Interview with ERWIN LEVY

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q: TODAY'S THURSDAY, JUNE 21, 1990. I'M JUDITH BACKOVER, AND I'M INTERVIEWING ERWIN LEVY. WE'RE AT CONGREGATION BETH JUDEA IN SAN FRANCISCO, AND THIS IS FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. ALSO WITH ME TODAY IS BARBARA HARRIS. MR. LEVY, CAN WE START WITH WHEN AND WHERE YOU WERE BORN.

A: I was born in a very small town, approximately the population of 1,000. In this town there were 12 Jewish families. Many of them left for America about 1935, '37, '39, and approximately 35 or 36 perished. There were two survivors, my brother and myself.

Q: CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR LIFE AS A CHILD IN THIS SMALL TOWN?

A: I was born in 1921. 1933 I was 12 years old, and in the

beginning the system, the Nazi system, did not appear to me at that time that I was involved in it. But as the time went on, and I became 12 and 13 and 14, I realized I was the only Jewish child in the school. And the momentum of the Nazi regime affected my schooling. One boy in particular, I don't know if I should mention this at this stage, I was in Germany recently, and we had many friends who were very much anti-Nazi. There was one particular fellow who did the utmost to beat me up on a daily basis. And he happened to come into this restaurant and he was staring at me at least for half an hour, and he probably wanted to come and say hello to me, but everybody knows that I despise him and he didn't have the courage to come to me.

Now, I don't know if this is fate, but he also lost his right arm during the Second World War, and that was the one he beat me up with. Very, very often.

There are many people who were decent, and there were many more who were not. And I still like to see the ones who helped us, who helped my parents, who helped our neighbors, maybe not during the daytime, but they helped them at night, and I cannot forget the good ones. I cannot forget the bad ones either, but I like to remember the good people wherever they are.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT, YOU SAID IT WAS AROUND 1935, THAT THINGS STARTED TO CHANGE FOR THE WORSE?

A: Well, the first thing, my father, who was in the cattle business, owned a little farmhouse, approximately I would say 20 miles from the town we lived. And this little farmhouse had approximately 50 or 60 acres of land, and there was a family who rented this house. My father furnished a horse and some cattle, and they worked the land and the income was divided between them and my father. So this man went ahead, joined the Nazi party and sold all the cattle. My father went to court and got an eviction. But before he could be evicted, one day he showed up with three trucks with SS, not SS, SR, those were the brown shirts, and they tried to beat up my father. One of the people who came, and he was also in the uniform, happened to be a former friend of my father's who spent four years in the First World War together.

And my father looked at the man and said to him, "I don't know what you intend to do, but you should know better, I'm not afraid of anybody." So he said if you want to come in, you can talk to me, everybody else has to stay outside. And this man came in and told him that he better be careful because they would lock him up. And they didn't do anything at that time, but three or four days later they beat up my father in

another town. They had masks on and they beat him up and he was bleeding. He went to the local doctor who would refuse to treat him. So he had to go to another town where there was a Jewish doctor to be treated, and he also put him in the hospital for a few days. But the local doctor, not that he was that bad, but he was afraid of the other people what would happen to him.

So that was my first experience, how the atmosphere progressed. I don't remember exactly the year, if it was '34 or '35, I don't remember.

Q: BEFORE WE GET TOO FAR, MAY I ASK YOU TO BACK UP A MINUTE AND WHAT'S THE NAME OF YOUR TOWN AND WHERE IS IT LOCATED EXACTLY?

A: It's approximately eight miles from the Rhine River. It's called Wald Breitbach, I spell it for you. W-a-l-d B-r-e-i-t-b-a-c-h. And this is south of Bonn, approximately 20 miles. And then about five miles or so from the Rhine River, over the mountains and down in the valley, it's a very pretty little town.

Q: AND IT WAS A FARMING TOWN PRIMARILY?

A: No, it was a town primarily for summer tourists. It was located in a valley, and there have been many hotels even when I was a child or before I was born, and during the summer and also wintertime many, many tourists from different industrial cities came there for

relaxation and vacation, and it still is the same thing today.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAMILY? GIVE ME THE NAMES OF YOUR PARENTS AND BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY LIFE AT HOME.

A: Okay. My father had two brothers. One brother died in the First World War. The second brother, who lived also in this town, perished with his wife, one daughter, and the mother-in-law. And one daughter lived in England, she survived, she lives in Los Angeles now. My father and mother and sister perished. My brother and I survived. My brother lives in Los Angeles and I live here. He survived at the age of about 19 years. When we were deported he was approximately 15 1/2 years old.

My sister we really don't know what happened to her. She was in Belgium, and she was sent somewhere from Belgium but we don't know for sure. My mother's family, there were three girls and one boy. The brother perished with his wife and son. One son survived, who died last year in New York. The other sister of my mother's, she and her husband and one daughter perished. One daughter is alive. The other sister of my mother's went to America in 1940, through England, Canada, the United States, and they all survived, but at present time there's only one daughter living in the Middle West. That is the immediate family.

Then there has been a large family because my great-great-grandfather, there were 12 boys and 1 girl, and all those children, alot of cousins and second cousins. And I really couldn't count how many of those perished.

Q: DID YOU HAVE A SHUL IN THIS TOWN?

A: A shul. Oh, yes. We had a very nice synagogue. It was destroyed, of course, in 1939, the Kristallnacht. And one of my missions when I returned to this little town, and I lived there after the war for two and a half years, the first thing I did, I had the people who burnt the synagogue, had them arrested, and they were in jail as long as I was in Germany, and when we left they were let out, so it was a very short trip for them.

At the present time none of them is alive anymore. Some of the wives are still but the men are not. And we lived in the same house we were born in for approximately two and a half years. And this was sold to a utility company and due to some persuasion by a local lawyer, we received very little for it, and it doesn't matter anymore. We are happily living in the United States and that's important.

Q: GOING BACK TO THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT WITH YOUR FATHER, IF YOU COULD CONTINUE WITH YOUR LIFE...

A: No, that was only the beginning, that's happened many more times. The very unique thing, what I still don't understand, is that he did not expedite to save his own life and the life of the family. He always was under the impression that the system couldn't last. He was a soldier in the First World War, he was a soldier before the war, he had many friends, he was an officer, he had some, what do you call it, some special assignment given because he was a good soldier evidently, and he thought this could not happen to him. Even so after he was beaten up a few times, he really thinked he could outlive the system.

Then finally, the last time he was beaten up he decided to move to Cuba. And then this thing didn't work out, and by the time we were ready to leave, everything was too late. In those days to go to America you needed a visa, what we had, but you also needed a number, and we had that too, but the numbers were so large that we never had a chance to be called to the Consulate, and that's what happened. The Nazi system decided that we had to be eliminated. And so one day the time arrived that they deported us. And we all left together, my father, my mother, my brother and myself.

Q: WHEN WAS THIS?

A: We moved 1938. One week before the very famous

Kristallnacht. From this little town to the city of Cologne. And my parents lived in Cologne from 1938 till the second transport from Cologne to Litzmannstadt or Lodz. Now, I can't tell you exactly what date this was, but the lady I spoke to told me there was some book what had the date of the deportation. I thought it was in September, 1941. I was under the impression it was 1940, but she told me it was 1941. And it was the second transport from Cologne to Lodz.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT THE TRANSPORT?

