Interview with Paul Bleicher

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q. AND YOUR BIRTH DATE AND YOUR BIRTH PLACE?

A. I was born October 2nd, 1920, in (Czestochowa) Polland. SP?

Q. AND CAN YOU TELL US WHERE THAT IS IN POLAND? IS IT NEAR A LARGE CITY?

A. Czestochowa is a big city. It was considered -- it is still considered by the Poles a Holy city. The Poles once a year they go on pilgrimage over there to their holy shrine they have on the hill. I used to live not too far away from that shrine. And they are so religious they even went on their knees on top of that hill. And they still continue this. They're very devoted Catholics. And I remember I used to live two blocks away from that shine. But when I was about six, seven years old, our family, we moved to a different city, to (Sosnowiec) which is also in (Salaria) in SP? the western part of Poland not too far from the German border, so --

Q. ----------?

A. And I started over there in school and stayed there, of course, and I grew up over there in my teenage years until

the war broke out.

Q. TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD AND YOUR FAMILY?

A. We were a family of five kids, three sisters and two brothers. One sister is alive. She lives in New York now. And we lived over there -- I grew up over there, and I went to school over there in (Hyder.) And then when I was finishing school, I enrolled in a Zionist organization, and until 1939 when the war broke out. While I was belonging to this organization I had a mind to go to Palestine at that time, but since there was no possibility to go by legal means, we anticipated, me and another friend, to leave Poland to go by illegal means.

But I figured at that time, you know, my father needed me in his shop. We had our little shop. He worked. He worked. He was a shoe upper cutter. He had a little shop. And when I grew up, I left school, and I helped him out in the shop, so I couldn't bring myself to leave home. It was clearly the most crucial time that he needed me. So I postponed it, postponed it until it was too late. And then the war war broke out September 1st, 1939. And only three or four days later, the Germans occupied the city.

And this I will never forget. When I was -- the day when the Germans entered the city and I went to the back yard to look out through the next street, I was anxious to see what's going on, and I saw the German soldiers watching with

their first patrols, shooting in the windows, you know, whoever looked up there. And I came in to tell my father. My father broke down. He was laying on his back in the pillow with his face in the pillow, and he started to cry.

I never saw my father cry before. And I asked him why is he crying. He said only two things, which I will never forget. He said, "This is it. This is the end." And that's -- I could start to realize what's going on. And then the usual things started to happen. You know, all the new regulation against the Jews, the yellow star on the arm band, and this was 1939. It was -- this was September.

Shortly after were the high holidays. And my first encounter with the Germans was during the high holidays. It was Yom Kipper day. So naturally all the Jews were afraid to go to the synagogue and pray. I was staying -- we were living downstairs on the ground floor, and I was staying near the window. All of a sudden as I was looking at my prayer book, I see at the window a soldier, a German soldier, with a gun pointing at me. He saw me, so he shout at me I should go out and meet him. I was afraid he shouldn't go in the house to see my father in the back room when he was praying inside, so I went out in the street, and he told me to keep my hands high.

And I saw a big mob of Poles following, a big crowd, because where we lived, it was a suburb of Sosnowiec, and

most of them, we were, the Jews were a minority. Mostly Jews lived in the city itself, but we lived in the suburbs. So I knew right away, they must have showed to the soldier where the Jewish family lived. So he took me out to the street, and he told me to march in front of him. And he was with hands high up. And he was walking behind me with his gun, and a big crowd after him.

And then a civilian general, it must have been from the Gestapo or something, came over to him, and he told me to take him to the apartment where the president of the (Shoe) SP lives, by the name of Friedman. He was the cantor and the president of the Shoe. So I told him -- he asked me where he lives. I told him two or three streets away from us. And they told me to go forward and to show him where he lives. And the old father -- my mother was scared, of course. Her father was, also. And they were thinking that the Jews are praying in the synagogue. There was no, you know, at that time, you know, they were thinking to do something against the Jews. But as usual the Jews were staying home.

So he told me to take -- I took him to the house where this cantor lived, to the synagogue, to that Friedman. And it's a good thing that the soldier told me to go in and bring him out. He was standing in front of the house. And as I was going in, and then I saw his mother, his old mother sitting there and praying. Then I asked, "Where is your

son?" She pointed me to the other room, to the back room. I came into the other room, to the third room. There was about twenty Jews praying over there in the shawls, the praying shawls. The windows were covered with, you know, for the noise, not to hear, you know.

And so the minute I came in, I told them to everybody leave everything and disappear because the soldier might come in. It's going to be something terrible. So they all followed, followed what I said, and they all left the room, and we all escaped through a back yard. We left the crowd with the soldier outside. But afterwards, a week or two afterwards I didn't dare to sleep home, me and my father, we couldn't, we were afraid they would come back for us. But, anyway, I heard that the synagogue was burned down. They did it the same day, because they were looking and saw I wasn't there, so they burned down the synagogue. And then I was, after that I was home about a year since the war started.

A year later in November, 1940, I got my notice to report for work to go to Germany. And in that report was written that it's only for three months. Everybody has to contribute three months working for the Germans. So I figured -- and nobody dared to not to report because they punish the fam -- the whole family was punished. They could send away the whole family to the concentration camp, and I didn't do that, so I said to my parents, "What's going to be

is going to be. I'm going to go. It's only for three months. And after three months, I would be replaced by others."

But this whole thing was a gimmick. Since we went in, no more I didn't see my own family again. So it was the end of 1940, November, I was sent away for work in it's called (zwangsarlag) at that time. It was not concentration camp. It was called zwangsarlag, which is in English is forced labor camps, but the conditions were just as bad as concentration camp. We were wearing civilian clothes, but we had to wear the Judah sign, you know, the yellow star on my chest. And the regulations and discipline very strict.

We were working on a big project. The project was called (risealterbar) which is the eight-lane super highway which is still running from Berlin through the whole length of eastern part of Germany all the way south. An eight-lane super highway. And every few miles was a camp over there. And they start sending thousands and thousands more from every town.

So in the wintertime when the ground was frozen, we stopped, we couldn't work on that highway, so we stopped working. And then I saw that three months were up by January, February, March, and they were still keeping us instead of sending us home. In the spring they send us back. Meanwhile during the winter we had to go out and shovel snow

on the roads for the villages and haul it out. And we kept over there.

The Commandant's name I remember the first commandant's name was Ackerman. A very strict German. He was a devil of a guy. He would just walk around with a leather strap. Any little thing, he hit anybody. And he had such a strict -- he kept us under such a strict discipline which I will never forget. The first time was on January 12 -- this date I will never forget -- 1941, he chased us out 5:00 o'clock in the morning, zero degrees without a shirt outside for a half an hour to wash ourselves in snow. And it was bitter cold. And since then he did it a few times more. It was his specialty.

And he had -- even at night we had to sleep with half our window open, during the winter, half a window had to be open. So after spring came, we went out back to work to the highway. We built that highway, and the highway went straight all the way down. I remember at that time somehow I read in the newspaper there they had the Nazi newspaper which was called (Felckishbelba,) and I remember distinctly on the front page was this written down, this line, that Hitler's project was to build that highway from Point B to Point B, from Berlin to Bagdad. He was after the oil in the Middle East. So he made the line was going straight through woods. We removed mountains and forests, everything straight, straight and straight and straight.

SP?

When we finished the project, that certain project, that certain place where we were building, we were transferred to a different camp. But every few miles was a camp which were on the same project, working on the same project. So I was there in (Gapestoff) -- this was the first camp -- about fourteen months. Fourteen or sixteen months. SP

And then we were sent to (Bleckamer,) a big industrial complex. It was called -- in German it was called the Herman Gehring Hemsher worker. A whole city just camps and camps and camps, all nationalities. I met over there French POW's and British POW's and Yugoslavs and Cerbs and Czecks and Poles, a whole city, thousands and thousands of them. And I was at that camp about five months I remember, doing all kinds of work. SP

And then all of a sudden after five months they send us back closer to the German/Pole, former German/Polish border, which was called (Gaspolyaf,) and then in a steel mill. Also I worked in a steel mill over there, transportation. If you call this work, I don't know. We slept, about sixty of us, we slept in a big hall. The train the whole night was going through with that noise and the heat. When we passed by from the office where they melted the steel, we had to cover our faces. We didn't wear any masks. We were working on mostly transport, loading and unloading those trucks, those big iron and steel. SP

And then this town was called in German was calling (Lowahuta.) Huta is a mill, steel mill. In Polish it was (Siemianowice.) And I knew that Siemianowice from Sosnowiec where we used to live. It's only about an hour's ride. So at that time I figured, I was thinking about a daring plan which, you know, I took my life in my hands, but I wanted to do it eagerly because it was about two years -- this was already 1942, two years since I was away from home.

So we three of us, three guys from the same town of Sosnowiec, our job was to load and unload that truck, but when we used to go out from the factory always a guard was with us, watching us. And so one time I got in touch with the truck driver, with the German truck driver, and he was part German and part Polish. You know, he was more German than Polish.

And I got in the truck with him, and I promised him, and I knew my parents were still home, and my father was still working in the shop. And I promised him if he's going to take me home just for a few hours, nobody should know, you know, and my father would make him boots, the boots and everything what he wants, he could get it because, you know, I was getting to do it. Two years I didn't see my family.

And this driver, when he heard the boots, they all wanted those Polish officers, the leather boots. My father was an expert in those. He had made the most, the best work

he did on this. So he decided to do it. He took a risk, also.

So one day he came with the truck to the mill over there. We unloaded the truck. And the three of us, we went in the truck. He covered us with a cover, you know, the whole cover. We went through the check point. We risked our lives because at the check point if they would find us, they would say that we tried to escape. So this is it. But somehow, I don't know. I have force, I had such a force in me I wanted to do it. And the three of us were from Sosnowiec.

We came to -- he went out imdetected pit from the city. It took us only about forty-five minutes, an hour, he came to Sosnowiec. I was so excited, you know, two years I didn't see. I says to him, to the driver, "First go to the -- not to the suburb where I lived. Go to the center of town where most the Jews live." When he came to the city, the main street is (Wolitzmadriff,) the main street. This is the main street in Sosnowiec where most the Jews live. They have their businesses there.

And he stopped over there, and something was suspicious to me. I stopped to the truck, and I looked up from the truck. I see everything is closed. I don't see any people in the streets. All the stores closed. Not even a person in the street. And then I saw from far away walking two Jewish

policemen with the bands, and I called them over. And I asked them, "What's going on here?"

And they looked at me and says, "Where you come from? Where are you coming from?"

I said, "We're coming from Siemianowice, a town."

So they said to me, "Don't you know what's going on?"

I says, "We don't know nothing. We just came."

He says, "All the Jews from the three surrounding towns, from Sosnowiec, Bedzin, Dabrowa, all big towns, they had to report on a big stadium for a selection," you know, because it was their first selection. They had to check their working permits, working cards. So at that time -- this was already under the SS. And they told us not to dare togo over there. I wouldn't dare to go there because I was illegal. I was out from camp, and nobody knew.

And at that time was a big selection. I remember my parents were there. I didn't know about it, you know. I told the driver, "You know, what? Maybe you go to my house, to the suburbs, maybe my parents are still home. Maybe they didn't report." So he went to my house. My heart was beating, and I come in. We lived -- our apartment was ground floor, and there was a store in the front and the rooms in the back. A room and a kitchen. I seen the front is closed. The back room -- I start to call everybody's name, knock on the window. Nobody is there. Nobody. So I figure everybody

must be in the big stadium.

I went across the street to our neighbor, a good neighbor, a Polish woman, an elderly woman, and she didn't recognize me. After I told her who I was, she criss-crossed herself, and she pulled me into the next room. She gave me food right away and this and that. And she gave me -- and I told her, "Give me a pencil. I'm going to write down and let my parents know that I was here and I will be here again. In a few days again, I do the same thing."

