotten any reparations from Germany?

Yeah, back in 19-- I think beginning '60s, I think you got something like \$1,800. And now, they have got that Article II claim or whatever, and I put in for that. But I was told that anybody that makes over I think \$14,000 a year is not qualified. So basically, what they consider it's welfare.

Rather than a just-- not really compensation, even.

No.

So you have to qualify.

Of course, many people got pensions because of ill health and so on. But at that time, I felt I couldn't accept any of that money. I felt that would be-- they could never pay me if they gave me half of Germany, they couldn't pay what they did to me and my family. So I never put in for that. But now, I thought, gee, I'd rather to see my children have it than-- but, ah, well.

Do you think something like the Holocaust could happen again?

Oh, yeah.

What about this historical revisionism? You know what they call it revisionists, people who say that it never happened?

I don't know. It's just unbelievable that anybody could come out and say something with all the eyewitness and photographic and documentary evidence where there are thousands of people that are eyewitnesses, not necessarily Jewish people, Germans, Americans, English. There are films, there are documents, and how anybody could come out-- maybe it's true what Goebbels said, the bigger the lie, the more believable it is. I don't know.

Do you feel like there's any message you would like to leave? You don't have to, but if there's anything you would like to say?

Well, the message is that we as survivors have to go out, especially now that there's getting to be less and less of us because most of the people that were middle aged or older are gone already years ago. I myself, I'm probably one of the youngest survivors remaining. And I'm coming close, and it's important that we go out and let as many young people know what happened. And hopefully, they can go on and pass it on to their children and to their contemporaries and maybe knowing what happened, maybe prevent something like that happening again.

What made it necessary for you to go out and start talking in the schools?

Well, that's one reason. I want to pass on-- I mean, most of these high school and university students already are aware of what happened during the Holocaust. They get some information in school, they see movies. But it's different seeing a movie or reading a book, a teacher telling them, and somebody that was there that witnessed it and can tell them, I was there and this is what I've seen, I think might make more impact than anything else.

I mean, going out there and standing in front of a group of students and telling them, it's opening up wounds. But I think it has to be done and maybe that will help preventing recurrence.

So it's hard for you when you--

Well, of course. Yes. I don't have much problem communicating coming before people. It's just that every time it just brings things back. It can't be helped. But from what I have seen after I speak, a lot of those young people come forward. And I think I'm accomplishing something. And really, this was one of the things that kept me going during the imprisonment and in the ghettos and in concentration camp is the idea of surviving and bearing witness.

And I think that's what I should do, especially now that I'm retired and I have the time to do it. I've done it before while I was working, but time was a limiting factor. But now, I do it more and more. In fact, I just spoke at the University of Santa Clara last Monday.

Have you been back to the camps at all-- the camps you were in? Well, Sachsenhausen.

Want to talk about that?

Well, there wasn't much left there, just the fence was there, one of the posts on the fence, and the remains of the crematoria and the gas chambers. Just ruins.

Why was that? What happened to it?

I guess they were destroyed before the Allies came in, but the wounds were left. And then, afterward, it was preserved as a historical landmark. But I understand now they are planning to do away with it.

Do you know why?

I guess money, and also I guess it's a pin in your rear end or something like that.

You said before, not on the tape, that you were invited by the German government.

Yes.

And--

Well, they didn't send me a letter of invitation, but there was information in the newspaper that all the previous people that were imprisoned at Sachsenhausen and there's another camp [INAUDIBLE] but I have forgot, that there would be a commemoration of liberation and that they are invited to join. And yeah, I filled out a paper, and they went ahead and sent me the invitation.

Was it hard for you to go back?

Well, it brought back memories, yeah.

You haven't been to any of the other camps you were at?

No. In fact, I was thinking while I was there to do it, but like I said, the whole thing was cut short. And most of those camps are not there anymore. Sachsenhausen is there. I think Bergen-Belsen they still have some thing there. But-- Auschwitz, of course, there's still something there.

