

INTERVIEW WITH HARRY LAWTON

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q: IT'S JULY 18, 1990. WE'RE IN SAN FRANCISCO WITH HARRY LAWTON.

JOHN ANGELL GRANT ON CAMERA. I'M ANNE FEIBELMAN.

HARRY, LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING. WHERE WERE YOU BORN AND WHEN?

A: Okay. I was born in Berlin, Germany, June 16th, 1920.

Q: AND TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY LIFE, YOU KNOW, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, SHUL. WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILY LIFE LIKE?

A: Okay. I had no brothers or sisters. I was an only child. My parents were not born in Berlin. Both came from small towns, but lived in Berlin most of their life. And my father originally was in -- what kind of business was it? After World War I. I think he worked at a clothing store, men's clothing, which later was taken over by a big company, Herman Tietz, but you, naturally, you wouldn't know anything about that. And then he and my uncle, my mother's brother, started the theatre business. My uncle grew up -- he was an actor originally, before World War I and during World War I, I think. And then they started a theatre in Berlin, a kind of review type. In other words, it was a variety theatre and became quite famous in Berlin. It was called the Komische Oper, which is comic opera. And, as a matter of fact, I just heard that in East Berlin they have the same -- apparently not the same building, but they continued it. They are now bringing operas and -- similar type. So it's still in existence. But my uncle was killed in France by the Nazis and -- so this

1 eventually went bankrupt on account of the takeover by Hitler.

2 Q: HARRY, WHAT WAS YOUR UNCLE'S NAME AND YOUR FATHER'S NAME AND YOUR
3 MOTHER'S NAME?

4 A: Okay. My father's name was Artur Levison, spelled L-e-v-i-s-o-n,
5 Arthur. But in German you pronounce it "Artur."

6 Any my mother's name was Gertrude.

7 My uncle's name was James Klein, and there are many books
8 written about him. He was well known in Germany, so if you talk to
9 German people -- I mean my age and older -- they will remember
10 James Klein.

11 Q: DID YOU KNOW YOUR MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME?

12 A: Yeah. Klein.

13 Q: OH, RIGHT. NOW WHAT KIND OF RELIGIOUS LIFE?

14 A: Okay. They were, first of all, they were very modern people, very
15 progressive, both my parents, being in the theatre business, you know.
16 And my father came out of a very orthodox family. My mother did not.
17 I grew up -- I went to synagogue, but it was a more -- it wasn't
18 really a reform; it was in between. They called it the (Gen ten straz za,
19 named after the street where the synagogue was located, in the western
20 part of Berlin. And so I didn't grow up under very orthodox conditions.
21 It was strictly almost reform type.

22 Q: DID YOU EVER GO TO RELIGIOUS SCHOOL, YOU KNOW, ON SUNDAY OR WEDNESDAY,
23 OR -- WHAT KIND OF TRAINING DID YOU HAVE?

24 A: As a child? Yeah. I had to go to Sunday -- we had Sunday school in
25 our temple.

26 Q: And then what was your schooling like, your regular day school?

27 A: Okay. I had what we call -- I mean similar to grammar school. Four
28 years of grammar school. Then I went to what we call gymnasium.

1 which was the equivalent of -- I mean it's a high school, but we
2 started out with Latin and Greek, because originally I wanted to --
3 or rather my parents wanted me to become a doctor, naturally. Never
4 turned out. Never worked out that way.

5 But I had actually only eight years of school, because I was the
6 only Jew at that particular school, and in nineteen thirty -- well,
7 1935, I was thrown out. See, we had what they called
8 sexta, quinta, quarta, which is the first three school years of the
9 gymnasium. And they -- then I had to leave. They just said: We
10 don't want Jews in our school. So that was the end. It was called
11 the -- the school was called Momsen Gymnasium after -- there
12 was a famous poet and writer in Germany, Momsen. I think he
13 was .

14 Q: HARRY, TELL ME ABOUT BEING TOLD TO LEAVE THE SCHOOL. DID YOU KNOW
15 IT WAS COMING? DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY?

16 A: Oh, yeah. Sure. Because, well, I was already almost 15 years old.
17 And it was two years after the takeover by the Nazis. So, naturally,
18 we -- I could see the handwriting on the wall. But in those days,
19 naturally, you tried to stay in school as long as possible. Now, I
20 know some of my friends went over to Jewish schools. We had a few in
21 Berlin, but I never did. I just -- till they threw me out, stayed
22 there.

23 Q: WHEN YOU SAY YOU "SAW THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL," DO YOU REMEMBER
24 ANY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF ANTI-SEMITISM OF -- THOSE TWO YEARS?

25 A: In our school or --

26 Q: IN YOUR SCHOOL.

27 A: -- in general?

28 Q: AND IN GENERAL.

1 A: Well, I mean I noticed it in our school, definitely, like I said.
2 Matter of fact, there were a lot of well-known -- children of Nazi
3 families in our school. Because it was a -- it was a very well-known
4 school in Berlin and a good school, so everybody liked to send their
5 kids there. Definitely, there was -- I even remember my teacher, one
6 of them, the Latin teacher, a Dr. Roche. I never forget that
7 name. And he -- right after 1933, he wore his swastika on his lapel,
8 and -- so I remember that. And he was the typical German tough guy.
9 I mean -- and he was definitely an anti-semiter. So I don't know who
10 actually threw me out of school. I mean who made the decision, but
11 I'm quite sure he was part of it.

12 Q: NOW, WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING IN HIS CLASS, YOU KNOW, HOW --

13 A: Well, naturally, this is hard to say now. I mean it's so long ago.
14 But I'm quite sure I wasn't very comfortable any more the last few
15 months. I'm certain.

16 Q: AND, HARRY, WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU LEFT THERE? WHEN DID YOU LEAVE
17 THAT SCHOOL, AND WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

18 A: Okay. This was in 1935. My father at the time -- see -- that I
19 would have to go back, because -- to -- like I told you before, the
20 theater collapsed, and there was a bankruptcy declared, and my uncle
21 left Germany, and my father, who was the manager of the theater, was
22 responsible for the -- there was a certain amount of debt. And in
23 those days it was a little different than today. Bankruptcy was,
24 you know, was not a very -- you didn't just go on with your life.
25 I mean he was very embarrassed about it, and he -- I remember he had
26 to sign that he would make a monthly payment, because, I think, mostly
27 it was a matter of all these actors had to be paid after the bankruptcy,
28 and social security and all these things were involved.

1 And my father said he was going to pay it. So then he started all
2 kinds of different business. He became a salesman for awhile and
3 did all kinds of things, just so that we could survive. We had to
4 give up our house. We had to move into a very, very small apartment.
5 And then he said the best -- oh -- and a friend of his had an auto-
6 mobile repair shop, and he got in touch with him, and they decided
7 the best thing would be for me to become an auto mechanic. And that's
8 when I started as an auto mechanic.

8 Q: And when was that?

9 A: 1935

10 Q: AND WHY DID THE THEATRE -- WHY DID IT GO BANKRUPT?

11 A: Well, they bought some political plays and decided to go all around --
12 this was before 1933, shortly before, year or two -- and my -- they
13 decided to buy a huge tent, a circus tent, and go all over Germany.
14 And later on they wanted to go all over Europe, but playing variety
15 shows. As a matter of fact, they were very similar to the Follies
16 Bergere in France, in Paris. Very progressive type, I mean, risque
17 type shows, but also -- and well-known German actors started at the
18 theatre, so it was pretty (inaudible) . . .

19 But anyway, the first show in that particular tent theatre,
20 which was -- I will never forget this -- was a small town about
21 two hours away from Berlin called Magdenburg, and they called
22 the theatre the Theatre of the Five Thousand, because it had five
23 thousand seats. So you can imagine how big. And the show was
24 supposed to start on Easter day. And I remember, I was with my
25 parents. We were all there when it started. And the mayor of
26 Magdenburg, this town, who was -- later on we found out that he
27 was already a -- a part of the Nazi movement; he belonged to it.
28 And he didn't -- he started -- within a couple of days, in our
newspapers, a campaign about the Jew James Klein. And we found

1 out that they hired some kids, and they would cut the columns of
2 some of -- you know how a circus tent, the seats are going up; and
3 they cut them, and part of it collapsed. We found out -- I mean we
4 noticed it afterwards. We didn't know it before. And immediately he
5 closed the show. And that was the end of it, because they invested
6 so much money into this whole idea that they just couldn't continue.
7 And then they -- apparently, they said, well, there's no sense in
8 going on with it.

9 Q: NOW, IN 1935, WHEN YOU BECAME APPRENTICED TO THE AUTO MECHANIC, WHAT
10 WAS -- TELL ME ABOUT THAT. WHAT WAS YOUR JOB, AND HOW LONG DID IT
11 LAST? WHAT WAS HAPPENING POLITICALLY?

12 A: Politically? Well, I mean, now, I'm not quite sure. You mean in
13 our family, or in general?

14 Q: BOTH. BOTH.

15 A: Okay. Well, number one, my father was a -- what they called a
16 "Front Kämpfer." I mean he was the typical proud German Jew. To
17 him, Germany was the most important thing outside of his family.
18 And he fought for four years in World War I, so, consequently, to him,
19 this whole Nazi movement, this will pass; it won't last very long.
20 It can't last. Not in Germany. So he -- some of our friends left
21 Germany in those days already, and part of the family, but he said
22 no. He had a cross which was given to him by -- during World War I,
23 and so he was -- he said nothing can happen to us.

24 And the job I had was -- I mean I worked as an apprentice in --
25 at that point, I personally didn't notice anything. I mean nothing
26 happened to me at that point, so I can't say that -- sure, I mean we
27 saw the papers. We read the -- what they call the Stürmer,
28 which was the famous Nazi newspaper. And they had several, but --

1 besides, I was, you know, 15 years old, 16 -- by that time, 15, 16 years
2 old. I was not -- I knew what was going on, but I was more interested in
3 sports, because we still belonged to a Jewish sport club. And I was more
4 interested in girls, also. So, I mean, so I can't say at that point that
5 it was affecting me. And probably my parents were probably affected by it,
6 but they didn't really show it too much to me.

7 Q: AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR JOB? WHO WAS -- OR THE INTERNSHIP, RATHER, THE
8 APPRENTICE?

9 A: Yes.

10 Q: WHO WAS IT FOR? WAS IT FOR A JEWISH -- GENTILE?

11 A: No. Gentile. It was an automobile repair shop. They were importers
12 for French Peugeot cars. Then they had some German cars. But I mean it
13 was just a regular, neighborhood repair shop. So I actually learned for
14 almost four years, and I -- in Germany you have to make an examine after
15 four years' apprenticeship. Then you become a full-fledged journeyman.
16 And I made my examine at the time, so I was, basically, a full-fledged
17 auto mechanic, which, you'll find out later on, which saved my life.

18 Q: WHAT YEAR DID YOU PASS THE EXAM?

19 A: 1938.

20 Q: ALL RIGHT. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED IN '38?

21 A: Okay. First of all, in June, June 1938, my father was picked up by
22 the Gestapo in Berlin and put into -- they took him to Buchenwald, the
23 concentration camp Buchenwald. I don't know how you -- I mean we pronounce
24 it Buchenwald, but it's pretty well known, anyway. And the reason was --
25 going back to the theatre, because they picked him up because he -- they
26 knew -- our family life was connected with the theatre -- and especially
27 on account of some of the political jokes they made in those days. So he
28 was picked up.

1 And my mother and I went with him to the police station. In those
2 days they would take them to the police station. And then we had to
3 leave. And we didn't see my father till April or May 1939. He was in
4 Buchenwald. We had, naturally, a very tough time, because they
5 confiscated everything we had. I mean the Nazis did. And we went on
6 welfare. There was a Jewish welfare in Berlin. As a matter of fact,
7 I remember -- which was -- see, in those days everything was so much more
8 embarrassing, because some of my friends were very well off, and, all of
9 a sudden, practically from one day to another, we were poorer than poor.
10 No job, you know. Nothing. No money. And we moved into a one-room
11 apartment paid by the Jewish welfare. And then we -- actually, we tried
12 to get my father -- we tried to get him out of the concentration camp.

13 I remember that we were allowed to write a letter once a month,
14 through the Red Cross -- German Red Cross, or International Red Cross --
15 and I think we got one or two letters from him, too. But he had a tough
16 time. He -- they had to amputate his toes because he got blood poisoning
17 when he came back. He only had, I think, one toe left on one foot. And it
18 was -- apparently he had a tough time.

19 Q: WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HIS TIME THERE?

20 A: Well, they had to -- he told us when he came back -- I mean, first of
21 all, he was a pretty heavysset man. He was a little shorter than I, but
22 he was heavier. And when he came back, he was under a hundred pounds.
23 I mean he was just as skinny as -- I still see him. And when he came back
24 on a cane -- and he wasn't that old yet, really. He was -- at the time
25 he must have been -- he was born in '83, so this was 30 -- 38 and 17 --
26 oh, 48, 50, 55 years old. And he looked like -- I remember, he looked like
27 an 80-year old man. At least that's how I remember him.

28 So then he told us that they had to carry all these heavy rocks from

1 one place to the other. Everything by hand, you know. And very little
2 food. And so that -- but, I mean, at least he survived. He came out.
3 And why they released him, we never found out. All of a sudden they
4 released him.

5 And that's when we started seriously to think we have to leave
6 Germany. And we got in touch with the -- well, I think it was a Jewish
7 organization in Berlin. I think it was the -- I don't
8 remember now which organization, but there was one. And we wanted to --
9 I think my father -- I'll be honest with you; I don't remember exactly.
10 He got a visa to Shanghai. How he got it, I don't remember that. But
11 somehow he got it. And he wanted -- he wanted to leave.

12 And we got a notice -- now this was in July 1939 -- that we --
13 Well, in the meantime in the meantime -- by the way, my father had to work at a -- for
14 the railroad to -- it was a forced labor. And they had to put all these
15 ties, you know, for the rails. He had to work. And it was very tough
16 for him, naturally, but at least he would get a little bit money, you know,
17 because -- so then he signed at the -- I guess for the Gestapo. They
18 forced him to leave and said: Well, you have to leave by August the 20th,
19 1939. And we went to the -- this Jewish organization, and they gave us
20 tickets, railroad tickets to go to Italy.

