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Interview with OTTO HERTZ
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Q: As I explained a couple of minutes ago, some of these questions are going to be repeated from last time, so why don't you start by talking about your arrival at the camp, at Dachau.

A: Yes. We all arrived together. From the place where I used to live there were about four or five other Jewish men. We knew each other, and we came all in one barrack, all in the same barrack. One barrack had several rooms.

And the first thing they did when we arrived was taking all the names and registered us. Everybody got a number, but at that time we did not get any tattoo on our arms. That was later when they started with that.

But we were all told what we could do, what we were not allowed to do. If anybody would try to escape there was no chance, because there were watchtowers guarded by armed guards, and the fence was electrically loaded, so nobody even tried to escape when we were there.

Q: Did you talk about escaping with other prisoners?

A: No, we didn't even talk about it. We didn't think we would stay there for the rest of our lives, because there were thousands of people and we were pretty sure -- we were all optimistic that after a few days or so they would let people go back home again, because what should we do there? It didn't make any sense to us. It was just a chicane to make us feel bad and force us to get out of Germany.

What we did during the day was the first thing -- you

probably have heard it from other inmates -- we had to hold a roll call. People were called. If one member was missing we would have to stand in line until this person would show up. It happened to be in the end of November and in Dachau, where we were, it was quite cold already. And we had no coats or anything; we stood there just in our suits which we had brought from home. And some people there had to wear the blue-and-white striped uniforms. I was lucky; I didn't get a uniform. I could keep my coat which I had taken, not an overcoat, just a sport coat.

And sometimes we had to stand in line there for hours and hours and the guards who handled us, they humiliated us as much as they could. They called us names. At random they came by the lines and asked, "What are you? What did you do? What is your profession?" So we had to tell them what we were. And then they made nasty remarks about "dirty Jews" and all this.

And after the roll call was finished we had to do marching, marching. It was cold and it was half out snow, and we had to go through all this. And our shoes were not so good anymore; we got cold feet and lots of people got very sick after a few days, got colds and so on. And when somebody got sick they didn't take care of these people. They just let them get sick more and more sick and they didn't care if they died or if they got well.

And so day after day after day after day we had to do the same things again. And in the middle of the day we got our food. It was a big mess hall. We had to go get our food with our plate, or whatever it was, and they just put it on the plate.

At home we wouldn't have eaten this food, but we had to eat something because we would get weak when we wouldn't eat. But it was terrible food. You wouldn't even cook anything like that.

And in the evening it was the same thing. About six o'clock in the evening we got our last food and then we had to go in our little barracks and go to sleep. Our beds consisted of straw. We had no pajamas or nightshirts or anything; we slept in our regular coat which we also wore during the day.

In the morning there was a big water fountain in which we had to wash our hands and our face.

Sometimes when we were marching some nasty guards came and hit some people with shoes and with fists, and they were expecially against people who were overweight. They hated the Jewish people who were overweight; they thought they had too good a life. And so I was really lucky that I was not mistreated, but I saw that other people were getting mistreated and it could happen to you any day, any minute.

That went on for three weeks. One morning my name was called and so I thought, "Oy, what happens now?" I had to report in the camp office and I was told I was ready to be sent home. But first, we had a medical examination. If the medical examination showed that you weren't a hundred percent healthy, they wouldn't let you out. I had terrible cold feet and I had a bad cold but other than that I was in good health, so I passed the medical test.

And the next morning, I remember the date was the 6th of December, 1938, I was sent, together with a few other inmates,

and we had to go into a train which brought us to Munich. Dachau is about an hour's train ride from Munich.

We didn't have money to -- we had to pay for our own ride home but we had no money, but the Jewish community in Munich advanced the money for all the people who were in Dachau to be sent home, and so we didn't even have to pay for it. The Jewish community in München paid for it.

And so we went on the train in Munich and I came home the same day, late in the evening, and nobody picked me up at the station. I went home. I had lost about maybe twenty pounds and my hair was all cut short like all the inmates, and when I came home they looked at me and they almost didn't recognize me. But they were happy that I came home.

And that is when I had to do a lot of work before -- when I came home, then I got to know why I was released. My brother was, at that time when I was in Dachau, he was in Cuba. And he was notified by relatives of mine that I was in Dachau and he got me a visa to come to Cuba. When people had proof that they would be able to leave Germany, they were released from the concentration camps at that time.

Q: So your family got you out.

A: Ja, really. My brother got me a visa to come to Cuba. I had to go to Hamburg where the Cuban consulate was there to get my visa from the consul and I got it right away, and I could leave Germany any time I wanted to. But, as I told you before, I got engaged to my wife after I came back from Dachau, on December 31st, 1938. And three weeks after I came from Dachau we married, and I

wanted to postpone my departure from Germany as long as I could because, you know, we loved each other and we wanted to be together as long as we could.

I had to report to the Gestapo in my hometown twice a week, and since I lived in a small town the Gestapo people in my hometown knew me and they knew I was not a criminal, but they had orders from above. They had to do what they were told. So after a few weeks when I still was in my hometown they told me, "Mr. Hertz, we have to tell you you are here already so long, you'd better leave pretty soon; otherwise, you will be sent back to Dachau." And that's when I got busy to get out.

So I left my mother, who was still living, and my young wife, and I left them behind and went to Holland first, where relatives of mine lived and had gotten me a temporary permit to stay in Holland.

At that time all countries in the whole world did not take any Jewish people as immigrants anymore. That was when already so many people had immigrated and they couldn't handle all these immigrants. There were lots of people unemployed.

Q: Going back to the camp, how often did they feed you?

A: Twice a day.

Q: And did you do any trades or any black marketing in the camp so that you could get more food?

