Interview with ERWIN LEVY

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q. GOOD AFTERNOON, MR. LEVY.

A. Good afternoon.

Q. THIS IS A SECOND PART OF OUR INTERVIEW. AND WHAT I'D LIKE TO DO TODAY IS KIND OF GO FROM THE BEGINNING AND PICK UP SOME DETAILS ABOUT DIFFERENT THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFE, PRIOR TO AND DURING THE HOLOCAUST.

LET ME FIRST START WITH YOUR CHILDHOOD. WE DIDN'T TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT IT. YOU MENTIONED THAT YOUR FATHER WAS IN THE CATTLE BUSINESS. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU COULD TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR SCHOOLING AND ABOUT YOUR JEWISH BACKGROUND?

A. My father was very much educated in Judaism. He went to a Kheder in Dusseldorf. He was capable of reading from the Torah. He could translate. He knew what he was reading. He also became a shochet, but he never practiced. And he was quite a religious man.

I went to school in this little town. It was a Catholic school and I was the only Jewish child in that school. We were separated, boys and girls. The girl part of the school, there were four Jewish girls, my sister, my cousin and two other Jewish girls. But I was the only boy. And later on, five years later, my brother came to school, and he was an only boy in the same fashion I was.

In the beginning, school was very normal. And later on, when Hitler came to power, the teacher who was supposed to train me or teach me was a very devoted Nazi, and I had a very, very bad time. My father -- I came home many, many times during the week, and I was bleeding, at the end. Before I finished school, my father took me out of school. He couldn't stand it anymore and sent me to a different city. And of course, when I came back, after the war, I tried to talk to this particular teacher, and I give him some bad times. But I could never do what he do to me. I wasn't capable of doing this.

Q. WHERE DID YOUR FATHER SEND YOU TO SCHOOL? AND DID YOUR OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS GO WITH YOU?

A. Yes. My brother is four and a half years younger than I am. So when I was, in 1933, I was twelve years old, and he was seven and a half. And he went to another teacher. His teacher in those days was a very fine man. And also, the lady teacher who taught the girls would never let them out in half time. She would always keep them in school. And she would always stand around them, that nothing happened to them, very fine devoted person. Except this man they called teacher, I went to school with, was a terrible person.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER HIS NAME?

A. Yes. His name was Kramer, K-r-a-m-e-r.

Q. SO WHERE DID YOU END UP FINISHING SCHOOL?

A. I finished school -- I never finished school. I went to school in another bigger town, and there they closed the school too. So then later on, I went to Cologne, and I couldn't go to school anymore because I was already over the age. And I was then, through the official organization, what supplies jobs to people, to a forced labor. We had to work on the streets and we had to work on different jobs where they sent you to.

Q. WHAT YEAR WAS THAT, THAT YOU WENT TO COLOGNE?

A. I went to Cologne in 1936. And first, when I came to Cologne, this forced labor, that's not in existence. But later on, that took place.

Q. WAS YOUR CHILDHOOD A HAPPY CHILDHOOD, WITH THE FAMILY?

A. Yes, with the family we had a wonderful -- very tight. We still do. My brother and I, even though he lives in Los Angeles, we talk at least two, three, four times a week on the telephone. And I have a cousin in Los Angeles. We talk all the time. And all the relatives, we talk to each other at least once a week. Very tight-knit family. But the circumstances, we couldn't change the situation. And everybody suffered. If one suffered, the other suffered too.

Q. WHEN YOU WENT TO COLOGNE DID YOU GO BY YOURSELF?

A. Yes. I went by myself. And one week before the Kristallnacht, approximately, it was maybe the 2nd or 3rd of November, 1938, the family moved also to Cologne. And this prevented my father from being arrested, because all the other Jewish males in this town were arrested and sent to camp. And my father, nothing happened to him. And my brother was too young. And I wasn't even home when that happened. I was in another town again, visiting a friend of my father's. And then during the night -- I think I said that before, once -- by bicycle, I went to Cologne.

Q. TELL ME ABOUT THIS FORCED LABOR. WHEN YOU FIRST WENT TO COLOGNE, THERE WAS NONE?

A. Well, when I say forced labor, they have an organization like we have here, too. If you're unemployed, you go there and, looking for a job. And they had the same thing in Germany also. Nobody would hire you or could hire you unless you had a piece of paper from this organization, Labor Department, or whatever you call it.

And they would not assign a Jew to selling clothes or selling shoes. The only sent you to mostly jobs where you had to use a shovel and dig a ditch or

move dirt, or anything like this. So I worked for approximately two years, on the freeway, Autobahn. They were building the freeway from Cologne to Frankfurt, and from Cologne to Aachen. And I was occupied at different places during those years.

Q. DID YOU HAVE, FORM A SOCIAL GROUP AND HAVE FRIENDS?

A. Oh, I have many friends. We had Jewish friends. Oh, yes. I still have many Jewish friends in the United States. We are friends for many, many years, and every so often we get together. I also phone them and they phone me. They are all over the country. They're as far as Australia and Canada.

And we had a little social event in Cologne too. That was a Jewish woman, who was a dancer, ballet dancer. And she could not continue doing this because she was Jewish. And she opened up a dance school. Her name was (Krietta Keller). And she had a big flat, big apartment. And she took two rooms, and every Friday night, Saturday night for two, three hours, she had record players and we used to go there. We had to pay for it and we used to go dancing. So that was the event of the week, for a couple of years. And then they closed us down too.

Q. IS THAT WHEN YOU WERE NOT ALLOWED TO

PARTICIPATE IN REGULAR SOCIAL EVENTS, YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED TO GO TO CLUBS OR --

A. Well, in those days we were not even allowed to go out in the evening. We had to wear the star of David, and after, I think it was 8 o'clock in the evening, you could not be seen in the street. And before, I guess 6 o'clock in the morning, you couldn't be seen in the street.

There was a time when shopping was restricted to one hour a day, for Jewish people. It was certain -- I don't remember. I never went shopping. My mother used to do this. But there was, I believe, there was one or two hours a day, and I don't think every day of the week. I think there was only certain days you could do it.

You could not sit in the street car. You had to stand in the back. You could not sit in the train. You had to stand in the back. And you had to wear the star of David, that everybody recognized you, that you were Jewish.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST WERE TOLD YOU HAD TO WEAR THE STAR, HOW YOU WERE NOTIFIED ABOUT IT AND HOW YOU REACTED TO IT?

A. Well, I believe that they passed a law. The Nazi government passed a law that every Jew had, on a

certain day -- I don't remember the day, I don't even remember the year when it was -- had to wear the star of David. And inside was the word written, Jew, in there. And this, if you were caught, one way or another, without wearing it, they put you in jail. They probably put you in jail anyway, but they put you in jail sooner. It was very difficult to go without it.

A lot of times, we tried to have a coat over your arm and cover it up, or have a piece of paper. Why, I don't remember. Sometimes you wanted to go somewhere and you thought you had a better chance without this. But people got caught and they were punished for it. So we were all afraid to -- today I don't see why we were afraid, because nothing worse or nothing better happened to us. But in those days, we were very scared.

Q. DID YOU LOOK JEWISH WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG? YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL BLUE EYES.

A. I have not really no idea. I look myself in the mirror, I don't know if I look Jewish or not. And I don't know, as a child, probably I didn't. I have no idea.

Q. WOULD PEOPLE WALK UP TO YOU AND MAKE ANTI-SEMITIC REMARKS?

A. Well, not -- Cologne by itself, what shall I

say, it was a liberal city. Even though, when they knew you were Jewish, people would try to help you.

I remember when we went to the dance school, in the evening. That was also before the time that we had to be home at 8 o'clock in the evening. But we had to wear the star already. There was a restaurant and a butcher shop, but they slaughtered only horses. And they were very famous for goulash. I don't know if you know what goulash is it. Horse goulash, very famous for this. And when we went in there, we went in, the boys and girls, and when they see the star, they would put us in the back room, and they always would give us double portion for half the price. So there were people like this. They did their best. They also were afraid of themselves, they could get caught. But there were quite a few people who were and tried to be very helpful. I remember those people.

Then I remember the bakery. My mother used to go by there and give them a piece of paper, what she needed. And in the evening, they would bring the bread to the house. And also, the people in the grocery market, they were all on the same street where we lived. They were very nice. And not only to my parents, to all of us who was all Jewish people, to all of them. Very, very generous.