21 And from Italy we were supposed to go to Shanghai. And this was
22 just a few days before the war started. The war started September the 1st,
23 right? And we arrived at the border station, which -- between Germany and
24 Italy. And the German border police gave us -- stamped our -- I don't
25 know if we had a passport or if he just had papers. No. He must have had
26 a passport with, probably with the -- probably said "Jew." I don't know
27 if they had it in there already at that point or when we came back. That,
28 I don't remember. But, anyway, he had a visa to go to Shanghai.

1 And the Germans let us go. But the Italians stopped us and said,
2 "No, we don't take any Jews anymore." And the reason was -- my father
3 could understand a little bit. My father spoke several languages, so
4 he could understand. He spoke fluent French and some Italian, and he
5 could understand that they said, well, we don't know whether Italy is
6 going to go with Germany or against Germany at that point. This was,
7 you know, a few days before the war started. So he -- and they stopped
8 us.

9 So we left the train. And we were -- I still see this -- we were --
10 my parents wanted to commit suicide. They wanted to throw themselves in
11 front of the train, because they said: Well, if they send us back to
12 Germany, we'll -- they'll put us into a -- in a concentration -- into a
13 concentration camp again. And then we tried to -- somehow we got away
14 from the station.

15 Now, mind you, this was -- it's called Brenner,
16 which is the border between Germany -- and it is probably about
17 7,000 feet high. And there was snow. And even in August, there was
18 already snow up there. And we tried to walk away from the station,
19 because we thought -- my parents said: Well, maybe we can just walk.
20 I mean, it would have been ridiculous anyway, but we started walking.
21 And all of a sudden, there was three or four Italian -- I guess border
22 police -- and they caught us and brought us right back to the German
23 border police.

24 And they took us back to Berlin. And, first, they put us in -- into
25 prison, but I mean city prison in Berlin. And, coincident, happened
26 one of the Gestapo men was a former friend of my father, back from,
27 from the theatre time. He knew him. And he saw us, and he somehow
28 released us. How, I don't know how he did it. But anyway, that's --

1 As a matter of fact, that man was later on shot by the SA for helping
2 Jews.

3 Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HIS NAME?

4 A: No. Yes! Yes! Sure, I remember. I'm sorry. The name was
5 (Mis rail is). But he was not Jewish. I mean he was -- yes, I remember
6 that. And so then he -- they released us, and we were allowed to rent a
7 one-room apartment. My father continued working for the railroad,
8 continued his job. My mother worked as a maid, helping, you know, for
9 another family. I think it was a family where the husband was Jewish,
10 but the wife was gentile. And under the law, since my mother was
11 apparently over 50 years old, she was allowed to work there as a maid.

12 And I got a job also. This was forced labor, but since I was
13 a mechanic -- at a large -- one of the biggest electrical companies in
14 Berlin, which is called Siemens. They're still a big company over
15 there. Siemens. And I worked there as -- first as a mechanic, and
16 then I supervised some -- there were all Jewish people in our hall there,
17 in our room. I don't know how many. Hundreds of them. And I worked
18 there -- I don't know if you have ever heard, there was a group of people
19 in Berlin called the Baum Group. They did a lot of sabotage and, as
20 a matter of fact, all of them were killed, shot by the Germans. And
21 some of our people and I did this, too, helped them.

22 I was never involved in the actual sabotage, but we would be --
23 go between. We would bring messages and all. So I was very fortunate
24 again. That I -- And I worked there. Eventually, you know, we had
25 to wear a yellow star.

26 Q: WHEN? DO YOU REMEMBER?

27 A: Well, this must have been, okay, '39, probably 1940, I would say,
28 it started. Then we were only allowed to buy food between 4:00 and 5:00

1 in the afternoon. Jews were not allowed -- and there was a reason for
2 it: because the Christian people and all the other people could buy in
3 the morning when there was -- see, there was already a shortage of food,
4 and they could buy food when it came in. The Jews had to go between 4:00
5 and 5:00, and there was hardly anything left or only the leftovers, so
6 that was --

7 And everything was tougher. You couldn't -- I got a so-called
8 passport to go to work. So, you knew exactly, you were allowed to go
9 by streetcar or bus from your place, house, or from your apartment to
10 work and back. That's all. And then I worked there till -- then the --
11 this was 1940, '41. I was still in Berlin. Then the -- well, then the
12 bombing started in Berlin. And we were allowed to go in our apartment
13 house into a shelter, but the Jews were on one side and the Christian
14 people were on the other. We are not allowed to be together with them,
15 but we were allowed to go in the shelter. I think it was more they were
16 afraid we might use a flashlight or (laughing) -- anyway, and then it
17 started, gradually, that people would be deported. We would hear about it.

18 I was engaged to a girl in Berlin at the time. She was deported in
19 19-- I think '41. Yeah. Must have been then. And --

20 Q: WHAT WAS HER NAME?

21 A: Olgasinski. Lottie Olgasinski. As a matter of fact, years
22 ago, I tried to find out if she was still alive. I even wrote to all
23 the different agencies. Never heard of her. I know she was deported
24 to -- at the time I think Poland somewhere.

25 But, now, you would -- in these days, you would get a notice from
26 the Gestapo. The notice, it was a postcard. And this postcard was actually
27 sent by the -- from the Jewish organizations. There was -- the Gestapo
28 would not call the Jews to be deported. They would let the Jewish

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1 organization, which was at a -- at the -- well, it was -- the street was
2 called (roza hum bowl ta stra za). I think that's where the
3 organization was for all the Jews in Berlin. Like a central Jewish
4 agency. And they had the files of all the Jews, and they would pull out
5 so many cards for the next transport. And I had a friend there. And
6 she called -- "called" me -- she talked to me three times, and she said,
7 "Listen, your parents are now on that list," and she would always take
8 that card and put it in the back, so that my parents wouldn't be
9 deported.

10 I was, basically, at that point pretty secure. The job I had was
11 called -- they called it -- it was an important job, because
12 it was for war production. So they needed us at that point. So I was
13 not -- I was not in any danger. But my parents were.

14 So then one day, apparently, she was -- either she was deported --
15 I don't remember what happened to this girl, and we got the -- we got
16 the postcard that my parents should be ready for deportation.

17 Q: WHEN?

18 A: That was on October -- I know exactly. October the 13th, 1942.
19 I was that long in Berlin. And I didn't even have to go then. It was
20 a matter of -- I went to the -- at this factory where I worked, you know,
21 Siemens, and talked to the manager and said, "Listen, my parents
22 have to leave. I want to go with them." So I went with them.

23 So we were deported on October the 19th, 1942.

24 Q: WHAT DID YOU DO IN THAT WEEK?

25 A: Well, we had -- we had this one-room apartment. I still see us --
26 everybody -- see, several Jews lived in one apartment together. They
27 would all put them in one apartment. And we were the last ones in that
28 apartment. There were three other families, and they were already

1 deported. So, actually, the strange thing about it is that we were
2 told that we are being transferred to a work -- to a labor camp, and
3 that we will -- if we work, we will get food, and everything will be
4 okay. This was what we were told by all kinds of other people, and --
5 So, basically, those last few days, I remember, we were just thinking
6 what to take along. I mean we had -- we didn't have very much anymore,
7 but we took a few blankets, and I still see my mother making a big, like
8 an afghan, you know, out of a blanket, so that she could -- because we
9 didn't know where we are going, but she figured one should have warm
10 clothes. Especially, it was in October, you know, so -- so this was
11 probably most -- we didn't have --

12 See, what -- we were -- from our family, we were the last ones.
13 Everybody else was deported. Or some of them -- one uncle lived in
14 Israel, and we -- we were in touch with him. But we couldn't get out
15 anymore. There was no way. So I am quite sure mostly we talked about
16 what to take along. I mean that's probably -- But I mean, look, it's
17 very hard to, you know, to remember exactly what we did. But it was
18 very -- it wasn't, naturally, it wasn't easy. But I -- but we wanted
19 to stay together. That was the main thing.

20 Q: AND THEN -- GO ON, HARRY, WHAT --

21 A: Well, then we were picked up by two Gestapo men. It was -- I
22 remember it was about, probably, 5:00 or 6:00 in the afternoon. And
23 they were very polite, just said, "Here's a card," and, "You have to
24 leave now." And at the corner there was a big truck, and there were
25 about, I don't know, 10, 15 people on that truck, covered. And they
26 put us on that truck and took us to a synagogue. It was called --

27 That was the -- in Berlin, they would bring all the people to
28 that synagogue. And from there, they would put us on the trains to leave.

1 But we had to stay at that synagogue for about two or three days.
2 Yeah, that's right, because this was on the 16th we were picked up,
3 and we stayed till the 19th. And on the 19th they put us on the train,
4 and we left. I think it was called -- well -- the synagogue,
5 (Rik ten straz za), whatever it was, the name of the street.

6 Q: WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE IN THE SYNAGOGUE?

7 A: Well, it was -- first of all, they -- you had to go -- when you
8 entered, the first thing, they were -- they would take everything you had
9 away, except one suitcase. You were allowed to keep a suitcase up to
10 40 -- 40 -- no, 20 kilograms, or about 40 pounds, I think. That's if
11 I remember it. And -- but you were not allowed to keep a belt. They
12 would take a belt away from you. You were not allowed to keep a pencil
13 or pen. In those days they had the -- not a ballpoint; they didn't have
14 this yet -- you know, a regular pen. All kinds of things.

15 You see, the Jews in those days didn't have much anymore, because
16 we had to give up our radios before, already, all silver and gold. This
17 was few years before that, already, when one of the Nazis was killed,
18 and we had to -- I think it was the one in France, but I'm not sure now
19 exactly when it happened. So we had to take everything down to a certain
20 point. And if somebody had a fur coat, they had to bring the fur coat
21 in. If they had, like I say, silver. All jewelry. So we didn't really
22 have anything. We, personally, didn't have much anyway, but there were
23 some people who were rich. And they had to take everything down there,
24 too. So whatever was left, they still would take certain things away
25 from us. And we would get very little food. In those three days they
26 never turned the lights off. We were all sleeping. They had taken all
27 the -- I think all the benches out, so it was one big room, and we would
28 all sleep on the floor.

1 And then they took us to a train station, which is not far from
2 there. And I mean it -- probably not more than a mile or so. They would
3 march us over and -- and put us on those trains. Now, in my case, they
4 were regular -- a regular train. But we were, in our compartment, about,
5 oh, I would say 20 people. So the older people, like, I mean my parents,
6 and there were some others, they would sit on the benches, but we would --
7 the younger ones, we would all sit on the floor. But we were not allowed
8 to go to the outside, and the windows were all covered up with wooden --
9 I guess they nailed plywood or whatever against it so that we couldn't
10 look out.

11 But still, I mean, we didn't know where we were going. And then
12 we -- the train left, and I still remember they gave us each a piece of
13 bread. That was still in the synagogue. We had to take that along,
14 a piece of bread which was -- I mean a very small piece of bread. And
15 nothing else, just bread and not even water. I remember that, because,
16 why I remember it: About a day later they stopped somewhere, and they
17 screamed -- always dirty language, naturally -- "goddamn pig Jews" and
18 all. And some of them had to run out. There were -- apparently, there
19 was a well, water well, and they brought some water in buckets. By the
20 way, we didn't have any toilets there. We had to go -- there was a bucket.
21 And, apparently, some of -- and that was the first time that I saw
22 somebody getting shot. Because one or two of these people who were
23 supposed to get water -- whether -- what happened, I don't know whether
24 they weren't fast enough or what. Anyway, they killed them right there.
25 That -- I still remember. That was the first time that I saw anybody
26 getting shot. So, naturally -- and the reason why I could see it: In our
27 compartment there were two girls and another boy about my age or maybe a
28 little older, and, naturally, young people, we wanted to see what was

1 going on. So one of them -- I don't know whether the girls or one of the
2 boys -- had a knife. Somehow, he smuggled it in. And I still see us
3 working on that wooden cover and carve out a little hole so that we could
4 look out. And that's how I remember that.

0948 5 I think it took three or four days on that train. And we arrived
6 at a -- naturally, we didn't know where, but we arrived at a railroad
7 station. And it was called Skirotava. Nobody ever heard of a
8 Skirotava, or Skirotava, except somebody, apparently,
9 had been in Latvia before, and he says, "Oh, this must be -- this is
10 Latvia." So when we stopped all of a sudden there was screaming going
11 on, you know. We saw -- all the doors opened, and now all these --
12 mostly Latvian SS, I mean SS troops -- they were standing there with guns.
13 And every one of them had almost like baseball bats, you know, long,
14 round sticks. And they would scream in Latvian. And, naturally, nobody
15 understood. But we knew what to do, you know, jump out. And, naturally,
16 for the older people, they would just pull them out and throw them on
17 the ground.

18 So that was how we arrived in Latvia. And then, all of a sudden,
19 several cars arrived, and trucks, and the German Gestapo -- German
20 storm troopers, SS men, all in uniforms. And they, naturally, screamed,
21 all dirty language, and hit us, kicked us, and said, "All the men on one
22 side and the women on the other side." Oh, and then we had to -- the
23 young people had to go back to the train and clean the train up. So
24 we had to clean all this. And I was -- my mother was with the women on
25 one side, and my father and I were -- stood together.

26 And then they were starting to load all the women on those trucks.
27 And my father and I were standing there, and, all of a sudden, a --
28 an SS man -- later on I found out -- as a matter of fact, I have all

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1 the names of all these people anyway -- a Dr. Langer, who was one of
2 the -- later on we called him the Butcher of Riga; he was well known.
3 He and a couple other guys with big dogs -- naturally, they were always
4 running around with big dogs. And he called, in German, "Any auto
5 mechanics. I need auto mechanics." So a lot of people walked up,
6 naturally. And I didn't want to go. I said -- my father said, "Listen,
7 don't be stupid. Why don't you raise your hand? Then you have a job
8 already." You see, this was always -- we all felt as long as you have
9 a job, you're okay. So I said, "No. I don't want to leave you here."
10 And he said, "Come on, now. Go." And I had one of those satchels
11 hanging here with some stuff, whatever I had, and I gave it to him to
12 hold, and I went, and I raised my hand.

13 We were, about, I don't know about how many people. And there
14 were older people and younger ones. And this Dr. Langer said -- looked
15 around, looked at us, and he said, "You, you, and you." The three
16 youngest, he pulled out, and all the other ones he sent back.

