

1 INTERVIEW WITH: HERMAN HIRSCHFELD

2 DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 1984

3 PLACE: SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

4 TRANSCRIBER: JUDITH MOORE

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6

7 Q. Mr. Hirschfeld, would you please tell  
8 me when and where you were born.

9 A. I was born in 1909 in Berlin, Germany.

10 Q. And did you live in Berlin, you know,  
11 since from that time on, or did you move from Berlin?

12 A. No. I lived in Berlin until I came  
13 here.

14 Q. Okay. So, if we start thinking from  
15 the time that the Nazis came to power in 1932, would  
16 you please tell me what you were doing at that time.

17 A. I had just finished my college  
18 studies, and I had finished my work, my preparation  
19 for the -- for an examination for the General  
20 Secondary Credential, which is the -- to work as a  
21 high school teacher. This examination took place in  
22 February of 1933, right two weeks after Hitler came  
23 to power. And at that time, of course, was still the  
24 old way.

25 Q. When did you first notice a change in  
26 the conditions, you know, or in your own private  
27 affairs due to the fact that the Nazis were now in  
28 power in Berlin?

1           A.           You could feel it the same day they  
2 took -- they came to power with torch-light parades  
3 and all kinds of elections to the Reichstag. The  
4 first, let's say, the first big sign of a change was  
5 the fire of the -- when the Nazis burned the Reichstag.  
6 That was definitely a great big sign, and everything  
7 that followed thereafter. It was then in April --  
8 how when things are, things which you know, of  
9 course, came the bulk of the Jewish stories.

10           And then I couldn't do anything with my  
11 examination and with my paper as a high school  
12 teacher with what -- there would be a student/  
13 teacher, an internship, for two years before I was  
14 really a high school teacher because I was not  
15 admitted to this internship program on account of the  
16 law for the restitution of civil service. That was  
17 so that -- that was the first -- that was when I --  
18 that's when I really suffered because I couldn't  
19 follow this -- I couldn't follow my plans, my career  
20 plans.

21           Q.           So what did you do instead when you  
22 could not practice your profession, you could not  
23 become a high school teacher as you were planning to  
24 do; what did you do?

25           A.           I became a teacher, but not a high  
26 school teacher. But a teacher in a Jewish school.  
27 And first I went to the -- what could be called a  
28 junior high school, Jewish junior high school in

1 Berlin, where I was some kind of a student/teacher.  
2 And then after a while, I got a teaching job at a  
3 boys' grammar school, Jewish grammar school, in  
4 Berlin.

5                   Maybe, I know it's -- it was a mistake  
6 that I did that and didn't emigrate at that time, but  
7 I got this job because my father used to be a  
8 teacher, too -- Jewish teacher. For a while, he was  
9 the superintendent of Jewish schools in Berlin, so he  
10 knew how to get me that job. In the meantime, I --  
11 now, my major was mathematics and science, but there  
12 was -- and that's one of the funny things,  
13 paradoxical things.

14                   One of the minors which you could  
15 choose for your General Secondary Credential was  
16 Jewish religion. And the Nazis didn't know that this  
17 existed. So, since I had some pretty good Jewish  
18 background, and -- I wouldn't say that I knew  
19 everything about it, but I knew quite a bit,  
20 especially, as I said, since my father was in that  
21 field, too. He said I should sit, again, for that  
22 exam and take a minor in Jewish religion, which  
23 happened in June of 1933.

24                   The examiner was nobody else but Rabbi  
25 Leo Baeck, who was the head of the rabbinate. It was  
26 a very interesting hour I had there during that  
27 examination because he taught me quite a bit during  
28 that hour. So then I had this, on top of my math and

1 science, I had a minor in Jewish religion, which I  
2 could never use, by the way.

3 Q. Okay. Now, this was 1933. The war  
4 started in 1939.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Could you describe how the Jews in  
7 Berlin lived during that time, what kind of hardships  
8 they had that you know personally of; that you  
9 suffered from; what kind of restrictions. I mean,  
10 how was their life really affected during this time  
11 by the Nazis, from '33 to '39?

12 A. It's pretty hard to say this in 25  
13 words or less. The restrictions, which were  
14 relatively minor, at first, became worse and worse  
15 during those years. And it's very hard to pinpoint  
16 any exact date where the -- and any exact events  
17 which took place, and -- there was trust we could  
18 live in.

19 Now, we had to move for some reason or  
20 another, which had, I think, nothing to do with the  
21 racial background -- moved to another place. We  
22 could live, at first, as we used to. We could  
23 travel; we could move away; we could go shopping.  
24 There came the restrictions of the Nuremberg Laws in  
25 1935. And then, of course, there was always this  
26 underground of fear that something might happen.  
27 But, we always had the fear -- even now, from  
28 hindsight -- that Hitler wanted to have the Olympic

1 Games in Berlin. And he had to restrict his acts  
2 against the Jews because he wanted the outside world  
3 to know -- or not to know what really happened.

4 And then, I think after 1936, it  
5 became worse. And there was always something which  
6 happened on the 9th of November. Every year on the  
7 9th of November, something happened which was more or  
8 less -- maybe the Jews were not always affected, but  
9 something always happened where he had a step  
10 forward. And I think he selected this date because  
11 that was a date on which he had this -- Hitler Putsch  
12 in 1923. So there was always something on that day.