I remember I couldn't write. I was so nervous, my pencil, I couldn't write. She gave me food to eat, and I just told her, "Listen, tell my parents I was here and I will be here in a few days again." That's it.

I could have stayed very easy because, you know, all three of us because the truck was waiting outside. I went in the room over there, and we could go through the back door, but we didn't think of it because the reason for it was because a few of us boys escaped from the other places where we used to work, in the mill. They didn't even look for us. As Polishmen, they took the whole family, and they sent to Auschwitz. So I figured what am I going to do? I'm going to save myself, and the whole family will be gone.

So we went back. He was very disappointed, also, the truck driver, but I promised him we were going to do it again. So we came back the same day to camp. Nobody knew

anything. They guard just took us in the way we went out. And that's all. And we were supposed to do it again in another few days, the next occasion. But in a few days later some kind of a sickness broke out. Everybody got sick, the whole -- our group was only a small group, sixty of us in that steel mill. Everybody got diarrhea or something from some kind of food, poison food. They closed up the whole thing, and they sent us deep into Germany, and I couldn't do it again. I was standing near my door knocking on my door, and that's it. I didn't see again.

So later on they send us to a camp which was called (Branda.) This was Branda. This was like a transit camp. I remember people, inmates came from all over. And some big industrialist, Germany industrialists, came from all over Germany to hire workers over there, so they took a group of fifty, sixty, a hundred. This was like a transit camp to take back to Germany. I was only there about a week or so. And it was terrible. It was such strict disciplinarian.

We were standing at 12:00 o'clock at night we were all standing for hours at the appell. And this camp commandant went around to us, counting, counting how many here, how many there, groups here, groups there; but any slightest move, he hit anybody. He was a devil of a man.

So I was glad after a week to leave that place, and I was sent to (Brunslow.) Brunslow was also near (Breslau.) It

was called (Hoberland, halsber arbiten verka.) We were working on mostly on barracks, constructing barracks, and this is the longest time I was there was about two years I was over there. During those two years what I did over there, also, they were working mostly were over there like carpenters, mechanics, all kinds of mechanics. SP?

And those carpenters, they were working, besides the barracks where they constructing barracks, they were working on trapeze, trapeze work where the trapeze work was made from plywood. They were made -- they made airplanes, the actual size of German airplanes. If you look from outside, you didn't recognize it. It was like airplane. Inside was hollow. Outside was everything painted like a real German fighter plane. This was to deceive the enemy. They put those planes on the air field, and the real planes they were hiding in the woods camouflaged, you know, to deceive the pilots. Once I went inside to see how it looks like. Inside it was a hollow plane, nothing inside, just plywood outside, painted. From the outside you couldn't tell.

I was there about two years in this camp, but my work was -- I was manual. I'm not a carpenter. I'm not a mechanic, so my work was either gardening, this and that around, whatever I did. But curious enough, my boss, Hoffman, my German boss, Hoffman, he was not a Nazi. This was my luck. Thanks to him, I'm alive today. The way he

treated our group -- we were a group about fifteen or sixteen of us working all kind of manual work. The way he talked to us, and the way he treated us, he was not a Nazi. He helped us a lot.

I remember I got sick on typhus in that Brunslow once. I unloaded once a truck for a German kitchen. I unloaded some food. It looks like I ate some cheese or then I drink water or something. I got sick on typhus and a few others of us, about six, seven of us got sick on typhus. We were sent to like a (kuntin sluber) there, and we were afraid they shouldn't send us away. Not only this, but the ---------- was more afraid for himself than for us. He wanted us to send away, but I went over to there was -- we didn't have a doctor, but he was like a main nurse, like an angel, he saved us all. He got up in the middle of the night. He made us hot tea and potatoes, just to keep us alive.

He went to the German guard. He told them, "They're all going to get well. They're going to get back to work." And then I went over to him, and I said to him, "Listen, do me a favor, send me back to work," because I was afraid all of a sudden might come an inspection from the SS, like had happened at other camps before. When they came all of a sudden to a camp, they met a lot in the sick room, a lot of people, just took the whole group and sent to Auschwitz, so I knew from before it might happen the same thing over here.

I went over to him. I says, "Do me a favor, send me back to work."

He says to me, "In your condition?" I had a 104 fever. It was 42 -- 104 fever a whole week. I couldn't eat, weak. I couldn't -- "How are you going to be able to work?"

I says to him, "Listen, my boss is Hoffman, and he's not a bad guy, and he's going to see my condition. I think he's going to treat me well."

When he heard that, he says, "Okay, go back to work." I went back to work. I couldn't even lift a finger. My boss, he saw me, my condition. He says, "Go (feckstesier") he tells me, because I couldn't work, anyway. For three or four days he didn't let me do nothing. He just said, told me, "Just go hide someplace." Another German wouldn't do that. He was an angel. He saved me. SP?

And I was there until January, 1945. Not only that, but he saved another guy's life, also. There was another boy in our group, and he went out up to the German kitchen, and he stole a salami. This guys lives in Florida now. He worked with me. He's retired now. He's a senior representative. He was a senior representative of Metropolitan Insurance Company. For many years, twenty-five or thirty years.

And this was already in the beginning of 1945. So the German kitchen chef, he caught him stealing a salami. This

was the worst thing to do at that time. So he reported to my boss, and my boss is supposed to report to the SS commandant from our camp, (Shramel.) He was a mean guy. And then the worst thing would happen. Somehow he knew this already at the time we were supposed to be evacuated. He was holding back for another day and another day and another day and another day for a few days, and he didn't report. And then they sent us away, and that's it. That means he saved his life, also. His life was saved.

This in January, 1945. All of a sudden they woke us up in the middle of the night and chased us out from camp because we heard already the Russian front behind the city over there, and they chased us in the middle of the winter. We started to walk, and we walked for six weeks, and they chased us. Whoever fell behind got shot. And, you know, in the beginning I had in mind not to go because -- but it was impossibe. They chased us out in force all around. They left just the very sick ones. They left, everything was in a haste, in a hurry because the front was very near.

We walked for six weeks. And the first night, the first couple days after we came to our camp. Before we came, we slept over in farms, in big farms. One night I remember after we slept over, the next day we were supposed to start to walk again. The guards, they saw that a lot of portions -- we got a portion of bread for everybody for the

whole day. That's all. They saw a lot of portions are left over. They knew how much we left. In this camp we were fifteen hundred of us.

And they saw there is a lot left over, see, and then came the German farmer and says something to the guard that some of us were hiding in the barns, in the hay. So then the shooting started. The guards came in, and they found them, and they started to shoot whoever they found in the barns hiding over there. I remember one guy by the name of (Lipschitz) because I will never forget, they took him out from the farm -- they took him out from he was hiding in the barn, took him out and put him against the wall. SP?

So one of the guards, an SS man by the name of Schultz, he told an elderly SS man to shoot him, to execute him. This elderly SS man -- and I was standing nearby. He was standing over behind, he was shooting next to him. He didn't want to hurt him. If he would fell down to make believe he was dead, he would be alive.

But he was standing there, so this Schultz nervously, he grabbed his gun, you know, and he shoot him himself because he was hiding. Well, a lot escaped, anyway, but it was very terrible. They watched us from all sides, the guards, you know. Some of them -- I remember I had a cousin of mine. He risked his life on the roads. When we passed by, he went out to the field to grab a potato, to grab

something in the field to eat. We walked like this for six weeks. Went down towns and near Lypstick here and there, and a lot of gunshot, a lot died.

And then we came to a big camp which was called Nordhausen. About twenty thousand inmates were there. In this camp they were working, they were making the V1 and V2 bombs, those -- inside the mountains in those factories over there underground. Discipline was terrible there. Every day there were hangings over there. They accused the inmates of sabotage, so any little thing, there was a hanging over there. So, and then I thank God that they shipped us out after a week. They shipped us out.

I met in that camp one black guy. I was wondering how does a black guy come over there. With twenty thousand inmates, one black inmate. And I asked him how does he come over here? He was dressed nice and looked nice, healthy. There was only one between twenty thousand. The Germans kept him as a puppet or something. They didn't let him do any work. That's it. I didn't know how he got over there.

Anyway, we left over there after a week. After a week I was glad to get out. So they sent us to another camp, which was called (Ellberby,) and this one was even worse than the other one. The worst place there ever was. They had criminals, a lot of criminals were there, too. In Nordhausen were the political prisonors a lot, so when the political

prisoners were there, they had a better organization in camp. But where the criminals were, it was the worst thing over there.

And when I came into that camp, they told me right away that more than three weeks nobody lived here in this camp anymore. You cannot last more than three weeks in this camp. When I saw those faces on the inmates coming back from the inside -- they were working inside underground in those factories, with the munitions, with the bombs -- they all looked like ghosts, the dust on their faces. They couldn't last any more than three weeks, nobody.

I remember I gave away my shoes. I still had from Brunslow. I had a pair of shoes, so I gave away to one guy who was some kind of (fushinair) or whatever, and he promised me a bread, a whole bread, a loaf of bread for my shoes. I says, "Okay, give me every day a quarter of a bread." He paid me three portions of bread, and he still owes me one portion of bread. He didn't pay for the whole bread.

And speaking about bread, if I may, I want to mention about my wife. She was also in camp, I mean if it's possible. She was only about two, three years in camp. She said they asked her in the beginning, she was asked to give an interview also to give testimony on her history, but she said she wouldn't be able to do it. She's very -- when it comes to those things she's very emotional. But this story

after when I met her after the war, she told me when she left home -- she's from a little town (Shimischitzen.) When she left home, her mother gave her a little diamond ring when she left for camp to be able to help herself in the camp.

And she was working in a place only for girls, a female camp. She was working very hard, a whole day stacking up some hundred pound sacks of some kind of they were collecting, they were harvesting some kind of vegetable and squeezing it out for some kind of juice or oil or what. So she was collecting this, stacking up in sacks in a big hall over there, she and another girl. This was her work. Very hard work for a girl.

And then one day she got in touch with a Czechoslovakian worker, and she gave away her diamond ring for a loaf of bread. She was afraid to take that bread to camp. So she was hiding that bread under the place where she was working under a sack. But after the day or two later, the German boss found the bread, the boss, her boss. And he reported it to the guards. Well, they took her and the other girl to find out. tHey made a whole investigation to find out where she got the bread from. She's supposed to say where she got the bread from. She was telling from the beginning that she found the bread.

They hit her once or twice, and she didn't want to say. She didn't want to give away the guy where she got the bread

from. There came a special, an officer from the SS came to investigate the whole case. He came with a rope, and he told her, "You're going to be hanged if you're not going to tell us the truth from where you got the bread." She kept saying she found the bread, and they said, "What? Found the bread? Who finds bread?" That's all. She found the bread. The other girl was already, you know, she couldn't stand it anymore. She was ready to testify, to tell the truth.

And she told her -- they tied them up both, facing each other on the tree a whole day wintertime, without shoes. A whole day like this. They didn't go to work, but facing like this tied up to the tree until they say the truth. And my wife, she said one thing, she kept saying, "I found the bread." That's all. The other girl was ready to give in. She told her, "If you're going to give away, you're going to give away us. They're going to hang us, anyway, and the guy who gave us the bread."

Anyway, after two or three days, they let them go back to work, and the whole thing was -- and they warned if it happened again, they're going to -- but when I met her after the war in Bergen-Belsen -- I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. When I met her right after the war, her feet, she had a pair of swollen feet. Her feet was like two feet from a table, such a roundness. It could be that's from this. That's the story I remember from her what she told me.