17 Any then my -- then my parents -- my father was also -- they put all
18 the people on trucks. And they were killed the first day, right then,
19 in a forest not too far. And the reason why I know it is that same
20 evening, when I was at this -- when they took me to the garage where I
21 worked, then from then on. They brought the clothes over. There was a
22 big building, and they would collect all the clothes of the people, of
23 the killed people, for the German -- for the families of the soldiers and
24 SS men, and the whole Gestapo in Riga. And all the clothes would go to
25 their families. And the Jews had to -- some people were in charge of
26 that -- to clean those. And I saw -- I saw my -- not only my parents'
27 clothes, but also pictures at the time we had, my father had with him,
28 and the -- And then, later on, I talked to one of the drivers, because,

1 like I say, then I'll tell you that later. I worked as an auto mechanic
2 there, you know, and he told me, "Yeah. That transport" -- we were about
3 a thousand people in our -- about. And he told us, "Sure. They were all
4 shot." So they all -- some were buried in -- I mean we know the area,
5 because later on a couple times we had to go into that area, and we saw
6 these mass graves. We didn't -- we could see that something happened
7 there. It was all covered up, but I remember that. So that -- at least
8 they didn't -- you know, this went pretty fast, I'm quite sure. But I
9 was -- that was the end for them. So then I worked as an auto mechanic
10 there. There were --

11 Q: AND --

12 A: I'm sorry.

13 Q: SO, HARRY, ONLY TWO OF YOU WERE --

14 A: Three.

15 Q: THREE OF YOU.

16 A: Yes.

17 Q: ONLY THREE OF YOU LIVED?

18 A: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. I even remember their names. There was
19 (Koh nik er) and (Kar min). Those were the two. But as far as -- I heard
20 later on that they didn't survive either. But I'm not sure about that.

21 And then -- then they took me to this workshop, auto -- this auto
22 repair shop. They were in charge of all the Gestapo cars and trucks for
23 the whole area there. And that's really what saved me. My first job
24 was -- I don't know if you ever -- the reason -- I'll be very frank with
25 you. The reason why I wanted to -- when I heard about this, this
26 interview, the reason why I wanted to talk about it is because very
27 little is known about the Riga area. Everybody is talking about
28 Auschwitz, and Birkenau, and Theresienstadt, and all the well
known -- but Riga is not that well known. And yet, I remember they --
number one, they killed 30, 000 Latvian Jews in practically one day.

1 in order to make room for the German Jews, or other -- German, Austrian,
2 and Czechoslovakian Jews.

3 Q: HOW WERE THEY KILLED?

4 A: Part of it -- part of them were shot, right then and there.
5 Because when the first group of German Jews -- matter of fact, my wife --
6 I met my wife in Riga. And when she arrived, she came from west Germany.
7 When she arrived, there were still in some of the houses in the -- she
8 went to the ghetto. I was only a very short time in the ghetto. There
9 was a big ghetto in Riga. There was a Latvian ghetto, and a German
10 ghetto. And when she arrived, there was still -- there was still food
11 on the table where they had -- where they shot them, and then they just
12 carried them out, or whatever.

13 The majority, I think, were shot. But then some of them probably
14 were taken -- maybe they were taken to Auschwitz. I don't know. That,
15 I couldn't -- I don't know. But when they moved -- when the first
16 German Jews arrived there, there was -- everything was still the way
17 these people left. And the -- like I said, the Latvian Jews -- there
18 was about 20,000 of them -- were killed. And then the German Jews,
19 and Austrian, and -- they were -- lot of them died of starvation. Some
20 were -- in the ghetto they had a gallows. We watched them several times
21 to hang people. Some of them died in other, so-called work camps. They
22 were -- some of them were by the army, and some of them belonged to
23 the Gestapo. Some of them were deported -- rather, not deported, but
24 transferred from the Riga ghetto to other areas. There was -- one was
25 called Stutthof. One was called West -- there was a women's
26 camp in Germany. They brought them back. And they died there. And,
27 you know, I mean, there was -- but there are very few survivors of
28 the Riga area.

1 There's a -- I belong to an organization in New York. It's called
2 Survivors of the Riga Camp or Riga Ghetto. And we are now about, not
3 more than 250. Probably all together there were about 800 --800 or 1,000
4 survivors. I think that's all. From all -- and I would say, all
5 together, Latvian and German and Austrian Jews, maybe 40,000, 50,000
6 were there, and that's all that's left. And that's why it's not really
7 well known, because there's -- I understand -- I have a picture with me
8 of the entrance of the ghetto. I brought that along in case you're
9 interested. And I also have a picture of myself, which was -- they
10 took pictures of everybody, and when the Russians took over Riga, we had
11 to leave, together with the German army, and they -- and I broke into the
12 office and stole some pictures, and mine -- I found mine, too. So I have
13 that at least, which I thought was, you know -- because so many, as you
14 know, so many people say well, this never happened. So I can vouch for
15 it. It happened.

16 Q: GOOD.

17 A: It sure did. Well -- oh, I'm sorry.

18 Q: I WAS JUST GOING TO ASK YOU, BECAUSE I REALLY DON'T KNOW ANYTHING
19 ABOUT RIGA --

20 A: That's right. Very few people, really.

21 Q: -- CAN YOU DESCRIBE IT?

22 A: Yes. Oh, yeah. Sure. Okay. Number one, the most important
23 thing was that people worked. As long as you worked, you would survive,
24 or, rather, you felt you would survive. They killed a lot of people in
25 between, for all kinds of reasons.

26 I mean I remember one of my very good friends -- you were not allowed
27 to shave, because you were not allowed to have a razor blade. But if
28 you -- if you were caught that you grew a little bit of a beard, they

1 would either give you 25 lashes, or -- it all depends how -- how the --
2 this particular SS man, you know, this guy, how he felt -- or he would
3 shoot you. It sounds dramatic, and it sounds like I'm making this up,
4 but that's how it was.

5 For -- you never knew. You know, people say you live from day to
6 day, right? That's -- over there, you live from one minute to the other,
7 because you didn't really know what's going to happen in the next minute.
8 And if you -- whatever -- whatever -- if you didn't make a mistake. And
9 that was it. So it was -- I lived for a short time in the ghetto. That
10 was from around December 1942 till May '44.

11 Q: WHEN DID YOU FIRST ARRIVE IN RIGA?

12 A: I arrived in Riga on the 23rd of October, nineteen forty-- oh, wait
13 a second. You are right. Wait a second. No. That's true. 1942.
14 October 1942. In December I went to the ghetto. I -- yeah.

15 Q: I'M SORRY. WHERE DID YOU LIVE FROM OCTOBER TO --

16 A: In this particular automobile repair shop. We were about 29 auto
17 mechanics there. Jewish auto mechanics. And the -- naturally. in
18 charge was what they call the title of these SS men.
19 They are very -- they were not very high-ranked people. He was a -- a
20 Schaffführer. Now, a Schaffführer, I don't even think -- might be a
21 corporal, but maybe even less than a corporal. His name was Michelson.
22 He was in charge of the repair shop. And we had all the well known
23 people over there. I mean even Eichmann was at our repair shop at one
24 time, when he was in Riga.

25 I don't know if you ever read the book by Forsyth,
26 Odessa File?

27 Q: YES. I DID.

28 A: Okay. There is an article about Riga, about our camp. That's one

1 of the few books written -- part of it in there. There's a man named
2 Roschmann. He -- I remember hundreds of times working on his car.
3 Well, like I say, I have a whole list of these people, and they are all
4 well known. Some of them committed suicide. Some of them got caught.
5 Some of them are still around. Matter of fact, right now I think one
6 of them is being tried in, I think in -- somewhere here in the States.
7 So it's -- some of them are still around.

8 Q: WHO?

9 A: The -- there's a man named -- a Latvian -- the German
10 title -- I mean his rank was an Obersturmführer, which is one
11 of the real high officials. His name was spelled A-R-A-I-S, Arais.
12 He was well known. Real miserable SOB. And I understand that they never
13 caught him. And -- and like I say, I have a list there of all kinds of
14 people. And a man named Weederman. A man named -- this Dr. Langer,
15 I think he was the one who -- basically, I'm alive today on account of
16 him. But he was a real miserable man. A man named Sherwitz,
17 who was -- later he was -- when he was pretty high official in Paris
18 under the occupation. So I mean I have several of them, and this --
19 the Survivors of the Riga Ghetto, this organization in New York, they
20 are always looking for these people. And we got -- some of them got
21 caught. Some of them went back to Germany, and nobody bothered with
22 them, you know, and -- so, anyway, that's --

23 Q: SO YOU SPENT OCTOBER TO DECEMBER, YOU LIVED IN THE AUTOMOTIVE
24 BUILDING?

25 A: Right.

26 Q: AND THEN WHY -- WHY WERE YOU TRANSFERRED TO THE GHETTO? DO YOU KNOW?

27 A: Okay. I wanted to better my conditions. This was -- you know,
28 when you are young, you're adventurous, naturally. Even with what was

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1 going on there. So I decided I'd like to -- everybody told me how many
2 people are in the ghetto, so I -- also, I wanted to see if there are
3 some people I knew. Matter of fact, I met several from Berlin, and I
4 wanted to see these people again, if there was a chance. So I told
5 this -- the man who was in charge of our repair shop, this SS man, I
6 said, "I don't feel so good. I have . . ." I don't know. Some pain
7 or whatever. And there was a doctor in the ghetto, a Jewish doctor,
8 Dr. Alfa Weiss. Matter of fact, I even have a picture of him.
9 I stole that, too, at the time. And a couple of -- I understand -- I
10 remember there was a Latvian doctor, and -- yeah, and two surgeons from
11 Germany. But they all got killed, except this one Latvian doctor. He
12 survived, but he died a few years ago in Los Angeles. But most of the
13 doctors were killed later on or died, you know. So I wanted to go to
14 a doctor; that's what I told him. And, naturally, you couldn't just go.
15 So I had to wait till one of the trucks to be repaired/would go to the ghetto.

16 See, they had trucks going every day, because some people worked
17 in the ghetto, some people worked outside; so there was a constant
18 movement going on because, after all, there was a war going on. And
19 you know, so -- so I went to the ghetto and went to the doctor. And the
20 doctor said, "Yes. Yes. You have a --" I think I faked it -- gall
21 bladder, you know, something. So, yeah, "You stay for a short while."
22 And they gave me a room in one of the houses in the ghetto.

23 Now, the ghetto is part of the city. They had a fence around,
24 and you had two entrances: One, there was a main street, and you would
25 have to get into the ghetto through those gates. They had a ghetto
26 police, which was Jewish. The man in charge -- I mean the Gestapo --
27 they had, naturally -- I mean they had a beautiful building there. They
28 lived there, in the ghetto. But, basically, everything was handled by

1 a -- by Jewish police. Now, naturally, some of them were very nice;
2 some of them were miserable, because they figured it would be to their
3 advantage. So we had both, which is normal. Everybody wants to survive.

4 And that's where I met my wife, by coincidence. She was in the
5 building, and I went over there one day and started talking to her.
6 She was already -- no hair, you know, and I -- we just once in a while
7 would see each other and talk to each other.

8 And then I got caught coming back from a job. Then, finally, I was
9 still staying at the ghetto -- in the ghetto, but I felt better. And I
10 got a job by -- but staying in the ghetto. But I would go out every
11 day to this particular job. And --

12 Q: WAS THIS A NEW JOB?

13 A: Different kind of job. But it was, also, as a mechanic. And the --
14 then -- let's see. What happened there? Yeah. Coming back one day --
15 see, we had very very little food. I mean there was -- we would try
16 anything to get food, because what you got in the ghetto was, usually,
17 it was when you came home from work. I mean, first of all, in the
18 morning you had to -- there was a huge area, and you had to -- everybody
19 had to stand, and then they would select the people for the job. And
20 then at -- when you came home, you would get either a couple of slices
21 of bread and a soup -- this was usually what they would provide.

22 And there were women in the ghetto, Jewish women. They would cook
23 this for the people. But you couldn't survive on that. There was no
24 way. I mean in the beginning, where people didn't have anything, that's
25 how they died. The older people.

26 There were very few children. Most children were killed, because
27 they didn't want children there. A few survived, but so few it's
28 unbelievable. I don't think there are more than maybe 15 or 20 children.

1 I don't think there were more than that survived.

2 So you would get this -- you -- the way to survive was that you would
3 try to steal something on your job. And then you would take a chance
4 during the night, climb over the fence or what, and deal with some of
5 the Latvian people. Now, that's how a lot of our people got killed,
6 by this nightly trading. But everybody -- I don't want to say everybody,
7 but the majority of younger people definitely took chances, because what
8 else could you do? You weren't sure whether you'd survive anyway, so
9 you might as well get something. So you would see if you could -- let's
10 say one of the favorite things was a roll of yarn. Now, you would --
11 if you had a job somewhere where you could -- an army job or what, where
12 you could get into the office somewhere or wherever, and you found some
13 yarn, you would get maybe a half a loaf of bread for a roll of yarn.

14 That was fantastic!

15 So anyway, I got caught once bringing some -- I had a loaf of bread,
16 and I had a certain vegetable. I forget that, what it was. We don't
17 have it here anyway. It's like a --

18 Q: TURNIP? RUTABAGA?

19 A: Well, similar to it. And a couple of potatoes. And I got this for
20 whatever I traded it for. And I brought it in, and I was caught by --
21 coming into the ghetto. See, you had to march up. There was a long road
22 and the truck -- they brought you back by truck from your job. But they
23 would leave you up front, and you would have to walk into the ghetto.
24 Those trucks wouldn't go into the ghetto. And on one side was a Gestapo
25 hospital. And those people, somehow they would always be at the window
26 in the evening, the wounded soldiers. And, naturally, they hated the
27 Jews. And would they/always make remarks and scream, and, you know. And we
28 were three people coming from our truck and walked up there, and the --

1 they were screaming and saying, "Hey, they got all kinds of food with
2 them." They didn't know, but -- so the police at the gate stopped us,
3 and we had to empty all our pockets. And, naturally, they found this
4 bread. And so they put me in -- we had a jail in the ghetto. And then
5 I was caught.