13 Q. Was that -- I'm not sure of that, but  
14 was that the date for the Kristallnacht?

15 A. That was the same day, yes, same date.  
16 So there was always -- and we were always afraid what  
17 would happen. Sometimes, at first, it didn't have so  
18 much to do with Jews, directly. But it always became  
19 some kind of a bad date. Of course, I mean, I had to  
20 suffer from the beginning because I couldn't go to  
21 the Jewish -- I couldn't go in to the general school  
22 system to be a teacher. I was there. I was pretty  
23 happy in my Jewish grade school.

24 And, of course, more and more children  
25 came from the other, from the public schools, who  
26 couldn't be there any more because there was -- there  
27 were some restrictions; especially for high schools,  
28 where the children could be only under certain

1 circumstances. Of course, in colleges and  
2 universities you had to be -- or your father had to  
3 have served in the First World War or something. So  
4 there were some pretty bad restrictions. But then  
5 the children didn't feel safe and didn't feel happy  
6 in the public schools anymore, most of them. So they  
7 came over to the Jewish schools.

8 Our school was built for maybe 250 or  
9 300 children. In Germany it was different, you know,  
10 the children -- the schools were smaller than here.  
11 Here a school of 2,000 children is small, you know.  
12 In Germany, it was impossible to have a school like  
13 that. Our school had about, I think, 500 children.  
14 And it was -- we had a tough time with this many  
15 children there.

16 And so the children came over in to  
17 our school because they couldn't be anymore in the  
18 other. Until then, it was even -- that was, I think,  
19 in '36? I'm not too sure about this. There was even  
20 a high school. Jewish high school was formed, and --  
21 but the children still had to go to school. There  
22 was a law that they had to be -- had to go to school,  
23 compulsory. And so we had -- we performed a very  
24 valuable service for these kids.

25 Q. During this time when you had all  
26 these restrictions and everything, did you ever think  
27 about leaving Germany and emigrating?

28 A. Of course the idea came, but since I

1 had a good job, I had a job with the Jewish community  
2 and there was a superstition that the -- first, that  
3 there will always be a Jewish community in Berlin.  
4 And, secondly, this misconception which many people  
5 had that it wouldn't, that it cannot get that bad.  
6 Which, maybe at that time was true, but, of course,  
7 we were proven wrong after. So that I -- on the  
8 contrary, there were even things -- there were some  
9 events in 19- -- I think it was 1937. The Education  
10 Ministry all of a sudden found out that there are not  
11 enough Jewish schools and not enough Jewish teachers  
12 because, as I said, the students were still obligated  
13 to go to school.

14 So they insisted, the Reich's Ministry  
15 of Education, whatever it was called, insisted that  
16 some teachers' seminaries were founded where Jewish  
17 teachers could be educated. And that people like  
18 myself, who had that first examination but not the  
19 student/teacher part of his internship yet, that they  
20 could finish their internship in a Jewish school, and  
21 then could try to pass an exam, this second final  
22 examination for high school teachers. I was one of  
23 those who did this.

24 Now since I had, in the meantime, from  
25 '33 to '37, quite a bit of teaching experience, my  
26 internship consisted in going to the Jewish high  
27 school one day a week. My schedule in the grade  
28 school was arranged that way that I could have one

1 day off. And then several of us passed the  
2 examination and then I sat for that examination in  
3 August of 1939, a week before the war started. And  
4 the people there from the school board, from the  
5 official school board came to the Jewish high school.  
6 We gave our teaching -- our lessons there, and had an  
7 oral examination and then, as a result, 50 percent  
8 passed. That was me. The other guy didn't  
9 (laughing).

10 And so I still have this certificate  
11 which entitles me to teach in high schools, but with  
12 one paragraph that this certificate is good for  
13 teaching only at Jewish high schools. After the war,  
14 of course, nobody looked at that paragraph.

15 Q. Okay. We now came to the start of the  
16 war, 1939. What happened when the war started as far  
17 as your life in Berlin was concerned?

18 A. Now, at first, when the war started,  
19 there were quite a few things already happen, before,  
20 like the, as you said, the Kristallnacht. And at  
21 that time, I think the restrictions really became,  
22 very bad so that we couldn't move around anymore as  
23 much as we wanted. Jewish stores, as you know, were  
24 closed, and even in the schools there was then a  
25 feeling of uneasiness. And then everyone wanted to  
26 emigrate and, as you said yourself, many people went  
27 to China, to Shanghai, because that was the only  
28 place that was open and admitted Jews -- at first, at

1 least, without any questioning.