A: Yes. I remember the day we were sent to the railroad station. It was the freight yard, and we were put in trains. Trains without toilets. There was not one single toilet on the whole train. And it was the first demoralizing thing for any grownup I've ever seen. I don't remember exactly how many people were in one car, but they were stuffed like the herrings in a can. And everybody was exhausted, excited, nobody knew what happened to us, and it was an awful situation, especially for older people. My parents and some people the same age. I was young at that time, I was approximately 20 years old. So I could much easier take the situation than my parents could. I wasn't aware, I didn't have a family, my father and mother had children, so I accepted the fact. But for them it was a tremendous burden. Not only my parents, but all the other people

too.

Immediately there was a change in their personality, a change in their physical expression, and that was a very heavy burden also on the younger generation, but we didn't take it as serious as they did.

So we arrived, I don't know exactly how long it took, two or three days. We never stopped for any food or anything. We were taken directly to Lodz. I think it's called Lodz or Litzmannstadt. And there we were unloaded and assigned to a room, there must have been 30 or 40 people in a room. Arriving at, I can see that even today, arriving at the railroad yard, or whatever it was, we were sitting in the train for awhile, and we could see people unloading potatoes out of a freight car into what we would call a horse or animal-pulled cart. But this was not the case. Humans were pulling the wagons, big wagons. And the SS was behind with the whips, and they were beating up the people right there in front of us. That was the first impression, and I can still see this today. Now, they probably did this to show the new incoming people how the life would be, or just happened to be that way, I don't know. I was very fortunate in this respect that after a couple of days I went to work and at least during the work we were not exposed to this type of picture. And after approximately three weeks I was caught one afternoon walking home from work and they

locked me up for one day, and the next day they sent me out to a camp near Poznan, where they had to build a second railroad track, because the railroad in Poland at that time was only one track and the trains had to go both ways and stop on the station and then one would pass and the other would come or go. And to double, to make this easier for the Germans to transfer their soldiers, we were engaged in building the second track.

And in this place I worked, my work consisted of loading dirt in wagons and push them, and they already we, our food supply was very limited. We were in camp, it was almost like a concentration camp except there was no SS, our guards were Polish civilians. They belonged to an organization what supplies, we would call that here security guards. They worked for a security guard organization and they were drafted or specially selected to guard the prisoners. In this particular camp, there was many around there, I don't know how many, but, a mile and a half away was another one and two miles was another one. In this particular camp there were the first time I seen that if you picked up a potato at work and took it into camp, and you were checked out every day for picking up a potatoe or two they would hang you. And I seen many, many people hanged for absolutely nothing, just try to survive.

And from this camp we went, the whole group of people, the whole

trainload of us, were gathered together, but I can't remember how many months I worked in this particular place. But I do remember when we were collected, put on the train, and shipped to Auschwitz. But I do not remember the date when we arrived in Auschwitz. I haven't the faintest idea. I do remember when we left, but I don't remember when I arrived.

Q: TALK ABOUT WHEN YOU LEFT...

A: Left Auschwitz?

Q: WHEN YOU LEFT TO GO TO AUSCHWITZ. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT...?

A: Well, we went in this particular train, and this was not passenger wagons any more, this was regular cattle cars, I think that's probably the right expression. We had to stand up, and I do not remember how long that took, but this was already under the SS. The SS picked us up, picked us up I mean they were guarding the train, and they took us to Auschwitz. And arriving in Auschwitz, I think I heard once mentioned we were a thousand people. The first thing we arrived there, they opened the cattle cars and they hollered at us, "out, out, out," and there was, in those days I didn't know who the man was, he was an SS man, a tall man, and he had a little stick in his hands and he would guide the people two different sides. I was chosen to one side and other people were chosen to the other

side, and I found out later on that the side I was chosen on were the ones who went to work, and the ones who were sent to the opposite side were sent to the gas chambers. I found that out in the next few days. We were taken from there to march, well, first they took everything away what we had, we had a little bundle of clothes or whatever. They took us to a washroom, and there we had to get rid of everything. We couldn't keep no shoes, some people probably had a watch, and they want to get rid of everything. So we were totally stripped, we went through a shower, we were shaven, the few hair we had left they were shaven, and we were then in another barrack. We were given prison clothes, striped outfits, I don't know if you're familiar with those. And also again here I lost my dates. I don't remember if we stayed there in this barrack for a day, or a week, or two weeks.

One day we were loaded on trucks, and we were sent to a coal mine. I forgot one thing what's probably important. Everybody who arrived in Auschwitz with me was tattooed. And I don't know if you're familiar with this, that no other camp from all camps, tattooed the people, Auschwitz was the only one. And only the people who were sent to Auschwitz and kept there to work were tattooed. Many people went to Auschwitz and stayed in Birkenau, and were sent out again from there who did not have a

tattoo. And there also we received the first whipping because putting the needle in the arm was not the most pleasant thing there was, and the minute, one guy was doing the tattooing and an SS man was standing next to it, and when you made a movement they either kicked you or they slapped you in the face. And there I received first slap in my ear and I lost my hearing, I still can't hear on this ear. It was the first day or hour I arrived in Auschwitz.

Then from there we were sent to a coal mine. It's called Janinagrube. I would say probably seven, eight or ten kilometers, or less, I have no idea. Even though I walked the distance but I can't remember. And arriving there we were a group of approximately 250 people. There was no camp set up yet. They had built a fence but no housing. So we had to, well, I should say no barracks. There was one stone brick house. And in this house we were all 240, we slept in there, but we had to work in the coal mine, and at the same time, in the off hours we didn't go in the coal mine we had to build the camp. We had to build barracks. We had to gather stones outside the field for building walls, for building toilet facilities, to build shower facilities. We didn't have anything. And that went on for, again, I don't remember the time, a few months. And as soon as there was enough facility they brought in new people.

And in the meantime I would say half of us, the 240 or 50, perished in the meantime. You only could survive if you able to work. If you became sick, you were picked up and taken to the gas chambers. Picked up once a week we had a truck, brought us fresh clothing, and they also picked up the dirty clothes and they also would take the people who were unable to continue to work. They would take them back to Auschwitz and they would send them in the gas chambers. So survival was totally depending on your ability to work. No matter how skinny you became, if you were able to walk to the coal mine and could endure the physical and mental pressure without a good meal, that was the end of it. And even so we had doctors who would attend to us if we needed to, but there was no medical help, they didn't have any medicine to treat people. I myself had an open leg for at least, well, from the time I got there until I was liberated, I had an open leg. Even today I have problems with it. I got shot in my head and I still survived.

Last year I was called to a murder trial in Germany and that was the guard, actually he was the Commandant of the camp, who shot me. And many other people. And I was called to his trial, and the trial is going on for 12 years and the man is still alive. So, I don't know if that was too quick, but there's many details I have skipped, I'm sure.

Q: WHAT DID THEY FEED YOU?

A: Well, the food consisted of what we would say, one meal a day. You would get a soup, and the soup was made primarily out of squash. Similar to, it looked on the outside like a watermelon, and the inside looked like a yellow squash. And they peeled this and this was put in a big kettle and that was the soup. Beside the soup a daily ration we got one fourth of one bread. And I can only show you the size of it, I don't know how much it weighed, it was about a piece of bread this high and this big. We could have eat each one five of them, or ten of them, but that was the ration. Then we got a cup of what we called coffee, it was brown water. I think the coffee grinds was used probably for the whole time I was there. There was no taste to it but it was liquid. And the very bad thing about the soup and the bread they gave you, if you would not eat this immediately, somebody would steal it from you. So you practically had one meal a day. Some people tried to hide it, and there was no way because if you took it with you to bed, somebody would steal it from you because everybody was so hungry and wherever you could find something to eat, I don't think you would call it steal, that was survival.