A: No, no. It wasn't possible.

Q: It wasn't? You didn't know anybody else who did either?

A: No, not that I know.

Q: Okay. Did you actually work while you were there?

Did they give you a job?

A: No, I didn't work at all; just we had to stand in line for hours and hours and march through the whole camp. If it was raining or snowing or if it was twenty degrees below zero, we had to march.

Q: Where did you march? Did they have anywhere particularly that you would have to go?

A: No, no, just through the camp to keep us busy.

Q: Did the SS guards have to march with you all those times?

A: Yes. Yes, but there were several, there were shifts.

Q: What were the guards like while you were marching?

A: Well, the guards, most of them were really nasty. You know, they were all members of the Social Nationalist party and they had to prove that they were nasty against the Jews. They had to prove that. The guards were also supervised like in the miliary by their commanders, and you know, they had to show that they really were anti-Jewish and nasty.

Q: Were most of them physically abusive or did some just limit it to verbal abuse?

A: If they were physically --

Q: Yeah. You know, if they were like --

A: They mistreated people or what?

Q: Well, physically, like beatings and things like that.

A: Verbally and physically.

Q: They all did or --

A: No, I wouldn't say all, but some of the worst ones.

Q: What did the worst ones do?

A: The worst ones would scream at us and if somebody would not -- we had to stand like military people and couldn't move. If somebody would move they would beat them. And especially they would beat them and hit them with their military shoes.

Q: Military shoes; like kick them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you recall any good guards, anybody who didn't abuse physically or verbally?

A: No, no. If they were good guards they wouldn't become guards in a concentration camp.

Q: Do you ever remember anything nice from a guard happening?

A: (Laughing.) No. Even Jewish capos -- they called them capos -- they even had to be bad against their own brother.

Q: What would they do that you recall?

A: Well, they had to tell them what the people had to do, they gave them orders. But they didn't mistreat any of them, no, but they had to give them the orders.

Q: Did you witness any public executions at Dachau?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: How about any public punishments?

A: Public punishment? Oh, I only witnessed mistreatments, not public punishments. This was when people were hit and beaten.

Q: Did you see any young children?

A: No, there were no children while we were there.

Q: No children.

A: No.

Q: Did you notice differences in how Jews and non-Jews were treated?

A: No, I don't think there were any non-Jews in our barracks. These were all Jews. This whole concentration of Jews was all prepared military and they were looking for -- what is this -- this pogrom -- no, I shouldn't -- it was a pogrom. And the 10th of November was just initiated when the German ambassador (sic) in Paris was killed by a Jewish man, Grynzpan, and tried the same day, and this whole pogrom in Germany started. So it was not the people who started it, but it was started by the government and it was all prepared.

Q: Who was the worst guard you encountered?

A: We didn't get to know the guards. We only knew them by sight; we didn't know their names or rank or anything, so I really don't know who was worst. I don't know.

Q: Were there any selections while you were there?

A: That we had to give money?

Q: No, selections of prisoners.

A: Selections?

Q: Yeah. Or were they doing it that early in Dachau? You know, where they would select some people to die or to live or whatever they selected people for.

A: No, no, we were all inmates. No special selections, no. I remember we -- in our barracks we had one rabbi from Krefeld and in our barracks in the evening before we would go to sleep he would say prayers, and that gave us really lots of emotion and peace. If I would have been alone or only two, then

it would have been much worse. But we were all in one barracks, maybe a hundred people in one barracks, and we slept all in the same barracks, so we said to ourselves, "What other people can suffer, then I can suffer that, too."

Q: How many people were in the same bunk with you?

A: About a hundred.

Q: No, I mean in each bunk.

A: In the bunk? Oh, who had the same bunk?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We slept about four next to each other in the straw. Yeah, four. This was all in compartments, you know.

Q: Did you ever encounter any of the non-Jewish prisoners or did you just encounter Jewish prisoners?

A: Encounter where?

Q: At Dachau, because they had a lot of political prisoners there, too.

A: No, I don't think -- I think they were separated from us, and probably they were treated even worse than we were, because we were actually not criminals or anything. They couldn't do anything to us because we had done nothing wrong. Our crime was that we were Jewish. They had mostly political criminals; they were treated really badly.

Q: Could you elaborate on that?

A: Well, this is things which I didn't experience myself personally, but I read it in the papers, you know, and I heard it also on radio, which was forbidden to hear foreign radio stations in Germany. There was at that time no television, but we listened

to radio stations in Germany and we heard what terrible deeds National Socialists did. It was a radio station from Luxembourg and from Holland.

Q: When people died at Dachau how did they treat them, what did they do with the bodies?

A: I don't know. I have never seen any people getting to their last rest. Sometimes -- we hadn't heard anything about gassing. They might have killed a few people, just shoot them, but I haven't seen it.

Q: Did you develop any special friendships while you were at Dachau?

A: Friendships with other Jewish inmates? Ja, we talked to each other and I met a few people in my barracks who were from the same town where my wife came from. And they told me that they knew my wife. At that time we were not married yet, but I knew her at the time and so I got friends with them. And as a matter of fact, after we got married we went to my wife's hometown and wrote him a letter that we were coming to visit my wife's mother, and so he came to the railway station when our train arrived. And when we told him that we were married, he didn't believe it. He knew me from the concentration camp and he knew my wife because she came from the same hometown.

Q: Did they let him out at the same time they let you out?

A: Uh-huh. And so they knew each other -- they went to school together and knew each other very well.

Q: Did being in the camp affect your friendship with these people? What I mean is, sometimes when people go through a really

difficult experience together, later on when they see each other they remind each other of the horrible experience, so it destroys the friendships becuase of that. Did that happen with any of your friendships?