Well, going back to my story, I was -- when I was in Ellerby, they put us, a week only, they put us on the cattle trains. This was already about in March, '45. They put us on the cattle trains, and we were transported. It was chaos over there. The first three days they packed us in in a cattle train. The first three days we didn't even have a drop of water and nothing in our mouths. And I remember next to me I was sitting by a guy, and I asked him how long can a person last without food, and he says to me just like that, well, he heard that seven days it's possible to get out without food. So I says to him, "Okay. Three, we are already without food. Another four days, and that's it." Anyway, another died in that train.

I volunteered to even go out on some stops. We were on that train for about a week, five or six days. Some stops we volunteer to take out the dead just to stretch out my legs and to catch a little fresh air. And I couldn't even move myself, so weak, from weakness. Anybody who tried to escape got shot right away. So then on the third day, on the fourth day they gave us a portion of bread for the whole day.

Then we came to a place called Bergen-Belsen. This was our camp. I was there two weeks. But the camp was completely without, you know, we didn't go to work, but no food distribution, nothing, just like that, because the Germans themselves, they saw already that the end is near.

And after two weeks we got liberated. In April 15, 1945. And the British came in. A few days before, they came in, I saw some of the Germans starting to wear white arm bands, and we understood that the liberation was near.

I had a cousin of mine from our town, we kept ourself, we were together since Brunslow and during these six weeks. All those camps I kept close with him, a very nice fellow. His name was (Schamil Cotrain,) and he risked his life many times. He went out from the column, ran out to the field to grab something to eat for me to share with him. You know, for any little thing you could get shot. Anyway, two days before the British came in, he went in, he was so hungry. We didn't get any food from no place. He sneaked in in the German kitchen in the basement where the potatoes were. He tried to steal a few pototatos, and he got shot from the guard in the back, in the rear.

SP?

And I didn't know what to do. There was no doctors, no medicine, nothing. I took him on my shoulders, and I put him on the bed in his room. There was no place, no medical. I washed away his wound with water, with anything I could, but what he needed is take out, he had this bullet still in his rear. Two days later the British came. The British came in. In the beginning I went over to the first tanks came in, the first trucks came in, and I knew a little, a few words in English I knew because I studied it in Poland. When I was a

student, I started to study a little English.

And I came over to him, and I says -- he looks at me, and I says to him, he looks at me and he takes out his sandwich. He gives it to me just like this, white bread with meat. I went over to my cousin. I share with him, but he was in very bad shape. I took him out. They started to organize hospitals, this and that. I took him on my shoulders to put him in a special barrack hospital. And I remember distinctly, he was crying like a child, you know. He was happy to see his liberators, but here he was very sick. He needed Penicillin. Nothing, not yet. A day or two later he died from gangrene.

Now, I was liberated from Bergen-Belsen April 15th. Bergen-Belson was a big camp. It was a special camp for males, and there was four miles further was the real camp, Bergen-Belsen camp where all the females are. There were about twenty or thirty thousand females over there. This was the real barracks, with the crematorium. Where we were, they didn't have a place where to put us. They put us -- this was before this was used for the Germans as their military barracks for the German soldiers. We were put over there, stone house, two stories high. And we were there. So our condition wasn't so bad, but the women over there, it was even more terrible.

So after we were liberated already they were still

guarding us. We couldn't get out. The war was still going on. April 15th until May 8th. And besides this, they were afraid. There was typhus all around. They were afraid we shouldn't spread the disease. We couldn't go out. One day I see there was a lot of visitors came to the camp. Was newspaper men, camera men, came all over the world to see Bergen- Belsen. It was a big name. I was standing near the main gate, and I figured how is it possible that I'm liberated already, and I cannot go out like a free man?

And so I see a group of Canadian soldiers just like this. Uniforms, it must have been pilots or something from Canada. A group of about twenty came in with the newspaper men and taking pictures. And they went around the camp to look around. And then they go back out through the gate. I just went in amongst them, between them, and I just walked out like this, and nobody stopped me. Just like that. I figured to go out, to go to a farmer to get some food, you know, because the food that they gave us was still from the German food left over. They didn't have any -- this wasn't organized yet.

When I came out, I teamed up with another guy who digged himself out from under the barbed wire or something, and we went for a walk. We went on the highway. We did a foolish thing because we heard still shooting in the woods. The war was still going on. We could get ambushed by some

Germans and killed just like nothing.

All of a sudden we were walking like that, the two of us, and we stopped, I remember, at a POW camp where there was a French and a Yugoslav and POW's, you know. They were shipping home. They were shipped home at the time, so they gave us away everything. Someone gave me a jacket, a military jacket, and food and clothing, cigarettes. They gave us everything.

But as we were walking back, all of a sudden a British patrol stops us, surrounds us from the woods. They came out. They thought we are Germans or something or soldiers, and they started to ask us who we are. We told them. We are inmates from Bergen-Belsen. And he said we should go back fast. We still heard really actually the shots in the woods. They were looking for pockets of resistance of the German soldiers that were still in the woods hiding.

And we came over there. We came back to camp. They let us in, but out not, but we could go in. When I was back in camp, the next day a friend of mine I remember came over to me. His name is (Weindrop.) He lives in New Jersey now, SP? came and we were still working the same group in the Brunslow labor camp. He came over to me. He says, "Paul Bleicher, do you know that your two sisters are alive? They're in Bergen-Belsen in the female camp." I says, "What?" I just came back from the two-day trip, and I slept over in the

barrack for the POW. When I came back, I didn't know.

He says, "Yes, I went out from here. I knew about the camp over there. I sneaked out over here, and I sneaked in. I went over there to the barbed wire. They wouldn't let us in because the real sick camp was over there. They were guarded, also."

So some girls came to the barbed wire from the inside, and some boys came from the outside, and they start asking questions, from where you are. So one girl by the name of (Fela Mikese,) which is my wife, came over to the gates, to the barbed wire, and he asked him, my friend, if he knows somebody by the name of Paul Bleicher. He says, "Paul Bleicher? It's my friend. We were working together at Brunslow." SP?

She said, "Well, tell him if you see him that his two sisters, Sally and Helen, are with me inside. He should come to see them." And he told me that. When he told me that, I didn't know, I got electrified to think this. So I says to him, "Well, tomorrow I'm going to start, I'm going to try to get in there."

The next day I dig myself out. I had a little food with me, which I brought. I dig myself out from our camp, and I went walking the three or four miles, and I went over to the camp where they are, the big female Bergen-Belsen camp. I came over to the main gate, and I talked to the British

soldier, the guard over there, and I told him, "I have two sisters in here. I know. Somebody told me. I didn't see them for five years. I would like you should let me in. I want to see them."

He says, "Well, I'm not allowed," he told me. I remember he wouldn't let me in, but he told me distinctly, "If you want to get in, try someplace else, you know, go around it."

So I went around to the other side to a barbed wire, and I digged a ditch under the barbed wire, and I slipped in. I went in, and I went barracks and barracks, but I saw over there is a real hell. Piles of dead corpses, left over still from the Germans. And the smell, the stench, it's terrible. Some of the girls were making bonfires, making some food, cooking outside.

And then I found the barrack that my sisters is supposed to be. So I came into the barrack, and there were sick girls that were laying in the bunks. I came over there, and I found my sister, Sally, laying. She had the typhus, but she's already after the sickness, very week, anorex. Next to her was standing her friend were my sister, Sally, and her friend, Fay, and my other sister, Helen, they were all together. They kept all together since they left from one of the camps they were working together. And they kept all together.

And then I asked her, "Where is Helen? Where is the older sister?" She says, "She's very critical in a different barrack among the very sick." ----------

So I spent time with -- I remember she asked me, she looked at me, and she asked me if I'm some kind of a military man. She saw me in a little Eisenhower jacket that some POW gave to me. She looks at me, "Are you a soldier or what?" I says, "No, somebody gave it to me." I asked her, "Where is Helen?" She says, "She's in the other barracks, just ----------.

I started to look for the other barrack, and I came in. All I heard, there was the double bunk beds, you know, up and down, young girls, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, seventeen. And all I heard when I came inside is moaning and groaning. Very sick, critical. They are all like skeletons. I go around once and twice and three times. I cannot recognize her. I know this is the barrack, No. 9 or something like this, and I cannot recognize her.

And I start to call, "Helen, Helen, Helen." And then she called my name. She recognized me. She didn't know that I'm coming, and she recognized. I came over to her bed. I was standing like a statue. I couldn't move. I didn't know nothing. I couldn't cry. I couldn't say a word. Then her face, everything like a skeleton.

And I didn't know what to do. I says I knew that she

had typhus, and I knew they had terrible diarrhea. The worst sickness was this diarrhea. Whatever they took in their mouth didn't hold. It came out right away. I had with me a few potatoes. I told her, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going outside and make a little bonfire, and I'm going to make the potatos very boiled," but I knew that the charcoal is supposed to be a remedy for diarrhea, the skin of the charcoal. And I gave her some pieces to eat, but she was hardly alive.

And I didn't know what to do. I went over to there was a British, he was not a doctor, a nurse or a doctor, and I told him, "Please, can you do something to help my sister?" He says, "We're doing all we can." The ambulance was taking them, going and coming day and night from the barracks to a hospital, back and forth, back and forth. They did what they can. They didn't have enough doctors. They didn't have nothing yet. Anyway, the next day she died in ambulance to the hospital. This was I saw her after five years. That's the only one time, the only one time, and that's the last time I saw her.

So at that time, then came the end of the war on May 8th in '45. Came back to our camp. And I took my other sister with her friend. She says, "I go, but I want to take my friend, also," with her. I says, "Okay, you can take her. Why not?"

And I knew that there is a town -- this was in Bergen-Belsen. There is a town about forty miles from Bergen-Belsen, not far from Hannover. There is a town called Selick. This town is a little town, but all this time I knew there were only hospitals over there. The Germans were using it as a hospital. The town was intact. They had the Red Cross on their roofs. The only station was bombed out is the radio station was bombed out. The rest was everything intact. The hospital was all standing there.

So I figured I'm going to take my other sister -- I was afraid she shouldn't also die. I was already after the typhus. I was immune. It looks like I didn't get the typhus. I had diarrhea, also, but in not such a terrible form. I had typhus two years before in the other camp.

So I took my sister, Sally, and we hitchhiked, just stopped on the road and a British Army truck, we couldn't even get up. I couldn't even lift my sister to get up on the truck. And he took us to Selick just like that, and I checked into the first hospital, we went in a German hospital, and I says, "So and so, we are from Bergen-Belsen. We want to check in."

They treated us very good. They give her a bed right away, and she was in this hospital for about six weeks, I remember, and the gardens all around, fine, everything, downstairs. I remember two soldiers, two British soldiers,

came over every day to our window. They brought her chocolate, they brought her goodies and this and that. After six weeks she got better. And that's it. So this was in Selick.

Then after Selick, I went back to Bergen-Belsen because we wanted -- in Bergen-Belsen we always met people that came from all over Germany, from east to west, from Poland, and I wanted to find out if some other members of the family. At that time I went over to our chaplin, a British chaplin, I remember a tall guy with a little beard, and I asked him to do me a favor, to send a letter to my aunt in the USA.

I remember my aunt's address during the whole time of the war because before the war I used to write some letters to her, a few words in English. I wanted to show off that I know a little English, so I remember the address. He asked me, "Do you know the address?" I said, "Of course. It's 2058 Union Street in Brooklyn, New York." He says, "Okay. Give me the letter. I send it to you. I send it for you." He sent it away.

After two or three weeks I got answer. He brought me answer from them. I'm the first one that got a letter from abroad. I was happy to get an answer from my aunt and my cousins in Brooklyn. They asked me where everybody else is. And my father, my family, this and that. And they wrote to me also the address of my uncle, my father's brother, in

Chile. He had a brother in Santiago, Chile. He was a German Jew, but he was smart enough. In 1933 he was a businessman in Dresden in Germany. He left only a few months after Hitler came to power. He and his partner sold the business, and he went to South America. They opened up a business right away in Santiago, Chile. So I wanted to get in touch with him, also, of course. So they send me the address, my aunt, and I wrote to him, also.