6 They brought me over to this commander of the ghetto, this (Rosh man).
7 He was the commander. And he said, "Well, shoot him." And -- but they
8 wouldn't shoot you right away, because they wanted, first of all, to
9 inter-- to talk to you, because they wanted to find out if you would --
10 maybe there would be some deals; you would say: Okay. If you don't
11 shoot me, I'll inform -- some other people, or --

12 So they put me in jail for three days. No food. Nothing. Nothing.
13 And brought me up to Roschmann again, to this commander. And he
14 started talking to me, and he said, "Oh, I know you, don't I?" So I
15 said, "Well, yes. I worked on your car many times." "Oh, yeah. I know
16 you. Sure, Juden" -- Jew, you know -- "Levison." But at that point my
17 name was still Levison. So he said, "Well, humm. Okay. You get 25 lashes."
18 And I had told him that I worked before at the repair shop, and he says,
19 "You go back to Michelson," which was the commander. "I don't want
20 to see you again in the ghetto." So then I got 25 lashes, which is not
21 fun, believe me, is no fun. But it was better than being shot.

22 Then I went back to that repair shop and worked there. Oh, there
23 are so many -- it's almost impossible to talk about all these little
24 things. I mean one day -- you know, this day by day.

25 I got pneumonia once. I really got sick. And they wanted to take
26 us from our place to -- this was a famous camp where they killed most
27 of the people. They were -- it's called Salaspils, which is in Riga.
28 Famous area. I mean a famous area. I mean if you talk to somebody who

1 survived, that area was unbelievable. I mean hardly anybody. And I
2 had -- I was very sick. And they took me there, because they appar-
3 ently wanted to get rid of me, or whatever happened --
4 wanted to do. And I had to march about 25 kilometers with some other
5 people. And I was there for several weeks. That was one of those
6 camps where they had people walking around with chains, and they had
7 to bury the other people. And this was your job there, you know, to
8 take care of the -- to bury the people who died or were shot or what.
9 And I survived that. See, when you're young -- it's -- when I look
10 back today, it's -- I always say it's amazing, but, really, when you
11 are young, you have a tremendous amount of resilience, and so --

12 Q: TELL ME ABOUT THAT CAMP THOUGH. WHAT DID YOU DO THERE?

13 A: Where?

14 Q: NOT AT RIGA, BUT AT --

15 A: You mean Salaspils?

16 Q: YEAH.

17 A: Okay. When we arrived there, it was half empty. There was still
18 some women on one side, and there were very few people there. We
19 never found out why they took us there. We didn't have a job at all.
20 We were practically, day and night, just no -- there was hardly any
21 food at all. We were just lying there and doing nothing, but -- and
22 the -- the only thing was, one day, one of the -- one of the people
23 got killed. And we buried him. But that was the only person in that
24 camp I ever had to, to bury. Well, at that particular -- I mean
25 another camp was different, but at that camp -- so I -- at that point
26 I didn't have too much -- there wasn't for me personally, there
27 wasn't -- I didn't have anything to do with that. But some of our
28 other people that I remember -- well, and then I -- then -- what

1 happened then -- well, Riga was taken over by the Russians.

2 Oh, there was another thing what happened to me. One day --
3 we had a -- in a different kind of a -- there was a different workshop.
4 It was called "Lenta," L-e-n-t-a. And the commander of that workshop --
5 the automotive -- I mean auto repair shop, his name was (Ap' er).
6 He came from western Germany or somewhere. And he was constantly
7 drunk.

8 That's another thing. You see, these people, most of the time
9 were drunk, because they gave them -- there wasn't much food, not
10 even for the Germans, but plenty to drink. So they always -- they
11 were hardly ever sober. And so one day -- and they tried -- they
12 wanted to make all kinds of jokes with their Jews. See they called
13 us "their Jews." We were always -- in German it's "mein Juda" --
14 "my Jew." That's how they talked about us. Because, basically, we
15 were the ones who saved them from going to the front lines against
16 the Russians. They wanted to keep us. That was their way to survive;
17 otherwise, they would have been fighting the Russians. So that was
18 a very important -- "my Jew" was very important.

19 So one day he was drunk, and they were playing around -- they
20 were always shooting and always -- and why it started, I don't remem-
21 ber. They decided we have -- we want to put the Jews in a coffin and
22 close it up and see how long it takes till they knock at the -- at
23 the lid that they can't survive. So they put me in a coffin, and
24 I was -- I don't know how long, five or ten minutes, but it's a scary
25 thing. You know, you don't know if you're going to open it. And you
26 can't have any air in there. And then they open it up, and they,
27 "ha-ha-ha," you know. Big -- was fun. I mean that's the kind of
28 people they were.

1 So we had all these little -- the only reason why I bring it
2 up is these were the little things which were -- from one minute to
3 the other, you never knew what's going to happen. And they, again,
4 they were -- all of a sudden they would be very nice to you for --
5 they would say -- oh, yeah, you know, "Here. I just got a sandwich.
6 Here. Eat it." If you -- let's say I repaired a job. I did a good
7 job. They would all of a sudden -- I mean these things.

8 Q: TELL ME MORE INCIDENCES YOU KNOW.

9 A: Okay. Well, for instance, in the ghetto one of the big things,
10 right, like I told you, you had to stand in line in the morning to
11 get your job assignment. And it was a huge area. And there, in the
12 middle of it, was the prison. It was called -- well, Tin Plaza.
13 In German it's Blech Platz, which is really, yeah, Tin Plaza.
14 And behind there was a gallow. So many times, say somebody did
15 something, ran away, or was caught stealing, was caught -- whatever
16 reason. In most cases you would get either your lashes, and they
17 would put you in jail; or if it was a more serious thing, I mean like
18 running away or something like this, they would hang you. And that
19 was right behind there. And in the morning -- usually, they would
20 hang people in the evening, and they would hang there all night.
21 And then in the morning, when you all came out, then you saw them
22 hanging there. This was in the ghetto. This happened several times,
23 I mean. What else can I think of?

24 Like I said, I mean people would -- Oh, we were in that workshop
25 I told you, the first one where I was. They had a Latvian foreman.
26 His name was -- in German it's (Pater), Peter. And every time you
27 did something wrong -- now, something wrong could be you were supposed
28 to put a couple of screws into a certain part and you didn't; for

1 whatever reason, you didn't do it right, the foreman of the repair
2 shop, this Michelson, could call the -- this Latvian guy, Peter,
3 and would say -- in German it's only "rauf" -- means "upstairs,"
4 because upstairs they had like a loft above there. And you would get
5 beat. The guy was a powerful -- he was actually a former prisoner --
6 I mean for whatever crime he committed -- murder or whatever. And
7 this guy was absolutely a sadist. So you would get -- he would take
8 a -- he had a leather strap -- I still see this -- about this wide.
9 That long. And he would put it in water. And when you get hit by
10 a strap, a leather strap which is wet, it hurts ten times as much,
11 and what happens is that immediately you would start bleeding.

12 So he would hit you -- and depend what your crime was, you know.
13 So sometimes you would get only five or ten or whatever. And the bad
14 part about it was that you had to take your pants off, and he would
15 hit you, so that he could hit you between your legs. And he was good
16 at it. And I -- this is one of -- I mean, I don't know if I want to
17 talk about this. I suffered from that very much. I got cancer from
18 it. It was -- my doctors found that that was the reason, because I
19 got beaten so much at the time, and certain parts. But that's --
20 that's -- Well, no. I don't want to talk more about that.

21 Q: OKAY.

22 A: So I mean, then -- now Riga was taken over by the Russians. And the
23 Gestapo would take us to Lithuania.

24 Q: YEAH . WHEN WAS THIS, HARRY? TELL ME.

25 A: Okay. This was in nineteen-forty -- must have been '44.

26 Q: Did you sense that --

27 A: '43 or --

28 Q: -- sense that the Russians were coming?

1 A: Oh, we knew. Absolutely. Oh, yes, because -- see, maybe not every-
2 body, but in our workshop, when we saw these trucks coming back from
3 the front lines, and we had to repair them --

4 By the way, that's another thing I forgot about. One of my jobs
5 was -- I don't know if you ever heard of that -- we built trucks --
6 and they were closed like a van, and we would put steel plates on the
7 inside, cover them. And they would put benches inside. We had to
8 build all those. And then we had -- we built a contraption from the
9 exhaust pipe which would go from both sides, would go into the van
10 on the back, which was completely enclosed. And a lot of people would
11 get killed this way. There was a lever up front where the driver was,
12 and they could change it so that instead of, you know, that the
13 exhaust fumes wouldn't go outside, and they would go inside. And I
14 know several people who were -- they would just drive them from one
15 area to another, and by the time they would -- and they would be
16 killed. I built three of those trucks.

17 And, naturally, we -- see, the -- you know, there was something
18 very interesting what they did. For instance, if they would -- say,
19 let's say you did something wrong. Now this happened many times.
20 They wouldn't kill you; they would say, "Now you name one or two or
21 five people who should be killed," which was -- in a way was worse
22 than anything else, because so many of these people, I mean, were
23 really your good friends. And sometimes, you know, they -- they would
24 do this. Which was another way of sadism, you know, that you, your-
25 self, wouldn't get killed, but you name this guy or that guy, and you
26 had to do that. Now, I don't know if this happened in other areas,
27 but it sure happened in Riga.

28 Q: HARRY, WILL YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE LAYOUT OF RIGA?

YOU SAID THERE WAS THE CITY WITH THE JEWISH SECTION.

A: Can I show you one picture?

Q: YEAH. THAT WOULD BE GOOD.

A: I brought it along because this was --

Q: WE WILL -- AT THE END, WE WILL TAKE A PICTURE OF ALL YOUR PICTURES.

A: Oh, I see. Okay. Yeah.

Q: AND THEN WE WILL PUT IT IN AN APPROPRIATE PLACE.

A: See, this is the picture I was talking about.

(Showing picture of himself as a young man.)

Q: OH, YEAH.

A: See, I wrote this down. In 19-- in '44 I stole this, so we were still in Riga in the beginning of 1944. And I brought a picture along, if you can use it.

Q: YES. ABSOLUTELY.

A: I've made a copy of it, you know, because this, I want to, naturally, keep.

Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY. YOUR IDEA IS GOOD. AT THE END OF THE TAPE WE'LL SET UP A LITTLE EASEL AND --

A: Then I'll show you those later on. But this would be the ghetto.

Q: (BY MR. GRANT) FEEL FREE TO REFER TO ANY OF THOSE AS YOU GO ALONG. THAT'S FINE, TOO.

A: Okay. Now, see, I mean it's a typical --

(Showing picture of a street.)

(Showing a second picture of a street.)

Now, you can't read it, but it says on that sign here, both in German and in Latvian, that you get shot if you go over the fence there, see.

Q: (BY MS. FEIBELMAN) GOOD. SAVE THESE.

A: Yeah.

Q: AND --

A: See, now here's a group of people going to work. See? Now it --

(Showing picture of a line of people in a street.)

1 when you look at it, it's -- it could be -- it looks all very, very
2 pleasant, you know. I mean it doesn't -- and yet it -- it's so hard
3 to explain that a whole group of people walk through the city, and
4 the people there, they were not very nice, believe me, the Latvians.
5 I mean I know that Latvia is so much in the news right now, but as
6 far as I'm concerned, I have no sympathy for the Latvian people,
7 because they were not -- not just a few -- by the hundreds. Some of
8 them were much worse than the Germans were, because they wanted to
9 prove to the Germans, you know, how loyal they are. So it's -- I
10 have no sympathy.

11 Q: LIKE WHAT DID THEY DO?

12 A: They spat at you. You know, I mean they couldn't get too close to
13 you. The only time they would really be interested in talking to you,
14 if they could -- spoke German. A lot of Latvians speak German and Russian,
15 because, because they were close to Germany and to Russia. You know
16 Russia occupied it in those days already at one time. And they are --
17 the only time they would talk to you would be if you had something to
18 trade where they would get something for it. You know, that was the
19 thing. Otherwise, they were really -- and they wouldn't -- very few
20 would help the Latvian Jews. There were some, naturally. I mean I
21 don't want to say nobody. I'm quite sure there were. But they knew
22 quite a bit about it. They knew what happened to the Latvian Jews.
23 And I don't remember in all these years there that I met a Latvian --
24 there were -- there were some German people in the army, for instance.
25 They were not as bad as the Gestapo people, you know, in the German
26 army. In the army, you see, there was always a difference. Some of
27 them were bastards. But, I mean, there were some nice ones. At least
28 when I say "nice," they weren't kicking you. But the Latvians, they --

1 you could see the hatred of Jews. That's why I say when they're
2 talking about today and the -- what's going on with Russia and --
3 they don't deserve anything better. Really not. But that's my
4 opinion. I may be wrong. Right?

5 Q: BUT IT'S YOUR OPINION.

6 A: That's my opinion.

7 Q: HARRY, CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT -- I'M TRYING TO GET A PICTURE OF --

8 A: If I talk too much, don't --

9 Q: NO. IF I TALK TOO MUCH YOU CAN SHUT ME UP.

10 A: No. I mean I'm --

11 Q: THERE'S THE TOWN OF RIGA. AND THEN THERE'S THE GHETTO INSIDE THE
12 TOWN AND THEN THE AREA WHERE YOU WERE WORKING IN THE AUTOMOTIVE SHOP,
13 AND HAD TO LIVE THERE, WAS THAT IN THE TOWN OR --

14 A: Yeah. That was inside the town but surrounded by barbed wire.

15 Q: INSIDE THE GHETTO OR THE TOWN?

16 A: No, no, no. Like I said, I was in the ghetto only those few months.
17 Otherwise, most of the time -- no, all the time, as long as I was in
18 Riga, I was in one of those -- it was more or less like a building
19 where we slept. There was a three -- two-story building surrounded
20 by, by barbed wire. And they had a guard at the gate. Just like you
21 would take a, a big house in our area here, and let's say a house
22 about 10, 15 rooms -- that type of a house -- and they would -- we
23 would have these -- excuse me -- double beds, which we built ourselves.
24 You have seen them. It's typical for all -- just like in the ghetto
25 we had that. You didn't have any real beds. You would take -- you
26 would put straw into a -- like a potato sack, you know, that kind of
27 material. And you slept on that and -- but there was the same in the
28 ghetto, all around. We would build them ourselves, and they were

1 always two -- a double -- like a double bed, you know, up and down.