2 So at that time I thought of going to  
3 Shanghai, too. But somehow it didn't work out. The  
4 war -- the start of the war itself didn't mean too  
5 much at first. But then came one restriction after  
6 another. There came -- I don't know. Ja, we -- I  
7 think the first thing which was taken away from us  
8 were the radios. And I think that came -- I don't  
9 know, I think it was already in '39, Yom Kippur, when  
10 they knew that everybody was in the service, then  
11 they took these away, I think. And then the  
12 telephones were disconnected. But that came later,  
13 this -- because -- I think that I --

14 Can you take it off for a moment?

15 (BRIEF BREAK)

16 A. (Continuing) Anyway, there was one  
17 thing after another and things came very fast. As I  
18 say, the radios were taken away. The telephones  
19 eventually were taken away. The ration points, which  
20 we got, were marked with a "J" for Jew. And we  
21 didn't get everything which the non-Jews got. And  
22 then -- and, again, I'm not sure about dates and the  
23 sequence of these events. It was not possible for us  
24 to shop at any time. We were only allowed to shop  
25 between 3:00 and 4:00, 4:00 or 5:00. 4:00 to 5:00.  
26 4:00 to 5:00 I think it was, wasn't it?

27 And, of course, in many cases the good  
28 things which you could get without ration points were

1 stored away during the hours from 4:00 to 5:00. But  
2 when you worked during that time, you got a special  
3 permit that you could shop at another time and then,  
4 sometimes, you got a better deal because at that time  
5 you could -- you may have had better service.

6 Q. I just want to ask you something.  
7 Were the schools still operating? I mean, after the  
8 war started, you still had your job with the school?

9 A. I still had my job, yes. Of course,  
10 many people -- between, especially between the end of  
11 '38 and beginning of '39, many students left. Now  
12 even before that, there was always -- we always lost  
13 children through emigration, so that the classes were  
14 smaller and smaller. They -- hmmm... (pause) And so  
15 that the teachers with the lowest seniority, of  
16 course, had to leave. Many then, of course, they  
17 immigrate to China or wherever they could find some  
18 peace.

19 I could stay until March of 1942. I  
20 was still a teacher at that time. I had, at that  
21 time, I still had, of course, some seniority. And at  
22 that time, in March of '32 (sic), I was transferred  
23 to a -- emigration was almost impossible at that  
24 time. I think the latest -- the last ship, last ship  
25 or last shipment that they left for the United States  
26 sometime in 1941. They went in a sealed train  
27 through France, through Spain, and then Portugal and  
28 then left from there here to the United States. There

1 was still, before Russia was invaded, there was still  
2 a possibility to go through Siberia to Shanghai. But  
3 that was very much restricted in those days.

4 Then, of course, in October of 1941,  
5 the arrests and deportations started. And then after  
6 each transport left and each collection was made, we  
7 had less students. So that we could see when we  
8 could close our shop.

9 And in March of 1942, I was  
10 transferred to a furniture warehouse, which the  
11 Jewish community operated. And there we had  
12 accumulated all kinds of old furniture from  
13 households of people who had emigrated or were  
14 arrested because the arrests had started at that  
15 time, as I said.

16 And so I worked there, which was a  
17 (humph) very nice time (chuckle). I worked there, I  
18 don't know, there was -- I don't know what everybody  
19 else was, but I know I worked with an opera singer.  
20 And we were pretty good friends. But there were  
21 other -- I think there -- yes. There were other  
22 teachers, too, in that group.

23 Q. And you say that at that time the  
24 arrests and that deportation started. Were you --  
25 did you have any idea what was going on? That the  
26 Jews were actually sent to those camps and were  
27 exterminated? Did you have -- did you know about it?

28 A. Of course we knew about it. Because

1 we -- as members or as employees of the Jewish  
2 community familiar with these things, at that time,  
3 in the beginning, the people got a letter that they  
4 were chosen to be resettled someplace. And that they  
5 should get everything ready. And they would get  
6 another notice when this resettlement would take  
7 place.

8           And then they would be picked up by  
9 the police or Gestapo. They could take at that time,  
10 during this first time, some suitcases and some of  
11 their belongings. And we were told that the first  
12 transport would go to Lodz, which was called  
13 Litzmannstadt at that time, which was a ghetto. It  
14 was really not a camp in the infamous meaning of the  
15 word. And I think that the first transports really  
16 went to Lodz. What happened then, there is something  
17 else again.

18           I know a colleague of mine, a teacher,  
19 was in one of these first transports. He went as far  
20 as Lodz, as far as the station in Lodz and he was not  
21 even taken into the ghetto. He was transported back  
22 into a labor camp. And he survived, too. That's why  
23 I know the story.

24           Q.           So in other words, you were really not  
25 aware that people were taken to camps and were  
26 exterminated?

27           A.           Not -- I don't think they were  
28 exterminated --

1 Q. At that time.

2 A. -- at that time. That came later.  
3 And, I mean, they were carried then from there,  
4 farther. That was during the first few months.  
5 Afterwards -- but we didn't know anything about it.  
6 The destinations were changed, then the -- some went  
7 to Lublin. Some went to Riga. And my mother-in-law --  
8 we got married in the war -- my mother-in-law was  
9 taken to Riga and never arrived there.

10 Q. Okay. Now you continued living in  
11 Berlin until you also were arrested or selected or  
12 whatever. So would you tell me how it happened and  
13 where were you sent from Berlin?