And I think most of us who survived had one distinct desire. And my wish came true many times. To be able to sit on a table [crying], I'm

sorry, to have a good meal with a family.

Q: WHAT ELSE DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT DAILY LIFE WORKING IN THE COAL MINE AND LIVING IN THIS CAMP?

A: Well, the daily life, probably the easiest thing was in the coal mine. Because in the coal mine there was no guards, there were no SS. They took us to the coal mine, and we had to stand in line until we were lowered with the elevators. Some miles down, I have no idea. Once we were in there we had to do very hard labor. We had to load coal on wagon. The tunnelling in this coal mine was approximately I would say no more than four feet high, and in this crouching position you had to load for eight hours, or ten hours, whatever it was. You had to load the coal. Even so it was hard work but nobody bothered you.

Then when you came out the SS took you. They took you into a shower room because you were dirty, your face was black, your clothes was black, and like myself, many people had open wounds. I understand due to the inefficiency of certain minerals in your body that will never heal. So you did the best you could to wash the wounds out, the coal dust in there, your nostrils were full of dust, your lungs were full of dust. And they give you a piece of soap. In those days there were rumors, you probably heard that rumor before. But anyway, we needed it because we

had to wash ourselves.

But we had to wear the same clothes because we didn't have any other clothes. So you would go and hit the clothes against something and knock the dust off and you had to wear the same clothes back into camp. Once a week they came to replace your clothes, and it wasn't because they were dirty. The clothes was replaced and taken into a steam cooker, so to speak, because the danger of typhoid was so great from lice that the lice, the eggs were in the clothes. The only way they could be killed was in steam boilers. Normal washing machine, that wouldn't have happened. And they always were afraid that an epidemic would break out and that would affect the guards, too. So there was at least once a week an inspection, where you had to strip down and they would check you and the clothes, and for this reason many times they found lice, too. Because people became weak and the did not have the ambition to get up in the morning and wash themselves, and they just didn't have the strength. So it's very difficult to really express the feelings, you had to stand in line for sometimes two, three hours. They checked everybody out. Sometimes it was very cold, in the wintertime. It could have been spring or summertime, but the wintertime mostly I remember. And you stripped your shirt, and we didn't have much clothes anyway. And then you had to stand there in the cold

until they came along and looked the inside of the shirts. You had to strip your pants down also because they want to look if there was other spots where lice found a warm place to lay their eggs.

If they did found any lice they would take you in another room and they would use a very strong solution and would burn the skin, practically to speak, that everything there would become killed, or the eggs would die. But all the rest of us, every time they came out of the shower, they also had a solution they would brush you everywhere where clumps of hair normally would exist, because that's were the lice would lay their eggs. I guess that was also done to our benefit too, because very few people survived a disease like typhoid fever. It has happened, it's broken out in places and none of them survived. So maybe by doing this maybe we survived, the few of us who did.

Q: ABOUT HOW LONG WERE YOU A COAL MINER?

A: How long was I a coal miner? If I knew what time I came to Auschwitz I could tell you, but I don't remember exactly. I do remember the day when we marched away from the coal mine, but I can't tell you exactly. Was it two years, was it two and a half years? I cannot remember. Was it three years? I don't know. I can't, I'd like to wipe this out of my mind, and I can't, I can't remember. It was a very, very tough

time, and I can't remember. I do remember that we left the coal mine on January 19, 1945. That was very close to the Russian soldiers came to Auschwitz, because we could hear the shooting of the tanks very close. And they marched us from the coal mine, I marched to Auschwitz, I don't remember how far it was, five kilometers, five miles, ten miles, I have no idea. And from January 19, I was liberated by the Americans, I believe it was April 26, 1945, and in this period of time, February, March, April, about three months, we were mostly marching. And I don't remember how many people we lost. I remember we marched to Auschwitz, and Auschwitz they give each one a half of bread, and we continue marching to another camp, Gleiwitz.

In Gleiwitz we stayed overnight. The next day we were loaded into cattle cars, open cars, stuffed in like the herrings. We stayed in those cars for hours. Finally the train moved. I don't remember how long or how far the train moved. Then the train stopped again. And this location either was called Schoenwald or Schoenbrunn, I'm not sure of this. The whole trainload was loaded with people. We'd seen all kinds of activities. Next to our train there were many locomotives. In those days they used steam locomotives. They were on the sideline, evidently they didn't function anymore. And we could see the SS putting up machine guns on top

of the locomotives. And when they were all in place the SS opened the doors and hollered at us to get out. And we jumped down from the cars, some needed help, others helped others. And I still can see the landscape. Behind the railroad tracks there was an upgrading hill, all pasture. On the left side and the right side there were forests. And as all those thousand people, or two or three, I have no idea, came out of the railroad cars, they let go with the machine guns and they shot into all the people. And I don't remember how many, everybody ran for his life. We were collected later on from the same guards again. The group I was affiliated with at that time, we were 24 left. None of them I knew. Friends of mine who are still alive, one in Kansas, one in New York, who were in the same car, we separated there too, and we were collected again and put together in groups again, and continue marching.

And this man I testified against in Germany last year, was supposed to be the man who give the orders to kill all of them. And he was also the Commandant in the camp I was in Janinagrube. And he's still alive, and he's still not in jail, and he is supposed to give orders to kill many people. I've been shot by him and many other people been shot by him, and I've been told from the jury at the trial that he has lots of money, he hires every year or every few months new lawyers to postpone the trial. And it's

going on for12 years. My friend in New York wrote a letter last year to the Judge in Hanover, want to know how the trial was doing, and he said we still looking for witnesses. So it's still, they want to wait, another five years, another ten years, looking for witnesses.

So the thing it's not the way it should be, but we are alive. And this is one aspect what we have to appreciate.

Q: YOU WERE SHOT IN THIS FREE-FOR-ALL?

A: No, I wasn't shot in that free-for-all. I was shot before and I was shot afterwards. See, we were collected and we marched, and as we were marching people became weak and we had no food, there was no kitchen to eat. Some people brought us some food. We have passed walking, we have passed railroad cars loaded with German soldiers who opened the window and threw out food to us. I have witnessed this. And as we became weaker and weaker, we walked to a camp near Breslau, that was called Grossrosen. We stayed in Grossrosen a few days, and then we were put together in a group of maybe a thousand people. We start marching again.

Then the next stop we had, we march from Grossrosen all the way to a camp called Flossenburg, that is near Weiden. And there we stayed, I don't remember exactly, a week or two, and then one morning we woke

up, I think they woke us up, and we could see some American soldiers with tanks maybe a kilometer away from us on the hill. And they took, oh, I forgot to say, all those marches, any time somebody became weak and couldn't walk anymore, he was shot in the head. And as we walked along there were thousands of prisoners in prison gowns or uniforms laying on the roads. And that was seen by the American and the Russian soldiers.

So we were taken to this camp in Flossenburg. So one morning they took us all together and I was hiding with a friend of mine in a place where they collected dirty clothes. And before they all left they torched some of the buildings and they put a torch to this building also that we were hiding under the dirty clothes. And we noticed the temperature rising so we crawled out of the clothes and we ran after the others. And we were approximately the last people leaving this camp. And we marched another two days, and I became so weak that I also was shot. But two friends of mine, who I had never met before, helped me to march one more day, and I was liberated the next day by the American in a little town called Cham in the Oberpfalz. We were leaving the camp, we probably were 600 people, and we were liberated by the American, there were 14 left of us. I don't know what happened to the others. I have no idea.