This was 1946. Then in 1946, the end of 1946, my wife's sister and my future brother-in-law, she was liberated. She was in Auschwitz, (Burkenow,) and they went back after the war to Poland. From Poland they're supposed to go to Israel. They wanted to go and leave Poland and settle in Israel. But when they came to Austria, somebody got word that her sister is in Bergen-Belsen, so they changed their mind, and they came to us to meet her sister, and they came to us. So we all got together over there, and then we decided to leave the British zone and go to the American zone.

sp?

But one thing I have to tell the story of my brother-in-law, of my -- he wasn't yet my brother-in-law. He was my future brother-in-law. He was with my wife's sister at that time traveling from Poland to go to Israel. They came to Bergen-Belsen. Everybody was engaged in a little black marketing because there was no open stores, no

factories or anything. We bought stuff here, we brought to another city. We sold it there. We got ten times as much as it's worth over there. And we are traveling back and forth to meet, maybe meet somebody from relatives.

So when we traveled from Bergen-Belsen, we're supposed to take a train to the American zone. So we took the train in Hannover. In Hannover, the train went to Frankfurt Dell Main, which was the American zone already. And then we went on to Munich or someplace else. So and this was in 1945, December, '45, I remember. So everything was bombed out still. The station was bombed out.

In Hannover, there was a big air raid shelter, which was holding thousands of people, mostly Germans, a lot of refugees from east and west, women and children. You couldn't go down there. Thousands of people in that shelter where we were waiting for that train from Hannover to Frankfurt Dell Main. We went downstairs. We had to wait a couple hours or more. Outside was cold, winter, December. We went downstairs to wait. Downstairs in that shelter we couldn't walk so many people were there.

In that shelter, there was a gang of German sailors from Hamburg. There was a regular gang sticking out such knives over there, patches on their eyes with beard like real pirates, like you read a book and you see a movie on the middle ages, just the same. And they were the bosses

downstairs. Everybody was afraid of them. The German police or the British MP, they didn't want to mix in downstairs. They couldn't get attendance, there were so many people in there. There were lots of people downstairs just like that. It was warm.

So when we, our group, boys and girl, we were traveling back and forth, they came over to us and they asked us, ("Where bisto? Where bisto?") So we told them. I said we're Judah from Bergen-Belsen, (concentralagan) and I took out right away some cigarettes, some salami, a little bread, and I share with him. They were our best friends. They actually killed a few Poles. They were mad on the Poles, and I found out the reason why. Polish pirates during the war, they bombed the whole City of Hannover. This was their job. So if they met a Pole downstairs, they killed him right away.

sp? sp?

One time my brother-in-law was traveling by himself. It was at that time my sister was with him, also. I wasn't traveling at that time with him. We were just traveling from the English onto the -- our transportation was free. Just by showing a DP card, we could go any train, but the train was terrible, packed, on the roofs, on the steps. You couldn't even stay a whole night on one leg. I was standing one night because I couldn't put down because it was so crowded, so packed. But, no, we were traveling free all over. But sometimes we got bosses on trucks from the British, from the

British Army that took us places, also.

So one time my brother-in-law went down in that shelter to wait for the next train. They came over to him, the same, the same guy, the same pirates came over to him. He was thinking that he was going to say he's a Udah wouldn't be good. They're going to kill him. He was not in concentration. He was in Russia during the war. He was fighting the Russian Army. Then he escaped at the end of the war, threw away his uniform and everything, was a sergeant in the Polish Army, Russia, was fighting at the front. So he thought he was going to say he was a Udah is not going to be good. It might harm him.

So he said he's a Pole. That's it. They beat him up so severely. They took away his watch, took away he had some money, and they dragged him up on the snow upstairs, and they left him as dead, unconscious. He was unconscious. They thought he was dead. They left him out there. But after -- and my sister started to call for help, but there is no place to go there for help over there. Nobody, there is no police, no authority, nothing. After a while, he came back to his self, but he wouldn't go no more to Hannover. He wouldn't stop at that place.

Anyway, we all went to the American zone in 1946, beginning of 1946. We ---------- in a camp called the (Neefrimer.) This was in the outskirts of Munich. And I still Sp?

have a picture of General Eisenhower when he came in to visit us for the first time. This was a settlement of about 200 one-family houses. And we occupied those houses. They gave the Germans about 24 hours or 48 hours to leave, just to take their personal belongings. Those houses belonged only to Nazi members. Hitler gave them as, you know, for devoted members he gave them like a reward.

So we moved into those houses. And in every one-family house we moved in about two or three families. One family upstairs, one downstairs. It was only one-family. Little gardens. It was nice over there. So we lived over there. We lived over there. I got married over there, and my brother-in-law got married over there. My sister went to live in Frankfurt Dell Main. And I started over there vocational school because I knew already about modeling shoes. I know how to -- I still know how to model and make models for ladies' and men's shoes, sketches. And I started over there from art, an American art was our classes over there.

And after I got married, in 1949 -- I lived there until 1949. 1949 my daughter, Paula, was born over there, April 17th. And at that time I couldn't -- I knew I wanted to go to the USA because my aunt was here or go to South America to my uncle over there, to see, to be with my family. But since I couldn't go, I --------- to go to Australia. I remember

they let in certain contingent of refugees to Australia. I had to sign a contract to work for the government two years, for the Australian government.

I figured I couldn't go here, I couldn't there, and Israel I wanted to go, but when I heard that in 1948 when the war broke out, a distant cousin of my brother-in-law, that he got caught on the ship and they sent him to Cyprus. He was in a camp. So I figured I just got liberated and go back to camp, I couldn't see myself behind barbed wire again. So I figured I go to Australia.

But at the last minute, the Congress of the United States, they introduced a bill to let in a hundred thousand refugees, and President Truman approved it. So I fell under this category, and we were --------- to come to the USA. My sister went six months earlier. I couldn't go because my baby, she couldn't travel until she was six months old. So we left Europe in 1949. I came the end of November, 1949. I came by the boat. The boat, it was the General Sturgis, about fourteen hundred of us, came to Boston Harbor, and from Boston, we took our train to New York.

My cousin came to meet us, and the first thing she looked at me, she says, "Paul, cut off." I was wearing a long overcoat up to my ankle, like in Europe, they used to wear. She says to me, "Cut off half the coat because you look like a priest." I says, "Okay, I'm going to do it. I

don't want to look like a priest." I cut off my coat.

And so -- and she got for me my first apartment. I lived for the first year and a half with an elderly man. He had an apartment in Brooklyn, in Brownsville. And I lived over there in this apartment for about fourteen or fifteen years in Brownsville. And then I moved to (Karnarsey) section of Brooklyn. First I started to work in a men's clothing factory. At that time the Korean war broke out in the beginning of 1950. A lot of work was over there, day and overtime. They asked us to work and work because they had plenty of work over there. I worked in that place about five years, almost five years.

sp?

After five years, I left the place, and I bought a little grocery store. Me and my wife, she helped me out. She took the kids every day for a few hours to the store, also, and we worked. I was there in the store for about four, five years. And then I went with a partner and bought a supermarket in Brooklyn, which I was there about four years. And then I went to Manhattan, and I was over there for ten years until 1980. From 1970 until 1980.

1970 I went to Israel for the first time, and then was -- I was in that store in Manhattan until 1980. In 1980 I retired, and I moved to Florida. And after I moved to Florida, I was always thinking about writing my memoirs, my autobiography. I wrote, I started to write my autobiography,

which I completed only a year ago this year. The whole story since childhood, tells what I went through.

And I also picked up a nice hobby of writing poems. I have over three hundred poems. I brought some with me. And if you don't mind, I would like to read a couple about the camp, about everything about the Holocaust. I like to rhyme, I rhyme it. And I have six volumes of those poems in my home. And I'm still writing. And now I'm translating the English poem to Jewish, to Yiddish. And in Yiddish it sounds -- some poems sounds better because the language is much richer. You can express yourself better. So if you don't mind, I would like to read a couple poems about the Holocaust. Okay? It's here. For this I need my glasses.

Q. DO YOU HAVE THEM?

A. Where are they? Oh, they're right here behind me. The first thing is about Poland. And it goes like this.

> I am bringing you a great tale, a great story, which is so much full of life and glory. I came from a land where my ancestors lived there for many years before. But now very few are left, you don't hear their voices anymore. Most of them vanished in a big, most horrible war. We were three and a half million strong, and we should have had a say in our own fate, while all around us there was only hostility and vicious

hate. Most of us were leading a rich social, cultural or religious life. But between us, there was always lots of strife. We didn't think, we didn't plan for our protection. Our house was divided, and everybody pulled in a different direction. We had among us great people, actors, singers, writers, everyone a real master. We didn't it use it for our own benefit. That was our real disaster. For every upheaval, hardship, calamity, they said it's our fault. To those vicious, anti-semitic attacks, there was never a hold. Some leaders warned us, urging us to leave, saying this is not our land. But very few listened. We didn't want to understand. They tried to awaken us and gave us a warning, but we waited until it was too late one morning. Over one million children perished, which could have brought hope for all mankind thereafter. But now their playgrounds are quiet. You don't hear anymore their laughter. We were trapped, surrounded, couldn't get left or right, while the rest of the world closed their doors very tight. Everyone came up for us with a different plan. They wanted to send us to God foresaken places like Uganda, Madagascar, Manjuria and (Biribijon.) sp?

They pointed us to go here and there, and a final solution at the end it was almost too late when we took matters in our own hands and decided to go back to our own ancient land. But now they're trying again to grab away our hope, our eternity. At this time either we're going to live in peace or we die with dignity.

This is about Poland. This is called, "The Holocaust and Israel."

We are the survivors of the Holocaust. Never before perpetrated in history, how we survived is to us the greatest mystery. We witnessed the disappearance of our closest and dearest in a brutal annihilation condoned by a people who claim to be the highest in civilization. Whole cities and towns uprooted in the most merciless ways, few of us left to tell the world of those dreadful days. We were slaves, horribly treated, humiliated, beaten, starved, gased, burned by the Nazi beast who done it with cheers and us who could not stop the flow of our tears. We will never forget the ghettos, extermination camps, death marches and cattle trains, while they were trying to crush us physically and numb our brains. Never before had our people endured so

much pain, while the rest of the world doing little to stop it and us hoping in vain. Liberation came after the world decided this beast to eliminate. But for us it came much, much too late. As a result of that painful miserable, unforgettable time, most us have health problems now due to horrendous crime. After the nightmare and what they did to our nation, we were trying to rebuild our lives, bringing up a new generation. But now we are seeing signs around world from one end to the other end, dark forces are rising again, trying to destroy our only hope, Israel, our promised land. This land needs our most support, and every one of us has to be told that without Israel, our lives are in danger again, rich or poor, young and old. It took two thousand years to get back our land. We paid the highest price for it. This the world must understand. So we are bringing a warning, don't let those evil forces rise again, stop it without hesitation, because they are not only a threat to us, but to the whole world's population. We the Jews are members of our internal nation. Our only aim is to live in peace in this world organization.

And then I have a couple about the lives in camp. This is called, "A Day in Camp."