2 But I was surrounded by barbed wire all through the garage where
3 I worked. And they would take you over the -- one of the Gestapo men
4 would take you over in the morning. We had to start around, oh, most
5 of the time 6:00, 6:30 or so and work till it got dark.

6 Q: AND WERE THERE SEVERAL, IN RIGA, YOU KNOW, THERE WERE THE JEWS THAT
7 LIVED IN THE GHETTO, AND THEN THERE WERE THE JEWS THAT LIVED IN
8 BUILDINGS THE WAY YOU DID. WERE THERE SEVERAL BUILDINGS LIKE THAT?

9 A: The thing is this: There weren't too many Latvian Jews left. See,
10 like I say, the majority was killed. There were very few left in the
11 Latvian ghetto, very few, and it was very small by that time. I don't
12 know how many, but I don't think there were more -- I might be mistaken,
13 but I don't think there were more than a couple hundred, 200 or 300,
14 that's all. Everybody was either killed at the time, or they brought
15 them to Auschwitz or somewhere, where -- you know, so there weren't
16 too many Latvians left. There was mostly now German, Austrian, and
17 Czechoslovakian Jews.

18 Q: AND DID MOST OF THOSE JEWS LIVE IN THE GHETTO?

19 A: The majority, yes, most of them. But then there were smaller camps.
20 One was called Kaiserwald, which was famous. One was called
21 ABA, which was an army work camp. One was called
22 Jungfrau Hof. I mean these are separate camps. They were like
23 small concentration camps. Well, they were concentration camps that
24 were separate, but the main reason was that these people worked there,
25 and it was closer to, to the jobs they had.

26 For instance, this -- my wife worked in, for quite a long time
27 in a -- for the army. They had to clean the uniforms from the front
28 lines when they came back. People got killed you know, and they would

1 bring the uniforms back by trucks, and they had to clean them.

2 And then they would repair them, and they would then give them back
3 to the army, you know.

4 Q: NOW, THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED IN THE WORK CAMPS, DID THEY LIVE IN THE
5 GHETTO, OR THEY LIVED IN THE WORK CAMPS?

6 A: Again, no. In the work camps, they lived in those camps. Yeah. Yes.

7 Q: OKAY. I'VE GOT THE PICTURE THEN.

8 A: Yeah. That was separate. They weren't really in the -- most of them
9 were not in the city of Riga; they were out on the outskirts, on the
10 outside. There were I don't know how many camps they had in the
11 surrounding areas. There was a camp for, if I recall it, for
12 Hungarian people. There were only Hungarians there, if I remember.
13 There were -- I don't know. I mean there were several different camps.

14 Q: OKAY. NOW, I WANTED TO HEAR ABOUT WHEN YOU STARTED TO SENSE THAT THE
15 RUSSIANS WERE COMING.

16 A: Oh, yeah.

17 Q: HOW DID YOU, YOU KNOW, WHAT CHANGED? HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT IT, FIRST
18 OF ALL, AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE?

19 A: Uh-huh. Well, first of all, like I said, we heard it from these
20 drivers of the trucks, and because -- let's say we had to repair a
21 truck, and the driver was standing there. Well, naturally, they would
22 start talking to each other. You would -- see, you know, under those
23 circumstances you are very -- you do your job, but at the same time
24 your ears are open. You always want to hear what's going on, so you
25 were fairly well informed. Even so, we never saw a newspaper or any-
26 thing, you know, but you more or less -- and when we heard that the
27 would Russians/come closer, naturally, we were -- somehow we would -- I
28 mean it would give us a lift morally. But at the same time, there was

1 something which in one way we didn't like it. And then again we were
2 happy about it. The Russian -- the Russians would bomb.

3 See, Riga has a big harbor, and they had a tremendous amount of
4 ship traffic. Troops and everything. So they would bomb the -- the
5 harbor quite often, and we -- many times we had to work in the middle
6 of it. I have a -- I was hit by a -- right here -- hit by a shrapnel
7 (indicating place on his leg). I mean fragment of a bomb.

8 One day on one of the ships -- unloading -- we had to -- once in
9 a while we had to unload ships or load them. We did this, too. I mean
10 you never knew from one day to another what kind of a job you had, so
11 once in a while even an auto mechanic had to unload a ship. So I got
12 hit once. So they would bomb -- the only problem was, I don't know
13 how they ever won the war. I mean that sounds like a joke, but they
14 hit everything except the areas they were supposed to hit. They
15 were -- we made jokes about it. I still remember that. I mean the
16 bombs would be next to the ship, on both sides -- hardly ever would
17 hit the ship. So what I meant, in one way we were naturally very
18 unhappy that they would -- we never knew whether we're going to get
19 hit or not, and that's another thing. I'll tell you in a minute what
20 happened to us, but the -- at the same time, we were --

21 It seems like that the Russians came closer and closer. So we
22 figured: Well, if we could only survive; because maybe there is a
23 chance now. Why would they be already that close to Riga, you know,
24 this was the -- so we always felt that way. And then one day when
25 they -- we had to leave Riga, because it was -- they came closer and
26 closer and occupied it.

27 Q: WHEN?

28 A:.. Well, this must have been middle of '44, I imagine, because this

1 picture is -- that's when we left, either -- I'm not now -- I should
2 have brought it along. At home I have a list of the dates, but I
3 didn't bring that along. But there is -- it must have been in --
4 probably in May or June of '44.

5 And then they took us to Leibau, which is a town. It was
6 now in the news in Lithuania when they had all these things against
7 Russia now, you know, when they wanted to -- I don't know how it's
8 called in -- Lithuania, and that's -- and we worked there, again,
9 mostly taking care of bombed houses, clean up the area. I didn't
10 work as an auto mechanic anymore. That wasn't necessary anymore,
11 because this was now all on the way back now.

12 Now the retreat started, see. And one day we were in our --
13 we built ourselves an air-raid shelter by digging a whole trench and
14 putting trees over it to -- just for our people there. We were --
15 I don't know in that -- by that time, maybe a couple hundred people
16 left. And one day we were in that shelter, and the shelter got hit,
17 and 13 people got killed, including . . .

18 (TAPE NO. 1 ENDS. TAPE NO. 2 BEGINS.)
19

20 . . . told her, naturally, about it, but in general I don't talk
21 much about it. And it's sometimes to me now, it's like it isn't
22 really my life; it's what -- it's like reading a book, you know,
23 because it's so long ago. And I mean, I never forget it, but still
24 it's not real. I know there are many times when sometimes, you know,
25 people ask you, and --

26 Q: I COULD TELL IN THE BEGINNING WHEN YOU WERE TALKING THAT IT WAS AS
27 THOUGH YOU WERE READING A BOOK OUT LOUD TO ME.

28 A: Yeah.

1 Q: AND THEN AS -- AND THEN IT SEEMED TO CHANGE, SOMEWHERE, AND YOU SEEMED
2 TO BE MORE LIVING IT.

3 A: Well, because certain things, you know, you -- it's -- oh, many times
4 I dreamt about it, you know, and these things. And you really never
5 forget it. It's -- but it's still -- see, when I left -- when I
6 arrived -- I mean after I was liberated, I decided this is part of my
7 life -- but I don't want it to take over my life -- that from now on,
8 I'm going to be -- just remember all these things constantly. I
9 didn't want that, because I figured it would hurt me more. And I have
10 to -- you know, it's -- it's a new life now. And so I -- and that's
11 really how I become, because I know some people --

12 We went to New York a couple times and met some of the people,
13 naturally, from Riga. And we talked about it. You could see some
14 of them are mentally -- never recovered. And I made up my mind at
15 the time in order to, you know, survive, you really have to -- the
16 word "to forget about it" is not the right word, because I really --
17 I didn't forget it. But you put it -- you block it out. That's the
18 word. You know, I blocked it out.

19 Q: DID IT HELP THROUGH THE YEARS THAT YOUR WIFE, YOU KNOW, WAS FROM
20 THE SAME BACKGROUND, THAT SHE KNEW?

21 A: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely, yes. We are now married 43 years. And it
22 definitely -- because it's so many times there are certain things which
23 we just look at each other, and there are certain things. If somebody
24 talks about certain things, you know, and you know exactly what the
25 other person is thinking. That's -- oh, yeah. Definitely. Uh-huh.

26 Q: MAZEL TOV ON 47.

27 A: Forty-three. Let's not overdo it now.

28 Q: MARRIED IN '47.

A: Yes. It's 43 years. I think we did all right.

1 Q: HARRY, I WANTED TO GO BACK TO THE RUSSIANS.

2 A: Oh, yeah.

3 Q: NOW, WHAT HAPPENED? YOU TOLD ME YOU HEARD THROUGH THE DRIVERS --

4 A: YES.

5 Q: -- AND YOU HEARD THE BOMBS --

6 A: Yeah.

7 Q: -- AND YOU WERE UNLOADING AT THE DOCK.

8 A: Right.

9 Q: WHAT ELSE? WHAT THEN?

10 A: Well, I mean we never -- we were never -- see, before the Russians
11 entered, we -- we left. They took us away from there. The only
12 thing we did was -- Riga has several bridges. And I remember we had
13 to -- they took us on a job once, on one of the bridges. Apparently,
14 they had -- they attached some of these detonators to the bridge so
15 they could blow it up. And I remember we had to bring some of the
16 stuff out to -- we had to load and unload this -- whatever it was.
17 I mean they had steel cables and all this, you know, and we had to
18 bring it over to the bridge. That was shortly before -- but that
19 was about all I remember, because we never saw a Russian, naturally,
20 because they took us out.

21 We had to drive some of the trucks back to -- to this town,
22 Leibau, in Lithuania. And the Germans took everything they could
23 get hold of. I mean the trucks were loaded with -- all of a sudden
24 there was so much food, it was unbelievable. Canned food. What
25 they -- you know, they took it all with them. And we had to take it
26 back -- naturally, we didn't get it (laughing). That was -- and
27 then -- but that was about all I remember, you know, of the end of Riga.

28 For us there was -- I mean we weren't really that much affected
by it, since they took us back. But they did take a lot of Jews from

the -- from the ghetto -- took them -- but that was -- no, that was before already. They took them to other camps in -- outside of -- some of them went to -- I'm quite sure, went to Auschwitz. And some of them to this camp in Stutthof, which is in Germany. But then I don't know too much about it, because, like I say, we were a smaller group of people.

Q: AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU ONCE YOU GOT TO LIEBAU?

A: Okay. Like I said, we worked there mostly on bombed areas. We had to get the -- some street work, you know, so that trucks could get through, and tanks, and, you know, the whole army had to get through there. So we did that kind of work.

And then, shortly after, we had this -- when we were bombed, and these people got killed in our shelter, then we were told this is the end for us in that area. And one day they told us -- the Gestapo told us, "Okay. Tomorrow morning all of you go back to Germany." So we -- we -- you know, you never know what that means. It could mean you get killed or what, because nobody really believed anything. But then there was a ship there. And we had to load the ship first of all. All kinds of -- they put on armaments. I mean some tanks and some guns and everything, and it was all -- the holds, you know, inside. And then they covered it all up. And then they took us and put us on that ship. In the morning, one of the other ships leaving was torpedoed. And, naturally, we were kind of scared, all of us, because you never knew, you know. You didn't know what could happen.

So they -- we left. And we were supposed to go back to a small -- they told us, "We take you to a camp in" -- in north Germany. But then they changed that, for whatever reason. We never found out. And they took us to -- you've heard of the town of Hamburg? Okay. And we arrived there after four or five days.

02 1 And they put us in a prison, a regular prison called Fuhlsbüttel.
2 It's a famous prison in Hamburg. And this was the time when they
3 had all these heavy bomb -- when they bombed Hamburg so heavily, you
4 know. Thousands and thousands of people were killed. But our prison
5 was never hit.

6 Now, we were always talking about this. We always had a feeling
7 that the -- those were mostly the -- either Canadian or American
8 pilots, and we always felt that they were told -- they knew exactly
9 the area, knew that this was a big prison. It's a huge brick --
10 brick -- surrounding brick-walled prison. And they were apparently
11 aware of it, that there were a lot of prisoners in there. So never
12 once.

13 And we worked there. One of the jobs we had was to -- the
14 soldiers had to pick up the cartridges of the -- the bullets, the
15 spent bullets. They had to bring them back with them, because by
16 that time Germany was so poor on raw material they had to -- and we
17 had to segregate them, copper and -- and I still see this: mountains
18 of it. I mean it's unbelievable. Millions of them. We did this
19 every day. As soon as they would bomb Hamburg, we would have to go
20 and -- ourselves. They would never put us in a -- in a shelter.
21 We just had to stay on ourselves. But this wasn't really -- this was
22 still not too bad. I mean it was better than Riga.

23 And then one day they -- oh, and women were separated from men --
24 different cells, you know. Then one day we had to -- they would take
25 us out and said, "Well, you are leaving now. And we are taking you
26 to another camp. And then we had to march four days and four nights.
27 Hardly any food. Really hardly any food. They gave us some bread
28 and some jam, a little bit, and that was it for the four days.

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1 And we -- and constantly being bombed. There was, you know, just --
2 and they took us to what they called a work camp, but it was actually
3 an extermination camp. It was called Kiel Arbeitslager. Kiel is a town
4 right at the waterfront in north Germany. And that was the last
5 camp -- this was now in '45.

6 And we, we arrived there. And by that time I had typhoid fever,
7 and I was so sick. It was unbelievable. I mean, really, I was --
8 felt like I wanted to give up. And then they took us to this camp,
9 and they -- we worked there. Even though I was sick, I still had to
10 work; because if you said you were sick, that was -- might as well
11 forget about it. That's the end of it. And then we stayed there
12 for a while.

13 And one day they said, well -- oh, and there were Polish officers
14 in that same camp, prisoners. And one day they shot all of the Polish
15 officers. All of them. There were I don't know how many. There must
16 have been there 150 or 200 of them. They killed them all. And the
17 same day -- oh, excuse me. I have to go back. While we were marching
18 from Hamburg to this town, Kiel, all of a sudden, we see these white
19 trucks coming with red crosses. And they passed by. And later on
20 we found out that -- you have heard of the Swedish guy who got killed,
21 Folke Bernadotte? Well, he saw us, and he made a deal at
22 the time with Himmler. Himmler was the man in charge of the -- in
23 Germany, you know. Well, you must have heard. Made a deal with him --

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24 Q: EXCUSE ME. YES?