A: As I told you, I left -- I was one of the first inmates that left the camp. And when I left Germany the others were still in camp, so I have never seen them again. I have only met a friend of mine who came to Holland while I was in Holland and met him there, but he was not in camp with me. He was already in Holland before I was out of Germany. But he visited me in Holland when I was living there for a few weeks. And we were good friends, we talked to each other, and when I left Holland we never got to see each other again, because all the people from my hometown who didn't get out of Germany, they all departed later to gas camps. They lost all their lives there. I was one of the lucky ones, to get out. It was just a matter of fate.

Q: What inspired you to keep going while you were in the camp?

A: What kept me going?

Q: Yeah.

A: My mother was still alive and my brother was still alive, who was in Cuba, so I still had family. And Jewish people have usually lots of faith. That is what kept me going, my faith, my faith in God, my faith in the future.

Q: While you were in the camp were you aware of the difference between your quarters and the SS quarters?

A: I have never seen SS quarters. They were not shown to us.

Q: How about SS torture chambers; did the SS have torture chambers that you knew of while you were there?

A: No, no, I haven't seen any. All we saw were the barracks and the grounds of the camps and the towers where the guards watched and the barbed wire. That's all we saw.

Q: What do you recall about the commandant at Dachau at that time?

A: I didn't know who he was, I hadn't seen him, and only heard about concentration camp commandants much later, after I left Germany. The commandant I don't think was active himself in handling inmates. He was the one who gave the orders. When he ordered his guards to shoot people, they had to shoot people, or mistreat people.

Three weeks is a long time when you are in camp, but relatively spoken, I was very lucky that I was there only for three weeks, that I was one of the ones that came out in the beginning.

Q: So do you think that the guards were relatively helpless about how they treated you? Do you feel like they really had any choice at all?

A: I wouldn't say they were helpless, but they had no choice, no. They had to do what they were told, and they probably did like to do it, because that is the way they acted against Jews. The propaganda made them already all do that. You have heard about the propaganda by Goebbels, by Streicher, with Der Stürmer and all the newspapers, the propaganda on the streets, the "Juden unerwünscht," and "No Jews and dogs allowed," things

like that. That was their state of mind. When you hear that every day you get to believe it. We were Unglück, tough luck!

Q: Were there any bright spots that made it more bearable, you know, like friendships?

A: One day was like any other day, so to speak. I cannot say that there were any brights spots. When the weather was nice, that was our bright spot, that we didn't have to bear all the rain and snow and things like that. But no bright spot, no. As a matter of fact, even when you lived outside of a concentration camp, regular life in Germany for us Jews was no bright spot. We were humiliated from day to day. Every day we were humiliated and we had not committed any crime.

Q: Were there any expressions of humor while you were at Dachau, any joking?

A: Amongst ourselves we sometimes made some jokes, yes, amongst ourselves, but nobody was allowed to hear it who was not one of ours. For God's sake, if they would have heard what we would say, we would have been -- not survived.

Q: What did you say?

A: Oh, we made some jokes about Hitler. There were quite a few jokes in Germany, even non-Jewish people made jokes about him. But when the non-Jewish people told the jokes to somebody, then they had to look around that nobody heard it. About Hitler, and Göring, too.

Q: Did you lose your ability to feel humor at the time?

A: No. No, as I said, you have to think positive. That is one way to go and is the best. Not everyone has positive

thinking, but I always was a positive thinker. I still think positive now (laughing). Maybe that's how I got so old that way.

Q: Did being in the camp strain that ability to think positively while you were there?

A: No, no. That is nature. Your thinking, this is nature.

Q: What kinds of things would you tell yourself to think positively like this?

A: Well, I was optimistic that someday I would get out and lead a better life again. We all were optimistic about the development in Germany. Already in the beginning when Hitler came to power, we didn't think he would last longer than a year maybe. We thought either he cannot show the people that he can do it better than any other chancellor in Germany, or the democracies would get him out of the way. But nothing happened. But you have to think positive, and that is what I did, someday we would have a better life, and that is what happened.

Q: Do you remember any of the jokes that you told or that others told?

A: No, it's too long a time ago that I really don't know. Well, I don't know if I can translate it into English (laughing). It sounds better in German than English, you know.

Q: Why don't you say it in German and then translate it as best you can into English.

A: About Göring. Göring's wife's name was (Emma Sonneman). And in the middle of the night (Emma Sonneman) got up and put on some candles, and that woke up Göring, her husband. And he told her, "Emma, what are you doing?" She said, "I lighted a few

candles." And Göring, "Why do you light a few candles? What is it for?" She told Göring, "Ihr macht für jeden DRECK EINEN FACKELZUG," which means, "You also make a parade for every Scheissdreck." You know what that means; for every shit (laughing).

I don't remember too many. It's too long a time ago. Besides, I'm not a good joke teller.

Q: Oh, you're fine. That was great.

Do you recall any camp theater?

A: No. The camp itself was a theater.

Q: How about camp prostitutes?

A: No, not where we were. You mean that prostitutes were inmates? No, we didn't see any. No, I don't know anything about that and I have never read anything about it.

Q: While you were there did you ever hear anybody sing?

A: Ja. Before we went to sleep, I mentioned about Rabbi Blum saying a prayer. We sang sometimes Jewish Hebrew songs, Schma Jisroel, something like that, we sang that. That kept us strong. We believed in our faith and in God.

Q: Was there any scrip or money for the canteen that you saw?

A: When we were received in the camp they took what little money we had in our pockets, they took that away. They took everything away, that which we had. And before we left the camp and went home they gave us back everything which we had given to them. In that respect they were very conservative. But no, there were no collections or anything.

Q: So you never encountered any of the camp scrip?