And from there I went to the hospital. I also don't remember the

stay in the hospital, whether it was three months or two months or four months, I have no idea.

Now comes the happy part of the whole adventure, at least I consider it my happiest part. I was transported by the Americans from Cham to Nuremburg. I stayed in Nuremburg in a hospital for a week. From Nuremburg to Frankfurt. I stayed in Frankfurt for a few days in a hospital. And then from Frankfurt I went to my little town I was born. And in this house I lived in, I was born in, three families live there. And I did not have the heart to throw those people out, there was only women and children, their husbands or their men were either killed or in prison camps. So the person who was given the title as mayor of the town, was a very nice family, asked me if I wanted to stay in his house, because at one time they had ten children and they all were gone. So I accepted and moved in their house and I stayed there for approximately two months.

So one day the wife of this mayor said to me she heard on the radio that the city of Cologne had set up a whole floor in a hospital for the Jewish people who returned from a concentration camp. So one day a friend of mine who had a motorcycle took me to Cologne. And since I lived in Cologne for the war, for two, three years, I was very familiar with the town. I went to this hospital, I registered, and this was operated by the

Franciscan Order, Catholic nuns, they took me upstairs, first, second or third floor, I don't remember, and took me to a room, and in this room there was already four men, under the same circumstance than I, they came out of the camp, they were looking for the family. I introduced myself, and everybody asked where were you, have you heard this name or this name. The people were, I never seen them before, they never seen me before, but we all were looking for family.

And after I was in this room two, three hours, one of those men came over to me and said, "What's your name?" I said "Erwin Levy." [Crying] And he walked out on the floor in the next room and all of a sudden I hear somebody screaming. Everybody ran outside, and I didn't know where to go. I looked, and my brother walked into the room, he was in the next room, and he survived also. [Crying] I'm sorry. And he's still alive today.

I don't know if you want to hear more stories like this. I found my wife the same way, and my cousin also.

Q: WHEN YOU MET YOUR BROTHER THERE, WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DID YOU EXCHANGE?

A: Well, he had typhoid fever and he survived. He had to stay in the hospital for another four weeks. We only were together for

approximately two weeks and I never see him in the whole episode. They picked me up in Litzmannstadt in Lodz. He stayed there. And then he was separated from my father and separated later from my mother, and he came to Auschwitz, then he came to Dachau, and from there he went to near Bad Tolz. And there they, I guess they were in a cave, working in a cave and living in a cave. And as far as I understand, typhoid fever broke out and the Americans went in there after the war was over, the medical team, and they had gas masks, and they walked in there and they picked out the ones who were still breathing and he was one of them. When I found him he had spots all over his body yet.

And he also had from this an aftereffect. He had an enlarged heart. And he had ten, twelve years ago, he had open heart surgery, five bypasses, but he is good shape today. My wife who I wasn't married to then, but I knew her and her family all my life. She lost all of her family also, and I found her walking in the street. She was taken by friends, non-Jewish friends, to a Jewish affair. And my brother and I were also taken to the same affair and we happened to stop at the same gas station to buy gas. And she was walking the street, and there I recognized her and found her and we got married later on.

And I have another little episode. My cousin who died last year. My

wife, my brother, my cousin and I, we came together to America in 1948. And in this little town where I lived there was a Catholic priest, a very dear friend of ours. One day he asked me if I would go with him to pick up some wine for the Catholic Church. They had permission from the military authority, and he had a car, and we drove up the Mosel River, past the town where my mother was born, and my uncle used to live, and the outskirt of town my cousin was walking in the street. I seen him three times in camp. I seen him in Auschwitz, I seen him in Grossrosen, I seen him in Flossenburg, and we never could stay together. And there in the street I see him for the first time.

And we lived together for two and a half years and we came together to America. And he had an open-heart surgery last year and he died. But we had 40 happy years together.

So if you want to know more you can ask me, I'll be happy to tell you.

Q: TALK ABOUT COMING TO AMERICA.

A: Well, coming to America was a dream all of us had. It took us, of course, three years. We applied for it, and finally we made it as displaced persons. We could have made it later on also under different program, but displaced persons was the easiest way to come. So we came to New York, and my cousin, who had an uncle in New York, his mother's

brother, he stayed in New York. My brother, my wife and I, we moved to Sioux City, Iowa. That was where my mother's sister lived from before the war. She was the only survivor of my mother's family. Then she was still alive at that time, we decided to move to Sioux City, Iowa.

We stayed there until she passed away in 1953. In 1954 my wife and I we moved from Sioux City to San Francisco, and my brother moved from Sioux City to Los Angeles. He still lives there.

Now what's America for someone who has been through all this? The Statue of Liberty says it all. Nobody gives you anything if you don't have anything here, it's a hard country. But you have the same opportunity everybody else has. If you work hard, and save a little bit, you can also live not only while you work, but also when you retired. And I had 42 very happy years in America. 36 of them I worked very hard and I enjoyed every minute of it. And I still enjoy my retirement. Unfortunately, my wife passed away six years ago, but she had beautiful years too. And this is a wonderful country. The difference between this country, in my opinion, and any other country in the world, this country became what it is because of immigrants from everywhere in the world. We don't have to agree with everybody, but we work with everybody, and it's a marvelous thing what people from different places of the world if they work together what they

can achieve. And I'm so proud to be an American, they could give me the whole world, I wouldn't go anywhere else.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU DO?

A: I was a plumber, and I went to, seven years I went to college, evening courses, and I also became, without credentials, an engineer. I worked for 21 years for a very fine company, and I worked in many big buildings in San Francisco, and I enjoyed every minute of it. And I have many, many good friends through my work and through all kinds activities, and I enjoy that too.

Q: OTHER THAN THE COUSIN AND YOUR WIFE AND THE RELATIVE YOU KNEW HERE AND YOUR BROTHER, WHEN DID YOU FIRST LEARN THE FATES OF OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?

A: Well, my brother, when I found my brother, he knew of my father's death. He came to Auschwitz with my mother. He was separated, like I mentioned before. He went to one side, our mother went to the other side, no doubt about it. Our father, who had something like a diarrhea, shortly after we arrived maybe, well, I wasn't there anymore, but my brother said that he passed away, he died from sort of a diarrhea, whatever that was.

My sister, we don't really know what happened to her. She lived for

awhile underground in Belgium. I have friends who knew her. She was a baby nurse. She took care of children, small children of people who were deported from Belgium, and they were looking for her. She went to live with different people, on different farms, different houses. But as far as we know they caught up with her somewhere. And somebody said they deported her and we heard from other people that they killed her instantly. We don't know for sure. We have no official knowledge of this.

My wife's family, it's also, family completely disappeared. The father, the mother, the brother and the sister-in-law, the immediate family. Then the father had two brothers, they all perished. The mother had one brother. The one daughter who lived, who came to America in 1936, was the only relative my wife had, one living cousin, who has passed in the meantime also. So I have one cousin in Los Angeles, who's my father's brother's family, they all perished. I have one cousin in Sioux City. Her family came out. And this is the family.

So whatever is left there, we are very close. We don't see each other that often, two, three times a year, but we do telephone each other every week. And this is the best we can do, but we have contact. And we remember the family as it was 50 years ago, 40 years ago, no, 60 years ago. It was a very close-knit family, they always came together to

occasions. Birthday, Jewish celebration, non-Jewish celebrations, and we try to do the best we can to keep the families together because it's very little left of us. Unfortunately, I don't have any children. My brother has two children, a son and a daughter, and he has five grandchildren. So there might be a continuation of the family. But unfortunately, we didn't have any.