25 (THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.
26 THE TAPE IS TURNED OFF AND THEN
TURNED ON AGAIN.)

27 A: He apparently made a -- he made a deal with Himmler to let these
28 women -- all these women he saw -- let them go, and whatever deal

1 they made, that we don't know, but we heard later on that this is
2 how it happened. And, naturally, we didn't know anything about it.

3 So now we are in that camp. And several people died there.
4 And then they shot all these Polish officers. And that same day the
5 man in charge of our barrack -- we were in separate barracks there,
6 so many people to each barrack -- came over to us and said, "You know,
7 you guys, you are lucky. Tomorrow morning you are free." And, natur-
8 ally, nobody believed that, expecially after what happened -- we saw
9 all this, you know, with the Polish officers. And during the night
10 they -- by the way, we wore striped clothes, you know, striped uniforms.
11 Most of us had that, and, if not that, then we had a big white cross
12 painted on the back of our clothes, if you didn't have the striped
13 clothes. And we had to get rid of all our clothes. And there were --
14 we had to take -- there was a huge room there, a whole barrack full
15 with dead people. And we had to take their clothes and put them on.
16 They were civilians they had killed. So we had to put all those
17 clothes on, because they had, apparently, for whatever reason -- I
18 mean you never -- it's so hard to understand when I look back. All
19 these things were, you know, strict-- it's like reading a book. And
20 we had to put these clothes on. And in the morning, all of a sudden --
21 this was May, May the 1st. It was a week before the war ended in
22 Europe; the war ended I think the 7th, May 7th.

23 And here are these white trucks coming with the red cross.
24 And all the Swedish drivers jumped out, and they said in broken
25 German, "You are free." This -- well, it's unbelievable. This is --
26 and the first thing is they gave us food and all this, which we hadn't
27 seen in so many years. And then they took us to Malmo in Sweden.
28 And then -- yeah --

1 Q: HARRY, CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT THAT WAS LIKE AT ALL?

2 A: Well, you know, it's really -- after so many yeras, it's hard
3 to -- really hard to. It's -- I'm not enough of a poet to put
4 this into -- that's how you should really -- the only explanation
5 would be if somebody would be on his deathbed, and all of a sudden
6 he would be told, "You're okay." I think that would be the only --
7 and even that is -- it was too long and too many things which --
8 that's why so many older people couldn't survive. The younger people
9 could because, you know, when you are young there's always a certain
10 amount of hope. And I'm quite sure that Americans in Japanese prison
11 camps, they must have felt the same thing when they were released,
12 you know. Young people always hope. And that's the only way I can
13 explain it. It's --

14 But I must say this: I was so sick that I'm not sure that I
15 really understood what was going on. Because then when we arrived
16 in Sweden they put me in quarantine because I -- on account of the
17 typhoid. And then I got hepatitis on top of it. And so I was sick
18 for quite a whole. But I survived that, too. But it's -- you are
19 coming back to your question. I really don't, at this point, I --
20 I couldn't explain it. It was overpowering, but -- it's too long
21 ago to really feel it, you know?

22 Q: DID YOU BELIEVE IT?

23 A: No. None of us. Matter of fact, we -- that I remember. We were on
24 those trucks, and I remember that none of us said this is -- we are
25 free. We still thought this is just another thing -- they are going
26 to play another game with us and take us somewhere, till we actually --
27 Oh, I remember the first time we noticed it was -- they put us on a
28 train, and we went to Copenhagen. And this was several days before

1 the war ended. And the German troops -- see, Denmark was occupied,
2 right? And the troops were standing -- the German troops were
3 standing at the station but didn't do anything anymore because it
4 was -- the war was practically over. And here were thousands of
5 Danish people. They were screaming and applauding when our train
6 came through. And the train stopped, and they would throw candies
7 and -- I mean that's the first -- that's exactly when we knew --
8 when we found -- when we started to believe this is freedom. They
9 were absolutely fantastic. Yes. I still remember that! Um-hum.

10 Q: AND AFTER IT -- HOW LONG WERE YOU IN THE HOSPITAL? YOU WERE IN THE
11 HOSPITAL IN SWEDEN?

12 A: Yeah. Yeah. Well, first of all, all of us were brought from Malmo.
13 First we came to Malmo, which is a town closest to Denmark. I mean
14 there is a ferryboat going over, and the train goes right on the ship,
15 and then they take you over.

16 And they put us into tents. And the first thing was we had to
17 go through -- got sprayed with all kinds -- you know, they were
18 afraid of -- we were all full of lice and you know, naturally, this
19 was -- and we got new, clean clothes, and everything else was burned.

20 Then they took us to a rehabilitation -- yeah, rehabilitation
21 camp. And it's called -- well, it wouldn't mean anything to you --
22 Smalandstenar. It's almost in the middle of Sweden. And we
23 were supposed to recuperate there. And then they put me in a hospi-
24 tal in quarantine for a while. All together I would say about a month.
25 And then I gradually recuperated and went back to this camp where all
26 my friends were, you know, all the surviving people. And then after
27 a while they took us to another camp. I mean these were all
28 beautiful -- the Swedes were fantastic to us. I mean they were --

1 you couldn't get better food and clothing and everything.

2 And then I remember the -- then I tried to get in touch with
3 some of my relatives. I tried to find anybody. The only ones I
4 found was this one uncle in Israel. And I thought, Well, maybe I
5 will go to Israel, because I didn't know what's going to -- then,
6 would gradually, people/leave from Sweden. They would have -- find rela-
7 tives. You know, this was -- the HIAS would work, and, you know,
8 all these Jewish organizations: World Congress and, you know, all
9 these organizations, they worked for us. Gradually they would leave.

10 My wife went to England. She had a sister in England. We
11 wanted to get married in England. England was in those days, was
12 very, very bad. And I mean they -- it's hard to understand today,
13 but we requested -- my brother-in-law in England, who is an Englishman,
14 I mean born Englishman, he went to the Home Office over there and
15 tried to get me over to get -- so that his sister-in-law could marry,
16 that we could get married. And they said, No, absolutely not; we let
17 only close relatives. You know, mother, father, daughter, sister.
18 So we -- there was no way. They wouldn't. And we told them we were
19 both together in a concentration camp. No. Nothing doing. So that
20 was a big shock. And I worked in Sweden as an auto mechanic for
21 almost two years.

22 And then I -- I found a friend in Bolivia, in South America.
23 So I wrote to him; and he sent me the papers to move to La Paz,
24 Bolivia. And then I took Lottie, my wife, over, and we got married
25 in La Paz, Bolivia.

26 And then we waited till we could get the papers to go to the
27 United States, because we -- that was our dream. We wanted to go to
28 the United States. And I remember the consul in La Paz, Bolivia,

1 the American consul. He was the most wonderful man you can imagine.
2 That man, he -- he was actually the one who said, "Two young people
3 like you should go to the United States, and I'll do anything for
4 you." And, really, I mean, I didn't -- you know in those days you
5 had to have an affidavit, or you had to have -- somebody had to
6 guarantee. They had to put -- matter of fact, I think they had to
7 put \$50,000 in escrow or put it -- you had to have it in order to --
8 in those days it wasn't easy to move from one country to the other.
9 And he helped us quite a bit with all these things, you know. And --

10 Q: WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

11 A: Walker. He was the consul in -- I don't -- we -- matter of fact,
12 he visited us two or three times when we lived in San Francisco, and
13 all of a sudden he disappeared, and I really don't know what ever
14 happened to him. Well, he might have -- he was quite a bit older,
15 so he might have died.

16 Q: WHAT WAS HIS FIRST NAME?

17 A: I think it was John, but I'm not hundred percent sure now.

18 Q: AND ANOTHER THING I MEANT TO ASK YOU: WHAT WAS YOUR WIFE'S MAIDEN
19 NAME?

20 A: Berger, B-e-r-g-e-r, Berger. Lottie Berger.

21 And then I have a -- then we have a daughter who -- but she was
22 born here in San Francisco. Jeannie.

23 Q: HOW OLD IS SHE?

24 A: Thirty-eight.

25 Q: SO TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED ONCE HE -- DID YOU GET AN AFFIDAVIT, OR HOW
26 DID YOU GET IN?

27 A: Okay. Yeah. I had a -- first we got an affidavit and -- not an
28 affidavit -- how was this now? Because I remembered we were supposed

1 to go to Cleveland, Ohio. And Mr. Walker said, "Listen, you don't
2 want to go to Cleveland, Ohio. Winters aren't too good there." He
3 said, "You want to go to California." And I, you know -- and it just
4 so happened that I had a friend who -- also a survivor of Riga -- who
5 had an aunt in Oakland. And he wrote to me, to Bolivia, and he said --
6 well, he can't -- he doesn't -- I mean he is fairly new here, too,
7 and he doesn't have enough money to send me an affidavit, but since
8 he has a job he could get me a partial, if I could get one, you know,
9 somewhere else, too. And then I found another friend and two --
10 actually these two friends together sent me the affidavit.

11 And we went to Oakland, California, and we stayed there for
12 about a year or so. And then I got a job in San Francisco and --
13 and we moved to San Francisco.

14 Q: WHEN YOU CAME FROM LA PAZ, DID YOU TAKE THE BOAT TO NEW YORK, OR AROUND --

15 A: No. The boat went through the Panama Canal and back -- and first they
16 had to go through and back again, because we had to take -- we had to
17 change ships in Panama. And then we arrived at San Pedro, California,
18 which is southern California. No, we never came through. No, only
19 the west coast.

20 Q: AND WHEN YOU GOT TO AMERICA, WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

21 A: Oh, well, I -- till this day, I feel it's God's country. I mean that
22 sounds like a cliché or sounds like -- but for us, it really is.
23 I mean where else -- you know we came here -- matter of fact, we
24 arrived here with -- we promised a couple in La Paz -- they gave us
25 the money for the trip. That was \$1,000. And we promised them to
26 put it here in a bank for -- they had a bank account here, and we
27 promised we're going to put it here. Now, they trusted us with --
28 a thousand dollars was a lot of money in those days. And I remember

1 we paid that off in, I think in one year. We didn't do anything
2 else, just paying this off. And we didn't -- I mean -- the first
3 jobs we had was -- I worked at a gas station pumping gas. My wife
4 had a job telephoning -- she spoke -- by the way, she spoke English
5 very well for the simple reason that she lived in England after the
6 war. And in La Paz she worked as an English teacher at the American
7 Institute. I didn't speak one word. No. I mean "yes" and "no," but
8 that was all. Matter of fact, this sounds like a joke, but it's the
9 truth. I got this job at the gas station, and somebody comes over
10 and says, "Give me two --" in those days -- "two bits worth of ethyl."
11 And I knew "Ethel" is a girl's name, you know, "Ethel." And "two bits,"
12 I didn't know what "two bits" are. I remember calling my wife:
13 "Tell me what are two bits." Never forget that.

14 Q: THAT'S GREAT. "TWO BITS OF ETHEL."

15 A: Yes. No, to us, really -- we had really -- I mean in a way a wonder-
16 ful life in the States. Both of us had to work, naturally, and --
17 but no complaints. I got sick several times, but that can happen
18 anywhere. So it's really -- couldn't ask for a better life.

19 Q: HARRY, AFTER THE PUMPING GAS, WHAT WAS NEXT?

20 A: Oh, well, then I worked at a job in a chemical company, working --
21 we had to glaze -- put a glaze coat on bakery pans. We had to do
22 this for Kilpatrick and Liendorf and these bakeries.

23 And then I got a job as a warehouseman at Sears Roebuck. And
24 I stayed with Sears for 25 years. All right. From that job, then
25 I -- they gave me a job in the store as a salesman, and I worked in
26 the -- selling appliances. Then they -- and my wife started with a
27 trucking company and became quite a high executive in a major
28 trucking company.

1 Q: WHAT IS THE COMPANY?

2 A. The company is now out of business. It's O.N.C. Oregon - Nevada -
3 California Trucking. But they're out of business. And then I --
4 let's see. Yeah. And then I worked -- was with Sears till -- in
5 San Francisco -- till they closed the store. There was the store
6 on Mission Street.

7 And then I opened my own -- I had a little gift shop on Irving
8 Street in San Francisco. And I did this till three years ago, till
9 I retired completely. And --

10 Q: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE SHOP?

11 A: Gifts by Harry. (Laughing)

12 Q: WHERE? WHAT NUMBER? WHAT NUMBER ON IRVING?

13 A: Twenty-- oh, my God -- twenty-two or three Irving Street, I think.
14 The 2200 block, between -- yeah, 22nd and 23rd. Um-hum. And so,
15 I mean this was -- and my daughter started with a -- had a summer job
16 with the Bank of America, and she is now vice-president of the Bank
17 of American. So that's -- knock on wood -- another success story.

18 Q: MAZEL TOV.

19 A: Yeah. Thank you. Really, that's why I say I -- turned out to be a
20 wonderful life.

21 Q: DID --

22 A: I wish my parents could have seen it.

23 Q: I'M SURE THEY SEE IT.

24 A: Yeah, well --

25 Q: I'M SURE THEY SEE IT. I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE
26 EFFECT THAT THE WAR HAD ON YOU, ON HOW YOU SEE LIFE.

27 A: Well, I -- I am an optimist. I always was. So I'm -- otherwise, I
28 wouldn't sit here today. Like I said, I mean I have talked to other

1 people, and they -- they just -- mentally, they couldn't take it and
2 survive all the misery. But somehow I -- I was always optimistic.
3 I -- I can't really say that I -- I don't give up very easy, and that's
4 why I feel I -- I am a survivor; because, believe me, like I said,
5 I have had, during these 40 years now, I mean I was six times in the
6 hospital. I had many operations. And still I always recovered and --
7 because I told myself: No, you don't give up. You don't give up.
8 So I really -- you know, I hate to say this; it sounds like I'm bragging,
9 but it's not. It's just -- I feel I am an optimist, and I'm strong
10 enough to survive a lot of things. Probably a lot had to do with
11 being in camp. Maybe that gave me the strength. But on top of it,
12 I -- I have to admit it, I have a wonderful wife. I have a beautiful
13 daughter. And that helped quite a bit. They helped. I have a very
14 strong wife. So, you know, so the combination is there, and that's --

15 Q: WHAT ABOUT THE WAY YOU RAISED YOUR DAUGHTER, JEAN?

16 A: Jeannie.

17 Q: JEANNIE.

18 A: Uh-huh.

19 Q: DO YOU THINK THAT YOU RAISED HER IN A CERTAIN WAY BECAUSE OF THE WAR,
20 YOU KNOW, CERTAIN THINGS?

21 A: We talked about that. And probably, if we would have -- let's say
22 we would have been -- I mean under normal, for us, normal circum-
23 stances, whether in Germany or in America, but whichever country,
24 we probably would have brought up our daughter different. But now,
25 I don't know whether we did this, or this is -- or it's just plain
26 luck, but we are very, very close with our daughter. We can -- we
27 always could talk about everything, and she said this so many times.
28 We are very open about everything, and that helped quite a bit.