A: No.

Q: Were there any sexual encounters in the camp that you know of?

A: No, no. Not only were there no female persons, but there were only men, you know, but at that time homosexuality was not allowed. It would have been just like a heavy crime if somebody would have tried to commit a sexual encounter. No, there was none. When I got out of concentration camp it was a pleasure to see some female persons again, after three weeks. It was like another world.

Q: Were there any German doctors at Dachau when you were there?

A: No. Plenty of Jewish doctors, but no German non-Jewish doctors were in the camp. There were Nazi doctors who treated Jewish people, but they were not allowed to let people who were sick to get well; they just let them die. No, they were not humanitarian, absolutely not.

Q: So there were no experiments at this time.

A: No, not while we were there. There might have been experiments, but we were not aware of it. 1938 was when just the personal persecution of the Jewish people started, and that was the beginning of it.

While you were in the camp did you lose your ability to feel emotions?

A: No. You mean to scream and things like that, emotions?

Q: Well, that would be part of it.

A: No, no. We couldn't be too emotional; we had to do what we were told to do. We couldn't say, "No, I don't like this," or anything like that. We had to do what we were told, and whoever objected didn't stay long in the camp. They were killed.

Q: How did you deal with the emotions that came up from this experience?

A: You mean after I came out of the camp?

Q: During and after.

A: Well, like everybody, we were not happy, but we couldn't do anything. We were just numbers. We had to pity ourselves, each other, that's all we could do. We had lived a good life before, before Hitler, and we were all very happy and were all better off, and when we were together there in this camp all we could do is pity ourselves, "My God, how it's possible?"

Q: Did you talk about your experiences in the camp when you got out?

A: We were told we couldn't tell anybody what we had gone through in the camp. We had to sign a paper and swear to it that we wouldn't tell anybody what was happening. And we had at that time no connection anymore with non-Jewish people anyway, so if we told our Jewish neighbors and friends, that was a different story.

Q: Did you tell your Jewish neighbors and friends?

A: I told them what we had to do, yes. But when I came home they saw how I looked and they could see that we had no fun there.

Q: Did you hesitate to tell them out of kind of concern because they might worry about their own fate?

A: No. We didn't tell them the worst what we saw, but we told them what we had to do.

Q: Why didn't you tell them the worst?

A: I didn't want to get them worried. Most of the Jewish members in our congregation were either women or old men, whom they didn't take at the time. They only took people under 55 to the camp; over 55 they didn't take, not at that time.

Q: Who was the most memorable guard?

A: The most memorable guard was the one who had the roll call with us, the roll call. He was the one with whom we had to do most of the time. When we got up in the morning and went out of the barracks into the outside, this guard was the one who had to roll call us, and that is the one whom I remember the most.

Q: Who was the most memorable inmate?

A: I don't think I can answer that. There was no inmate who was more memorable than any other; they were all inmates and -- except a few real heavy people who were mistreated I remember. But I didn't know them personally.

It was not pleasant to listen sometimes to all the words which the guards swore at us, like "Jewish pig," and things like that. We sometimes felt like animals.

Q: Did that stay with you, any of those feelings that they aroused in you when they would say those things?

A: Yeah, I would say. I would say. It was a National Socialist dogma.

Q: But the feelings, do they stay with you?

A: Of course. Of course. It was the whole system, that

was their system. We were the worst enemies of theirs. And the German Jews did so much good to Germany. There were so many Jewish artists and painters and scientists that Germany benefited from, but that didn't count anymore.

Q: How do the feelings express themselves today in your life?

A: I don't talk about it too much anymore. It's just too long a time ago, so many years have gone by. I have a family and we talk about more pleasant things.

By the way, my daughter is interviewing somebody today, too. She lives in Sunnyvale.

Q: Is that in Sunnyvale?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Do you want to go ahead and overview the time when you got out of Dachau, you know, the process of getting out of the country as far as Holland. Do you want to overview that now?

A: Yeah. I had to get out of the country when I came out of Dachau, but I also had to dissolve the business which I had in Germany. Our business was still functioning until the morning of November 10th when the National Socialists smashed our windows, and that was the end of the business. But it had to be dissolved. My mother was at that time already quite old and she couldn't do it alone, so in the short time after I came home I and my future wife, Ilse Isaak, my wife's name is Ilse, she helped me in dissolving the business. All the merchandise had to be sold and the house had to be taken care of, had to be sold. And so that

was what I had to do, too.

And then to prepare to get out of Germany I had all of my things which I would take to Cuba and I was allowed to only take certain things. I couldn't take any valuable objects with me, no gold, silver, anything like that, only my wedding ring.

Besides my wedding ring I had also another valuable ring of my mother which I had smuggled to Holland before I went to camp. And when the custom officials came to inspect the things which I would take along to Holland, my mother, who was quite naive at the time, asked me, "Otto, ask these people, these custom officials, if you can take that ring to Holland too." I said, "What ring?" "That ring" -- oh, no, that was not a ring of my mother; that was a ring which a girlfriend of mine had given to me before. And I said, "What ring? Oh," I said, "that ring I gave back to my former girlfriend a long time ago." The customs official said, "That's all right. You don't have to apologize, but we don't believe you anyway. But it's all right." (Laughing.) They were decent people.

So then I left Germany and went to Holland where in The Hague relatives of mine lived, and I spent about six weeks in Holland before I left Holland and went to Antwerp to board the boat to Havana.

When I went on the boat to Antwerp I had time enough to take a look at the city of Antwerp, where I had never been before. And when I left the boat to go into the city I saw somebody coming from Antwerp back to the boat and I looked at him and I thought to myself, "I know this fellow; he looks so familiar." I let him

pass by me and I turned around and said, "Fritz!" He looked around and he said, "Oh, Otto," he said, "what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm going to Cuba." He said, "So am I."