The sky is so dark, so gray. The sun is hiding every day. And I'm so tired, degraded in every way, faceless, resigned, come what may. In the morning I'm shivering, I'm cold, and I feel so weak, so old. Every day hungrier more and more, didn't even recover from the day before. At appell I'm standing there like a piece of lumber. I'm not a person. I'm just a number. I'm getting weaker. I cannot stand. Oh, my God when will all this end? I'm forgetting how to be human, how to behave. I'm treated just like a slave. At work I hear all day mach schnell. They are the masters of hell. At sundown I'm so tired, dragging my feet, wondering what will they give us to eat. At night I'm dreaming of a warm bed and how to get that extra piece of bread. I don't know when liberty will come, if and when. Meanwhile I have to endure tomorrow the same things again. Another day is gone. I don't know how. Please, God, give me back my freedom now.

And this is called, "A Mother and Her Child in the Ghetto."

Mother dear, tell me, why are we here? What is

this place? Why can't I see a smile on your face? Why can't I be free just like that bird I see high in the sky? Please tell me why. Why are they doing those things to you and me? Why should this be? Is this true, because I'm a Jew? Where is God to help us? I know he's out there. I promise I will say a prayer. I want to ask God if I can to let me play with my friends again. Where are they now? Where are they now? I don't see them somehow. I want to play and smile just as before, and I will love you so much more. Please tell me, mother, dear, why is it so dark here? My child, don't be afraid, be strong. You know how. The sun will shine again. It's not too long now. I know you are hungry and tired, but for now let's keep it quiet. I promise you that some day you will be able to go out and play. Meanwhile, dream about the bird which is free, and that's the way we will be, you and me.

And one I wrote about the partisans. It's called, "Mission of the Partisan."

Please meet Misha. It is someone you should know. He was a partisan a long time ago. A real hero who fought with strength and bravery, who said no to oppression and slavery. Misha escaped

from the ghetto in the last minute where his whole family was killed and everyone in it. He was the only one who survived the slaughter, this horrible nightmare, by running away from this place right there. He joined the partisans in the forest, a life so rough and strange, and he swore on the enemy to take his revenge. He blew up bridges, railraods, munition dumps, inflicting on them a heavy toll. He said this is for my people, for the memory of all. Deep in the forest, always on the run, he forget many times about the shining sun. But he was longing for his people, his mind away so far. He played a lonely tune on his guitar. A melody so heart breaking, so sad, a tune which he will never forget. He fought in any kind of weather, hot or cold. The struggle must never be forgotten. It must be told. Misha was a fierce freedom fighter, never at ease. He hoped for the day when it will be peace. Finally, the enemy was crushed and Misha was free again. And now he hopes that peace will prevail for all men.

Okay. This is just a few. I got more here, and I'm going to leave it here with the center, and if you want in Jewish, I could send it to you in Jewish -- or in Yiddish I

mean. I could send it in Yiddish, also.
Q. DO YOU REMEMBER ANY YIDDISH, ABOUT YOUR MEMORIES?
A. I should have brought, I got it at my daughter's house. I have it in Yiddish, nice Yiddish. I like it a lot in Yiddish because you could express differently in Yiddish, more ---------- in Yiddish, also. If you like some questions and answers, go right ahead.
Q. THIS GOES WAY BACK.
A. Right.
Q. YOU CAME A LONG WAY --
A. Yeah. Should I take this off?
Q. -- IN YOUR NATTARIVE. SO LET'S GO BACK TO WHERE YOU GREW UP.
A. Yeah.
Q. ABOUT YOUR HOME AND YOUR PARENTS AND WHERE YOU LIVED. WERE YOU A DEVOUT FAMILY, ORTHODOX? TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW IT WAS THERE.
A. I have, I think I got some picture of my family, if it's possible to show. My aunt gave it to me when I came to this country. She gave me a postcard, which I'm cherishing very much. I have only one picture, and here is my father. I'll show you it. My mother and my sisters. Here. Yeah, this is the picture made before the war in Poland.
Q. WE CAN LOOK AT THE PICTURES AT THE END AND GET PHOTOS.
VIDEO OPERATOR: YEAH, WE'LL GET A NICE

SHOT.

A. Yeah, very good, yeah.

Q. SO TELL US ABOUT THEM NOW?

A. My father, he was like a person like for God and for people. He was not like a very religious guy with the beard as you see in the picture. In the street he was walking without a hat, but he never smoked -- he was a heavy smoker. He never smoked on Saturdays or holidays. He never worked on holidays, and we had a Kosher home. We had to have it. But a progressive family, a very close-knit family.

And my father, I remember, because since I was the oldest home -- we were five kids home. I have only here three sisters here and myself. I'm here about ten or twelve years old. I had another little brother, but I never, I don't have his picture because he was born when I was seventeen years old. And I left -- he was three years old when I left for Germany.

But I remember the story that my father told me in 1929. We were four kids home, and the time was bad at that time in Poland. Anti-semitism was very, very rough over there with the Poles. Very anti -- I heard myself, when I went to school I remember, I will never forget when a Polish mother said to her child in the street, she said do this or do that or the Jew devil will take you. It was in their blood. And when a Jew went by, passed by let's say a church

without taking his hat off, first of all, a Jew was afraid, they wouln't go, but it just happened if a jew went by, passing by a church, and he wouldn't take his hat off, right away they would go over to him. They would hit him in the head.

Me, I wasn't looked too much Jewish, but I was still pretty much scared when I went to school. So we lived in the suburb of Sosnowiec. I wasn't able to go in a school with the Polacks, Polish kids together. We had to travel by trolley car every day to the city and go only with Jewish kids in the public school. I remember most of the teachers' names, and I went to seventh grade, until seventh grade public school over there.

After school, even during school, I helped out my father a lot because when I came home, he gave me a list what to buy for his shop, this and that, and I stopped over. We were a very close family. My father had in 1929, the time we were back in Poland, and his brother lived still in Germany, which I don't know. It's my uncle, which I never knew him. My father never had a chance to see him. He left during the First World War, he left for Germany to avoid the draft. He left from Poland to Germany. He established himself over there. He was very successful. He had a big business in Dresden with a partner.

So my father decided to visit him. It was in 1929.

Maybe to get a job over there in Germany and, you know, this and this. So he came over to him, and he was showing off. My uncle was showing Carl, was showing off his brother, took him all over Germany to show his father. Later on he left. He was lucky he left his father. So he couldn't get a job over there as a foreigner, so he went to Brussels, I remember, to get a job over there, Belgium. And he worked over there for a few months in his trade, leather craft. He worked on leather shoes. He send home money regularly. But it was very hard for my mother with four small kids, of course.

And then he decided to travel, to settle in South America, my father, in Argentina. Why? Because as a foreigner he couldn't get over there legal, but Argentina, he could obtain legal papers, and he wrote us back, he wrote to my mother what he's trying to do. When she saw this, she got very scared. I found out the story later. When I grew up they told me the whole story.

She wrote back to him right away, he should come back home right away because the kids are sick, all four of us, leave everything and come back home. He had to mind to go there, to settle there, intend to bring over the whole family over there afterwards. But she didn't want to do it. She didn't want to hear of it. So he came back.

And after he came back, while I grew up and went to

school, and I started to help out in the shop. And then, you know, usual thing, we saw the war -- we didn't know the war is going to come so quick, but we saw the bad situation coming. We didn't know where to turn, not east, not west, everything was closed, so we were like in a trap now in Poland. So this is the life that we had in Poland before the war.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR FATHER'S NAME?

A. My father's name was Sampson, Shimpson in Yiddish, yeah.

Q. AND YOUR MOTHER'S NAME?

A. Pessel, Pessel.

Q. WHAT WAS HER MAIDEN NAME?

A. Her maiden name was Goldfrank.

Q. OTHER THAN SALLY AND HELEN WHO DIED, PLEASE NAME ALL OF YOUR BROTHERS?

A. My little brother's name was Heilyakof, a beautiful boy, I remember. I knew him only, like I said, the first three years. I left when he was three years old. A little blond boy. I liked him so much. Like a little angel. Heilyakof. Then there was Helen who died after the war in Bergen-Belsen. And then my sister, Sally, who is alive. She lives in New York.

And then I have my oldest sister, Esther, and the story about my older sister is this. It's a curious story, an

interesting story. She married -- during the war, I was away already from home, and she married one of the biggest -- a grandson of one of the biggest rabbis in Poland. Very, very -- one of the biggest rabbies. If you ask anybody from Poland, Radomska Rabbi from Poland, everybody knew. He nmarried in Ecalps. She married in Ecalps the Kaminis. Her name was Kaminis. And she married his grandson because she was a beautiful girl. Her name was Esther. We called her Esther Ramulka. You know, the queen of Esther.

She was such a beautiful girl, and she married a grandson of Radomska Rabbi. And she had a little boy, but she perished. I heard she is not alive, but her sisters live in Canada. She has a sister in Canada, and she has a sister in Brazil. A sister and a brother. And one brother. This is one family among thousands of families. Unusual. There were five kids home, four survived. One brother is in Asculon. He comes to Florida sometimes to visit us. He was twice already in Florida. And there is a brother and a sister in Brazil and one sister in Toronto. So during the winter sometimes we meet each other, you know, and they come to see us. So this was the family.

But I knew only one grandfather of mine. My job was my grandfather was an old man, partially blind. And I had to take him by the hand to the synagogue when he stayed with us sometimes for the holidays. And I also had a job, he would

make me a job which I didn't like. I had to sit down with him every day for at least an hour, hour and a half, and to learn (Tamult, Tomora.) He knew by heart everything, and I had to read at least two, three pages, you know, and this takes, the explanation, to learn it, it takes an hour or more to do that.

I hated. My mind was to go outside and play ball, but I did it, anyway. I had to do it, but I tried to skip some lines, to make it shorter. And he knew it from the heart. He said, "Oh, oh. Oh, go back." He says to me, "Go back." I couldn't skip even one line, and this was every day. His name was Miah.

Q. THANK YOU. STILL BACK IN YOUR HOME TOWN, YOU WERE GROWING UP INTO A TEENAGER?

A. Yeah.

Q. BEFORE THE WAR CAME?

A. Right.

Q. YOU WERE NINETEEN YEARS OLD?

A. When the war came, I was nineteen.

Q. DID YOU UNDERSTAND OR DID YOU OR YOUR PARENTS KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN GERMANY?

A. Yeah, oh, yeah, I started to read the papers, you know, not only this, but I remember my aunt from Brooklyn sent us, from time to time sent us the Forward, the Jewish Daily Forward from New York to Poland, and I remember the Forward

was heavy paper sometimes, like the New York Times today. But my father was -- I started reading the papers. We knew his brother from German was writing, also, before Hitler came, but we knew what's going on.

It was also in Poland, there was a lot, Poland is like this. The anti-semitism was visible in every step wherever you went. You know, even the government encouraged it. You know, bankrupting Jewish businesses. There were gangs of holligans going around, you know, breaking windows in Jewish homes and cemetaries, vandalizing.

But the Jews in Poland was a big, three and a half million is a lot of people there. There was organizations from right to left; center, right, left, Socialism, Communism, Buddhism. And some said we have to leave. Some says no, we have to bring Socialism here. It was very rich -- in a family of four or five kids, grown-up kids, so every kid would belong to a different party sometimes. There was discussions of it. That was the cultural life.

But they had already before the war, the Poles, they had a concentration camp already, which was called (Cartos Perasa) and they sent some leftist Communists they sent over there. My friend's older brother, he was six months over there. When he came back, I didn't recognize him. He was thin like a stick, and he was afraid to talk. He was afraid to talk to his own mother even. When somebody was asking him

sp?

what was there, he would not open his mouth. So we figured it must have been a terrible place. They had already this place over there, the Poles. They were very, very anti-semitic, the Poles.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING WHEN YOU HEARD ABOUT KRISTALLNACHT?

A. About what?

Q. KRISTALLNACHT.

A. Oh, Kristallnacht, yeah, this was in 1938.

Q. NOVEMBER.

A. Yeah, I have a nice poem about it, too. I didn't bring it with me. Well, in the beginning when I heard what happened when that, what was his name, the (Grynszpan) who shot this German embassy, this dignitary. I understood that he wants to take his revenge for the parents, for displacing his parents. sp?