Q: YOU MENTIONED, IN FACT YOU MADE A POINT AT THE BEGINNING OF SAYING THAT THERE WERE MANY DECENT PEOPLE, AND THAT EVEN THE GERMAN SOLDIERS HELPED YOU ON THE DEATH MARCH, OR TRIED TO BY THROWING OUT BITS OF FOOD.

A: That's true.

Q: CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE DECENT PEOPLE YOU REMEMBER AND WHAT THEY DID FOR YOU?

A: Well, in the camp the SS who guarded us, they were not our German-born people. I would say more than half of the guards were Germans by choice, I would say. Some came from Hungary, some from Yugoslavia, some from Ukraine, some from Latvia, some came from Odessa, wherever they came from. They were the guards who were much, much worse to us than some of the Germans. Some of the Germans were not SS by choice either. Some of them they were soldiers who were

injured during a fight, wherever that might be, and after they're sufficiently recuperated from their injuries, often what we call here an R&R, they sent them to the concentration camps. Their duties were light, and some of them were just as much disgusted at what they had to do, and some of them were very decent people.

I have received sandwiches, cigarettes, but only under circumstances they were afraid of their life too. I have friends in Germany, even today, whom I visit all the time, who saved a Jewish lady from her destiny. She stayed in the house and they protected her. The mayor of the little town I come from, I have three letters with me. He just give it to me very recently. The father was drafted in the German army, and the oldest brother was drafted in the German army. His father, what I never knew until a month ago, was in France at a prison camp where there were French officers imprisoned. And he was a prison guard. They were decent people as long as I knew them. And now I have three letters that prove that this man was outstanding, a guard, in the prison camp. A Jewish man who survived the prison camp, his name was also Levy, wrote to him after the War, it's in German, if you'd like to have it I give you a copy of it. But he was such a decent man, he helped the prisoners, he tried to give them food whenever possible, and he wouldn't

do anything for a German, he wrote, this man, but if you could do anything for him, he would be delighted to do this.

So the wife of this man wrote a letter back that the man had disappeared, either died or was killed, and he returned another letter if he could do something for the wife, he would be more than happy to do so, because of the decency this man showed as a guard at the prison camp.

I don't know if those letters have any use for you. You're entitled to it. I have some pictures here, I have a friend here in San Francisco, who was one of the first American military to go into Dachau. He himself had a camera and he shot some pictures. I have them also with me. If you're interested, you can have some copies of this too.

Q: WOULD YOU LIKE TO HOLD THE PICTURES UP AND SHOW US? WE CAN RECORD THEM ON CAMERA.

A: I have to put my glasses on.

Q: (By camera operator) FINE.

A: Now what pictures would you like to have?

Q: WELL, LET'S START WITH THE ONES YOU WERE JUST TELLING US ABOUT.

A: [Taking out picture] That's a picture from my school, you're not interested in this.

Q: YEAH, WE'D LOVE TO SEE IT.

A: What do I do with it? [Holding up booklet]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY... AND THAT'S WHAT THIS BOOKLET IS?

A: Yes.

Q: WHICH SYNAGOGUE WAS IT, WHICH CITY?

A: Says right on there. Called Ahrweiler. Can you find me on this? [Holds up photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] ALRIGHT, SIR, WHO WAS IN THAT PICTURE?

A: This is myself with my cousin, now living in Los Angeles. Her name is Irene Marlow.

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, VERY GOOD.

A: [Looks through documents, holds up photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, THAT'S A SCHOOL PICTURE?

A: Yes.

Q: [By camera operator] AND YOU'RE ON THE LEFT THERE?

A: I'm on the left side of the teacher, right on the left [pointing]. [Holds up new photograph] This is my father and mother, way on top.

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, ON THE TOP IS YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER, AND WHO ELSE IS IN THERE?

A: My sister, myself and my brother, and the others are relatives.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE THE FULL NAMES OF EACH MEMBER OF YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY?

A: My father, Max Levy; my mother, Joanna Levy; my sister, Ruth Levy; my brother, Ernie Levy; and myself.

Q: [By camera operator] YEAH, IF YOU CAN ID THOSE PEOPLE?

A: [Points at photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] DAD, MOM, SISTER, ERWIN, AND YOUR BROTHER, OKAY VERY GOOD.

A: Excuse me, if you speak here, it gets that in there, or no? You shut that off or what? [Holds up new photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] WHEN THE CAMERA'S ON. THE CAMERA'S ON NOW BECAUSE WE'RE PHOTOGRAPHING THESE KIDS. SO WHO ARE THESE KIDS NOW?

A: Way on the right...

Q: [By camera operator] ON THE RIGHT...

A: It's my cousin in Los Angeles.

Q: [By camera operator] YOU CAN POINT, THAT'S OKAY.

A: [Pointing to photograph] My cousin in Los Angeles, her sister who perished. Myself. My sister, who perished. My brother in Los Angeles.

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, VERY GOOD.

Q: WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE WHO PERISHED?

A: Ilsa, Ilsa Levy. And my sister, Ruth Levy. [Holds up new photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

A: By brother, Ernie Levy, in Los Angeles, and myself. Approximately, I would say, 1946, after liberation. He left in '55, the end of '55, because according to the hairdo we were all cut down to the bone. So the hair is full, it should have been about a year later or so.

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY.

Q: WHERE WAS THAT SHOT, WHAT CITY?

A: In Wald Breitbach, in the home town we were born. [Holds up new photo]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

A: My sister, myself, next-door neighbor, little girl, 61 years old a month ago. My brother. And those are all neighbors.

Q: WHAT WAS THE OCCASION THIS WAS SHOT ON?

A: There was, I remember we used to go to the river and we, we had bathing suits on so we must have been in the river there. And all those pictures come from my next-door neighbor. We don't have any.

[Looks through documents; holds up another photograph]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

A: My grandfather and my grandmother.

Q: AND WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

A: Theodore Levy and Henrietta Levy. But they died a normal death, not in a concentration camp. [Holds up document]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY. SO THIS IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REOPENING OF THE SYNAGOGUE?

A: That's not the opening of the synagogue, the rededication of the synagogue.

Q: [By camera operator] THE REDEDICATION...

A: The synagogue can't be used as a synagogue. Everything is there but no Jewish people. So they have cultural events there, but if somebody wants to get married, it's approximately 15 miles from Bonn, in Bonn are Jewish people. The Consul General from Bonn was there, with his wife. There was approximately seven Jewish people. And after they started to rebuild this place, the Catholic Priest and the Protestant Minister responsible for doing this, they found, the architect found the original drawings of the synagogue when it was built. [Holds up another document]

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY, WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT NOW?

A: This is a document from the mayor of this town, father, who perished during the Second World War, who was a guard at a prison camp in France. In this prison were French military officers, and this man was a prisoner in this camp. He writes a letter to him and he thanks him for the beautiful, fair and nice treatment he received in this prison camp.

Q: WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE GUARD?

A: Levy. His name is Ernest C. Levy. Ernest C. Levy. I never heard of the man. He's not a family member. But I was just given this. You want to see the second one, too? [Holds up other document]

Q: [By camera operator] SURE.

A: First he wants to thank the man, and then she writes him back that the husband didn't come back, and then he writes those two letters afterwards.

Q: HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE HIS NAME?

A: Heunann.

Q: HEUNANN.