He was a fellow that I knew. He was not from my hometown but he was from another province and we had met before, but he was working in a neighborhood town where I lived. So we got to know each other. We got on the boat together and we spent quite a few nights, so I was glad I was not all alone, because I knew nobody. I was all by myself and I knew nobody, and through this I got to know, through this friend of mine, another fellow who was in the same position I was, because he had also to leave his wife behind. He had also a young wife whom he couldn't take along.

And when we arrived in Havana this fellow who had also his wife still in Germany and I got together and said to each other, in order to save money, we might as well live in the same room together. He was a Jewish teacher in Germany. Later, in the United States, he was ordained a rabbi.

We lived together until we both got our visa in Havana, and we both left Havana at the same time to come to the United States. He went to New York and I went to Chicago, but we took a bus together from Key West to Cincinnati, and from Cincinnati he took the train to New York and I went farther to Chicago.

Q: When you got out of Dachau your brother had arranged for a visa for you. When did your brother go to Cuba?

A: My brother came to Cuba in September 1938. He was -- in July 1938 he was also arrested by the Gestapo. He and his wife

were on the verge to go to a vacation in Switzerland. While they waited for the train to go to Switzerland the Gestapo arrested him and he was also sent to a concentration camp. He went to Sachsenhausen, the name of the concentration camp. So he was there also for several weeks, and his wife -- he was married at the time already -- he got also a visa to go to Cuba. That was also at that time the only country that still took Jewish immigrants. And that is why when I was in Dachau he still -- he was already in the United -- no, wait a minute. When I was in Dachau he still was in Cuba at the time. He was still in Cuba when I was in Dachau and he got me the visa, got in touch with the Cuban authorities, and that's how I got my visa to go to Cuba. There were hardly any countries that took Jewish immigrants anymore. You probably know the only country where Jewish people still could go was Shanghai, and Shanghai took quite a few Jewish people from Germany and Austria.

Q: Was it hard for your brother to get your visa?

A: No, it was not hard at all. Cuba let people in. They benefited from the Jewish immigration, because they made money on them, you know. But most of the Jewish people who went to Cuba went on permits, landing permits. A landing permit they had to buy, the people in Germany had to buy a landing permit, which cost five hundred dollars at the time. Five hundred dollars in 1938 is as much as maybe now fifty thousand dollars, on account of inflation.

So when I was in Cuba I did get a landing permit for my wife, too, paid my five hundred dollars. And she boarded the

boat in Hamburg -- when was that? -- in 1939, I forgot the month. But she only got the boat -- she boarded the boat in Januar -- no, not in Januar, in the month of May. She boarded the boat in Hamburg. And this boat went to Antwerp and in Antwerp they got news that Cuba had stopped the immigration from one day to another, so they didn't let that boat go on. And she sent me a cable. She sent me a cable that she couldn't come; what should she do? Well, I was in Cuba. I couldn't do anything. I knew that the boat was going back to Germany, so the boat went back to Germany.

Six months after I had been arriving in Cuba I got my American visa in Havana, went to Chicago, and in Chicago I tried to get a priority visa for her. And it took quite a while, until one day I heard from the State Department that I should send three or five dollars to the State Department and they would send the visa for her to Stuttgart in Germany, where the American consulate was. And she got notification from the American consulate in Stuttgart to come there and she got her visa there.

And then she went from Stuttgart to Genua and she boarded the boat in Genua and came to America on one of the last boats which left Europe.

Q: And when was that?

A: That was in 1940. She arrived in Chicago the 1st of April, 1940. That was one of the very last boats which left Europe. Then the war started and everybody was involved in the war and no more boats left. It was fortunate that she just got out in time.

Q: Going back to your visa or your -- did you have a visa or a landing permit?

A: I had a visa. I came by visa, but when I landed in Havana I had difficulties to land. All the people who had visas (sic) had no difficulties to land because they all had paid five hundred dollars. I had paid ten dollars for the visa. So I figured I had a hard time to land on my visa, I let her have a permit. So I got a permit for her and the permit didn't do her any good. Cuba got the money for it; they didn't return any money. It was Batista at the time.

Q: How did you get the five hundred dollars for the permit? I mean, you weren't allowed to take that much out, were you?

A: How I get the five hundred dollars, well, don't tell the National Socialists about it. I lived near the Dutch border and I had a good friend who asked me, "Otto, do you have any black money which you want to get out of Germany?" I said -- it was a Jewish friend, by the way. I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "Otto, it is very hard to get out your money. If you want me to get it out, give it to me and you can pick it up tomorrow morning in Nijmegen," which is the next larger city in Holland from where we lived. And I said, "Well, are you sure?" He said, "A hundred percent. It will cost you only ten percent."

So I gave him all the black money which I had. I mean, we had a business in Germany. We knew since 1933, since 1934, since 1935, we knew we had no future in Germany, we had to get out sometime. So I had collected some black money hidden, and that way I got him this black money. And the next morning I took the

train to Nijmegen and met my Jewish friend there and he gave me the money. And I happened to have also relatives living in -- a sister of my father was married in Nijmegen. And I visited them and I went to a bank in Nijmegen and I gave the money for a checking account -- savings account, and told them under no circumstances to send any statement to my house, to my home in Germany. "I don't want any statement." I would come over -- if I wanted to know what I have I would come over and come to the bank.