1 But probably a lot had to do with the whole bckground, so that we --
2 we -- it wasn't so much that she was like a daughter; she was more
3 like -- especially with my wife -- those two are, I mean, absolutely
4 fantastic. They are -- practically every day they're talking, even
5 though my daughter lives across the bay. And she said many times
6 that might have something to do with it, with our background. She
7 also looks at things a little different than maybe somebody who would
8 have been brought up under normal circumstances.

9 Q: CAN YOU GIVE ME ANY SPECIFIC, LIKE VALUES, OR THINGS THAT ARE DIFFERENT?

10 A: Well, look, she went through the '60s. I say all her friends -- I
11 remember they were in our house. They were smoking pot all the time.
12 She tried it. She didn't care for it. I'm quite sure she must have
13 done it a few times. I'm certain. She was a young person together
14 with her friends. But she got through all these times. I mean she
15 was never, not once, in trouble. Not once. She always found good
16 friends. And so I think she -- no, as a matter of fact, I know she
17 is all right.

18 Q: YEAH?

19 A: Very much so. She is very, very courageous, very -- this sounds like
20 a doting father, but it is, you know, because we talk about these
21 things, and I know she is really good. She had a problem, too.
22 She was married for 10 years, and she is right now in the process of
23 a divorce. But not -- that's her husband's fault.

24 Q: ANY CHILDREN?

25 A: No. As much as we wanted grandchildren. But I think at this point
26 this is just the right thing. It's better. But then she is also a
27 career girl. Her career is very important to her.

28 Q: IT'S WONDERFUL YOU WERE OPEN WITH HER. IT'S SO UNUSUAL. IT TAKES

1 SO MUCH COURAGE TO BE OPEN.

2 A: No. I agree with you, sure, but that's why I said before I don't know
3 if we were just lucky, or -- but I don't know.

4 Q: HARRY, WHAT ABOUT RELIGION AND GOD? WHEN -- AFTER THE WAR, WHAT ARE
5 YOUR BELIEFS?

6 A: Well, first of all, I -- I always believed in God, hundred percent.
7 But I am not -- I am what they call a "three-day Jew." I go to the
8 High Holidays and, you know, and once in a while in between, but I
9 mean I'm not going every week. That's -- may be wrong, but this is
10 my belief. I still -- if I talk to somebody, or so I always say,
11 I'm -- if we talk about it, I'm Jewish, and that's -- but I must say
12 this much: In camp, you also, you see a lot of things which are --
13 how can I explain this? There were a lot of -- we had a lot of very
14 Orthodox Jews who wouldn't even eat. They would rather die than eat
15 something which -- because it wasn't kosher. On the other hand, some
16 of them -- and I hate to say this -- but I know; I have seen this.
17 A lot of them, in order to survive, put other people to death. In
18 those days nobody -- you know you would say, "Well, everybody wants
19 to survive," but I remember -- there are degrees how far you go. So I
20 was sometimes -- and not just me. I mean after the war we were
21 also -- after we were liberated, we talked about this many times
22 with other people, and there were a lot of these people they were
23 very, very orthodox; and, yet, they were very, very selfish. And
24 that's -- which is very upsetting, naturally, you know, and --
25 But this doesn't change my belief in God. I mean that's --
26 Look, we all know. I mean if we start really thinking about it,
27 then you would say, Well, if there is a God, how come all this --
28 how could this happen, right? Why? I know that my parents weren't --

1 they probably weren't the best people in the world, but they weren't
2 any worse than other people; so why would they have to die, and I'm
3 alive, or Mr. So-and-so and Mrs. So-and-so, so you -- but this -- I
4 never -- my belief never changed -- in God. But I'm not a practicing
5 Jew. That's --

6 Q: I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION FOR YOU I FORGOT TO ASK. WHEN DID LEVISON
7 BECOME LAWTON?

8 A: Oh, okay. This is one of the -- well, when we were liberated and in
9 Sweden we were still -- my name was still Levison. When we arrived
10 in the United States--we got married in Bolivia, I was still Levison.
11 We arrived in America; I said to my wife, "When I was a child" -- when
12 we started talking about this--that's one thing I never mentioned:
13 The name Levison in Germany was definitely a Jewish name. And many
14 times I remember the minute I mentioned the name, automatically there
15 was, you know, I was -- people knew I was Jewish. So I -- when I
16 arrived in America, as much as -- now here I was liberated now,
17 and this seems to me it's going to be a wonderful life in front of me.
18 And I said, If I ever have a son, I don't want my son -- you never
19 know what the future brings. And I said I will change my name so that
20 my -- if I have a son, that he doesn't have to go through -- just the
21 minute he mentions the name -- because I was so bitter, so hateful,
22 if you would have known me. Even with always being so optimistic,
23 but I was hateful. Oh, I hated the Germans in those days. And I
24 felt I should -- shouldn't do this to my -- now maybe I used this as
25 an excuse. Maybe I, myself, wanted a different name for myself,
26 because I was afraid. I never really admitted it to myself. But
27 this might have -- you know, might have been too. That's when I
28 took -- when we took out what we call the first papers here, and

1 that's when I changed it. But I wanted to keep my initial, and I
2 felt my father would forgive me for that. But, again, I'm not hundred
3 percent sure that there wasn't a certain amount of selfishness
4 involved, you know. So then I had a daughter (laughing), and the
5 name didn't mean anything.

6 Q: GOD GOT YOU BACK.

7 A: That's right.

8 Q: SO YOU WERE BORN HEINRICH?

9 A: No, Heinz.

10 Q: HEINZ.

11 A: Well, the reason why I changed the name Heinz, because I -- when we
12 arrived here, right in the beginning, I still remember that there was
13 the advertising, Heinz 57 varieties, the -- the canned soup and vege-
14 table, and I was afraid they might kid me about Heinz, so I changed
15 it to Harry.

16 Q: WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE -- WITH YOUR HATRED OF THE GERMANS? HOW DID
17 YOU GET OVER IT?

18 A: Well, in a way I'm not over it yet. Matter of fact, when we were in
19 Berlin, we had -- you heard about these invitations Germany gives to
20 former people. And we went on those -- they had a seven-day trip to
21 Berlin. And we went there couple years ago. And at one of the
22 luncheon meetings -- there were about, I would say about, probably,
23 400 Jewish people there in Berlin at that time, and at our table at
24 the luncheon there were two senators from Berlin. They were sitting
25 at our table, and we were talking about it, and I -- we were talking
26 about this whole relationship now between how we feel about it, and
27 I said I'll be very frank with you, if I meet somebody on the street,
28 and he is about my age or older, I -- this might have been the person

1 who killed my parents. But the younger people I just cannot see
2 blaming them, because then I put myself on the same level with Hitler.
3 I hate, you know, just because they're Germans, and you can't go
4 through life hating, you know. So I -- but there is definitely a
5 certain amount of hatred left. Oh, yeah. I don't think I will ever --
6 and I don't really want to get rid of it. And it -- it's -- I remember
7 we had at our synagogue, Sherith Israel, when they had the Crystal
8 Night -- you know we had -- and the rabbi, Rabbi Wiener -- I don't
9 know if you know him -- he and the cantor asked me if I could say a
10 few words, which I did, about remembering the Crystal Night in Berlin.
11 And afterwards they had some of the students -- some of the kids, we
12 were talking about it, and we brought this up, and I -- that's why I
13 say it now, again, because that's what I said at the time. It's
14 something you -- you will never forget these things, and you will --
15 there is a certain amount of hatred, but it's not enough for me to
16 go on hating.

17 Q: THAT'S WELL PUT. I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT KRISTALLNACHT. YOU WERE
18 STILL IN BERLIN?

19 A: Um-hum.

20 Q: AND WHAT HAPPENED:

21 A: Well, they -- I had, at the time I had a job -- that's another job
22 I had -- together with a friend, and we were supposed to go to work.
23 We usually had a bike and usually went by bike. Now this was
24 November, 1938, right? And we went to work that day on a bus, or
25 streetcar -- not bus, streetcar. And we saw all the -- the store
26 windows were all broken, and they had, with white paint, painted
27 over: Jew pig and, you know, all these slogans they had. And our
28 synagogue -- first of all, our synagogue was burned to the ground.
That was -- as you probably heard, they -- practically

1 all synagogues, they put fire to them, which -- the synagogue wasn't
2 far from where we lived at that point. And we went to work. And
3 when we arrived there -- our boss was Jewish, too. This was a
4 printing outfit, and so it was another type of job I had for awhile.
5 So we decided there's no sense in staying here, and we disappeared.

6 And my -- see, as I told you before, my father was put into
7 the concentration camp, Buchenwald, in June '38. So it was only my
8 mother and I at home. So I went home and told my -- and I don't
9 even know how we heard all these things, but it seems like under
10 those circumstances, this is -- the grapevine is so fantastic --
11 it was in no time we found out that they're going to pick up
12 Jewish men. So I decided -- I went home and told my mother I am
13 disappearing for awhile. And I took my bike, and I left Berlin.
14 And for three days I hid.

15 I found some people I had met before, and I stayed with them,
16 Christian people. And after three days the whole thing was over.
17 I mean they picked up thousands of Jews, put them in -- there was
18 a -- a couple of concentration camps near Berlin called
19 Oranienburg, and this is where -- and then later on, I guess,
20 they went to Theresienstadt, where -- you probably heard of
21 Rabbi Beck, Leo Beck, who was the Jewish leader there.

22 And then I came back, and I continued working. But those
23 three days I -- and it was miserable. I mean all the Jewish stores
24 were vandalized, and people were picked up.

25 Q: DID YOU HEAR THE, YOU KNOW, DID YOU HEAR THE GERMANS ON KRISTALLNACHT
26 DOING THE BREAKING OF GLASS AND FIRES?

27 A: Well, the fires, we saw at our synagogue, because we went over there.
28 And the rabbi we had, a rabbi, Dr. Swazenski, who later went to

1 America, and he was in Wisconsin somewhere, as a rabbi, and died
2 there 10 years ago or so. He -- we went over to the synagogue. And
3 we saw the synagogue burning. And the fire engines -- I will never
4 forget this -- they were protecting the neighbor houses, you know;
5 they put water on the houses next to it, but not on the synagogue.
6 They let the synagogue burn. There is a book. It's called in German
7 Wegweiser durch Berlin, which means almost like a hell to
8 Berlin. And it shows all the synagogues before and after they were
9 burned. I mean if they could get pictures of it. Quite a number.
10 I have this book at home, so one could see it in that book. But
11 it was -- so that's the only one I saw actually burning, but I don't
12 know how many synagogues were burned in Berlin.

13 Q: THERE WAS ONE OTHER THING I WANTED TO ASK YOU, HARRY, AND THAT IS
14 TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SURVIVAL? DO YOU THINK IT WAS LUCK?

15 A: Well, definitely a combination. I mean, a certain amount of luck.
16 I mean anything, you can always say luck. But also, when I talked
17 before -- being an optimist had a lot to do with it. I wanted to
18 survive, and I -- you know, see all these things, those little things
19 come back. I remember in the ghetto one day -- you remember I told
20 you I was faking I was sick. And I remember I was -- it was a sunny
21 day, because so many times now I like to -- I like the sunshine, you
22 know, I like to go out and go in the water -- swim or -- I like
23 the sunshine. I remember nine -- there was a patch of grass like a
24 meadow, and for a short while I -- why I had to go there, I don't
25 remember, but I remember lying on my back. I never forget -- this
26 is one of the little things one never forgets -- and there was a
27 tree above and the green leaves against the blue sky. I never forget.
28 And somehow this gave me -- I mean it sounds really, like we say in

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1 German -- we say "kitsch." Kitsch. But this gave me -- somehow
2 I felt I'm going to survive this. Just looking at those green leaves
3 against the blue sky. And I never forgot that.

4 Q: I BELIEVE YOU.

5 A: That's one of the little things. But otherwise, sure, luck has a lot
6 to do; because when they selected me, I could have been with my father
7 and go on that truck. And there were many more times.

8 Q: AND WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE STATE OF ISRAEL?

9 A: Okay. Israel. I've been there, like I told you. I have a cousin
10 there. I think it's an unbelievable country. It's fantastic.
11 It's -- gave all of us -- well, I'm not talking about other people.
12 Right now I'm only talking about us survivors -- gave us a -- some-
13 thing to hold onto after -- later on, you know. I mean not in the
14 beginning, because there was only Palestine, right, but later on.
15 The only thing is what I have seen when I was there. It was really
16 too short a time to really -- I mean to make up your mind about
17 something. You shouldn't do this in a short time. The problems
18 they have in Israel, a lot of these problems are self-made, made by
19 the people themselves. They are very -- and that's the bad thing
20 to say "they," because, after all, they are our people, too. But
21 too many of the people are very, very arrogant. I know this when I
22 was over there. Probably a lot was to do with all these years
23 fighting and -- I mean there is a reason for it. But, again, what
24 I told you before about the very orthodox people in camp, I have seen
25 the same thing. It happened to us.

26 My cousin took us into the very orthodox area. And we made
27 that mistake, driving in there, and somebody threw a rock at us.
28 It was on a Shabbos. Okay. It was -- I have to admit we made a

1 mistake. We didn't think. But this is -- I'm just afraid that they
2 will -- they always will have internal problems. Not even talking
3 about the Arabs; this is a different story. I mean what they did --
4 what the people did over there is unbelievable. There's no doubt
5 about it. I mean -- but I'm just afraid that a lot of them are their
6 own enemy, and that's very discouraging, because they have enough
7 problems with the Arabs and, you know, I mean -- you know people
8 always say you should learn from history.