But afterwards what happened, this was an excuse for the Germans to start the repersecution of the Jews. After this they send away thousands and thousands and thousands to Dachau, to Sachsenhausen, to other concentration camps, so that's where the real trouble started. But after that time, I think some Jews could have left, you know. You know, they could have left, after the Kristallnacht, as I understand.

My uncle was smart because six months later, 1933, he saw what's happening. He sold the business right away. He

liquidated everything. He went to South America. There it is. But there was a time I was mad at my uncle, also, because when I couldn't get out from Germany and I wrote to him a letter, "Please take me out of Germany. I don't want to stay here anymore." He sent, he wrote me back, "You better to the USA. Go here, go there." He wouldn't take me there.

So I wrote to him something which later on I apologized, you know, a few years later. After that I wasn't in touch with him a few years. Then I apologized because I knew I did something wrong. And I said, I wrote to him in the letter distinctly, "You yourself were a refugee. You ran away from Hitler yourself. If you would stay a little longer, if you wouldn't leave, you would be with your brother now, my father." I shouldn't have done that. It was very bad. But later on I realize it was too harsh for him, and I wrote to him back. I apologized what I wrote. But this was the real fact.

Q. YOU WERE NINETEEN WHEN WAR BROKE OUT?

A. Right.

Q. WHY WERE YOU NOT IN THE POLISH ARMY?

A. In Polish Army, it's like this. I was supposed to report when the war broke out. They had the mobilization, general mobilization. And right away they said over there like from ages 18 or 17 until 25 to report right away. But

my mother, I remember my mother, she was a very smart woman. And she said to me, "Hold on, don't run too fast. Hold on another day, another day." Three days later, the Germans came in.

My mother did something very heroic, which was, I don't know why she did it. She took a very big risk. I remember the beginning, first of all, she was home like the guardian angel. My father was strict. He was afraid for his ---------- was enough. He was a very good father, provided everything, but he was very strict, and my mother, always, she was the guardian angel.

I remember the first when I was home that year during the war, the first year of the war, there were two German policemen patrolling the streets of our suburbs. And they made themselves a habit -- and they did it their own, which was not legal -- every Friday night they went to Jewish homes, and they confiscated right away -- they knew that the Jews are lighting candles, candelabras, this and that, sitting by the table.

So they went in the Jewish homes, and they confiscated silver candelabras, silverware from the table, and they collecting this. Everybody was afraid to open up their mouths because how can you? But we knew, we knew that they did this illegally. They did it on their own. So we decided, the Jews in the community decided to complain.

Where should we complain? You have to go to the Gestapo to complain. Now, who should go to complain? Men wouldn't dare to go complain. We have to pick two women. So who went? My mother went, and another woman went.

They went to the headquarters of the Gestapo, which was a very big risk. If you go into the Gestapo, you never knew if you walked back out. And she complained what's going on. They made an investigation, and they found a room, a full room of silver they were collecting, those two policemen. Called the (Schubaltzer.) With the pointy hats.

They took them off the force, and I think they went to jail, and this alone was very risky. They could have come back, and they could have taken revenge because later on I found out, somebody told me after the war, there was a Jewish policeman dealing something with a German policeman. This German policeman got sent to jail for a few months, and he came back. He went straight into the Jewish police office. He took out that policeman who deal with him. He put him against the wall. He shot him. I don't know why my mother did it a thing like this. She was just a brave, very brave woman.

Q. DURING THAT YEAR WHEN THE GERMANS WERE THERE --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- WHAT CHANGED? HOW DID LIFE CHANGE FOR YOU? WERE THERE LAWS AGAINST THE JEWS? ----------?

A. Yeah, every law. Almost every day we had laws, proclamations and this and that, and I remember there were bread lines, you know, for this shortage and the money loss. The currency lost its value every day. People started to exchange goods for goods. Nobody was willing to take money for this and that.

But I remember when there were lines, bread lines, for stores and this and that, a soldier was watching, a guard. So he didn't know who is a Jew, who is not a Pole, who is a Pole standing in the line. But the Poles came out, and they go over to the guard, and they say, "Judah, Judah, Judah." They throw them out from the line. He wouldn't know because who stood in the line. Some guy who didn't look Jewish, a girl or a boy, this and that, for bread to buy, but the Poles, they instigated, you know.

Q. COULD YOU CONTINUE TO WORSHIP AND DO JEWISH THINGS?

A. No, no, right as they came in they were not allowed to assemble, synagogue, no such thing. And then right away after they came in September 1st right away came the high holidays, no such a thing. All synagogues had to be closed, some of them they burned down right away.

And another thing, in our town when they came in, a soldier got shot in our street, a German soldier got killed, another three maybe in the city. They took right away hostages. A few thousand. We were lucky we were home.

Anybody in the street, they took hostages. They kept them for a few nights, some kind of basements, terrible treatment. They shot some for revenge. About three or four German soldiers got shot and killed. And then they let them back home. This was the first action was the hostages they were shooting.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE CONGREGATION AND THE FULL NAME OF THE CANTOR FRIEDMAN?

A. Yeah, his name was Mushia Yaso Friedman. Moses Yaso Freidman. Yeah, he was the cantor, a nice voice. He used to Schula every time. He was the main cantor over there of the Schula.

Q. AND THE NAME OF THE CONGREGATION?

A. The congregation name, I don't know. This I can't remember. I know it was on what street, Florianska Street. I know what street it was. Just a couple streets away from us. No, I don't remember.

Q. AND YOU WERE CALLED TO GO BE A LABORER IN NOVEMBER, 1940?

A. You mean in Germany?

Q. IN GERMANY.

A. I got my first notice I got a few months early, but in the last minute they canceled it; and a few weeks later, I got another notice. I remember when I had that second notice to report for like to go to Germany for work for three

months, and as my father was opening, he opened up his shop, he started to work on his shoe apparatus, a lot of soldiers came in. One recommended the other.

So one came in, a civilian guy, a German civilian guy, and he ordered by my father a pair of boots. They were so happy to get, my father, just the best work ever could be done. Everything, he measured, like a professional, an excellent professional. A German civilian came in, he ordered from my father a pair of boots, and he told him to come back a week or two later to pick it up. He came back a week or two later in a uni -- when he came he was in civilian clothes. When he came back, he was in a uniform for SS, officer of SS.

So my father, you know, my mother right away, she thought she was going to do something on my behalf. She went over to him. They were polite. They were paying. They were so happy to get the goods. They were paying, fine. That's it. And she went over to him. She showed him my notice to report to work in Germany. She told him. My father spoke good German. You know, he used to see a German doctor before the war. He suffered a lot from hemorrhoids, you know, so he used to see a German doctor before the war in (Katalis.) Mostly there lived Polish Germans. So he spoke good German.

My mother went over to that SS officer. She showed him the note. She says to him, she asked him if he could do

something for me not to be sent away for war because I'm needed home in the shop. So it looks like, I don't know, he didn't like my face or he didn't want to mix in. He said just like that, "Lika grin nichts macha." That means sorry, I can't do nothing about it, which is not true because a word from an officer, just one word would be enough. That's all. They already got their guards, you know. So that's the time I went away. I figured, I believed it is only for three months. I believed so. sp?

Q. WAS YOUR FAMILY STILL GETTING ENOUGH TO EAT AT THAT POINT?

A. At that time when I was home? Well, we still had -- in the beginning we still, yeah, we still could make some business because we had, we exchanged the leather for some farmers came from the farm, they brought some produce. There is exchange. Merchandise for merchandise. Nobody wanted any money anymore. And that's how we got along. The first year was not too bad. But then little by little it started. In the beginning even when I went to camp, I was allowed every two weeks to write a postcard home. And I was allowed to receive those. Of course, they checked everything over. I received that package once or twice a month. But later on as the SS took over, things got worse, and then I couldn't hear nothing no more from home.

Q. YOU WERE ABLE TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FAMILY AT

FIRST?

A. At first, yeah, yeah. First let's say the first few months, like a year maybe, maybe less. Then it got worse.

Q. THEN YOU LOST CONTACT?

A. I lost contact with them, yeah. I tried, also, I got in touch with a civilian Polish worker also I met. When we worked, there was a lot of civilians workers outside, you know. Except POW's, there was Czechoslavachs, Yugoslav workers, all kinds. So I met once a Polish guy from our town, and I gave him a note, and they were allowed once in two weeks to go for a weekend home. So I gave him a note to give my parents that I'm here and this and that, they shouldn't worry, this and that. So in the beginning he did it for me. But later on he disappeared, went away.

And there was another incident which I would like to mention. I was in Blackamer five months after the first camp. Then I was sent to Blackamer, the big industrial complex. This was a big camp, very big camp, and transports came and gone. All of a sudden came one day came a transport, and in my room where I was, there was a few allocated, and among them was one boy. The boy was about fourteen or fifteen years old, blond, blue eyes, real, 100 percent German accent. He didn't look at all like a Jew. He was wearing an undershirt with the initials of HJ, Hitler Youth.

So I says -- and it just happened that he slept on the bottom bunk, and I slept on the top. And I was opening up my eyes. "What's this? Is this a Judah?" He says, "Nein." Right away from the beginning he denied it. ---------- Judah. He says I'm --------. It's a mistake, the whole thing, and I --------- (hauser fort, schnell.) He was thinking he was going home any day. It's a mistake, the whole thing.

I says, "What?" And I remember his name. His name was (Alfred Koferbick,) and I started to ask questions. I says, "What do you mean? If you and me, if you would be a German boy, you wouldn't be here with me, with us here." He must a Judah. "What is it? Tell me."

Then he told me the whole thing. His father was Jewish, his mother was German. And he was already in the Hitler Youth, a member of the Hitler Youth, and he was taken out from there and sent to us in camp. And since then when I heard this, I started to ask him questions. "How was life in the Hitler Youth?" A half a day they had exercises and a half a day work. Very rough, discipline, this and that, you know, preparing him for the Army, this and that.

And at night when I was sleeping in bed, he started to sing the Host -- he had inside that blood already, the anti-Jewish blood. He started to sing the (Host of Vesalien,) if you know about the Host Vesalien. It starts with the verses, ("When Das Untinbrue from the Messerspritz,") you know,

when Jewish blood ----------." And I says to him, "Alfred, what's wrong with you? What's the matter with you? You're a Jew and you're singing that song?"

He kept, he denied, ("Kienda the Judah.") It looks like he was stupid or something because since he thought he's not the same as we were, he was in touch with the guards every day, and he was walking into their barracks, in the guards, the German guards because he talked their language perfect. He looked like them, and he thought that he's not us. Until he went, it looks like he went too far. All of a sudden, like a stone in the water, he disappeared. I don't know. He might have been killed or they sent him away or what. He disappeared one day just like that. But he looked 100 percent German.

SP?

Q. YOU WERE IN SEVERAL CAMPS?

A. Yeah, altogether it was nine camps.

Q. NINE CAMPS. AND I THINK WE WANT TO BE SURE TO IDENTIFY THE COMMANDANT WHO YOU SAID WAS LIKE A DEVIL.

A. Yeah.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER HIS NAME?

A. Yeah, From Brunslow, I remember the first one, I remember the first one because I was there about sixteen months in Gapestoff. His name was Ackerman. He was sent -- he must have gone to a special school how to treat us. But this was before the concentration. It was zwangsarlag. He

was just as bad. And then at Brunslow where I was two years was Coopershal Shamon. Shamon. He was an SS ----------. He was the commandant.