One day I got a letter from the bank. Fortunately, it was not opened. If that letter would have been opened, I wouldn't have been sitting here, because it was one of the worst economic crimes that Jewish people could commit, to get money out of Germany. And the next morning after I got that letter I took the train again to Nijmegen and went to the bank and took the money all out. And I took the money to my relatives who lived in The Hague. This relative of mine in The Hague was a very well-to-do businessman and I gave my authorization to administrate this money. And then when I left Germany and spent a few weeks in Holland, I got that money.

Q: How much did you have there?

A: I had at that time four thousand gilders, Dutch gilders, which was at the time quite a bit of money when you figure while I was in Cuba you could get a good dinner for twenty-five cents. And of course, we didn't have any income, we couldn't do any business in Havana or make any money, so I lived from that money, and I spent the five hundred dollars also for that landing permit. But please don't tell the National Socialist party.

Q: When did you actually take that money over to Holland?

A: Well, I didn't take it over. When it was smuggled out, that was -- I think it was in 1937. I don't remember the year exactly, but I think, pretty sure it was 1937. And was I happy when I got that money in Nijmegen, so if I have to get out at some time, at least I'm not dependent on anybody. I've never used a penny or had to ask for any penny when I was in Cuba or in America. I always could take care of my own. It would have feel me bad if I would have -- you know, when you have a business and you are well off, and then you have to go into the world and have no money, this is terrible. You can figure this out. So I was very happy that I had a little bit of money.

And when we came to United States -- I came to the United States in October 1939. In October 1939 the economic conditions in America were still very depressed. People still were selling apples on the street corners, you know, and it was very hard for us to get a job. I would have liked -- I was willing to take a job just to get a job, even if in the beginning I wouldn't make any money, just to get a job. But we couldn't find a job. So what did I do? I became a Fuller brush man, selling brushes from house to house. In Chicago it wasn't easy to do that. I couldn't afford a car. I had to take all these brushes, along with my little Fuller brush suitcase and handles, and go by streetcar or bus. And it wasn't easy. In the winter it was so cold I could -- oh, I remember. I did that for about maybe half a year. I didn't like that business. I hated it, going from house to house and ask people if they need something, and people tell you, "No, I have enough of that," and so on and so on.

Q: How did you manage to smuggle that ring out?

A: That ring I had brought to my relatives in Holland sometime before. From time to time I went to Holland because my relatives were there and I was glad to get out of Germany for a couple of days. And my relatives in The Hague had that ring also for me.

No, the people were not all bad in Germany. There were some people who would give you advice, what we should do, and they would like to help us as long as no Nazi would see what they would say or do.

Q: Now, was your visa available as soon as you got out of Dachau?

A: You mean for Cuba?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, it was available, yes. That's why I had to go, because they had advice from Havana to the consulate in Hamburg, and I went to Hamburg in December 1938 and got the visa.

Q: How long did it take you to sell your business?

A: To close the business, well, the business was actually closed the minute that the Nazis destroyed it. Then it was only a matter of selling the merchandise and the office work.

Q: How long did that take?

A: It took about two weeks.

Q: Who bought it?

A: My house -- a neighbor of ours bought my house, whom I knew very well. He paid us a regular price and we gave it to him because we knew him, he was a neighbor of ours. Our business was

in a better location than his, so he wanted to move and so he took our house. That didn't take long. And the merchandise which we had was taken over by a competitor of ours, a non-Jewish competitor, and he didn't pay much for the merchandise. He just paid what he wanted to pay.

Q: How much was that?

A: Maybe half of the price, or less, of what it was worth. But it didn't matter, because the money from the Jewish people was taken away anyway, whatever they had. We had to pay for -- Jewish people had to pay for everything, but for some reason it was -- they were taxed -- what I took out of Germany to take along in my immigration, I had to pay one hundred percent of that, of what it was worth, one hundred percent tax.

Q: What did you do with the leftover money?

A: My mother moved from our town where we lived, a small town, into a larger city where still more Jewish people lived. And they lived most together, several in one apartment, several Jewish people together, because they couldn't afford to pay the high rents. And my mother was then later on deported to Theresianstadt and the money is all gone. There's no more money. It was all confiscated.

Q: So you sold the house within two weeks of getting out of Dachau but you didn't leave until the end of December. Where did you live?

A: I came home from Dachau the 6th of December and I left the 20th of February to get out of Germany. I married on the 31st of January and I left the 20th of February, because I had to

leave. The authorities had warned me that I couldn't stay long.

Q: Where did you and your wife live after you had to give your house up?

A: We lived in the same house. We were still in the same house. We could live there until the new owners wanted to move in. The fellow who bought my house, I met him several times about fifteen years ago when we went for the first time back to Germany, and he was a very nice fellow. I met with several other old friends of mine, non-Jewish friends too. And he came to my side and said, "Mr. Hertz, you were such a decent guy, would I be able to give you five hundred mark just because I want to show you that I appreciate your kindness?" I said to him, "If it makes you feel happy, I'll take it and I can always give it for good deeds." So he gave me five hundred marks at that time. That was as much now as maybe three thousand marks at that time.

Q: When did he do this?

A: About fifteen years ago. The first time I was back in my old hometown.

And in Chicago, after I didn't make too much money in the Fuller brush business, I got a job which one of our relatives in Chicago gave me. It was in a factory and I had to check chains. It was a chain factory. It was not a hard job, but it was not a clean job, and I stayed there for several months until I got a job in a retail business, which suited me better, because I was a retailer too.

Q: When you still lived back in Germany before you got out, now, you had to report to the Gestapo every so often; right?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: How often?

A: Twice a week.

Q: How did they treat you when you reported?

A: Not bad. It was just a routine -- they just wanted to see that I was still there, that I hadn't disappeared.

Q: Were any of them old friends?

A: No, I didn't know these people, I didn't know them. But I knew other people who worked for the city who were old friends of mine.