Q. WHAT KIND OF HOUSING DID YOU HAVE BACK THEN?

A. We were living in normal houses. I mean, we used to live in the, in our private home. Even then, when we moved to Cologne, Jewish people only could live in houses owned by Jewish people. And sometimes they kicked out the Jews and moved them into another house, when the house was sold or taken. But you had to be living in the house owned by Jewish people. And there were not gentiles. They were either all gentiles or all Jews. They did not mix them.

Q. WERE YOU LIVING IN AN APARTMENT HOUSE?

A. Yes, yes. It was a, I think, four-story apartment house, and each floor had two apartments. So I presume there were eight apartments in the house. And I remember the house where we lived in, before we were deported, was totally destroyed. And to this day, it has never been rebuilt.

Q. HOW WAS IT DESTROYED?

A. I presume by bombs. I have no idea. Evidently it was owned by Jewish people. Maybe they didn't survive and there is no owners. I really don't know why it was never rebuilt, but it's never been rebuilt.

Q. DURING THE YEARS LEADING UP TO KRISTALLNACHT DID PEOPLE, AND DID YOU BECOME MORE FRIGHTENED OR --

A. Frightened is not the right word. I mean, you didn't have any, any rights whatsoever. If somebody beat you up, you couldn't go to the police and file charges. That didn't work. Even if the policeman was probably very nice gentleman, he couldn't do anything for you, because his job would be on the firing line. So you had to avoid every possible friction, because there was no jurisdiction. There was no right. Nobody would come out and help you, or step in between and protect you. There were no such things. Even some people probably would have liked to do it, but for their own sake, they wouldn't do it, or they couldn't do it.

But they were quite a few people who would come in the evening, to the house, and try to help Jewish people to survive. But during the daytime, they were all afraid of their own livelihood. And I can understand that very well.

Q. DID YOU LIVE IN THE GHETTO IN COLOGNE?

A. No, in Cologne, not in my time. There were ghettos, around 1500 there was a ghetto in Cologne. There was a time -- I don't know if that's appropriate -- in Cologne -- Jews lived in Cologne before Christ. That means over 2,000 years. And there was a time, approximately 300 years ago, either the Bishop or the Cardinal, who ruled Cologne in those days, chased out

the Jews. They had to leave this town and go on the other side of the Rhine River. They could not return for 300 years, until another leader, in those days religious leader, or land owners allowed the Jews to come back, full 300 years. So maybe in those days there were ghettos in Cologne, but my times, no.

Q. ON KRISTALLNACHT, YOU TOLD US YOU WERE NOT THERE. YOU MENTIONED THAT AFTER THAT, THAT'S WHEN PEOPLE STARTED BEING, THE FIRST DEPORTATIONS BEGAN, SOMETIME AFTER YOU LEFT, THE DEPORTATIONS?

A. Well, deportations started actually before this, I believe. Now, I'm not sure. I believe that people of Polish and Russian descent -- maybe descent is not the right word -- citizenship, I should say, were deported, I think before the Kristallnacht. Because I had friends, a very good friend of mine, his sister was married to a man had who had citizenship of Poland. And they were sent away. I think it was before the Kristallnacht. But I'm not convinced of this, the date. Yes, I think it was before the Kristallnacht.

But otherwise, of course, if you did something, if they caught you, or somebody turned you in, for no reason at all, accused you of some, doing something, they would come and get you, and they'd send you to a concentration camp. Yes, that happened many,

many times. But not like they did later on. They took 1,000 people, or 500 people, or 2,000 people, put them into railroad cars and shipped them away. This, that did not happen until -- there again, I don't know the date, but I think they started in 1940, if I'm not mistaken. But before that, that was individuals, or maybe two, three, people, or maybe a little town, they took all of them. But generally, the deportations started, I believe, in 1940.

Q. WOULD YOU KNOW OF ANYONE WHO WAS TAKEN AWAY IN THOSE EARLY YEARS FOR BEING TURNED IN FOR NOT --

A. Yes. I know a relative of mine. His name was (Kruger). His wife was my father's first cousin. And they lived in Germany, but I believe no more than two miles from the Dutch border. And one day the policeman came to him and said, Kruger, I think you should go to Holland tonight. He said, why? He said, I seen at the police station, there was a policeman. I seen at the police station, your former maid turned you in that you attacked her while she was working for you. He said, I did not. It's unbelieveable. I never did a thing like that. Why should I go away? Sure enough, the next day, they came and took him. And that was in 1933. They took him away and he never came out. And from the whole family, one son survived, and he immigrated to

Argentina. And I tried to locate him and I never could find him. Maybe he passed away in the meantime.

But there were many people. I know another man, a bachelor, who had, occasionally, had an affair with a non Jewish lady. And when Hitler came to power, somebody turned him in like he did it yesterday, or whatever, and they took him away. And he never came back. It's very easy.

I knew a man from my little town. He lives in Fargo, North Dakota. They had a butcher shop. I don't know if I mentioned that the last time, that they had a journeyman butcher working for them. And later on, when Hitler came to power, he took them in. And he said to the veterinarian, condemn the animals where they're slaughtered. And they had to bury them. And during the night, this man went out in the backyard, dug it up and put it in the sausage. And he was picked up and they gave him a trial. And they had the veterinarian testify, and he said he never did this. And yet they locked him up anyway. So justice, you couldn't get no justice.

And my father had similar experience. I don't think I every mentioned it the last time. Some people owed him money. And I don't remember if they phoned or sent a note that he should come and pick up the money.

When he arrived there, there was a letter laying there. They said, sign this. And it says, we paid you in full. He said, where is the money? So father and son, they took butcher knives out and put them on the throat and said, you sign this. They would have killed him. So he signed the note that they paid him.

And another episode, another man who owed him money, my father sued him, to get the money, and they went to court. And he testified that two witnesses that he was working in the field, in a potato field, my father came by, and they testified that he paid them cash in the potato field. Everybody knows when you are picking up, or to dig potatoes, you don't have any cash in your pocket. But my father lost the case.

And I think I mentioned this, when he got beaten up one time, and the doctor wouldn't take care of him. That was another time. So there were all kinds of things going on. And you could take somebody to court, but you could never win.

Q. WHAT KIND OF THINGS DID YOU DO IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE TO AVOID TROUBLE? HOW DID YOU CHANGE?

A. You could not avoid trouble, if there was somebody who wanted you put away or in jail, no matter what you did. You didn't have to leave the house. You could stay in the house, and they still could turn you

in for something that didn't even exist. But you couldn't prove anything because you had no rights.

People who live under the freedom you have in America cannot understand this in a thousand years. Innocent people, never did anything, just because they're Jews, accused of things they never did. I mean, I understand and I feel for people who live -- and thankfully some changed in the Eastern countries, in the dictatorship. But I know exactly how the things go on in those countries, or have been going on. And that's an empty feeling. You never know from one minute to the next where your life will end. And it's not something to be very proud of. Looking back, I mean, I've got to knock wood. We made it, just by, just by very small margin, but we made it. And so many others didn't.

Q. DID YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND DURING THIS PERIOD?

A. Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, we were supposed to get married before the deportation. And her parents were all for it and my parents were all for it. And I refused to do it, because I didn't see any future. And I couldn't, I didn't go along with it. And also, she perished. The whole family perished. None came back, of the whole family. But it was a very sad situation. Yes, I was going with the girl for three years.

Many people, many people got married at the last moment, and there was just an awful situation. Because once you were deported, you couldn't stay together. You were separated. And people thought that they could get together, stay together and try to survive together. But this was not the way it ended up. And I don't know exactly why I didn't want to get married, but I knew that I could not take care of my parents, in whatever little fashion, and a wife also. So I thought that was the best solution to it.

Q. HOW WERE YOU NOTIFIED OF THE -- YOU WERE IN THE SECOND TRANSPORT FROM COLOGNE?

A. From Cologne, yes.

Q. AND HOW WERE YOU NOTIFIED, AND CAN YOU DESCRIBE IT?

A. How we were notified, I believe that I'm correct in this, there was a Jewish council in the City of Cologne. And there was one man who was the president of this council. And the Gestapo would either go to the office or send a note to the office, or somebody delivered the note. And they would say, next Monday morning, a thousand Jews have to be at the wayward station in (Doits), that's on the other side of the Rhine River from Cologne, for transportation.

There again came a very difficult job for

anybody. I can't recall how many Jews were living in Cologne. Let's presume that there's 10,000 Jews, and 1,000 had to go on transport. How do you pick 1,000 out of 10,000? Everybody had friends, and a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend. So I don't know how they did this. If they put the names in a bucket and pulled them out, I have no idea.