A: By the way, Heunann is a Jewish name also. There's many Jews by the name of Heunann. See, this name is Ernest C. Levy, and he evidently wrote for his father, Leopold Levy. This comes from Luxemborg.

Q: [By camera operator] OKAY. IS THERE ANOTHER DOCUMENT?

A: Yes, there is a document. [Holds up document]

I could read it, but probably it's worthwhile reading because this man said he would never do anything for a German, but the way he treated those people. He says here my next-door neighbor in prison were police, in Paris, who'd also testify for this man if he could.

Q: [By camera operator] NOW WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT WE'RE LOOKING AT HERE NOW?

A: That is a document from this same Jewish man who was a prisoner in a French prison, and guarded by the father of this man. All three letters pertain to the same situation.

Q: [By camera operator] AND HOW DID YOU GET AHOLD OF THESE?

A: My neighbor in Germany, who is the mayor of the town now. And last year, he became mayor last year, and he told me two, three years ago he was going to run for mayor, and if he does, the first thing he's gonna do, he will have a memorial for the Jewish people who perished during the Holocaust, and he did. Last year, I was invited there...

Q: HE WASN'T...

A: [Coughing on tape obliterates response]

A: I thought it was very well written. [Holds up poem, entitled

KADDISH FOR THE EUROPEAN JEWS]

Q: CAN YOU TELL US WHERE YOU GOT THIS POEM FROM?

A: From my cousin from Los Angeles, she sent that to me. [Holds up document.] That's how it used to look, and I didn't know where it was. But I found this, that was never taken down, not during the whole war. But the building was used for all kinds of things.

[Interview stops and resumes again]

Now, regards to this book. This little town, Ahrweiler, you got the camera rolling, no?

Q: [By camera operator] YES, WE DO.

Q: OKAY, YEAH, WE'RE BACK ON FILM NOW.

A: You want me to tell about this little story there, the book?

Q: SURE, OF COURSE.

A: If there's interest to you. This town, it's called Ahrweiler, is approximately, I would say, ten miles from Bonn. And this town became very famous a hundred years ago. And they found out there were mineral wells in this town very much suitable for people with diabetes. And Jewish doctors who specialized in this moved to this town and opened sanitoriums. You know what a sanitorium is? Where people come with diabetes, checked and treated. There were many Jewish hotels and many

Jewish doctors. I can't tell you if there were 20 or 30, but lots of them. And those Jewish doctors, treating diabetes patients, most of them Jews also, because Jews like to eat well, and it was known that alot of Jewish people had diabetes. It contributed tremendously to the growth of this community.

And at this rededication to the synagogue there was a representative, who is not listed here, from the Bishop or the Cardinal of Germany. A Catholic Priest, or whatever his function is, and he spoke. And what he said I have heard for the first time from any Catholic representative. He said, "I seen Kristallnacht in my own way, with my own eyes. I'm still ashamed today that it happened. I couldn't do very much, but I never opened my mouth", he said, "and neither did the Catholic Priest or the Protestant Minister. Nobody did." He said, "The Jews contributed so much to this community, and nobody, everybody was watching, somebody were hurt by it, but nobody spoke it." And he said at the end, "I want to remind all of you", we were only a small, there probably were 150, 200 people, and we were six or seven Jewish people. He said, "I want you to know, all of you, if it wouldn't have been for Judaism, there would be no Christianity, and I want you to remember this." And that was the first time, we knew it, we know it, it's history. But coming out of a mouth

from a representative of the Cardinal or Bishop, was very emotional to me also. Because this man was honest, and he said, he was very emotional when he said this. Never heard that before. I don't know if that fits in with this, yes?

Q: I WANTED TO ASK YOU ABOUT THIS GUARD AGAINST WHOM YOU HAVE TESTIFIED. IF YOU COULD TELL US HIS NAME AND WHATEVER DETAILS YOU MIGHT KNOW ABOUT HIM?

A: Yes. About eight years ago I received a letter from the Judge from Superior Court, Hanover, Germany. The letter was sent through the German Consulate in San Francisco. I still have the copies at home. They wanted me to appear in court as a witness to testify against this man. And at that time I just had my first high blood pressure test, when it turned out that I had high blood pressure. And my doctor said, no, I don't want you to go there, it's a very emotional thing. So he wrote me a note and I sent it to Germany, to the Consulate here to Germany. And they decided they were sending over, and did send over, the district attorney, and his assistant, and the attorney for the defendant and his assistant, and a stenographer. So five people came from Germany. And they asked me to come to the German Consulate. My wife and I we went together, and it last from 9:00 in the morning till 6:00 at night.

And I told them everything I knew, they asked me questions. So in December, 1988, just a year and a half ago, I was invited to Hanover to testify again. And I came face to face with this man. I could not really do anything physically to him because he was in a different section, and I wouldn't let myself down to this anyway. If I grabbed him by myself it'd been a different story. I guess the judges and the jury wanted to ask me questions to my testimony. So I asked the judge before we went into trial, what the purpose of my going there. They said, well, there was some dispute, and the dispute was as follows:

This man, by the name of Heinrich..., I'll have to come back to the name, it just disappeared. He, as I told you before, he was the commander of our camp, and later on he must have given the order, I never heard this, but other people evidently did, that he give the orders to set up the machine guns on those locomotives, and he give the order to shoot. And he claims that he was only shooting at the Polish underground, they call them Partisans, I don't know if you've ever heard of this. So his defense attorneys claim that he only give the order to shoot because they were attacked by the Partisans. And they wanted for me to hear what I had to say about the Partisans because I never mentioned that in the testimony I give here. So the only thing I could say was, and it's true, I never heard

anybody shooting before they did. I did not know there were Partisans anywhere because we never read the paper, there was no television or radio. And I'm sure there were some people in the Underground fighting against whomever, but that was not the reason to set up eight or ten machine guns.

And I'm sure the machine guns were there to do exactly what they did, to kill us all. Fortunately, some of us survived. And that was probably, I mean it took an hour and fifteen minutes to interview, but that's what they want to hear from me. That he was protecting us from the Partisans.

Q: WHAT ELSE DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMANDANT WHILE IN THE CAMP? THIS WAS IN JANINA?

A: Janina. So, we had a Commandant before him. He was a decent man, really. His name was Baumgechner. He was, I call him decent because he was fair. I've never seen that he hit anybody. I never seen killing anybody. Why he took a job like this, I have no idea. But he was a decent man. He had a Polish woman as his wife, and for one reason or another they let him go and they took this man in as Commandant. He was a good-looking young man, approximately 25 years old. He had a German Shephard dog, and he trained him attacking people. And on one side of the

camp there was all fenced in with wire and loaded with electrical currency. He trained this dog for hours. He had some guards there, and they would wrap around their arms and wrapped around their legs, and he would say "Go after them," and the dog would jump and bite them, but they were protected well.

And he did the same thing in the evening with the dog, he went into the barracks where we stayed. And he would do the same thing. He opened the door, and he would say to the dog, "Go in and get the dogs." And many people were bitten and killed by this dog.

Another thing, one of his way of killing people, he had a picture of a horse. And he would go in camp and he would walk in and say, "Here, hold this picture up," with the horse. And then he would aim in the arm, or in the leg, or in the head, he wouldn't shoot at the horse. That was another one of his hobbies. And that's how I got hit.

Q: WHERE DID HE SHOOT YOU? HE HAD YOU HOLD UP THE PICTURE OF THE HORSE? AND WHERE DID HE SHOOT YOU IN THE HEAD?