Q: Now, at this time you were in where, in -- where you had always lived?

A: In my hometown? When I left?

Q: No, at this time when you were reporting to the Gestapo, was that where you were living and reporting was in your hometown?

A: Yeah. I just had to report. That was one of the conditions for people who had been released from a concentration camp. They wanted to make sure that I was still -- that they could still hold on me.

Q: Were they cold or were they friendly or were they noncommital?

A: No, they were not unfriendly, but they were not friendly either; just when I showed myself, "That's good, that's good." Until it took them too long, you know, they probably got orders from some upper level that I should leave. It was one of the reasons why they let me out, that I left Germany. But I postponed it as long as I could because I was on a honeymoon, you know? It was not really a honeymoon, but we were still newly married.

Q: Did you perceive that there was a limit? Before they told you that there was a limit and you had to get out, did you perceive that maybe you should hurry up and leave?

A: Well, as long as they didn't bother me -- they knew I had to dissolve the business, that I had still things to do, but then when I took too long -- it was from December until February the 20th -- you know, that was about two months.

Q: What were you allowed to take out?

A: I was allowed to take out personal things, furniture, clothes, but nothing dangerous and nothing valuable.

Q: What was dangerous?

A: Weapons.

Ten Marks, that was all I could take out in money, and they must have figured out that people couldn't live long on ten Marks. They didn't know I had money. There were quite a few people who had really no money and had to go to the relief fund, you know, the Hias and ask for money.

I know also a relative of mine who lived in Cologne, he also tried to get some black money out and he had somebody who took money of his out, also to Holland. And when he came to Holland to collect that money there was no money. It was not honest. It was gone!

My Jewish friend who took my money out, he didn't take it out himself either; he told me he knows of somebody who does it and he's not Jewish. It was a friend of my Jewish friend who was doing it. He earned ten percent, you know. Ten percent, for him it was fast money.

Q: Did you leave any possessions with anybody, any non-Jewish friends in Germany when you left?

A: No. If I gave something of my possessions?

Q: Yes, to keep for you.

A: No, no. They took it anyway, because whatever was left they took without asking us. My wife had all her trousseau in a lift in Holland and we were unable to get the lift from Holland because the war started and it couldn't be shipped to the United States. So we lost the whole lift. It was all -- after the war we were told that the whole lift was distributed amongst the Volksgenossen, among the Nazis.

Q: What's in the lift?

A: All the bedwear and furniture and rugs and carpets and whatever; you know, the whole lift. In Germany it was usual that brides, before they got married, got their whole trousseau for their lifetime. That was also in our business. We sold, for instance, bedwear and things like that, and when brides came to buy, that was big business. They bought bedwear for the rest of their lives. They didn't buy two bedsheets or two pillow cases; they bought twenty-four sheets, twenty-four pillow cases, all in quantities, and they had to last a whole life.

Q: Did it actually usually last the whole life?

A: Yeah, because merchandise was all first quality. It lasted a whole life. When I was in my hometown fifteen years ago I met a woman -- I was introduced to her. "Oh," she said, "you are Mr. Hertz. I still have our beds from your father," which she had bought maybe fifty years before.

Now, you want to know probably what I did in Chicago?

Q: I have a few more questions about when you were still in Germany and Holland.

So you went to Holland and you were there for six weeks?

A: Ja, I went for about six weeks -- not quite six weeks; five weeks, from February 20th until March 31st. That is when I left Holland to go to Cuba.

Q: Do you remember where you stayed while you were there?

A: If I knew somebody?

Q: Yeah. Did you know somebody to stay with?

A: You mean besides my relatives? No, I didn't know anybody besides my relatives, but I met some other Jewish people who also had temporarily to stay in Holland, who also wanted to go to the United States. I met a few. I was eating in a Jewish restaurant every day, or almost every day, when I wasn't with my relatives, and met some German Jewish people there.

Q: Did you stay with your relatives?

A: No, I didn't stay with them, but I visited them quite often. My relatives had gotten me the permit. They had good connections to the Dutch government. That is how they got me the permit, because it was already very hard to get a permit, even temporarily to stay in Holland.

Q: All this time were you trying to get the permits for your wife and your mother to leave?

A: Ja, but I had to wait until I was in Cuba to get them out.

Q: What kind of things did you try to do while you were

still in Germany that didn't work?

A: There was not much that I -- all my things which I had to do is get my papers to get out of Germany.

Q: Did your mother want to leave Germany?

A: My mother would have liked to leave Germany, but it was not easy. First of all, we had no relatives in the United States. When I arrived in the United States I started proceedings to get a visa for her and I had to apply for -- what do you call it? -- for an affidavit. I had to get her an affidavit. But I was not rich enough to give her an affidavit for my mother. And my uncle in Chicago would have helped me, but then it was already 1939 when I got -- late in '39, and it didn't work anymore. They were deported. I couldn't get our out anymore. She was at that time seventy-three years old and it was too late.

Q: After your wife left was there somebody left in Germany to take care of your mother?

A: Well, as I say, she lived together with another Jewish family who were the parents of my brother's wife. They lived together. But they also were not young anymore. They did as well as they could. They were all in their seventies; they had to make the best of it until 1940 or '41. In '41 I think they were all sent to -- some were sent to the east, some were sent to Theresienstadt, which is in Czechoslovakia. And Theresienstadt was supposed to be a model concentration camp, because the Red Cross sometimes sent people there to look how the people were treated. But it was actually the -- I don't know if people were killed in Theresienstadt, but then some people were also sent

from Theresienstadt to the gas chamber, the gas ovens.

But she died in Theresienstadt in 1943.

Q: How did you find that out?