But we were supposed to leave for the first transport. And the man I worked for, and my brother worked for, went to the Gestapo and told them that he needed us. And somehow he got us out of this transport. And when the second transport came, he tried the same thing again, and he was told that my brother and I could stay, but my parents had to leave. And we decided to go with them.

We probably would have survived, because this man we worked for, was an all-time supporter of Hitler. He was not an anti-Semite, but he was a long-time member of the Nazi party, and he had all kind of connections. So I had a feeling at that time that, really, if we would not have gone with the parents, he probably could somehow -- he had all kinds of goofy ideas how he could do this, and he probably would have done it, too.

Q. WHAT KIND OF GOOFY IDEAS DID HE HAVE?

A. Well, he was in the building industry. And we

built a house for a Gestapo, in the country, a country house. And he had an idea that he would finance it and build some more for some other Gestapos. By doing so, we would do the labor, and that way he could keep us there. And he told us that too. But it never worked out that way.

Q. DESCRIBE THE DAY YOU WENT TO THE TRANSPORT, WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN COLOGNE AT THE TRAIN STATION, HOW YOUR PARENTS REACTED.

A. How they reacted? We were allowed, each one, to have a suitcase, but you have to be able to carry it yourself. If you couldn't carry it, you couldn't take it. So first, we went out and bought some suitcases. And the people who sold suitcases, where they had to be bought, you needed stamps for this. You couldn't just walk into a store and buy a suitcase. This was all, everybody was stationed. So we bought the suitcases, through connection. I don't remember the details.

And then I made myself some kind of a belt over my shoulder, that I could carry a suitcase in the front and a suitcase in the back, because my mother couldn't take a suitcase. And then my father had a suitcase and my brother had a suitcase. And we had to go by streetcar from the City of the Cologne, across the Rhine River, to the station in (Doits). And of course,

in the streetcar, we were not allowed to sit down. We all wore a star, and people knew what was going on. And many people -- sorry, I get emotional again -- got up in the streetcar and let the Jewish woman sit down, and helped them to carry the stuff out from the streetcar. And they were wonderful people, really. And some people came with wheelbarrows and pushed the luggage to the station, many people.

And of course, it was very emotional too. Even the operator of the streetcar kissed my mother when she left the streetcar. It was a woman operator. And they really didn't know where we went or what happened, but a lot of people with tremendous feelings.

Finally, we got to the railroad station. We had to walk maybe half a mile. And we were standing in line. And they were not cattle cars. They were passenger cars, with wooden benches, but no toilet facilities there. And a whole train load -- I can't tell you how many railroad cars there were and how many people they put into one car. And each car had two buckets, and they served as toilet facilities. And that was the worst, that was the beginning of -- there is where we started to feel inhumanity toward people. In the middle of everybody, you had to go, you had to go. And everybody was around there, and what a degrading

thing to do this. And that's how they started.

And then finally, when the trains were all filled up -- again, I don't know how many people it was. I believe a thousand. And then this train moved to (Letmathe), to Lodz. And when we arrived there, we were unloaded. And I think I mentioned the last time too, the first thing we seen was big wagons, normally pulled by horses, they're pulled by people. And the SS, or Gestapo, whoever it was, had whips, and they were whipping the people to pull the wagon. And they were loaded with potatoes, or whatever was on it, maybe 10 or 20 people pulling on it, and a tremendous load. And people fell; they stepped on them. And that was the first sight we had going from civilization into a ghetto, or in a camp. Quite a disgrace for the whole human race, not just for us, how people would be able to do that to other people. And that's where the, the life started.

Q. WHERE DID YOU LIVE WHEN YOU GOT TO THE LODZ?

A. They had little houses. At one time I presume there was a one-family house, or maybe two-family house. And in each room -- there were no toilet facilities in the house. There was outside a little house, but nothing inside, no water inside. There was a pump outside. You had to pump water to wash yourself. And I

have to think. There were double beds, downstairs and upstairs. I would think there were two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, I think sixteen people in one room. And there was not enough room to go between the beds. They were sleeping on, that was wooden beds with straw. We had no mattresses. They had covers, and in the covers there was straw. And that's what we slept on.

And before we know it, the bugs had taken over. They were already in those houses. It was a terrible situation, cockroaches, fleas and lice, and you name it, they all were there.

Q. HOW BIG WAS THE GHETTO? HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE THERE WHEN YOU WERE THERE, DO YOU REMEMBER?

A. I don't know.

Q. WHAT WAS DAILY LIFE LIKE IN THE GHETTO? WHAT WAS IT?

A. I think after a day or two or three, we were assigned to, we had to go to work. They did all kinds of work in there. They were making clothes for the Germans. They were making all kinds of things. I remember I was working on making, I think you call them squeezers, where, you know, you pull the hairs.

Q. TWEEZERS?

A. Tweezers. I was making them by hand. You had a piece of metal, and you had to file all day long.

Then another thing I made, I worked on a press, and I pressed out a little piece of metal, what shoe makers put on the end of the heels, that the heels don't wear down. All kinds of different work. They were working on luggage, clothes, repair the clothes, seamstresses, but I worked in a factory where there were metal workings going on.

And in the morning, I left from the house where I lived. And in the evening, I came back. And during the day, there's a plight. Each house had a person who was in charge, put in charge for the supplies. And they had to go with one or two people, or three or four, and they had to go to a kitchen, with big cans, and they give them soup and bread, and probably coffee. And then when we came from work in the evening, we had our portions. And that was the supply of food. It wasn't always supplied, I can assure you.

And after, again, I don't know the dates, after this went on for, I would say two, three weeks, maybe, or maybe six weeks, I can't remember, one day the Gestapo or SS grabbed me, on the way home, and took me to the assembly hall. And in this hall were a lot of people I knew, a lot of friends of mine, young people. And they were organizing them for a transport. And this transport, for one reason, I don't understand it, there

was a Jewish girl who was filling out forms for everybody. I never seen that girl before. She took me out of the line and opened the back door and said, get out. And she threw me out. I don't want you to go. I never seen the girl again, never before. And lots of my friends went on this transport, including my cousin, and many of my friends.

And about a week later, they caught me again. And this time, I couldn't get out. So they sent me to a camp. At this camp there were, I forget now, but 60 or 80 people that were already there. And when we got there, we were 200. And this was near Poland. And the reason we were sent there, we had to build, I think I mentioned it the last time too, a second track for the railroad.

And after whatever time we spent there, one day, a train -- we were told the day before, or two days before. They didn't tell us what or when. You have to get ready, tomorrow morning or the next morning, certain time, you have to be ready. And the train, they picked us up and they shoved us, this time, in railroad cattle cars. And we were all shipped together. The ones from the first transport what I missed, they were also in those cattle cars. And we all were shipped together to Auschwitz.

And there in Auschwitz, and I think I did say that the last time, we were separated, one portion to the right, one portion to the left. I don't remember what side I was on, but I was on the survivors' side. And the other side was sent to the gas chambers.

Q. LET ME ASK YOU TO GO BACK, BEFORE WE CONTINUE WITH AUSCHWITZ. THE LAST TIME YOU SAW YOUR PARENTS WAS IN THE (LOCATA)?

A. The (Locata).

Q. TELL ME, WHAT KIND OF WORK WERE THEY DOING? AND WAS THERE DISCUSSION IN THE HOUSE ABOUT, WHAT IF YOU GOT SEPARATED, OR DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN?

A. Well, the only discussion, the only discussion we had, that whoever survives, goes back to that little town. And that's what we all tried to do. But my brother went to Auschwitz. My father died of typhoid fever in Lodz. My mother went with my brother to Auschwitz. My brother went to one side and my mother went to the other side. So we know what happened.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOUR FATHER DIED?

A. No, but my brother probably knows. I was not there anymore when he died. He actually starved to death. He was totally skin and bone, but I mean, I didn't see it. I was shipped out already.

Q. AND YOUR MOTHER, YOUR MOTHER AND BROTHER WERE TRANSPORTED TOGETHER?

A. Right, to Auschwitz.

Q. AND WHEN WERE THEY TRANSPORTED, HOW LONG AFTER YOU?

A. I have no -- well, they stayed much longer than I did. I don't know, maybe a year they stayed there. I don't know for sure. But what we know is that he went to one side and my mother went to the other side, and there is no question what happened.