A: [Shows scar on head]

Q: OH MY. BUT THE BULLET DIDN'T PENETRATE.

A: Oh no, it was just, I mean it was as deep as a finger. But life is only luck. Without this, I wouldn't be sitting here. I felt guilty after

liberation. Why did I survive and not the others? I had many sleepless nights because of this. I was no stronger, no older, no younger, no weaker than all the others. Why did I? So I could only come to one conclusion, that luck was on my side.

I have so many dear friends, even in Germany I have friends who were in concentration camps. We all, when we get together sometimes we look at the situation we went through. And there were so many of us who lived together, we dated certain ladies together, and very, very few survived. Why? I asked once our Rabbi here, I said, "Rabbi, why?" He said, "Erwin, I don't have the answer, nobody has." And I don't think it has to do with religion, or it has to with your outlook on life, or your intellectual, or your whatever, it's plain luck. And I still believe that anything we do in life depends on luck.

I don't think my luck would hold out to lay in front of a train. I wouldn't take a chance on this. But so far, I have to say I have been very, very lucky. And I hope I have few more years, it holds out. And I will do my best, and always have, if I can do anything for humanity to better many people's life, and can help people to change their attitude toward humanity, I be always happy to do this. Because I have been through different stages, and I have seen what people are able and willing to do

towards others, on the plus and on the minus, and I hope it's all in the plus now, and nothing no more in the minus. I have my doubt, really, but hoping.

Q: I HAVE SEVERAL QUESTIONS. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR UPBRINGING, YOUR SCHOOL YEARS. WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL YOU WENT TO, AND WHAT KIND OF REACTION, COMMUNITY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE JEWS AND THE GENTILES IN YOUR TOWN?

A: The upbringing and the school. I was mentioned before, and I showed you that picture. I was the only Jewish boy in school. So was my brother, but my brother was much younger. At the same time, when I went to school, I went to public school and then to middle school. I don't know what you call a middle school here. You have that here too, middle school?

And I suffered so much in that school that my father decided one day, and he took me out of school. He couldn't stand the way they, what they did to me, one boy in particular. And I mentioned him before. So after I left school, my father was, he learned to be a butcher, but he never practiced it. But he thought it was a good profession, and he wanted me to learn the same trade. So after he took me out of school I went to another town to learn to be a butcher. But it wasn't really what I wanted to be.

After a year or so, more or less, the people I was with, I worked for, were also Jewish people and they closed the butcher shop because they

were Jews. They could no longer continue with their butcher shop. So then I came here home for a very short time, and then I went to Cologne. And in Cologne I had an opportunity to work as a plumber, until they closed the Jewish plumbing shop.

Then came a new order from the Nazis, that all Jews had to be employed in certain fields, digging ditches, or working on street building, or similar jobs. So I worked for approximately two years, again I don't remember the dates, could be a year and a half, it could be two and a half, I worked on the Autobahn, that's the freeway, going from Cologne to Frankfurt. And then later on I worked at a other direction, Cologne - Aachen. One day, so at that time my parents already had moved to Cologne, and my brother was in a Jewish educational system, a Jewish high school, and besides high school they had a system where they could learn a trade. And when he finished high school he went in this full time. And there he met a man who was working for a company where the owner was an old -time Nazi, he joined the Nazi party in 1927, and he had hired two Jewish people. And one of the Jewish people who worked this, cousin or so, was in school with my brother. And he asked my brother if he wants to work there. He said yes, so he said come on, you can work there, the man takes you.

So then later on I quit the street work and went to work for those people, too. And this man was a very decent man. He probably could have saved my brother and I from deportation, but he could not save my parents from deportation. He postponed, we were supposed to go with the first transport out of Cologne to Lodz, and he went to the Gestapo and I don't know what he did, but he stopped the deportation for the family. And when the second order came to go, he went again and they told him that my brother and I could be working for him but the parents had to go. And my brother and I decided we would not let the parents go by themselves, so we went along. Also this man provided occasionally some work in his private home, Saturday and Sunday, for my brother, his house, and he would feed us and he would give us some food to take home. Even so, he was a long-time member, long time we have now 1940 or 41, and he was a member since 1927, but I don't think he was anti-Jewish as much as the rest of the Nazis were, because he showed quite an interest in having Jewish people working for him, and I found out later on what lots of people didn't do, he paid for the insurance where later on I collected Workman's Compensation. And not everybody did this. Many gentiles where Jewish people worked for did not do this, and this man did. This way I get a nice little pension now from Germany. It's not much, but

because of this man's decency. So you have to be lucky.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER THE RISE OF WHEN HITLER CAME TO POWER IN 1933, YOU WERE ONLY 12?

A: Oh yeah, I remember it very well.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THAT?

A: I remember that before this, I seen many fights, where Communists and Nazis actually had fist fights. One was pulling for one direction, the other pulling for the other direction. But I also remember that in 1933, when he was legally elected, he was elected, people voted for him. And I remember that some of the Jewish people in this town went to the hall where the polling boxes were, and when the vote was over, they had twice as many no votes that there were Jewish people. Exactly. And of course they knew that the Jews didn't vote for him. But they couldn't figure out who were the others. They want to find out. I mean, no Jew in his right mind would voted for him, and everybody knew and expected. I don't remember if there were 12 family, there probably were 24 or 30 votes, they had some children. And there were exactly double, 60 votes.

And that was a mysterious thing. Not only the Jewish people, but everybody said, the individual knew of course how they voted, but the

people at the voting booth, and the members, already there were members of the Nazi Party, they want to pinpoint who they were. And I'm sure I showed you the letter from this man who was, I know for sure that he never voted for them, this is for sure. And there were a few others. There were the butcher in this town, they all passed away. There was a Jewish lady who lived with a gentile husband, they had no children. They want to deport her too, and she found room or housing at the local butcher, and he kept her for two weeks, I have documentation of this at home. And then he took her to his brother who was a farmer for a few weeks. And then she settled down at another butcher's home for a year and a half. And she survived there. And when we go to Germany, we always visit those people and they have visited us.

And late in the Hitler time before we were deported, I used to go by bicycle from Cologne to this little town, with a backpack. I used to go on Saturday morning and they would put butter and eggs and sausage and meat and everything in there. And they never asked a penny for it. And I used to go home, and they were wonderful people. I mean, there were alot of none good, or bastards, but there also were alot of good people. And I speak up for the ones who were bastards, but I also have to speak up for the ones who were good. Otherwise I couldn't live with myself.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER LOSE HIS BUSINESS, WAS IT TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM?

A: Oh yes.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED?

A: No. People were afraid to dealing with Jews because they had a newspaper, and that's the newspaper was called the Stuermer, I don't know if you're familiar with this. And whenever a gentile did business with a Jew, he had a big writeup in there. And people tried to avoid this because...For instance, my next-door-neighbor was a dentist. His wife was 100%, she's still alive, he has died. He is the one who give me all those pictures. He joined the Party also because he was treating, he had patients, dental patients who belonged to different organizations. And he was afraid if he would not join that he would lose them. I don't think he would have taken a Jew during the day hours and looked at their teeth, but they used to go there in the evening.

I mentioned that the doctor in the town wouldn't take my father when they beat him up. If he probably would have gone at midnight, he probably would have treated him. And I can't say that he was such a terrible person. But they were afraid, and so were many, many other people.