9 Now, in Germany they had, what? They had another Weimar Republic.
10 I don't know if you ever read about how Hitler, how he could come to
11 power. I think they had 23 or 25 or 30 parties. Every little thing
12 was, was a party, you know, so they could never be united. Well, in
13 Israel, in a way, they have the same problem. I mean
14 this is, again, that's my opinion. I may be completely wrong. But
15 I think they are -- they have to iron out their own internal problems
16 first.

17 Q: WHAT ABOUT GERMANY AND REUNIFICATION AND EASTERN EUROPE? WHAT ARE
18 YOUR THOUGHTS THERE?

19 A: Well, naturally, we are always afraid of a united Germany. No doubt
20 about it, because the -- Germany will be the most powerful country
21 in Europe. But then there's -- it's a different generation now.
22 Again, that would be the same thing, what I said before: You can't
23 go on all your life hating, so, consequently, you have to give them
24 a chance, too. I -- I'm quite sure -- I mean economically there's no
25 doubt about it, they're probably the most powerful country in Europe,
26 right? I mean the Germans are that way. They are -- that's part of
27 their life and their upbringing. But I don't know. It's -- I just
28 feel that the world has changed so much. You can watch so much

1 more today. I mean the world is basically so small today that you
2 can see what's going on. It's different than 1933. That's how I
3 feel. So countries like, you know, the neighborhood -- I'm not even
4 talking about the United States, but the countries over there can
5 watch it much better. And I don't think -- but maybe I'm wrong, but
6 I feel this couldn't happen again. And, sure, they will be a very
7 powerful -- I think we have to worry more about it over here economi-
8 cally, because they are -- their products are A-1, you know. They
9 might be our competitors, and we should watch that.

10 Q: WE MAY HAVE TO MOVE BACK TO GERMANY IF THE ANTI-SEMITISM HERE GETS
11 TOO BAD.

12 A: Well, you will never -- there will always be anti-Semitism. It's --
13 it's -- you know, we are -- I think most people are not true to them-
14 selves. Most -- because, basically, everybody has a certain amount of
15 prejudice. There's no doubt about it. Again, as far as I'm concerned.
16 We all have something or somebody we don't like. But there's only
17 one thing to do: to watch out for it, and every time something
18 happens, one has to -- you can't just go out like that (putting his
19 hand over his eyes).

20 Q: HARRY, WHAT VALUES -- YOU SAID THAT YOU'RE A THREE-DAY JEW --

21 A: Yeah.

22 Q: -- BUT WHAT VALUES DO YOU THINK YOU GOT FROM JUDAISM?

23 A: Well, I think I'm a much more tolerant person than -- and I think
24 this has something to do with my Jewish background, as far as I'm
25 concerned. I see that not everything is black or white; it's --
26 there are a lot of grey areas. And I mean all these things sound
27 like cliches, you know, but it's really how I feel. So -- and I think
28 that a lot has to do with being a Jew. I don't -- because I notice

1 it so many times with all the problems today. When I really -- when
2 it -- you know, read the paper, watch television, and you see, whether
3 it's abortion or whatever, you know. And I feel I am more tolerant
4 of a lot of things because I've -- because I'm a Jew and my back-
5 ground, my parents, the way I look back so many times. Even -- well,
6 after all, I was 22 years old, so I wasn't a little child when they
7 died. And I remember we talked very openly about a lot of things,
8 and I think this has a lot to do with it. Even so, I'm not a
9 practicing Jew, but I think it has something. Really.

10 Q: I'VE ASKED JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING I HAD THOUGHT OF, BUT I JUST WANTED
11 TO ASK YOU IF YOU HAVE ANY WISH FOR THE FUTURE.

12 A: For --

13 Q: FOR YOURSELF OR JEWS OR YOUR DAUGHTER'S GENERATION, YOU KNOW, FOR
14 THE WORLD.

15 A: Well, that all fits together really. For my daughter, definitely.
16 I told her so many times: Don't be so prejudiced. Be more tolerant.
17 That's one of the things. That's why I brought this up. For the
18 Jews -- you mean just all over the world, or what? As far as I can
19 see, the problems Jews have will be the same problems in each country,
20 whatever problems they have over there. Nothing -- I just feel, like
21 I said before, the anti-Semitism will not disappear. Because as you
22 can see, there are hardly any Jews left in Poland, and the Polish
23 people are very -- you know, even now, even today, in a way there is
24 a lot of anti-Semitism. So I don't think this will change. Otherwise,
25 for myself, well, I just want to stay healthy for a few more years,
26 and, you know, together with my wife and my daughter. That's, really,
27 I mean, you know, when you're 70 years old, you don't -- it's --
28 naturally, you think more about it.

1 Q: I WOULD NEVER THINK YOU'RE 70.

2 A: Oh, yes. I turned just 70, June 16th.

3 Q: CONGRATULATIONS.

4 A: Thank you.

5 Q: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU -- THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY, OR
6 THOUGHTS THAT CAME UP THAT YOU WANTED TO TALK ABOUT THAT I MIGHT NOT
7 HAVE ASKED?

8 A: Well, I think we covered probably -- the only thing, like I said
9 before, when -- the only reason why I thought this might be a good
10 idea was because I felt there's so very little known about Riga.
11 And I thought -- I don't know -- have you been in New York at all?
12 Or did you interview only in the Bay area? I see. Because in
13 New York, naturally, there are, like I say, there are some -- more
14 survivors, and they probably -- they probably do the same thing over
15 there. I don't know, but I imagine. There's much more of them.

16 Q: THERE IS, YOU KNOW, THERE'S THE ARCHIVES AT YALE. AND THEN I KNOW
17 OF ONE GROUP. LANI WOULD PROBABLY KNOW OF GROUPS IN NEW YORK.

18 MR. GRANT: Holocaust Oral History Projects.

19 MS. FEIBELMAN: YEAH, YEAH.

20 MR. GRANT: There's one on Long Island, isn't there?

21 MS. FEIBELMAN: THAT'S RIGHT. THERE'S ONE ON LONG ISLAND.

22 A: And they're building one center in Washington.

23 Q: IF YOU HAVE ANY NAMES OF PEOPLE IN THE BAY AREA THAT WE SHOULD BE
24 CALLING, ASKING IF THEY WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SHARE --

25 A: Well --

26 MR. GRANT: Let's talk about that off camera. But I would
27 definitely like to get some ideas from you.

28 A: Well, yeah. I would have to think about it, because --

1 MR. GRANT: Maybe after we've finished the interview, we can
2 talk about that.

3 Q: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANTED TO TALK ABOUT?

4 A: Really, I think everything was covered. So I think this is -- I
5 don't think I have anything to add to it.

6 Q: THANKS.

7 A: You were a wonderful interviewer. You made it so easy for me.

8 Q: YOU WERE WONDERFUL. YOU KNOW, I COULDN'T STOP. I WAS HOPING I'M
9 NOT TIRING YOU OUT.

10 A: No. That's not -- but I thought maybe I talked too much.

11 Q: NOT AT ALL. I LOVED EVERY WORD. SO THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

12 A: Thank you.

13 Q: YEAH. IT WAS -- YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE SUCH A WONDERFUL WAY OF TALKING,
14 I -- YOU REMIND ME SO MUCH OF MY FATHER. HE'S A -- MANNHEIM --
15 BOTH OF MY PARENTS.

16 A: Oh, I didn't realize that.

17 Q: YEAH. THEY WERE BORN THERE IN '22 '24.

18 A: But you were born here

19 Q: I WAS BORN HERE. CINCINNATI. THEY HAD COUSINS IN CINCINNATI WHO
20 SIGNED THE AFFIDAVIT. THEY SIGNED THREE AFFIDAVITS, SO MY FATHER
21 CAME OUT AND HIS PARENTS. THEY BROUGHT HIM OUT, BECAUSE HE WAS THE
22 ONLY SON. AND THEN MY AUNTS DIDN'T GET THE AFFIDAVITS. YOU KNOW,
23 THEY WERE DAUGHTERS.

24 A: Oh, I see.

25 Q: SO --

26 A: Yeah.

27 Q: AND --

28 A: So what year did they leave?

1 Q: THEY LEFT '39.

2 A: Oh. So also that time, just before the war.

3 Q: YEAH. AFTER KRISTALLNACHT THEY REALIZED IT WAS TIME.

4 A: Oh, I see. So they lived in Mannheim?

5 Q: MANNHEIM. AND THEN MY MOM WAS BORN NEXT DOOR, AND THEY HATED EACH
6 OTHER. SHE WOULD STAND ON THE CORNER AND SPIT AT HIM BECAUSE HE HAD
7 A BICYCLE, AND HE WOULDN'T GIVE HER A RIDE. AND THEY MOVED TO FRANCE
8 AND LIVED UNDER CHRISTIAN NAMES IN THE ALPS. AND SHE WAS IN THE
9 UNDERGROUND.

10 A: Really! Oh, she was in the underground.

11 Q: YEAH. SO HE --

12 A: So are you using your parents' name, or were you --

13 Q: MY FATHER'S NAME, FEIBELMAN.

14 A: Oh. That's your father's name.

15 Q: THAT'S MY DAD'S NAME, YEAH. HER NAME WAS LEVY, AND THEY CHANGED IT
16 TO LONG. THEY CHANGED THE "E" INTO AN "O," AND "V" INTO AN "N,"
17 AND "Y" INTO A "G." YEAH.

18 A: Uh-huh. So you're -- well, you're lucky, too.

19 Q: OH, YES. SOME DAYS.

20 A: Well, look, it could have been completely different.

21 Q: YES.

22 A: One -- in those days --

23 Q: YES. THERE WAS A LOT OF LUCK. THERE WAS A LOT OF LUCK. HARRY,
24 IF YOU WOULD LIKE --

25 JOHN, DO YOU WANT TO SHOOT THE PICTURES?

26 MR. GRANT: Yes. I would like to do that.

27 Okay. So what is this?

28 (Picture of a street is shown, with figure walking on sidewalk.)

1 A: This would be the main street between the two ghettos in Riga.
2 On the left side is the German ghetto. On the right side would
3 be the former Latvian ghetto. There's naturally, there's the
4 barbed wire all around the ghetto, which is part of Riga. It's --
5 it's part of the town.

6 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY. DO YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THE STREET, OFFHAND?

7 A: I'll be honest with you, no.

8 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY.

9 A: Not on this particular picture.

10 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) ALL RIGHT. AND THIS ONE IS?

11 (Picture of narrow way with barbed-wire fence on left is shown.)

12 A. Okay. This is, also --

13 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) THIS IS, ALSO THE RIGA GHETTO?

14 A: Okay. Here. That's just another -- the ghetto is on the right
15 side. Again, it's the same thing, actually there is the one gate,
16 as you can see, and the -- I'm quite sure that this is reversed
17 now. On the right side is the German ghetto, and on the left side
18 is the Latvian ghetto.

19 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) ARE YOU SAYING THE NEGATIVE WAS FLIPPED OVER WHEN
20 THIS WAS PRINTED?

21 A: No. It's just from a different -- by the way, these pictures
22 originally were taken by Germans, and we just got them, you know,
23 by stealing them.

24 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY. YOU REFERRED TO THAT EARLIER IN YOUR
25 INTERVIEW, RIGHT? OKAY.

26 A: This would be the entrance to the ghetto. If you can move your
27 camera over.

28 (Picture of street with fencing is shown.)

1 That's right. Like that. On the right side, this big building,
2 that was -- as far as I remember, was the Gestapo hospital. And
3 this would be the entrance into the ghetto.

4 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY. OKAY. AND THIS IS?

5 (Picture of street with barbed wire and sign is shown.)

6 A: That would be the German part of the ghetto. And I don't know if
7 you can pick up the sign, but it says that in German and in
8 Latvian: "Anybody who is climbing over the fence or getting near
9 the fence will be shot."

10 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) CAN YOU TELL US THE STORY OF THIS PICTURE HERE?

11 (Picture of young Harry with the number 56 on his chest shown
12 earlier is shown again.)

13 A: Okay. Everybody in the Riga ghetto had to have his or her photo-
14 graph taken for the -- for the archives of the -- German archives.
15 Shortly before we left Riga, I broke into the office and took --
16 went through the files, which were all over the floor, and found
17 my picture plus pictures of some of the people -- some of other
18 people. But I didn't bring those along. I just brought this along
19 so that you can see. Now, at that -- this was taken -- the picture
20 was taken in 1943, beginning of '43.

21 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) AND THIS IS JUST A COPY OF THE SAME THING?

22 A: And, naturally, we had to -- in those days we had to wear a star.
23 The number is not a number we carried. This number was strictly
24 for the picture. In other words, I was number 56 they took.
25 But underneath -- it's hard to see on that picture, but there is
26 the yellow star. And later on we got these striped clothes, and --
27 or we had a big white cross painted on the back of our clothes.

28 Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY. THIS IS AGAIN?

(Picture of a long line of people in a city street is shown.)

A: It's a group of people from the ghetto. But I don't remember, naturally, which group it is. Whether they were coming back from work, or they just brought them in from a transport, that I don't know, because I don't recognize anybody. I mean it's such a small picture. So I really don't know, but, as you can see, there is a guard on a bike.

Q: (BY MR. GRANT) On the far right there?

A: Um-hum. That's right. And usually they had one in front, one on the side -- actually on both sides, and one in the back. But sometimes they were short. And the interesting part is very few people escaped for one single reason: Riga is surrounded by wilderness. You couldn't survive. Everybody knew it. And you didn't speak the language. So what would you do?

Q: RIGHT. WHERE WOULD YOU GO?

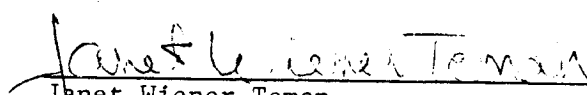
A: Where would you go? Because the Latvians wouldn't hide you. No way. That's --

Q: (BY MR. GRANT) OKAY.

(VIDEOTAPE NO. 2 ENDS.)

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I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of videotapes of the July 18, 1990, interview with Harry Lawton conducted by Anne Feibelman for the Holocaust Oral History Project.


Janet Wiener Teman,
Registered Professional Reporter