Q. DID YOUR PARENTS WORK IN THE GHETTO?

A. I don't think so.

Q. COULD YOU TELL ME THEIR NAMES AND HOW OLD THEY WERE?

A. Yes. My father was, his name was Max Levy. He was born April 4th, 1882. My mother's name was Joanna Levy. Her maiden name Wasserman. She was born November 26, 1890. My sister, who passed also, was born December 10, 1919. Also, we don't know for sure what happened to the sister.

Q. HOW DID SHE COME TO BELGIUM?

A. We had friends, they went to Belgium, but they had a son-in-law and daughter in Belgium, and they had two children. And my sister went to the nuns in this little town we lived, and she got some training as a

cook. She learned how to knit, to sew, and take care of babies. And they hired her. They asked my father if she couldn't come to Belgium, to take care of the two children. She went there and she took some courses in Belgium, and she became, I think she also had a license as a baby nurse. But she was hired in Belgium. But this was already in 1934. And as far as we know, the people she was with, half of them perished and the other half went to the United States.

And we have a friend in Wichita, Kansas, who lived also in Belgium and he knew my sister. And after Auschwitz -- he was in Auschwitz also -- he came back and he talked with some people there, and he couldn't find anything 100 percent, but there were assumptions that she lived underground, taking care of children from deported parents. And with the help of the Belgium people, she was moving around. And one day, they caught up with her. And that's what we heard. We don't know if that's true or not. We never could find out for sure. But she is listed as, what they call missing, or, I guess she didn't survive, and she didn't come back. So we don't know exactly.

Q. WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A. Her name was Ruth, Ruth Levy.

Q. SHE MUST HAVE BEEN VERY BRAVE TO HAVE TAKEN ON

RESPONSIBILITY?

A. Well, I don't know if that was brave. That was -- she had very little choice, I believe, because there were children without parents. What can you do? So under those circumstances, I think we all would do the best we can. And children are more helpless than grown-ups. And they needed all the help they could get. I'm sure a lot of Belgium, non Jewish people helped there too, but they also had to be careful because their life was on the line too. They wouldn't think nothing of taking people and put them on the wall and kill them. It was very easy. So they had also a dangerous situation. And plenty of them died also.

Q. PRIOR TO THE DEPORTATION, WAS THERE ANY TALK IN YOUR FAMILY ABOUT LEAVING GERMANY?

A. Oh, yes. We tried many times. We tried to go to Argentina. We tried to go to Cuba. We tried to go to Israel. We tried to go to the United States. To go to the United States, you needed two things. You needed a number, a quota number, and you need an affidavit. That means you needed a sponsor, and you needed a number. And we had both, but our number was so large that the day never came when the consulate summoned us to the consulate for the papers. So just thousands of Jews perished. Because if you wrote to the American

Consulate, they sent you a card back with a number. And we were still waiting for the call. And that's why so many Jews died, waiting for that call.

Q. WHEN DID YOU BEGIN APPLYING TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY?

A. Well, I guess I started 1935 already. Well, I have to tell you a little embarrassing story also. My mother had a first cousin who married an American soldier in the first World War, and went with him to America, or went afterwards to America. And she lived in Los Angeles. I could even mention her name too. Regina, Regina -- well, I come back to the name.

And when Hitler came to power, she sent the papers. In those days you didn't need any immigration number, just the visa. She sent her the papers, for my sister, my brother and for myself, in the beginning of 1933. And our father would not let us go. He said, I don't let my kids go. They're too young. I might never see them again. And he wouldn't do it. And later on, when the time came, he wanted us to go. We applied for a number, and we never got our turn.

Regina Fisk was her name, F-i-s-k. And we never did go.

The only connection I had with the family, my cousin's family, I'd like to mention that also, in

Oakland lived a woman, already has a husband, and he's already dead, relative of ours and very dear friends. And she tried to get us out somewhere, through the people in Los Angeles, through people in Sioux City, but the number would not allow us to do this.

When I was liberated from the Americans -- there's a German Jewish paper in New York called the (Ofbrau). I don't know if you're familiar with this. And I was hospitalized in the town I was liberated in, called (Mahopac Falls). It was an American soldier, American born, but his wife was German born, and his father-in-law worked for this Jewish German newspaper. The paper was printed in the German language, still is today.

And he took a picture of me and another fellow. And this picture was sent to his father-in-law, and it appeared in the paper, probably a month or maybe two months after the deportation. And when this woman in Oakland seen the picture, she had a brother in New York. And many people who knew me, knew I had survived. So this woman from Oakland, she wrote a letter. And mail was not in order yet. You couldn't receive any mail. But somehow, she sent it through some American military people, I got the letter. And through the same people, I answered her. She wanted to know the name of

those people in Los Angeles, because she had corresponded with them. But she didn't have the address anymore. And she also belonged to the Odessa. And there were connections through the Odessa where I could notify people. So she wrote a letter to the Odessa in Los Angeles, and told her that Fisk heard I survived.

And the letter came back that the lady had died, but she had a son who was a doctor in Los Angeles. And they notified this doctor. So it would be actually a second cousin to me. And he wrote a letter to the Odessa, he doesn't know anything about a relationship, and he doesn't want to start any relationship. He doesn't want nothing to do, and I just should forget it. And she sent the letter, translated to German, because I didn't read English, to me, to Germany.

So some people were more happy. They bent backwards to help anybody, not only relatives. And others didn't want nothing to do with it. And so many times, not now, but 35, 40 years ago, I wanted to go to Los Angeles, look up this gentleman, but my brother was against it. He said, leave him alone. If he doesn't want nothing to do with it, probably we don't need him. And probably he is right. But those are how people act.

Q. THAT'S HOW AMERICANS ACT IN THE GERMAN WAR?

A. Well, it's all kind of people. Some excuses

are legitimate too. They had bad experiences. So we have to put that all in perspective. Maybe he had bad experience with some other relatives. We don't know that. That can happen.

Q. WHO RAN THE GHETTO? WAS THERE A CIVILIAN GUARD THERE, OR WAS IT CIVILIANS OR WAS IT GERMAN SS?

A. Civilian guards?

Q. HOW DID THEY --

A. Outside the ghetto, I believe they were SS. There was a little tower, oh, every hundred yards or so, there was a tower. And then the guards would walk, some of them, back and forth, kept on walking. Others came this way. And there was a fence around it. I know they were uniform Germans, but I don't know if they were SS or military men. I really don't remember. I presume they were SS.

Of course, they had a special group of SS that didn't do anything, but they were put in camps to protect people from running away, and you couldn't run away. There was no where to run to. To what did you run? Especially if you didn't speak Polish. I'm sure that some people who spoke Polish tried to get out. And probably some did. I know some did. But we didn't speak any Polish, and the attempt even, the thought, was not a good idea.

Q. DID ANY OF THE PEOPLE, POLISH PEOPLE WHO LIVED AROUND THERE, TRY TO HELP PEOPLE IN THE GHETTO IN ANY WAY?

A. Well, you see, I'm sure there were. But since we didn't speak Polish, we had no connection with any of those people. Yiddish, I don't know if you're familiar with Yiddish, you don't speak it. But Yiddish is German. And anybody who speaks German understands Yiddish. So we understood and we could speak with people who spoke Yiddish. But Polish, we did not know.

Now, when I was liberated by the Americans, then I spoke some Polish, because I was together with other Polish people, and you picked this up. But at that time, we did not know.

I never seen anybody coming in with a truck, and deliver candies, or anything like this. I'm sure there were also, they were business going on between them, because we didn't have any money. And what we have, we spent. And then we had a watch that was traded for something. And I had a leather jacket that was traded for something, and shoes were traded for something, for a piece of bread. And I'm sure this all went underground outside the ghetto. Because there in the middle of the street, there was a fence. On one side was the ghetto; the other side were Polish people

living there. And I'm almost sure that, between those houses, they were underneath tunnels where those business took place. I never seen it, but I imagine that there was. And the people who came like we did, and bought a few things, and we had a little money, and we had some rings -- because the Germans took all the gold away from us. I don't know if you're familiar with this. The watches and everything, they took away. But they were gold watches. You could have aluminum or stainless steel, or whatever it was. And I'm sure there were deals made in those days.

Q. DID YOU HAVE ANY JEWISH COUNSELORS OR OFFICIALS IN THE GHETTOS?

A. Oh, yes. I just read an article, I just read an article in a book. There was a Jewish man in the ghetto who was, I think they called him the (Yudan) eldest, or (Yudan) leader. And he was the top man, and he had constant contact with the Gestapo. But in the end, they sent him away too.