14 A. Okay. Turn that thing off.

15 (BRIEF BREAK)

16 A. Since I was involved in heavy physical  
17 work, I was sent, detached at some times, to carry  
18 the baggage of the people to be -- of the arrested  
19 people; the people to be deported. At first it was  
20 so that they had to -- they were taken from their  
21 homes with the baggage to a police station and from  
22 there to a collection center, which was an old  
23 synagogue. And we come back to that synagogue again,  
24 to that collection center.

25 And we went with the police trucks  
26 around and collected the baggage and brought it into  
27 that collection center, which was partly very  
28 interesting because these policemen -- first, they

1 didn't like that job because it was during the night.  
2 And, secondly, they didn't know, some of them didn't  
3 even know what Jews are. I talked to one of -- some  
4 of them and they were really amazed that Jews lived  
5 in houses just like (laughing) other people. But --  
6 so I think I could do something good by setting them  
7 straight (laughing) and tell them that we are human  
8 beings just like anybody else.

9           This collection center, by the way,  
10 was the synagogue where we got married about a week  
11 before the first arrests were made. And we were  
12 married in the chapel, and the big main synagogue  
13 was, at that time, already prepared to take these  
14 unlucky and unhappy people. That started a week,  
15 exactly a week, after our marriage.

16           We had to take the baggage with us  
17 from police station to that collection center, to  
18 that synagogue, and then the next day from there to  
19 the station. And we had to load it into the trains.  
20 And the first trains were -- I think all the trains  
21 which I saw were passenger cars, were not cattle  
22 cars.

23           Q.           I have a question. You mean you  
24 loaded the luggage together with the people that were  
25 going? In other words, the Germans didn't confiscate  
26 the luggage and send it some other way? They  
27 actually send it together with the passengers?

28           A.           They didn't confiscate it at the -- at

1 the port of embarkation. They -- I'm pretty sure  
2 they confiscated part of it later on because that was  
3 our own experience, which comes later.

4 So we could stay in Berlin, we could  
5 still stay in Berlin under pretty heavy restrictions.  
6 But we could stay until there was no baggage to be  
7 carried, no Jews, till we have -- later on, the Jews,  
8 many Jews were arrested on the street, brought in to  
9 one of these collection centers without anything,  
10 just what they wore on their body.

11 And so we could, at that time, help  
12 them by getting something to them, at least a little  
13 bit. Sometimes even notifying friends what happened  
14 to them. So we really could help these people more.  
15 Of course, knowing, definitely, that we, at one time,  
16 would be one of them. Even at these later days, we  
17 didn't know for sure where these transports went.

18 We heard something about the place  
19 called Auschwitz, but we were not even sure what  
20 happened to the Jews there. And we couldn't get any  
21 information about it because I think even these  
22 Gestapo people who may have given us some information  
23 didn't even get in to these camps because that was  
24 top secret.

25 Q. Okay. So finally you were also  
26 arrested. So tell us, please, where were you sent?

27 A. We came at first to the -- at that  
28 time, we called it the ghetto of Theresienstadt. It

1 was, of course, another concentration camp, only it  
2 was a city, a little town, a little fortress town  
3 surrounded by walls and moat, which was built in the  
4 end of the 18th century in what is now Czechoslovakia;  
5 even it was at that time Czechoslovakia. And that  
6 was founded as a collection or concentration camp for  
7 the Czech Jews. Then old people from Germany came to  
8 Theresienstadt and then selected other people who  
9 were lucky enough to get there.

10 Q. But you don't know any particular  
11 reason why you were selected to go there? Because  
12 this was considered the model, the concentration  
13 camp.

14 A. It was considered the model  
15 concentration camp and I think we were selected  
16 because we were there for such a long time in Berlin  
17 that we deserved some special treatment. It was -- I  
18 don't think that it was -- of course, it was a bonus,  
19 you know, but I mean, it was not meant something more  
20 than that.

21 Q. Would you describe your day in  
22 Theresienstadt. What did you do there?

23 A. All kinds of things. At first I was  
24 in a street construction gang. And we went out of  
25 the ghetto every morning, walked for about half an  
26 hour to the next city Litomerice. There was a big  
27 river, Elbe, was there. And on one side, there was a  
28 street construction going on that was already going

1 on and was almost finished when we -- when I came  
2 there.

3           And that was pretty heavy work, heavy  
4 physical work. We even got extra food because it was  
5 so. When I came they were -- we were just pouring  
6 concrete. And that's pretty hard work because, you  
7 know, it has to be finished. And it has to go fast  
8 so that it doesn't dry before the -- one of these  
9 fields is finished. Then after the pouring of  
10 concrete was finished, they still needed some trucks  
11 and stones for the street. And since the quarry  
12 couldn't send -- didn't have enough people to give  
13 that. Ten of us were sent up there to the quarry to  
14 get those rocks there.

15           That was not like the quarry work  
16 which you may have seen in movies or heard about it  
17 from other concentration camps. This was a -- now,  
18 we were really working for a particular reason there.  
19 And the people in the quarry didn't even know how to  
20 treat Jews. The first thing -- the first day we came  
21 up there -- it sounds more like a summer resort, you  
22 know, it wasn't. They asked us where our lunch is.  
23 And we say we didn't bring any lunch, we didn't get  
24 any. "Now you have to do that because that's hard  
25 work and you have to eat."