And he had two specialties he had. When we -- first he taught us how to -- we were wearing this uniform, the stripes uniform and the stripped cap. So he developed a specialty that he let us stand sometimes for an hour or an hour and a half after a day's work in the center ----------, and he stand in the middle. He would stand in the middle, and he gave us a command, "Multze off, multze on." That means the cap off or on, put it back on. And we had to do it precisely fifteen hundred of us, we had to do it precisely in one second. So in the beginning, we didn't do it right. So he kept us for an hour and a half like this, until we reached a moment you could hear from fifteen hundred of us one click, multze on, multze off. Then he would let us go to the barrack.

And then he developed another specialty. If he hit somebody, he wouldn't hit with his fist, with the elbow. So when he hit somebody with the elbow, the guy fell right on the floor. I was lucky once. Where I worked in that factory over there, the factory was about, the big plant was about a half a mile away from the camp. So we had our orders in case of an air raid to leave everything, the work and run to camp, and they counted us. We had, everybody had their specific

place we had to stay. They counted us in a matter of seconds. They counted us. They knew right away if somebody is missing or not.

So one time it was an air raid. And I didn't hear the sirens go off. So me and my partner, we used to work there, we had a hiding place in the factory where sometimes we hide over there. We hid over there during the winter to keep warm. Nobody saw us, and I didn't hear. It looks like I fell asleep. All of a sudden I woke up, and I says to my friend, I says, "Something is suspicious." I didn't hear the machine, those machines going, and everything is quiet.

So we understood that there was a siren, and we didn't hear the siren. We start running to camp, back to camp. We had the order to run to camp. On the way to the camp, the (copos) came looking for us. They knew already that us two are SP?, missing, and they say to us, "Wait, Shamon is waiting for you."

Oh, my God. What can we do? We coming in, everybody is waiting. He stays in the middle like this, and he calls over my partner. "Where was you?" He gives him right away with the elbow, and he lands on the floor. And I was lucky. I don't know what happened. He didn't touch me even. He said maybe you was staying too long, and so right away everybody ran in the barrack because we had our order during the air raid to lay down to the floor. He didn't even touch

me. He run in the barrack. This I remember distinctly. But he was a devil of a man.

He could just -- I was hit once from another (lagas) that once hit me for not moving too fast with a stick on my hand. I couldn't move my hand. I covered my head. He wanted to hit me in my head, so I covered my head with my hand, so I hit me here. He could have broke my bone just like that. I couldn't move it for days. It was, you know, there was some German in camp. They had the lagas. He was a criminal himself, an inmate, but he had the highest post, and he had all the rights. He could kill or do anything he wants by an order from the commandant.

Q. IN THE CAMPS WERE MANY PEOPLE KILLED?

A. By the end. Not in the camps where I was. In the camp, the first camp that I was at, Gapestoff, some of us got killed during work because, you know, we didn't how to physically work. There was hard work on the super highways, so we got run over by the trains or from the rocks falling down, from this and that, so some of them got killed over there in the first camp.

And then later on as the situation got worse, started with the death march, then was the real trouble started. Many got killed. I mean got evacuated by the end. But I didn't go. I was lucky. I still was lucky. I wasn't sent to extermination camp like Auschwitz. They could have sent

me when I was sick on typhus. They could have sent us. There was seven boys in the barrack, all seven of us sick on typhus. Our luck was that we had a good, the nurse, the main nurse, was doing everything for us. And the German guard was an elderly German guard. This was not an SS man. He would have sent us away 100 percent.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER THE NURSE'S NAME?

A. Yeah, he is not alive anymore. His was Walderman. He left for Israel after the war, and already he died over there. An angel of a man. He did everything for us. He went every day to the guard. He said we're getting better. We're going to go back to work. As a matter of fact, we all got better. We all went back to work. He did anything for us to save us.

Q. WHEN YOU VISITED, WENT BACK TO VISIT YOUR FAMILY IN 1942 --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- AND COULDN'T SEE THEM, YOU SAID THAT YOU WERE ALREADY AWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN AUSCHWITZ?

A. We heard about Auschwitz, yeah, but not completely. We heard that Auschwitz is a very bad camp and that a lot of people get killed. But we didn't know the extent of it, the transports, sending transports from all over Europe to the crematorium to be gased, this and that. I found out the complete story, I found out when the Hungarian Jews, and this

was in '44, before it ended in summer of '44, a transport of four hundred Hungarian Jews from Budapest came to Brunslow, to our camp.

And among them there were a lot of intellectual people, doctors and dentists and this and that; and they came from Auschwitz. They were sent to Auschwitz, and since Auschwitz was already a little too late because the Russians were close, they were sending out transports farther to Germany. So a transport of four hundred Hungarian Jews came to our camp.

So I remember there was a father and a son over there by the name of Sternberg. The boy was about fourteen. Thirteen, fourteen years old. And the father was tall and skinny. And they told us everything, what's happening in Auschwitz. The first thing they came to us, they said food. They were concerned about food. I was lucky at that time because my kind of work, what I did, I was all around. I went here. I went there, all over. I didn't stay one place to work like the carpenters, like the auto mechanics.

So I was in touch with other nationalities, and I could do some exchanging with them. So I always could obtain a little food for myself. So when he told me the son -- the father told me about food, and I knew what they went through, I says, "Wait here. I'm going up to the German kitchen," because I had, I brought food and coal for the kitchen, you

know, to provide the kitchen, all kind, you know, unloading, loading things.

And up there in the kitchen, there was a French POW. He was a helper to the chef. And he was a very kind man to me. Everytime I came up, you know, he gave me something to eat. He prepared on the side, you know, to take it down. Everybody shouldn't see it. So I went up to him, and I says to him, "You got something to eat?"

He gave me a little pail of soup, and I brought it down, and I didn't know. When I told that Sternberg, I told him, "Wait here, I'm going to bring you some food," he was thinking I'm joking. "Oh, you're not hungry." Maybe that's why. I says, "Wait here, I'm going to bring you something to eat." When I brought him down a little food to eat, he was in seventh heaven. He wouldn't believe it.

So then I told him you are lucky to come out from Auschwitz and to go out of camp because relatively our camp, Brunslow, the conditions until the evacuation wasn't so bad. If you were healthy, you were working, you could get, you know, because it was not an extermination camp. It was a work camp. The discipline was harsh, everything, but if you were healthy, you could get through. And so this was Brunslow. But then when we started walking and the march and going until we came to Bergen-Belsen, this was the worst.

Q. WHAT WAS THE JOB YOU HAD THAT ALLOWED YOU TO MOVE

AROUND?

A. Well, it's like we had anything that came for the Germans for the barracks, we worked like allocating. A lot of foreign workers is over there, Polacks and Czecks coming, you know. We had to bring the beds, unloading the barracks, keep them clean, unload the truck, sometimes food for the kitchen, coal and wood, bringing down and the waste taken out.

There is another thing which I would like to mention. My boss gave me a job which I thought this is the worst job there ever was in all camps. He gave me a job to do to be as a helper to a French POW man. He had a horse and a wagon. The wagon was like a barrel, a long barrel. Our job was to clean out with a long stick with a big pail, a very long stick, to clean out all the toilets and spread it out as a fertilizer, human waste, on all the fields around, all around the fields.

I thought this cannot be any worse ----------. When I came home every day from a day's work, everybody in the barracks said, "Something smells. Something terrible smells here." I took a shower every day, I was allowed to take a shower. I didn't feel nothing, but I smelled because the whole day I was working with this. And I thought everybody would feel sorry for me because what could be worse than a job like this?

But the point is it turned out to be the best job. Why? When I came out to the fields, there were still, after the winter, they had the potatoes hidden in those, how you call it, to keep them warm not to get frozen, you know, the potatoes, whole lines of potatoes on the field covered with that. And the guy says to me, the French guy says, ("Com se, Com sa.") So every time I came out, I brought back home potatoes. I had for months and months I had potatoes. I could even give away others. So this turned out to be a good job instead of the worst job.

sp?

So you had to be lucky. You had to be, you know, because when I remember I was in camp from the beginning. I was with guys, strong guys, that could lift a building, very strong guys. I didn't see, I didn't meet. After the war I didn't see none of them. They vanished, and I was a meager, little skinny fellow, rubbing the war, always going in the war and how I slipped through, I don't know myself. I don't know. Just pure luck. That's all.

Q. HOW MUCH DID YOU WEIGH AT THE END?

A. I was a muscle man, you know what a muscleman is? There was an expression between us. That means almost a little better than a skeleton. Very skinny. Very skinny. I couldn't, you know, lift my foot. After I take off the train I couldn't lift a foot, but little by little, you know, started to come to strength. That's it. I have pictures.

This is my family if you would like, later on if you want to see.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE IN CAMP AND COULD NO LONGER GET A POSTCARD TO BACK HOME, WERE YOU AWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING BACK THERE, PERHAPS FORMING THE GHETTO?

A. Yeah, because transports kept coming and coming, and they were talking already about forming ghettos, and then from the ghettos came also transports already. Some were sent to Auschwitz, some to other camps, and there was at our camp once came a big -- that's where my cousin came with the transport from my home town, and he told me about the ghettos coming soon, and everybody knew already where it's going to be. They take like from three towns to get it all together in the ghetto, but I was not in the ghetto, but I heard what's going on with that cramped together, no food, no this, very horrible things.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PARENTS?

A. My parents, well, I don't know what happened exactly, but I'm almost sure they went with when they liquidated the ghetto, liquidate the ghetto because I always, I always wondered my father should be sent to my camp, he would have a better chance to survive, but since he stick with my mother and there was my little brother, maybe he didn't want to part, you know. Maybe they didn't want to give him away or something, so I'm sure they went to Auschwitz, like with the

arrest at the end with the liquidation where they liquidated the ghetto.

Q. CAN YOU SAY THE NAMES OF YOUR PARENTS, AND DID YOU HAVE -- WERE THERE BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO WENT WITH THEM?

A. Yeah, my parents, just my little brother, because all the sisters -- my other sister, my married sister, she probably went to Auschwitz, also, because she had a little boy, a very young boy. He must have been two years old. I wasn't there when she got married. But my little brother was three years old when I left, so he must have been six years old. And my parents were in their late forties. Something like that, you know. So I presume they went to Auschwitz.

Q. SAY THE NAMES OF THE FAMILY.

A. Yeah, my father's name was Sampson, Shimpson. And my mother's name was Pessel Bleicher. And my little brother's name was Heilyakof, and my oldest sister's name was Esther, the one that got married in the war. And my sister who died after the war, I mean just shortly right after the war in Bergen-Belsen was Helen, the youngest, a very beautiful blond girl. She was 19 years old when she died. And my other sister who is alive is Sally. She's married. She has one son, and she lives in Bayside, New York.

Q. HAVE YOU EVER ASKED THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT FOR REPARATION?

A. Yeah, I'm receiving. Me and my wife, we're both

receiving reparations, monthly reparations for the work because actually the work that we did, they paid us, but the SS took the money because we were not allowed to have money. They got the money. But actually the industrialists or the factory that we worked for, we were on their working list so we got paid, but we didn't see any money for it. So this is the reparation they're paying now, like an reparation for your health condition, this and that.

Q. DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH YOU WERE EARNING?

A. How much they are sending us? It's according to -- it's not every month the same. It's according to the German mark and the dollar. It now comes over, it's over three hundred dollars a month.

Q. I MEANT HOW MUCH YOU WERE EARNING IN THE CAMP.

A. Oh, this I don't know. I have no idea.

Q. BECAUSE YOU NEVER SAW IT?

A. No, I have no idea, but I knew you're talking about it that we are getting paid, but we're not allowed to get the money for the work that we're doing. As a matter of fact, at Brunslow when they once came to unload -- some high party member came, we unloaded his furniture. At the end of unloading the truck, the moving truck, he asked us how much money he owes us for the work done. So I told him myself, I says, "We are not allowed. We are Jews from the concentration. We're not allowed to have money. The only

thing that we need is food, if you could bring us some food."