And it's very difficult, especially under those circumstances. You had to send away people. Of course, you don't send your kids and your cousins and your uncles and aunts. You send all the others first. And this man arrived in Auschwitz, or wherever he arrived, I forgot already. I believe that he didn't

have a very good time arriving there, because there were people who accused him of showing favoritism. I'm sure there was. Probably you and I would have done the same thing. So the man had a very hard time. I don't think he survived.

And those things happened. I remember seeing them. He had a little buggy with a horse, and he had a little sign on it, that he was the top man. And he was riding around in the ghetto with this thing. And I guess a lot of people were afraid of him too. They jumped out of the way. So he had, in the ghetto, lots of power, up to the gate. And that is where the power ended. But I guess, when you do that for a certain length of time, you probably become convinced that nothing is going to happen to you. They need you. And that's not really true. So he had the same path we all had. Some of us survived and some didn't. So I understand he did not survive.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER HIS NAME?

A. No, I don't. I never had any dealings with him.

Q. PROBABLY JUST AS WELL.

YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T STAY IN AUSCHWITZ VERY LONG?

A. I stayed in Auschwitz, I don't think a week,

maybe only two days. We were sent to a coal mine, I would say maybe seven, eight miles, or maybe less or more, out up in the mountains, from Auschwitz. We could see the chimney from the coal mine. And we were the first people sent to this coal mine. We were 240. And they sent us with trucks. We had to stand up in the truck. I don't remember how many trucks it was, but we were sent there. And then we had to start to build the camp. There was no camp when we got there, no kitchen, no camp, no showers, no toilet facilities, nothing.

Q. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE? WHAT SEASON WAS IT WHEN YOU STARTED?

A. Well, to start with, we had to go working in the coal mine. And building the camp was done after we finished the work in the coal mine. So it was not an easy starter.

Q. HOW MANY HOURS DID YOU WORK IN THE COAL MINE, WOULD YOU SAY?

A. I believe there were three shifts. I believe there was eight hours. You see, we couldn't work by ourselves because we had no expertise in mining coal. And we were working with some Polish civilian coal miners, people who had the expertise. So as long as they worked, I think they worked eight hours, and when they changed, then we had to change too. And then

another group came in, I think about it was three times eight hours.

Q. WHICH SHIFT DID YOU WORK EIGHT HOURS?

A. I think they switched it around. And the reason for this was -- I believe I worked with civilians, Polish civilians. And they changed the shift, because they don't always want to go work at night or early shift or late shift. Whenever they changed the shift, they changed my shift too. Because we were there to accommodate them. And I think I worked all of them at certain times. I don't think we worked on Sunday. I know we didn't. So when you worked Saturday, the last shift, Sunday night, you had to go again, or Monday morning you had to go, or Monday afternoon you had to go. And on Sunday, that was regulated, which shift you would take.

Q. WHEN DID YOU HAVE TIME TO BUILD THE CAMP?

A. When we came back from the coal mine. Well, let's say we came home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Then we had to work. We had to go out and pick up rocks. We had to turn our jackets. We had to, those striped jackets, like the zebras have, you probably see those jackets, the color of the zebra. And we turn them around, put the sleeves in there, and inside there we carried the rocks.

And some were mixing mortar. And we became bricklayers and mortar mixers. And we built walls, first the toilets, then the showers. We had a hose that washed us down. And we spent probably four, five, six hours, I don't remember exactly, but we worked 12, 14, 16 hours a day.

Q. WHERE DID YOU SLEEP BEFORE THERE WERE BARRACKS?

A. Well, there was one building, one house, and we slept on the floor, 30 people on the floor. I don't know how you line them up. Maybe 50 people or 60, 70 people could sleep in here. That's how we slept. And there were, I think there was two toilets outside the building, outhouses, what they called. And that was the first thing they built. They dug a hole and they build a fence around it. And they took telephone posts, or something like this, and that was your seating facilities. And that's how that was from the beginning to the end. That was the toilet.

And they built a shower, and they also they built the steam line from the coal mine into the camp, steam pipe. And with this steam pipe, they cooked in the kitchen. They produced hot water for showers. But we had to do all this. It wasn't there when we came.

Q. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO GET THE CAMP FINISHED?

A. I can't remember.

Q. DID YOU MENTION THIS CAMP WAS CALLED (DENINA)?

A. (Yanina).

Q. AND IT WAS SOMETHING, IT WAS AN EXISTING COAL MINE?

A. Oh, yes. It was an existing coal mine. And the Polish people, coal miners worked there before the Nazis moved into Poland. And they had a German director of the mine. And I don't know how many, but there was some German officers, if they were SS or Gestapo, who organizing the working condition or whatever. And the rest was all done by Polish people.

Q. HOW WERE YOU TREATED BY THE POLISH CIVILIANS YOU WORKED WITH?

A. We had no contact except in the coal mine. The minute we got out of the coal mine, the SS guard would stand there, and they would line us up and they move us forward. And there were guards, and we march first to the showers, and then we march into camp. And then the next shift, we went up there again and lined up.

And I don't know if you're familiar with the coal mine. There's some elevator. 30, 40 people go in there. It goes down, there comes the next one, and that's how you're up and down. And when you were down

in the mine, you didn't have time to get into conversation. So all they want you to do is work.

I don't know if the Polish population worked on piecework, or they got paid by the hour. I have no idea. But the coal had to be moved. And that's what we did. And if you couldn't, were unable to produce, you were sent away from there into the gas chambers, to Auschwitz.

Once a week came a truck -- I don't remember if I mentioned it already -- and brought fresh laundry. And if you were unable to work, with this same truck, you were sent back. And that was the last time you worked in the coal mine, or anywhere else. That was the end of it.

Q. YOU MENTIONED EARLIER THAT YOU WERE WOUNDED, INJURED?

A. I was both, wounded and injured, and I was sick one time too. I had pneumonia. And you only were allowed in the -- we had, I don't know if you can call it a hospital or a dispensary, or whatever you call it, once a week there came a commission. And they would go in there and they would look who was laying in bed. If you were there more than a week, you were sent out.

And when I was there one week, I went back to the coal mine, even though I was unable to work. I was

unable to walk. But my friends, one is still alive in New York, he would drag me. Another one, I don't know if he is alive, they would drag me on the arm. They dragged me to the coal mine, and they would hide me and I would lay there. They cover me up. Nobody knew about it, I was down there, and at least for three weeks, or a month. And I recovered. And it's still visible in my lungs. There is still a little damage on the lungs. It can be seen in x-ray, I've been told.

Q. SO YOU NEVER WANTED TO STAY IN THE (KRUNKERHAUS)?

A. The (Krunkerhaus), no. The (Krunkerhaus) are good for a lot of people, are good if I needed. They were there to help me too. No. I had my share of it.

Q. AND THEN YOU ALSO SAID YOU WERE WOUNDED?

A. My leg.

Q. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

A. And my head.

Q. TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LEG.

A. My leg, I have -- and many, many people -- open wounds. Let's see. What do you call those? Boils, is that a right word? A boil, it's an opening where the pus continues running out. It never heals up. And I had this for years.

And a few days, day and a half, or a day or

three, I don't know exactly anymore, but it was shortly before the liberation, I got shot. And I still have today what is called an osteomyelitis or osteomyelitis. I don't know if you know that term. And this came from the infection, this pus running out. Now, what I say now, that might not be correct. But I was explained by a doctor that this is a bacteria in the bone marrow. And from the injury I had on the leg and the bone marrow was infected, the wound would never heal. It took me a year and a half, the pus was running out like a faucet. And I had seven operations and the wound wouldn't heal.

Q. THIS IS AFTER LIBERATION?

A. After liberation.

Q. WHEN DID YOU GET THE ORIGINAL INJURY THAT CAUSED IT?

A. A day before. Or I don't remember exactly.

Q. SO NOT WHILE YOU WERE IN THE COAL MINE?

A. No, no. But the boils were there already. You still can see them. I have to put my glasses on to find it. So, but I wasn't the only one. I had boils here and boils here and boils there and other places I don't want to show you, boils everywhere. And this was like a faucet. We all did. It has to do with the food, of course. And there was no -- we didn't have any band-aids, and the dirt in the coal mine. And we had a

doctor, but he didn't have any medicine, so he couldn't treat us. And we had open wounds, lots of people, open legs, terrible. But I have to knock wood.