26           But in any event, during lunch hour  
27 they told us, "Now go up there. There are berries,  
28 and pick the berries."

1           And so we had a very good time up  
2 there eating blackberries and raspberries I never  
3 ate that much in my life (Laughing). But that was  
4 exceptional. I mean, it was a special case.

5           We were very glad that we were  
6 selected to go to the quarry, you know, because that  
7 was -- first of all, it took us one hour to go up and  
8 one hour to come down. And that went -- that had to  
9 be deducted from our working hours.

10          Q.           When you were arrested, was your wife  
11 also arrested and sent together with you? Were you  
12 in Theresienstadt -- were you together?

13          A.           We were together there. She had  
14 another tough time.

15                       Can you turn off for a moment?

16                       (BRIEF BREAK)

17          Q.           (Inaudible) who was there.

18          A.           My wife was arrested, too, of course,  
19 at the same time. And we were brought together in  
20 the same car to Theresienstadt. We were separated at  
21 that time when we left the train because there was a  
22 separation by sex to avoid things. But my wife was  
23 already pregnant at that time. So she couldn't work  
24 too much in the beginning because she was already was  
25 in fifth or sixth month -- no. Fifth or sixth month.  
26 And so then we came there in June of 1943, and at the  
27 end of August I came home.

28                       Oh, ja, we had an hour GOSE-LITTLE

1 (chuckle). This trip up there to the quarry was very  
2 nice because it was on a truck with a Czech driver.  
3 And the Czechs, of course, didn't like that Nazis as  
4 much as we didn't like them. And So he -- that was a  
5 time in August when the food ripened, and --

6 (END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1)

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1 (START TAPE 1 SIDE 2)

2 A. -- would be better outdoors. But I  
3 got on the same job, and after a while, now -- yes.  
4 I moved, then, over into that home, youth home. But  
5 I couldn't -- we couldn't sleep together in one room,  
6 because you had to be -- I think, 120, 125 years old--  
7 no, both together, in order to do that.

8 She stayed with the girls and I stayed  
9 with the boys, and the room which we had to counsel  
10 had boys about 13 to 15 years of age. And they  
11 worked during the day. So during the day we didn't  
12 have too much to do, just keep this clean. And when  
13 there was a -- we were not allowed to teach children  
14 anything, but of course we did. And so the smaller  
15 children had, then, some kind of a school in the  
16 morning. And, but of course, we were always on the  
17 alert for some sudden inspection by the SS or  
18 Gestapo. But everything was all right then.

19 And, now it's -- there were several  
20 things, I mean, if you really want to go into detail,  
21 I mean, we can go on, you know.

22 Q. Yes, we definitely want.

23 A. There were little things -- again, we  
24 talked about the 9th of November, which in 1938 was  
25 the Kristallnacht. In 1941 -- '43, yes, the first year  
26 we were there, we had a -- the SS got the idea that  
27 they didn't know exactly how many people were there  
28 in Theresienstadt. So what did they do? They didn't

1 give any questionnaires out, or they didn't go from  
2 house to house, no. We all had to go to a big place  
3 just outside the ghetto, each house or barracks by  
4 itself -- and then we had to wait. That's the main  
5 thing, you know, every army you have to wait.

6 And then we have to stand up in rows,  
7 and then the SS came, and there, of course, outside,  
8 you know, there were armed guards that watched it.  
9 During that day, since my wife lived another place, I  
10 don't know, I was not at the youth room at that time.  
11 So, we didn't see each other. We didn't know what  
12 happened to each other during the (inaudible).

13 Then people came, counted, and that  
14 was it. And then nothing happened. We didn't get  
15 any signal to go back to the town. And there was a  
16 general disorder, you know, and everybody went home  
17 as fast as he could. We didn't get anything to eat  
18 during that day, of course, because -- outside. That  
19 was a pretty bad day. And then shortly thereafter, I  
20 think, I got, then, transferred into that youth room.

21 Q. Okay. I have -- I would like to ask  
22 you, now, one question. In Theresienstadt, the  
23 population of the camp was it mostly Jews or there  
24 were other people also from other nationalities?

25 A. Just Jews. They were, in the  
26 beginning, when the camp started, there were other  
27 people, Czech people, living in there. And there  
28 were army barracks; I don't know how many, 6, 7, 10.

1 And at first the Czech Jews were concentrated in  
2 these army barracks which were big strong  
3 (inaudible). The Fort Point reminds me very much of  
4 one of those army barracks. You know, it's the same  
5 thing, I mean. We hate it. But if you want see --  
6 if you want to know how these things look, look at  
7 Fort Point.

8 And then, first all of these army  
9 barracks were taken by the Czechs and then we came  
10 there, the Germans came very late. And then the  
11 civilian population, the Czech population, was taken  
12 out, and there were only Jews in the camp. My mother  
13 came there in -- because she already -- she belonged  
14 to that group which was 70 -- over 70 at that time.

15 She came to Theresienstadt in  
16 September of 1942. And when we came, nine months  
17 later, first we found out where she lived and then  
18 there came an old -- she was always -- we always made  
19 the joke, you know, that she had -- there were two  
20 balls, one for the face and one for the body. So  
21 well proportioned, you know.