So he said, "Okay." He went up to the kitchen, and he gave us some food for the work we done. But he wanted to pay us. He didn't know. It looks like he didn't know. He was a party member, Nazi member.

Q. WERE YOU TATOOED AT ANY TIME?

A. No, no, we only wore on a necklace on a string, we had our number. Tatooed is only certain camps like in extermination, Auschwitz I know. But we had a number. My number was -- I don't remember exactly, but either it was 105025 or 25035. This I remember. I don't know which way. But these two numbers sticks in my mind.

Q. THE BLACK MAN, WERE YOU EVER ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT HE WAS DOING IN THE CAMP?

A. Who?

Q. YOU SAID THERE WAS ONE BLACK MAN AMONG TWENTY THOUSAND --

A. Oh, yeah, yeah, this was in Nordhausen, one black man ----------. I didn't know if he was an American or someone else. He was only one black man among twenty thousand inmates. But I knew distinctly he was looking very well dressed. He looked fine, and everybody said he doesn't work and the Germans treat him like a king. Well, maybe he's a king. I don't know.

Q. YOU MEAN HE COULD HAVE BEEN AN AMERICAN PRISONER OF

WAR?

A. He could have been, also. I don't know. I never spoke to him. He could have been a prisoner, he could have been -- but I know he was the only one black man in that camp.

Q. WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE MAN WHO STOLE THE SALAMI?

A. The one is Inglad, Norman Inglad. And he lives, he's retired.

(New video tape.)

Q. BUT SHE WAS IN MORE THAN ONE CAMP, OR JUST BERGEN-BELSEN?

A. She was two camps, Grayben and Bergen-Belsen, but she went in '43. She went in '43.

Q. DO YOU MIND TELLING US ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE?

A. About her experience?

Q. YES.

A. Yes, she went, the thing is that she was with my two sisters together. They were all together, and they kept together, and they came to Bergen-Belsen together, and they got liberated together; but, unfortunately, my youngest sister couldn't make it, you know. She was an angel. She was a pretty girl.

Q. WHAT WAS THE FIRST CAMP THAT THEY WENT TO, AND WHAT WAS THE LAST ONE?

A. Not far from her was now (Boren.) It's a little town called Schimishitzen. And the camp that she was in was

sp?

Grayben near Breslau now, not far from Breslau, and then she went to Bergen-Belsen. But the camp in Bergen-Belsen was terrible the last few weeks.

Q. WHAT DID THEY DO IN GRAYBEN DO YOU KNOW?

A. In Grayben, it's like I said, they collected, I don't know, they call it (shamion, semion,) they call it, roots, they collected from the fields. They packed it in sacks, hundred pound, fifty pound sacks, hundred pound sacks. And they squeezed it, and they extracted some kind of a mineral for oil for the Germans. I don't know what it is. Maybe. I don't know. Her job was to stack it up. It was hard work. She said the whole day she had to stack up those sacks in a big hall, and that's what she did.

Q. WERE YOUR SISTERS ALSO LIBERATED?

A. Yeah, my two sisters were there, and they were in the same camp. That's how they met, and that's how I met them after the war, and that's how I got married. That was the girl with her. And that's it.

Q. WHEN DID THEY ARRIVE AT BERGEN-BELSEN?

A. They arrived only weeks before I arrived. Also in the beginning of 1945 was already the Germans saw what's happening. The Russians came from the east, and Americans from the west, so they kept shipping thousands and thousands by train, by cattle trains, even from Auschwitz came to Bergen-Belsen and all over. And this was the case. They all

came to Bergen-Belsen. But at the end of the war I had, I remember, I had a chance to go to Sweden. Sweden came, and they offered to take -- I think they took a few thousand of refugees, survivors for convalescence to their country. A few left already, and I had to mind to go there, too, but I always figured maybe I'm going it meet somebody from the family who is still alive or what. So I didn't want to go.

Q. HOW DID THE THREE WOMEN GET FROM THE FIRST CAMP TO BERGEN-BELSEN? DID THEY WALK, OR WERE THEY --

A. No, they were shipped. They were shipped. They didn't walk. They were shipped by train, cattle train, or something like this. Transport. So the cattle trains was all they shipped. They didn't have enough train for like for civilian people, so they start using the cattle trains. This is already the end of '44, '45. But before that, they shipped us on regular trains, also. Always on the guard. Or by trucks.

Q. YOU SAID WHEN YOU FOUND YOUR SISTERS AND THE WOMAN WHO WAS TO BECOME YOUR WIFE --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- THE WOMEN'S CAMP WAS IN A TERRIBLE SHAPE.

A. Yeah.

Q. BODIES PILED UP?

A. Yeah.

Q. WHAT HAD CAUSED THAT?

A. Well, mostly typhus. Typhus, yeah, because the war, at the end of the war, the typhus epidemic was terrible there. And even after the liberation, after the British came in, thousands and thousands died because the condition, they couldn't handle the situation. And for us in camp, there was even, when they came in, the British liberated our camp, Bergen-Belsen, which is only four miles apart and the men's were, tremendous big, hundreds of stone brick barracks, you know, like.

They didn't have enough food to distribute, so they found a warehouse of the German military left over, a warehouse of their food, canned food. And they started to distribute it. It was fatty meat. From the fatty meat a lot more died because our bodies couldn't get to it. I had -- my instinct told me I shouldn't touch it, you know. But we were so hungry. You know, some of them couldn't stand it. They ate, and they died from it. Because this brought more the diarrhea out, and that's it. Until later on they started to give us bread crusts, the powdered milk and this and that, but another thousand died after liberation.

Q. IN BERGEN-BELSEN, DID YOU EVER HEAR OF ANY CANNIBALISM?

A. Not where we were, no. Not where we were

Q. BUT FOOD WAS VERY SCARCE?

A. The end was nothing. The ---------- completely no food. Until the day when we got liberated. Even a few days

afterwards we had to go out on our own to get someplace food because the war was still going on around us. There was a guy, I remember the same room where I was, there was one survivor.

In the morning, we got up in the morning, it was about fifteen or eighteen in the room up there. All of a sudden in the morning we hear shooting. I look out the window. One plane is chasing each other. It was a German plane and a British plane chasing each other. This guy, I remember now, he was trying to put on his boots, he was sitting near the window. All of a sudden a bullet hit him, and he fell down. We took a door off from a chest because the next block was like a hospital room. He died just like that. It was one plane was chasing each other. Then the German plane got shot down, anyway, but just a stray bullet hit him standing near the window. He was from my room.

Q. HOW LONG WERE YOU -- BERGEN-BELSEN BECAME A DP CAMP?

A. Bergen-Belsen was, after the war was a big DP camp, yeah, very big.

Q. YOU STAYED THERE --

A. I stayed there months, a few months, even though time to time I went through Germany, all over, to Hamburg. The British provided us with trucks, Army trucks, if you wanted to go to this city, this city to meet people, relatives or what. So they provided us transporation for the day, but we

belonged ----------.

There was a time, also, I went, accidentally I went in the Russian zone, and I didn't want to do it, and I didn't know how it came about. We went -- there was from my town came people from my home town, after liberated they came to Bergen-Belsen, they met to us, and they said, "Why are you sitting still here? We are liberated. We are living over there near Lypstick in a little town called Halverstadt." He says to me, "Why are you sitting still here in the barracks? Over there we live like kings in private homes. We took away the Germans."

So we feel like this, we sat we got to do that. What do we have to lose? So there is a group of us, about fifteen, eighteen boys and girls. We took our belongings. We hitchhiked to Halverstadt. We came to Halverstadt, a little town, wherever, the town, most of it was bombed out, but it still had some houses. They took over, they gave it away for the refugees.

But all of a sudden about two, three days later I go out in the street. I see Russian soldiers. When I came were the British soldiers. They straightened out some kind of border. The British went back, and the Russians came in. "Oh, that's no good," I said. I don't want to be there in the first place.

So right away they're giving out orders. The Russian

----------, and then they says you have to report to the mayor's office, come to the mayor's office. We come. They ask you just like that where are you from and where were you born? He says, ("Da vo da moi,") he says to me. He doesn't ask me if I want to go home or when I want to go. He just tells you. He says, "Da vo da home." I says to him like now I remember, I says, ("---------- safda ve bootis.") We're going home, we're going home Safda. Ve bootis da moi. In Russion is da moi. Safda, I'm going da moi. Safda means tomorrow.

Meanwhile came the next morning, who wants to go back to Poland. We hired a German farmer, the whole group of us. We took our suitcases, whatever we got, we loaded this, and we said to him instead of going east, go west. We went back to ----------. And that's how we came back to Hamburg.

Q. I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU, BECAUSE YOU'RE POLISH --

A. Right.

Q. AND YOU FELL IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE --

A. Yeah, Just like that.

Q. THEY TRIED TO ---------- RUSSIA?

A. Yeah, that's it. They didn't ask you. When I came later on, just to come to USA and come before it was a CIC man, you know, you have to go through a screening, so he'll ask you where are you from, where you want to go, why don't you want to go back or why this and that, but the Russians no

such thing. They wouldn't ask you. Da vo da moi. That's it.

Q. HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY INTEREST IN GOING BACK?

A. No, no, I heard a lot of things, a lot of many others went back. I didn't want to. I knew I'm not going to meet nobody there, anyway, so I didn't want to go home.

Q. GENE, I'VE JUST BEEN GIVEN THE MESSAGE THAT WE'VE GOT TO CLEAN THIS UP BECAUSE THE NEXT PERSON IS LINED UP. I WOULD LIKE TO GET SOME SHOTS OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS, SO LET ME SET UP. OKAY. PAUL, NOW, IF YOU WOULD TELL US WHO IS IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH?

A. Yeah, this is in my family. My father and my mother. And here I am.

Q. IF YOU CAN NOT LEAN AGAINST THE CHAIR, THEN THE SHOT WON'T WIGGLE. OKAY.

A. And here I am, I don't know, about ten or eleven years old. And this is my three sisters. Esther, the oldest.

Q. WHICH ONE IS ESTHER?

A. On the right side, Esther. She is not alive. She got married in the first year after the war. She had a baby.

Q. RIGHT.

A. So she most probably perished in Auschwitz. In the middle is my sister, Sally, who is alive and well. She lives in Bayside, New York.

Q. OKAY.

A. And then the little one is my youngest sitter, Helen, which died in Bergen-Belsen right a couple days after liberation.
Q. OKAY.
A. When I met her.
Q. AND WHAT YEAR DO YOU THINK THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN?
A. This must have been when I was born 1920. 1930 or '32.
Q. '30 OR '32. AND WHERE WAS IT TAKEN?
A. This was taken in Sosnowiec.
Q. OKAY. AND LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE PICTURE HERE.
A. That's me. That's 1946 when I got married to Fay in Munich, in a suburb of Munich in North Rama. And we lived there -- I lived over there until I immigrated to the United States.
Q. ALL RIGHT. VERY GOOD.
A. And this was made in Germany during the four years we were in the DP camps.
Q. OKAY.
A. When I married in Munich, Germany, in 1946.
Q. OKAY.
A. This was right afterwards.
Q. ALL RIGHT. AND LET'S SEE IF WE CAN GET A LITTLE SHOT OF THAT.
A. This is me and my wife in Brooklyn, New York, when we came to the United States. That's my two daughters, Paula

and Betty. This was made in the fifties, 1950, something like that.

Q. OKAY. AND --

A. And this is just recently. Maybe a year or two ago. My wife, Fay, and my daughter, Betty, who lives here in Oakland, and she's also very active in the second generation survivors.

Q. OKAY.

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