Q. DID YOU WITNESS ANY BRUTALITY WHILE YOU WERE WORKING IN THE COAL MINES?

A. Say that again.

Q. DID YOU WITNESS ANY BRUTALITY?

A. Every day.

Q. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT?

A. I think I mentioned once before, that when I was in, right after the ghetto, we worked on the railroad, building a second line, that the trains could go one this way and one this way. And daily, huge trains with potatoes, and all kinds of coal, would go through there. And when he went around the curve, sometimes potatoes would fall down. And some of the people, including myself, we would pick them up and put them in our pocket. Either you ate them raw or you took them in camp. I don't know. There was no way of cooking them. But you probably saved them for another time. And if you were caught with one potato in your pocket, they would hang you for this. First they would beat you, and then they would hang you. Or they would hang you first and then beat you afterwards. And that was done every week, for the slightest, I mean, there

was no reason whatsoever. If you were caught, and they had checked you out every day, when you came in and they --

Q. PAT YOU?

A. Oh, yes. If you had a cigarette in your pocket, they didn't ask you where you got it from. You were not allowed to have a potato or cigarette. They would hang you for this.

The biggest brutality I once seen, that was one of the -- I wasn't in the corps, but another corps of workers, and we had civilians, not SS, civilian people, who advised us where to go and doing what work. And those people worked for the construction company. It was a German company. And this foreman, he was called a foreman, told the people to go on the other side of the railroad track. And the train was approaching. And he took, he had a cane, and he was beating the people to go on the other side. And one man got caught. And the train cut his leg off, right below the knee.

So in this town, no doctor. Polish doctors were afraid to do something. So four men took a little wagon, put this man on there, and went to Poznen. That is ten kilometers, about seven miles. And they went to bring the man to get something done to him. They

refused to do something. So we kept him in the barracks.

One day there was an inspection of the barracks, and the meat was dying and the man was dying. He was in agony. There was kind of an odor from the meat. So they took the man out, put him in the corner of the camp in the open air and they let him die there. The man was screaming and nobody could help him. He couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep. He was in such agony. It probably took him a week to die. And nobody would do a thing. And this man suffered unbelievably. You see his leg dying on him, open wound. Nobody.

Now, when they hang you, it's not really that painful. It's over once they pull the rope. They kick the feet, so you're dead. But this man died for a week, I don't know, ten days whatever. Unbelievable.

Q. TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER PEOPLE, IS THAT WHY THEY DID IT, SO THAT YOU WOULDN'T -- OTHER PEOPLE WERE AFRAID?

A. They could do anything. We were not part of the human race. I mean, we were, you know -- I feel lots of time for the non-white, what do they call them, WASP, White Anglo Saxon or -- when I look at some of the colored people and some of the Spanish and so on, and they have gone also through things what wasn't the best

human experience. And I can feel for those people. But I have never seen -- because they didn't live under the regime that we did.

There was nothing in any book, any law, to do anything for us. Whatever they wanted to do with us, that was all right. Just they could slaughter us or kill us or murder us or shoot us. There was no protection, nowhere. We did not, we did not have any protection. So if there was -- it didn't have to be an SS. It didn't have to be military men. Just a civilian who was sent from the company to supervise the work, and there was some of them.

There was one man, I tried to catch him after the war. His name was Schmidt. He used to -- he killed many people that way. He used to make them dig a hole, and made them climb in there, and then he would take the shovel and cover them up and just have the head out there, and put a bucket over their head, and he would sit there on top of the head until they were dead. And when I came, after the war, I came home. I knew approximately where the man lived. And I tried to get him. I never found the guy. And he was not a worker. He was a contractor. That's the company we worked for.

Q. WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE COMPANY, DO YOU KNOW?

A. I forget now. But his name was Schmidt. I

forget that -- if I think about it, maybe it comes back to me.

Q. MAYBE SOMEBODY ELSE FOUND HIM?

A. No. Those people, they knew, they had to go away. I don't know what happened to him. But lots of them like this, they could do anything, if they desired to, whatever. If they try to take your eyes out, they could do it. Nobody stopped them from doing this. So you couldn't do it with a mouse what they did to us. The organization, so many organizations, the laboratories, they take cats and dogs and use them for medicine, that we might extend our lives or whatever, and people walking the streets and dynamite the places that happened. Nobody did anything for us. Nobody. And well, to think about it makes me vomit.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE IN THERE, DID YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON THE OUTSIDE, ANYBODY TRYING TO GET TO YOU, TO TRY TO HELP?

A. Well, we really didn't care. I should say the only wish we had, that we had, was a good meal. And then we gladly die. Because hunger is such a terrible feeling that I guess we would have eaten anything, a mouse, a cat, whatever you could find. But there wasn't. Because hunger was terrible. You had to work and you didn't get any food.

Q. TELL ME WHAT THEY DID TO FEED YOU, AND WHAT DID YOU EAT?

A. Well, they fed us once a day. I think I mentioned it the last time, but I have to go over it again. I don't want to make a mistake there. We got soup and one-fourth of a bread. And then we had some brown water. They called that coffee. But you needed to drink, and the taste was not important. And on Sunday, you got a little piece of margarine. And every so often they give you a little slice of horse sausage, from horses. And that was delicious, believe me, delicious. The best steak doesn't taste so good today than that tasted then. But I can't, I don't want to make a mistake, because there were many people in there. I think they fed us once a day. But I know that's all they give us. Each one had a little bowl, and you got one scoop of soup in there. And then you had one-fourth of a bread. And if you didn't eat it, whatever you got, and you thought you could save it for the next day, forget it. Somebody stole it from you. So you had no choice but eat it right now.

Q. AND THEY FED YOU AT NIGHT; IS THAT RIGHT, OR IN THE MORNING?

A. No, at night, when you came back from the work. So when you worked early shift, they fed you when

you came back. And I believe the people who worked in the second shift, they got fed before they left. And then the third shift, I really don't remember. Because I don't want to make any false statements here, because the people probably remember better than I do. And I don't want to do this.

Q. SO YOU WENT TO WORK, IF YOU WORKED THE DAY SHIFT, WITH AN EMPTY STOMACH?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. AND WAS THERE ANY FOOD OR WATER IN THE MINE?

A. Water, yes. It was dripping. There were lots of places where the water dripped, and you had two hands and you would stand there. Yes, there was water in the mine. And that helped us a lot of times. I believe they had also had piped in water that you could drink.

Now, these civilians, the Polish civilians, they brought their food. But also, when they're finished there, their shift, there was a kitchen there. And they all, no matter what shift they were on, they went to the kitchen and they had a full course meal, the civilians. I don't know what that consisted of. But the mine furnished them a full course meal.

Q. DID ANYBODY EVER TRY TO GIVE YOU ANY OF THEIR FOOD?

A. Yes.

Q. REALLY?

A. Yes.

Q. SO THEY WEREN'T HOSTILE NECESSARILY, THE POLISH?

A. Not everybody. Some of them were. Some give you some, but nobody should see it either. Yes, there were people who shared with you, absolutely.

And also, I have to mention too, they also were guards, SS. If nobody was watching, some of them slipped you something too. I received occasionally cigarette, piece of candy, even a piece of bread, but they were afraid. And those were not the real SS. Those people who did this, they were military people, German military people, who had injuries on the front, and they sent them back for recreation and to recover, what do you call it, R and R, what is it? And then when they were a little better, but not good enough to go to the front, they would put a uniform on them, with SS markings on it, and they would send them in the camps. And those were the people who were, I wouldn't say all of them, not half of them, but some of them, yes, they watched out that they didn't get caught, but there were some of them there were helpful.

Q. HOW LONG DID YOU STAY IN THE LABOR COAL MINE, IN THE LABOR CAMP?

A. How long?

Q. HOW LONG? WHEN DID YOU LEAVE?

A. You mean, the house in Cologne?

Q. NO, NO. HOW LONG WERE YOU IN (YANINI)?

A. In (Yanini), I can't remember. I tried to go through this, to think it out, but I cannot remember how long I was there. I do remember I was the first people who went there, but I don't know when that was. And I was with people, we all left the same time. When the Russians came, we left. But I don't know how long that was.