22 There came an old lady and a cane, and  
23 very weak, very slim, very slender, and she was  
24 almost starved at that time already. And she lived  
25 there in a very -- with ten other old ladies in one  
26 room, which was smaller than this, I guess. And the  
27 old people didn't get very much food. They got, I  
28 think, about the equivalent of 500 or something

1 calories a day, which was starving diet.

2 Q. But you got much more?

3 A. I got much more. There was -- it was,  
4 ja, the amount of food was according to the kind of  
5 work you did. So we -- I mean I, personally, I got  
6 started out as a heavy worker, and I got the highest  
7 amount of food there, which was, I don't know, 2,000  
8 or 2500 calories, which was pretty much. But for the  
9 kind of work you did, you know, and was -- other ones  
10 it then went down.

11 People who did -- like later on I  
12 could -- I got less because I didn't work on the  
13 outside anymore. But still at first, once you were  
14 categorized as a heavy worker, you know, you stayed  
15 with it even when you were transferred inside. There  
16 was a (inaudible) like everywhere.

17 My mother died in January of '44 and  
18 she -- at least she saw us before.

19 Q. She died in Theresienstadt?

20 A. She died in Theresienstadt, yes.

21 Q. Were you, at that time, also, in  
22 Theresienstadt?

23 A. Yes. Yes. Yes. As I say, we met her  
24 when we came and we could see her quite often. And  
25 we were not there at the time of her death, but we  
26 were there before and then after, later on. And  
27 there was some kind of a ceremony, funeral ceremony  
28 held, and that was it. And I think she was cremated.

1 Q. Did you meet any people in  
2 Theresienstadt that you became friendly with?

3 A. Turn it off.

4 (BRIEF BREAK)

5 A. Of course there were friendships  
6 formed. But they didn't last because most of the  
7 people didn't survive. There were some people -- now  
8 we met some people there which we knew before and  
9 could give them, oh, in some cases they could give us  
10 comfort; in some cases, we could give them comfort.  
11 And one case, I met afterwards the son of one of  
12 these ladies, here, in San Francisco, and I could  
13 tell him, "I saw your mother there," you know. So it  
14 was very nice.

15 And other cases there were some  
16 friendships, which came from before and which lasted  
17 through that time. I still have one friend in Berlin  
18 who went through Theresienstadt and other camps. He  
19 was not in Auschwitz. And we are still writing each  
20 other when we were in Berlin and, of course, we met.  
21 And I would like to see him again before everything  
22 is over.

23 Q. How long did you stay in  
24 Theresienstadt?

25 A. Fifteen months.

26 Q. And your wife also?

27 A. My wife, yes. Two weeks longer.

28 Of course, there were things in

1 Theresienstadt which, you know, it's too short to go  
2 into all kinds. There was -- and I think you know  
3 about some of these things. For instance, there was  
4 a movie made of the "good life" the Jews had in  
5 Theresienstadt. Maybe you heard of that.

6 Q. Yes, I did.

7 A. And the director and producer of that --  
8 the director of this movie was then the first one to  
9 be sent to Auschwitz. And he never -- I think he  
10 never even made it to Auschwitz.

11 There was a very active life there as  
12 far as lectures were concerned: theater, music. My  
13 wife was in the choir where they sang The Creation by  
14 Haydn. And they sang Elijah by Mendelssohn. And we  
15 both know this by heart now. Because I went, very  
16 often, to the rehearsals, and so I know it. And then  
17 there were some -- there were even small orchestras  
18 and small chamber music, some -- many lectures,  
19 because there were people who were authorities in  
20 their field.

21 And we, in our youth room, we had once  
22 a week, a class by an art teacher from Vienna. And  
23 he taught us everything about art of the 19th and  
24 20th century. And he had all the books for that  
25 because he belonged to a group of artists who copied  
26 pictures for the residences of the SS. And they had  
27 to have, of course, some kind of pictures from which  
28 to copy these. So he had all kinds of art histories

1 and art books. Whatever he wanted, he had. And he  
2 brought them to us and we got a very good  
3 understanding of the art of the 19th and even the  
4 20th century there.

5 Q. Was there any religious life, like  
6 holidays where they celebrated, or anything like  
7 that?

8 A. Yes. Now first, I want to say that  
9 these classes, these art classes which we had, they  
10 were after curfew. And he had permission to go after  
11 curfew upon the street. But it was strictly against  
12 the rules and regulations, so we had to be careful  
13 that we were not detected there. So, I just want to  
14 point that out.

15 Yes, there was religious life. There  
16 were some services held in the attics of some  
17 buildings. And they were -- I don't know how much  
18 they were allowed, but somehow they were -- it was  
19 done, you know, it was so. But, yes, and we tried,  
20 of course -- in our youth room, we tried to celebrate  
21 Shabat and we tried to celebrate the holidays, too,  
22 as much as we could. I think we even got some matzo  
23 during Passover.

24 Q. Where did the matzo come from? I  
25 mean, it was probably baked right there.

26 A. That I don't know. Maybe it was baked  
27 there, because we had all kinds -- the bread was  
28 baked there. By the way, the food was very good

1 because it was Czech food. And Czech food is very  
2 good. It was just not enough. But it was very tasty.