I recall, and I've been told this many times, that my cousin who lives in Los Angeles, her mother used to go shopping, there was one hour twice a week where they could go shopping. She would go to the local butcher who helped survive the life of this Jewish lady. If she would come in he would take her, or his wife would take her, in the room next door to the butcher shop, and there they would feed her and they would give her things, and people were afraid. The good ones was also afraid for their own life. But many of them contributed and extended the life of Jewish people as long as possible, but mostly in the darkness. They were afraid of themself, and I can understand this.

Q: WHAT RISK WERE THEY TAKING EXACTLY? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THEM IF THEY WERE CAUGHT?

A: When they were caught, they were, in those days the war already had started. They had a stamp system. You could buy only food on certain stamps, for bread, for butter, for all those things you had stamps. So they probably would have said that people could not go and buy from this man, because there were other butcher shops. And they would put his name in the newspaper, the Stuermer, he treats people. So they were all a little bit afraid, they would close their business, they could not support their family.

My father had a very dear friend who worked for the railroad. Now, railroad is a national subsidy. It's not like in America, it's privately, it's all owned by the government. And this man used to play cards with my father twice a week for years and years. And he said, "I can't do that no more, it they catch me doing it, they fire me. And I have to keep on providing for my family." He had one son who even became a Jesuit priest, but he had to pay for this. But they were decent people, but afraid for their own life, or livelihood. And I understand that very well.

So that was a very difficult time also for some of the decent people. Lots of people took advantage of the situation, took whatever they could get, but other people never wanted a penny for every decent thing they did. They refused to take money for the food they brought. And others, you could buy food on the black market for triple the price. And all those things happened. I guess it's also human nature. Some people they take every opportunity, you have them everywhere in the world. And other people, they help others when they in need, and we have them all over the world. So it's very difficult. And lots of times I have put myself in the similar situation the non-Jewish people were in, with the best intention, and then I say to myself, "How far would I have gone?" So you have to look at that too, to be really honest with yourself.

Q: HAVE YOU FOUND AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION?

A: I haven't been in the situation. So if I would come to that situation, I have to decide then what I would do. And I probably would do it, probably, I can't say for sure, but I probably would do it. It's a very tough decision. Because there your lifeline, they locked up many Gentile people for assisting Jews. They called them anti-system. They give it a name, and they locked them up there. Many Gentiles were in concentration camps for disbehavior, they call them anti-government, and no problem, they locked them up just as fast as the Jews did.

So it's living under a dictatorship, in any form, whatever the name is, it's not as easy as people think it is. And especially free-thinking people, they have to be very, very careful. We are so fortunate that we can say anything we want here, within reason, and have the freedom to do this, and this freedom is protected. Many countries don't have that, even they call themselves democracies, but they don't have that.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER OF KRISTALLNACHT, AND HOW IT AFFECTED THE TOWN?

A: Kristallnacht. I don't remember it, because I wasn't anywhere near it. I was visiting a friend of my father's in a different town, also very decent people. And he said to me in the morning, "I just heard in the

radio, they destroyed," he didn't say they destroyed, "they burnt the synagogues in Cologne." He didn't want to tell me exactly what happened, but in the same town I knew a family where the man was a Communist, probably more of a Socialist, an anti-Nazi. And I went there in the afternoon, with this man I could speak more openly. He said to me, "Erwin, go home." He said, "This and this has happened." He said, "Here is a bicycle, don't go by train." And that was approximately 45, 50 miles ride. He gave me a bicycle, he said don't go by train, don't go by bus. So in the evening when it got dark, I took the bicycle and I went to Cologne. And fortunately nothing happened to the family.

But I didn't see actually when they destroyed the houses or destroyed the synagogues, I did not see that.

Q: WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU ARRIVED BACK IN COLOGNE, WHAT DID YOU SEE?

A: You mean the next day or two?

Q: THE NEXT DAY.

A: Well, I seen the, there were one, two, there were three or four synagogues they burned. And many Jewish businesses were destroyed, some of the people were arrested. But Cologne was a very liberal city by itself, and smaller towns...The town I was born in, every Jewish man who

was still living there was arrested and was in prison. But in Cologne, a town of 1,000,000 population, easily you could hide somewhere. But the general public was very much a liberal city and they did not have hundred percent participation in the Nazi system. I can't recall exactly the vote they had, but a limited vote.

And looking back at this, it was even at that time, unbelievable that educated people, even intellectuals, participated in such a thing, that a system could really brainwash people of such a high standard, an intellectual, people who were famous for music, for industry, for medicine, for all higher things in life, could be persuaded by one man like this, and change their whole, complete intellect. It's hard to believe. I still can't believe this. And sometimes I have experienced in my travel, I normally do not in Germany, do not speak to people 70, 65, 70 or older. I don't want to get involved with them.

And I don't know if you want to hear this, but I had a wonderful little experience. You want to hear this?

Q: PLEASE.

A: I have a friend in Zurich, Switzerland, that is the son of the man who was at that time, when I returned to my home town, he was the mayor. Appointed mayor, not the regular mayor, the regular mayor was

arrested. And the youngest son of this man, when I lived in their house, was 5, 6 years old. And I was at that time 24, 25, or something like this. And I remember this little kid looking at me all the time. Never had the courage to ask me anything, but he was always looking. And later on in life he became an apprentice, and he was unhappy, and at the age of 19, he joined the Franciscan Order of Monks. He became a Monk. And he became a very high official in this monastery. They're worldwide. He achieved the appointment of Secretary General. He used to go to Rome, to the Pope, see him twice a year. Travelled all over the world. After 20 years, being a Monk and second highest position, he left the monastery, went to Zurich, Switzerland, and became an Orthodox Jew.

He has been in this temple, four years ago, he spoke here. And fortunately he will be here again in October.

So one day I visited this man in Zurich, Switzerland. It was after my wife passed away. And going by train to Cologne, in the same little, what do you call it, compartment, was a young man sitting, about 40 years of age, and we started a conversation, because that's the age I like. He was a pilot for Lufthansa. And we start talking. The next stop was Bern, Switzerland. An elderly gentleman comes in there dressed, I mean, everything matching and fitting. And I looked at this man, and he starts

talking a beautiful German. I said, he must have been really one of the old-time Nazis, he took advantage then, he takes advantage now.

[End of Video Tape One. Interview resumes on Tape Two]

A: So the man said, "Yes, I understand because I lived all this time." But my father, my brother and I were never members of the Nazi Party, and yet we had to give to the Nazi Party our facilities. They said we have a meeting here, you had to open up the doors, but we never were. And he said, "Just a second," he took out his notebook, pencil and paper, gold pencil and gold paper, whatever it was, and he wrote down three names of Jewish people, one in London and two in New York. And one of the two I knew. So next time I was in New York, I phoned them up, just for curiousty. And they told me, yes it's true. They had Nazi Party functionings there, but they never became members, and they corresponded, and anytime one of their friends came near, they always were open and helped them. So sometimes you can be mistaken also. But I'd rather be mistaken once than get involved in something I don't like.

Q: YOU WERE GOING TO TELL US, HE PULLED OUT HIS BUSINESS CARD. WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS DID HE HAVE?

A: Hotel. One of the biggest hotels in Cologne. Very famous hotel. Banos Hotel, very famous hotel. I don't know if he still owned it. The man

at that time, that was five years ago, he was 83 years old then. But very elegant man. He had the tie, and the pin, and the buttons here, and the, I mean, he was, his attache case was made out of snake leather. I mean, there was nothing cheap. I thought he must have been one of the guys who pulled the gold teeth out of the crematorium from the Jews. But you can be wrong, too. I've been wrong.

So I think that's enough for one day.

Q: YES.

A: You heard enough of me.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: You're welcome.