But I wanted to. I definitely wanted to go up to Auschwitz and to Trzebinia because that was just a small town with a very small camp and just kind of retrace your steps a little bit.

Is there anything else you can think of or any other story you would like to tell? That you could add?

Well, what I can add is that I'm very, very grateful to be in the United States. The country has been very good to me and helped me to get back to the point where I have a family, a place to live, a means of making decent living, many friends and neighbors, get an education which probably I could not accomplish in any other country. And I'm a firm believer in the United States government, and I love this country.

Well, I thank you very, very much for coming and doing this tape. Thank you.

You're welcome.

OK.

OK.

That is 1946, sometime through the end of 1946 shortly after coming to San Francisco. Still had some hair. This is in 1952 in Germany. And there I am at the entrance of the restricted zone in Germany with our trusty dog. And at the end of 1952, already non-commissioned officer in full uniform.

Do you know when that was?

Pardon me?

Do you know where you were at that time?

Yeah.

I mean--

OK.

In front of a building or something?

I don't remember exactly where I took it.

OK.

OK. That is our wedding picture in September 26, 1953. And we still love each other as much as we did then. Here's our daughters, Priva and Dorothy, approximately three and two years old. And they were very enjoyable, very much loved.

Is that in your home?

No, a friend's home.

OK.

OK, here, the two girls are joined by our son, Leon. There were beautiful children. This is our old home in San Bruno. And this is a nice picture of our son Leon. He's our youngest. He's approximately six years old here.

Here's a picture of the whole family, and that occasion is my son's bar mitzvah.

OK.

And this is a picture of my oldest daughter, Priva, and her husband, Michael, her daughter Tamar, our granddaughter, Tamar, and our grandson, Iain.

And what's their last name?

Tarbet.

OK.

Priva met her husband Michael in Israel on a kibbutz, and they were married in our house. Michael comes from Australia, and his parents are still living in Australia. Priva and Michael and the children are going to be on the way to

Australia in August to celebrate her bat mitzvah.

And this is a picture of my younger daughter, Dorothy Rebecca, and her husband, Dan. Their name is Denardo. This is a picture of my son, Lean Marx, his wife Kerry, and their dog, Ben. This was taken shortly after their wedding.

OK.

And this is a picture of our grandson, my son's son, Travis Arthur. He just turned two years old. As you can see, he's quite a cowboy. Here again is my son, his wife Kerry, and our grandson Travis Arthur enjoying home life.

This picture was taken in our backyard. And we have Michael, my son-in-law, sitting there holding my grandson, Travis. Behind him is our daughter, Priva, and our grandchildren, Tamar and Iain. Here, my wife and I are celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary. It was a surprise party given to us by our children. We were absolutely unaware that it was going to happen.

Is that your home?

No, it was taken-- our daughter is a lieutenant in the fire department in Felton, and it was taking place in the firehouse in Felton. This is just an impromptu picture just taken recently of my wife and myself.

In your home, now?

In our home, yes.

OK.

This is one surviving cousin. She lives now in New York. She's got two children. One is a cardiologist. The other one is a teacher married to a dermatologist with four offices. Her grandchildren already got law degrees, and they're doing very well.

And what's her name?

Her name is Silber-- her name is Dorothy. By the way, she's named after the same person as my younger daughter. And her family is [? Silberger ?].

This is a picture of my surviving cousin. His name is Alex. It was [? Nasielski, ?] but he shortened it to Nash. That's his wife with him. He lives in Israel. His son was an officer in Israeli army. He's now working for the IRS as a CPA. He's got two grandchildren.

OK.

OK.

This is my honorable discharge from the army that I received in 1956 after the reserves.

You got any--

That is my military service award which was issued from the Pentagon for the service given to the US Navy.

This is the service of all those years you were--

Yeah, I have given service for 34 years.

OK.

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