A: After the Second World War we got papers from a German town where all the archives were, all the people registered who died in Germany. And we were told that she died in Theresienstadt in January 1943. I still have the paper at home. That's how we found out. We didn't know.

Q: Were you able to get letters from her after you had left?

A: No, there was no more communication. When I came to America, that was the end of 1939, the only communication which I had was when my wife arrived, she told me about her. But there was no more communication.

Q: After the war did you talk to anybody who knew her after you and your wife had gone but before she was sent to Theresienstadt?

A: Yes. We received a letter from a woman who survived Theresienstadt and who knew my mother, and she told us about her, exactly how she was, and she died of a natural death.

At that time it was a good thing to die, because what is life good for when you are like in a prison and you can't do anything and get not even enough to eat?

Q: Did you know anyone who knew what her life was like before she went to Theresienstadt though, who could tell you like did she have enough money or -- how did that go?

A: I really don't know how much money she had left, but in Theresienstadt I think they didn't need money. That was a concentration camp and they didn't have to pay for that. They just got to eat and be in the camp.

Q: Did this person who told you about your mother, did she tell you much about the camp or did you not want to know or did you want to know?

A: Well, what can you know about a camp? We read it in the papers and we know what happened. There were thousands of people in one camp and all they had to do was live, live the end of their lives. They were mostly old people; younger people were not sent to Theresienstadt. They were sent to Auschwitz and camps like that. And there was quite a few of my congregation members where I belonged to in my hometown were sent to concentration camps and gassed, but I found that out only after the war.

We didn't know in 1945 what happened in Germany. We knew that Jews were in concentration camps and were not treated well, but that they would kill them like that, nobody could even imagine that it was possible.

Q: When you were in Holland how was the admosphere in Holland different than the atmosphere in Germany?

A: The moment I came to Holland -- I mean, it is terrible when you have lived in a country for over thirty years -- I was over thirty years old when I had to leave -- and all of a sudden you have to leave your country. You don't know where you are going to be, what you are going to be, how you are going to live, and you might not even see your hometown again, you might not see your relatives again, you don't know the language, the customs and everything. It was a horrible feeling. But the moment I came to Holland, over that border, free, no Nazis, it was a different world, completely different world.

The only thing which was so bad is that the democracies let all that happen. They could have stopped Hitler in 1933 and 1934, and the whole world war would have never started. And that is what Bush now remembered with Saddam Hussein.

Q: Did you think the Nazis would invade Holland when you were over there?

A: No, we didn't think they would invade Holland. At that time there was no world war started yet, but everybody knew that he would start, that a war would go on sometime, but when and how, nobody knew.

Q: What ship did you take from Holland to Cuba?

A: I boarded the ship in Antwerp. That was -- the name of the ship was Orinoco. It was the Hamburg American line, I think. There were two boats: one was Orinoco and the other one was Iberia. I took the Orinoco and my wife took the same boat, which only went to Antwerp and then had to go back. And on the boat she was told by the same employees on the boat that they remembered me, because I was sick all the time. Oh, I was so seasick, you don't believe it. Have you ever been seasick? That is when you are not optimistic anymore; you want to die.

Q: And they didn't have motion sickness pills, either, did they?

A: No. I was on the deck all the time and I always had to feed the fish (laughing). But I was from the beginning when the boat started to go, I was seasick. And it was anchored in Lisbon and the moment we were on land I wasn't sick anymore. But when we left from Lisbon to Havana I was seasick all the time. I never was in the dining room.

Q: So you didn't eat all the way over?

A: I was always -- they came on deck and gave me something to eat and I couldn't keep it.

Then a few years ago we went on a cruise and I wasn't sick. It's probably technically different now.

Q: What class did you travel?

A: What class?

Q: Like first or second; what class did you travel on the ship?

A: Not first class. There are two classes, aren't there?

Q: I'm not sure what it was then.

A: It wasn't first class; it was passenger class, you know.

Q: Where was your stateroom?

A: I don't remember.

Q: It was probably down low, which would make the seasick worse.

A: No, even on deck I was seasick, even when I was on the deck in the fresh air. So that didn't make any difference. But it was April and the ocean was pretty rough. But there were people who never were seasick, and some people were seasick too, but not as much as I was (laughing).

Q: How much luggage did you take with you?

A: Oh, I took what they call a lift --

Q: What is a lift?

A: Well, a big crate.

Q: Is that like what they have now they call a container, like now you can ship a container over?

A: Yeah, yeah. But I didn't take overly much with me because it would have been just an inconvenience. I was glad to live in a room and a little bit of furniture and a little bit of clothes. That's all I had and all I wanted. We had to buy -- eventually, in Chicago when my wife came, we had to buy gradually all the things which we needed.

Q: What kind of papers did you have?

A: Papers?

Q: Well, like you have to have papers wherever you are, like citizenship or whatever.

A: Well, the moment you arrive in the United States you get a green card that you are a resident of the United States. And after five years in the United States you can become a citizen, and that's what I did.

Q: What kind of papers did you have for Cuba?

A: For Cuba all I needed was the visa and other people needed a landing permit.

Q: And it was the same for Holland?

A: In Holland I needed also -- that was a limited permit for a temporary limited time. And when I was on board the Orinoco in Antwerp one Belgian customs officer came on the boat and asked for me, if I was on board. He wanted to see if I was on board. They didn't want to have unauthorized people in the country. That's how strict everything was at that time. We felt like we were not wanted, you know.

Q: Did you ever get over that feeling of being not wanted?

A: In Germany or in America?

Q: I mean, did you bring it with you when you came here?

A: No, no, no. Here I knew it was a free country, everybody is free and can talk what he wants and can do what he wants, as long as it is within the law. Besides, when you have a clean conscience. . . (videotape ends midsentence).

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