3 The -- I don't know, something else,  
4 ja, there were some guards, of course, some kind of a  
5 police, the ghetto police, as we called them. Those  
6 were Jews, and they took their job very seriously,  
7 you know. Just like any policeman, you had to fear  
8 the police. So, not the nicest people, usually.

9 Q. So they didn't -- in other words, they  
10 did not treat the other Jews well.

11 A. No, they couldn't. I wouldn't go that  
12 far, but they were just like policemen. They had to  
13 be tough. What else? Of course, as I say, we went --  
14 after I got into the youth home and we stayed there,  
15 the -- in the same building was a post office.

16 And we could write letters. We could  
17 write post cards, not letters. And we could receive  
18 post cards from the outside and -- I don't know about  
19 letters, but post cards, anyway. And we could  
20 receive packages. But that was not too well-known  
21 that -- the extent to where we could get these  
22 packages.

23 So when everybody was afraid -- I had  
24 an uncle who was married to a non-Jew, and we wrote  
25 him some kind of a card, you know, hinting at the  
26 fact that we could receive packages, food packages,  
27 too. And he didn't dare sending us something. He  
28 told us, then, afterwards that he was very sorry

1 about that.

2                   So this post office, so-called post  
3 office, was on the ground floor of our building. And  
4 sometimes, of course, everything went through some  
5 kind of checking -- from newspapers and so on. So we  
6 got the -- so then they had to throw the newspapers  
7 out. But then, of course, we could go to the garbage  
8 cans and get the newspapers out of it. So we knew  
9 about D-Day, about the invasion of Normandy. We knew  
10 that two days later because we saw it in the German  
11 newspaper.

12                   So in any event, we were well informed  
13 because many people had access to this kind of thing.  
14 When I worked on the street construction, one of us  
15 was a Czech, and we went with some Czech guards  
16 there, not SS, you know, it was just Czech police or  
17 gendarmerie. And one of us knew one of those people.  
18 And when it was when this guy was on duty, this Czech  
19 policeman, then he was always in the back and he got  
20 the latest news. And sometimes he even got a  
21 newspaper, which he smuggled, then, into the camp.  
22 So we were well informed. I mean, even at Auschwitz,  
23 well informed.

24                   Q.           So, as I said before, how long did you  
25 stay in Theresienstadt and how were you selected and  
26 when were you sent to Auschwitz?

27                   A.           There always went some transports to  
28 Auschwitz. The camp was too crowded, or the town was

1 too crowded. They were up to 60,000 people in a  
2 little -- I don't know, it was more than a square  
3 mile. And you can imagine, that was pretty crowded.  
4 So the -- There was some transports going -- some of  
5 which we didn't even know, you know. I mean, people  
6 just taken away and sent up.

7           There was one big one that went in May  
8 of 1944 and we got out of that. We didn't go at that  
9 time. And then in September around of '44, I think  
10 the SS was afraid that there would be some kind of a  
11 riot or uprising. And so they wanted to close the  
12 camp as soon as possible; at least take everybody who  
13 could work out of the camp so there wouldn't be any  
14 organized uprising.

15           We were told that we would go,  
16 afterward, we would go to work camps someplace in  
17 Germany. And that was -- at first there were only  
18 men. And I was -- I couldn't get out of that, it was  
19 impossible. Because then if you -- oy -- if somebody  
20 was saved from this, somebody else had to go, you  
21 know.

22           So we went in the train and we could  
23 look out. It was some kind of converted cattle car,  
24 but -- I mean, with benches and so. And I knew when  
25 we went through Dereczyn and then we turned eastward,  
26 then I knew where we went.

27           Q.           I just want to ask you a question,  
28 were the people in Theresienstadt actually aware what

1 was going on in places like Auschwitz; that people  
2 were being gassed? Did they know about it?

3 A. I wouldn't say we knew about it. We  
4 heard rumors about it. But we didn't know for sure  
5 because nobody came back. And nobody really told us  
6 about it. I don't think that we knew the real extent  
7 of what happened in Auschwitz. We just knew it was  
8 awful and very much worse than Theresienstadt, yes.

9 So then when we came to Auschwitz, we --  
10 first, of course, we took our -- we took all kinds of  
11 baggage with us because we thought we go to one of  
12 these work camps. But, of course, that was a point  
13 where everything was confiscated because we just had  
14 to get out of the car and to pass some muster there.  
15 There was the SS men standing. And I am pretty sure  
16 it was that infamous Dr. Mengele.

17 And he looked at everybody and then we  
18 had to say how old we are, where we came from and  
19 whatever. We all stand at attention and then he says  
20 either this or there -- with the thumb, you know, he  
21 pointed one way or another. And one way was into the  
22 gas and the other one was you went the work camp.  
23 And I was lucky, as you can see.

24 And then we stayed there -- I stayed  
25 there in Auschwitz for about two weeks in these  
26 barracks, in these awful -- not army barracks, not  
27 the real stone or brick barracks, but wooden barracks  
28 with four bunks -- if you could call it bunks, they

1 were more shelves.