Q. DID YOU NOTICE THE CAMP DISCIPLINE BREAKING DOWN AS THE AMERICANS WERE APPROACHING? WERE THE GUARDS FLEEING?

A. They worked with us, absolutely. I remember one day, I guess they cut the telephones. There was no telephone connection. And the guy came with a motorcycle. And I think the coal mine was shut down already. And we could hear the airplanes flying. We could hear the tanks already, maybe not the tanks but the shooting of the tanks, and we knew it was getting closer. And then somebody showed up with a little motorcycle, and he give the order that, to liquidate. And so the next morning, everybody had to be ready and they marched. And the only people left in (Yanini),

were the ones sick and they couldn't march. And they were liberated by the Russians.

I heard one time that as soon as we left, a Polish civilian came in and took care of them. But we had to march from (Yanini) to Auschwitz, and from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz. We stayed in Gleiwitz until they loaded us on the trains. We stayed three days on the trains, and then they killed 90 percent of them.

Q. TELL ME, HOW FAR IS GLEIWITZ FROM AUSCHWITZ?

A. Well, we marched there. It wasn't that far. Maybe fifteen miles, ten, fifteen, twenty miles.

Q. AND --

A. I can look it up on the map. It's not that far.

Q. SO HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO COVER THAT MUCH GROUND, AND WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS ON THE MARCH?

A. What was the condition on the march? Well, number one, it was snow. It was in February and -- no. It was January. Pardon me. It was in January. And we had snow. We had to march through the snow. First we marched to Auschwitz. And in Auschwitz they give us bread. I don't remember if it was a half a bread or whole bread or quarter bread.

And then from there, we marched to Gleiwitz. And there was a camp also in the march. And that camp

was already filled up to the (gillards), with no room for anything, but they kept us there for a day, a few hours. And then load us up on railroad cars, and they tried to move the cars, but, evidently, the line was blocked by the Russians. And they couldn't go anywhere. They wanted to go west. And then they unloaded us and opened up machine gun fire. I think I mentioned it the last time.

Q. HOW MANY PEOPLE LEFT (YANINI) WITH YOU? DO YOU KNOW?

A. You mean, march away?

Q. YES.

A. I don't remember how many people were there. But there were probably no more than 20 sick people left behind. And my guess would be maybe 1,000 people or 1200 people, something like this. We started out with 240. And then we built one, two, three, four, five barracks. And there again, I don't know how many people could sleep in the barrack. I have no idea.

Q. HOW MANY SLEPT IN EACH BED?

A. Two. They were double, two here and two on top. And there was this much room between them. So two people couldn't move in and out. So I really don't know how much people were there. But the statistics, there are books. And in those books, there are, I seen a book

in Germany when I was there the last time, that's all written up how big, how many people were there. But I don't know offhand.

Q. WERE THEY ALL JEWS?

A. No, they were not all Jews. There we had Russians, we had Polish people, Jews and non Jews. We had Germans, French. When I say Germans, they were mostly criminals. And those criminals they were there for many, many years, some of them, for many, many years, murderers, and I mean, real criminals. And there where our -- they call them Korpos. That means they give, or they told us what to do. And there were Czechs and Hungarians and Yugoslavs. We even had Greeks there. We had, I can remember two Jews from Greece. Holland, from Holland we had people. And we had also two people from Morocco. They were caught in France.

Q. THOSE WERE MOROCCAN JEWS?

A. Yes. Danes, from Denmark, we had one or two. So from all over, really, every country the Germans conquered, and they sent the Jews to concentration camp.

Q. WAS ONE TREATED BETTER THAN THE OTHERS, OR WERE SOME GROUPS TREATED WORSE THAN THE OTHER?

A. I think the German gangsters, criminals -- we also had German political, and we all had a sign up here, with a number. And the Jews had a star. And the

criminals had green half a star, triangle.

Q. TRIANGLE?

A. Triangle, yes. The Jews had a star. The green was the criminals. The red were the politicals. The black ones were gays. The pink ones were clergy. We had some clergymen there too. I think that -- oh, no. Then we had, we had -- what do you call them? The Zingare? What is that? The Hungarians have a lot of them.

Q. GYPSIES?

A. Gypsies, that's it. We had Gypsies too. And they had, each one had their -- well, I mean, there's no question that the Jews were the bottom of the barrel. And the Polish, most the Polish people we had in there, they were all Army officers. They hated the Jews more than the Nazi hated the Jews. And they were all kinds of people in there. But the Jew was always the one who was on the bottom of the barrel. And even if you took those things off, the Jews were marked, tatooed, the only people with tatoos. Not the, no Gentile, no matter where they came from, were tatooed, only Jews. And you're familiar with this, right. And the only camp where tattoos were performed was Auschwitz. Not Tara, or Buchenwald or Beldenbert, none of them. Only Auschwitz.

Q. EVEN THOUGH YOU DIDN'T STAY IN AUSCHWITZ BUT A COUPLE DAYS YOU WERE TATOOED?

A. The minute you got in there, you were tatooed, because, I guess they had the plan already to send us to the coal mine.

Now, my brother, who also came to Auschwitz, to a place called Birknau. You probably heard of Birknau. He was not tatooed because he was not taken there to stay there and work. He went there, and a few days later he was shipped out. My wife was there, in Birknau, never tatooed. So only the people who went in the actual camp, Auschwitz, were tatooed.

Q. AND YOUR BROTHER WENT, HE WAS SHIPPED OUT TO ANOTHER LABOR CAMP?

A. He went from Auschwitz, from Auschwitz he was sent to Dachau, and from Dachau, he was sent to near (Batos), with a factory building in the mountains. And there were some, they were living in the mountain. They were working in the mountain. And they were all near the south of (Gillig), in the Alps, so to speak. There was all kinds of camps.

Q. LET'S GO BACK TO THE MARCH. YOU WENT TO Gleiwitz?

A. Gleiwitz.

Q. AND --

A. Do you want me to spell it for you, or you can look it up in the book. G-l-e-i-w-i-t-z.

Q. IT'S NOT WITH A K?

A. With a K, could be.

Q. I THINK IT'S CHANGED.

A. It's all right.

Q. GLEIWITZ, OKAY. AND I'D LIKE TO TALK A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE COMMANDER OF THE CAMP. LAST TIME YOU DIDN'T REMEMBER HIS NAME?

A. I remember.

Q. NIEMOLLER?

A. Niemoller, yes.

Q. TELL ME WHAT YOU REMEMBER ABOUT HIM.

A. We had two. We had one by the name of -- that was the first one. His name was -- I come back to it. Now, this guy, we had first, was married, or he married a Polish girl. Baumgartner was his name. And he was a farily decent man. I never see him hitting anybody or shooting anybody or killing anybody, never. He went with us from Auschwitz when we went 240 in the cars and started the camp. This guy was with us. He was SS. But I never see him personally do anything to anybody.

Now, this could have something to do, because he married a Polish girl. I have no idea. But what I do know is, that the doctor, we had in camp, was a Jew

from Czechoslovakia by the name of Dr. Oleg. And Dr. Oleg survived also. He died a few years ago in Canada. And when Baumgartner's wife gave birth to a child, Baumgartner took, even though, they had Polish doctor, Baumgartner took Dr. Oleg to his house to watch the birth of the child, to make sure the Polish doctor did it right. He had so much confidence in Dr. Oleg. That's true.

Q. THAT'S REMARKABLE.

A. Yes. And he was a fine doctor. But he didn't have any facilities and he anything to do anything with, but he was a fine man and fine doctor.

And then afterwards came this guy Niemoller. Now, Niemoller was, he came with a German shepherd. That was the first introduction. And he trained them every day. Some of the guards -- I think I mentioned it the last time, right? We don't have to go into this anymore? And he used to go in the evening and chase their dog in the barracks and he chewed up the people. And he used to have a picture with the horse's head on it. And he made people hold the picture and he would shoot them in the head. And he's still running around free.

Q. AND THAT'S HOW YOU WERE SHOT?

A. Yes.

Q. DID HE JUST PULL YOU ON THE LINE?

A. Just hold the picture. Not a line. Just hold the picture and shot you. Lots of people. I was fortunate. Some people he shot the leg off, or the arm off. I was very fortunate. Can you imagine, you go to a trial and this guy runs around, what are you going to do with him?

Q. TELL ME, FOR THE RECORD, SO WE HAVE THIS DOWN, TELL ME ABOUT THE FIRST TIME YOU WERE CONTACTED ABOUT ABOUT THE TRIAL, WHAT YOU KNEW OF WHAT HE WAS CHARGED WITH?

A. Well, you know, I did not know who I was testifying against. They didn't tell me. See, the first time was -- I have a record of this -- 1982, or maybe '81. I received a letter that the justice department from Hanover want to interview me in regards, or was to testify in regards to the camp in (Yanini), and if I wanted to come to Hanover to testify. So just about that time, I got high blood pressure and the doctor said, no, I won't let you go. So I told them I would gladly testify, but I couldn't go, doctor's orders.

So one day, they wrote me a note, I have a copy here of it, that they would come to San Francisco, and they would take my testimony here. So the district

attorney, his assistant, the defense attorney and his assistant, (Stanokfer), they showed up and I give testimony for a whole day, from 9 in the morning until 6:30 at night. But they never told me who I am testifying against. All they give me was a book, big book, with lots of pictures in it. And they told me to look through the book, and if I recognize someone, and if I did, they gave me a little piece of paper, I should, one of those pads where you got sticky, put something on it, and write down what you think the man was, did, or something like this. And I recognized, I think ten people, including the first commandants, Baumgartner, and this guy here and a few others. But they had all kinds of people in civilian. They were not in uniform. Some were in uniform. Some had caps on. They were all, people had nothing to do with it. That was a trial balloon. They wanted to see. And they didn't tell me who I was testifying against. They just asked me questions. And the best of my ability, I would answer these. And I never knew. That was in 1982.

And then finally, in 1988, they wrote me the letter that I should testify against Heinrich Neimoller for killing people. That's when I found out. And then, when they told me Heinrich Neimoller, I knew right away who the guy was. He didn't tell me whatever he did. So

when I went there, I recognized him. And I don't know if he recognized me. I doubt it very much. But he is still a free man.

Q. HOW DID YOU SURVIVE THAT MACHINE GUNNING AT THE RAILROAD TRACK?

A. That was not a railroad track. We were standing on the railroad track. And they were opening up the railroad cars, and they hollered, everybody out. So we went down, and then I went down a little dam, like this, and then they started a long rise. There was all green pastures. And as we run up the pasture, there is where they shot, with the machine guns, but you could see the machine guns sitting up there on all the old railroad, like motors. They're either out of repair, out of parts, but they were sitting there, lots of them. And on top of them, they had the machine guns set up. And as we ran up the hill, voom, voom, voom, they were shooting. And you asked me a good question. I don't know.

Q. DID YOU KEEP RUNNING?

A. Of course. You kept looking and running. Why, nobody knows. 90 percent were killed right there. And I have no idea. I have a friend in New York, my dear friend, we ran the -- we were in the same car. We were holding hands. We jumped out of the car. He was

not injured either. I never seen him again, until three months after the liberation. I didn't know if he was alive or not. He also survived and he had five brothers. He was the only one survived. So it's, nobody knows. It's a mystery. And that's life. We don't know what tomorrow is, but today we here, and we made it. But there is no answer for it.

And after liberation, I asked the same question myself, many, many, many times. Why me, and not the others? What did I do? Or did I deserve better or worse? Why? I don't think there's an answer for this. One time I asked our rabbi. We had a retreat. We went to a retreat. And I said, rabbi, why me? I said, there were so many good people. I don't know I was that good. Probably I was very bad too. But why me? He said, unfortunately, there's no where an answer for this. And probably it is just, I had a little bit more luck than some of the others. And I guess that's why I'm still here. I still have a little bit of luck. And I don't know if it runs out some day, but it's still with me.

Q. LET ME ASK YOU A DIFFICULT QUESTION. IS THERE EVER ANY TIME WHEN YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO, OR THE CAMPS, OR ON ONE OF THE MARCHES, THAT YOU EVER HAD TO MAKE A DECISION TO DO SOMETHING THAT YOU DECIDED TO DO BUT YOU

KNEW AT THE TIME MIGHT MAKE IT WORSE FOR SOMEBODY ELSE, MORE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO SURVIVE?

A. I don't think I ever did this.

Q. NEVER?

A. And I wouldn't do it today either.

Q. THAT'S SOMETHING TO BE VERY PROUD OF.

DID YOU SEE A LOT OF PEOPLE MAKING THESE KINDS OF CHOICES?

A. Yes. I never did. I could have made, even here in America, in my job, I could have made decisions like this. I never did. I never could. It's not part of me.

Q. THAT MUST BE WHY SO MANY PEOPLE WERE WILLING TO HELP YOU ALONG THE WAY TOO?

A. Oh, yes. Without help, without friends , life is miserable. It's cruel. And friends and family, that's really what keeps you going.

Q. LET ME ASK YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT AFTER LIBERATION. WHAT KIND OF EFFECT DID THIS HAVE ON YOUR LIFE, IN TERMS OF YOUR ABILITY TO COPE EVERY DAY, NIGHTMARES, OR DID YOU HAVE A LOT OF PROBLEMS READJUSTING?

A. Terrible. You see, there was such a guilt feeling, for long, long time. Why me? Because you look around you, and you had friends, they were as good as

you were, maybe better, never did anything in their life, young or older. Why not them? Why me? I still today, when I see a show on television, I don't care if it's a western, or whatever it is, if there's shooting, I have to shut it off. I can't watch it. And anything what has to do with cruelty, even the people say, well, it's only a movie, I just can't watch it.

And I still today, occasionally, I wake up in hot sweat. Something comes and I just -- it used to happen quite often, but now still occasionally that happens. I guess it's like a cut on the inside, what hasn't completely healed yet. And it might never will, because it's nothing -- it's, you can't just twist it around and throw it away. It doesn't work that way. Well, I have to say it doesn't work for me that way. Maybe for other people, it does. For me, it doesn't. I still have a little pain there. And I guess it never will go away.

Q. DID IT CHANGE HOW YOU FELT ABOUT BEING JEWISH AND ABOUT JUDAISM? DID YOU FEEL MORE JEWISH OR LESS JEWISH?

A. I'm a good Jew, but I don't believe in God. I used to, but I'm -- I like my fellow Jews, because more or less, they have to same background I have. But when it comes to believing that somebody is up there to help

you, this belief I don't have. I used to, but I don't have that anymore. And it is through my life experience. That doesn't mean I would go tomorrow and change to another religion. I don't think they could change that either. But I give everybody the right to believe whatever they want. And if they are believers, I'm happy for them. But I don't find any comfort in it. And it has to do with the years I was concentration camp, the Hitler period. It has to do with this.

And my friends, my brother, my friends, all, I only know of one person who became very religious. All the others are on the same basis than myself. Why? I guess you probably know why. You seen so many things could happen, and if there was somebody watching from above, they could not let that happen, regardless of what kind of religion that was. Because those things, any kind of religion cannot allow this to happen. Because this is not part of Judaism or Christianity or Hinduism, or whatever it is. People slaughtered, you cannot accept this. Or at least, I cannot.

Q. YOU CAME TO THIS COUNTRY. YOU MET YOUR WIFE IN THIS COUNTRY?

A. No. I knew her long before then. I knew her father and mother. And I knew her husband also. He perished at a concentration camp. We knew each other

very well, long before that.

Q. AND YOU MARRIED IN GERMANY?

A. I married twice. We married in Germany before we came here. But that wasn't legal, because she was not legally a widow, because her husband did not come back. But she didn't have a death certificate. So until she had a death certificate, what happened a year or so later, then we got married officially.

Q. AND WAS THAT HERE, THE SECOND WEDDING?

A. That was here, in Sioux City, Iowa. I had been married by a rabbi in Germany. But legally we are married in Sioux City.

Q. AND HER NAME IS?

A. Her name was Rose Levy. And her maiden name was Kahn, K-a-h-n.

Q. AND SHE IS NOW DECEASED?

A. She died February 5th, 1984.

Q. YOU HAD SOME NIECES AND NEPHEWS?

A. Yes. My brother has two children. The daughter lives in Denver. She is a lawyer. Her husband is a scientist. And they have two children. My nephew lives in Davis. He works for the university. He's a professor. And he has three children.

Q. DID YOU EVER DISCUSS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR BROTHER AND HIS CHILDREN?

A. Oh, yes. I talk to them every so often. As a matter of fact, I phoned up last week. And those children, the boy is 41 and the girl is 37. Now they're interested in our past. Until recently, the last five, six years, they didn't want no part of it. But now they become interested. The daughter has visited the town we were born. And the son wants to do that in the future. We even discussed to take, all together there, his children and his grandchildren, take a trip, and show them where we were and what happened. And we are thinking about doing this.

Q. THAT WOULD BE A SPECIAL MEMORY FOR THEM. WHAT'S YOUR BROTHER'S NAME?

A. Ernie, Ernst.

(End Tape 1.)

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