2                   And you asked if I made friends at  
3 that time. Yes, I made friends. I don't know his  
4 name, and it was just, you know -- and later on he  
5 went this way and I went this way. I don't know  
6 what happened to him. There were several people.  
7 One I liked very much was a ship's doctor who was on --  
8 I think on Dutch ships between South America and  
9 Australia. And he told me very much about his life  
10 there on ship. That was one man I am sorry that I  
11 lost him. And then later another came from Auschwitz,  
12 there was a Dutch chemist, a Dr. KHU-KOOKT. And we  
13 became very good friends. And he died about five  
14 minutes before Liberation, which was very hard on me.

15           Q.           Can you describe your day in  
16 Auschwitz? What was it like? What did you do there?  
17 Did you do some kind of work?

18           A.           At first we didn't do too much. We  
19 didn't do anything. We were -- we had to stand at  
20 attention. That was our main thing. And at first --  
21 no, there was nothing we could really do because we  
22 were just some newcomers, you know. They had to find  
23 out what they could do with us. Then, after a while --  
24 now there was barracks -- these barracks were divided  
25 into subcamps, and they were separated by  
26 electrically charged wire.

27                   But inside one of these camps was a  
28 street. You could move relatively freely. You could

1 go to the latrine; you could talk to people. And  
2 this, all of these capons, as they were called, which  
3 were Jews -- inmates -- who were supervising us, or  
4 SS people, tried to pull one on you. So that was  
5 during the first days. There was nothing which we  
6 really could do.

7           And then we were separated into kind  
8 of trades. And they asked if there were college  
9 graduates. And I was maybe stupid, you know, at  
10 least my friends at that time thought I was stupid.  
11 I volunteered for those people. But so then we were --  
12 used to do some cleaning. So they asked for  
13 volunteers to clean the kitchen garbage out or  
14 something like that. And it's better to do something  
15 than to sit around, so I volunteered for that. And  
16 we got a little bit of food in those kitchens, and  
17 that was pretty valuable.

18           Then one day, there came a new  
19 transport, new people came in and there was one of  
20 these boys from my youth room there. And he said,  
21 "You know, your wife came with us." So at least I  
22 knew that she was now there, too. And then I think  
23 same day or day later, I was in the latrine and  
24 somebody called out, "Anybody who wants to go to the  
25 women's camp?"

26           So I says, "Yes, I want to go there."

27           "Who do you have there?"

28           I said, "My wife."

1 "Okay. That's all right."

2 The official reason was to fetch some  
3 blankets. So we went there with some carts and went  
4 over there, and, of course, as soon as we were in  
5 that women's camp, everybody went look after his wife  
6 or girlfriend or whatever it was. But I didn't know  
7 where she was hiding out. So I saw one group of  
8 women coming towards me and I recognized the first  
9 one in the first row; she was from Theresienstadt,  
10 too.

11 All of a sudden, there in the last  
12 row, somebody came towards me and that was she. And  
13 so we could speak to each other; we could tell each  
14 other that we were still alive. And then somebody  
15 came and separated us in the end. But that was one  
16 of the un -- I think I told you that we had all kinds  
17 of unusual things happening to us. And so at least  
18 we knew that we were, at that time, still alive.

19 The next day, somebody came and asked  
20 for mechanics. Of course, for college graduates to  
21 ask for mechanics, that's -- there you can see how  
22 that thing was made -- was done. And I was sick and  
23 tired of staying there because I could see the  
24 chimneys where the fire came out of them. So I said,  
25 "I'm mechanic."

26 So a man came around, and he was SS  
27 man. He was from another camp, from Lublin camp in --  
28 next door to Auschwitz, not too far away. So he

1 asked everybody why he says he's a mechanic, and they  
2 say (inaudible).

3 So there was a doctor who was an  
4 engineer, and he said, "I'm doctor and an engineer."  
5 He wasn't taken. Then he came to me and I said, "I  
6 am a teacher, but I resettled as a mechanic." "Okay,  
7 fine." So I was taken. And I didn't know anything  
8 about mechanics.

9 So then that same night we -- okay,  
10 then we were immediately separated from the other  
11 people. We were treated just as cattle, you know. I  
12 mean, we were not ourselves anymore at that time.  
13 Then we were led to a place where we got our number  
14 and then we stayed overnight, I think, in one of  
15 these barracks. And next morning we were led to the --  
16 to some cattle -- this time was real cattle cars.

17 And we were brought then to another  
18 camp in the same area which was a satellite camp, you  
19 could tell it drove past across from Auschwitz. And  
20 then there we came again into one of these wooden  
21 barracks and that was empty because we heard that in --  
22 that it was occupied by some -- I don't know, some  
23 non-German Jews. I don't know. Non-German.  
24 Non-Jews. I don't know.

25 Anyway, they dug a tunnel from that  
26 barracks underneath the fence and fled. And so that  
27 was empty now, and we got into that. So then we  
28 worked in a railroad repair -- freight car repair

1 shop. That was, again, it was pretty hard work.  
2 Usually we worked at night and so we worked until  
3 midnight. Midnight we were counted again, had to  
4 stand up in line and we were counted. And then we  
5 had, I don't know, a half an hour's rest. And then  
6 we had to work until morning, and then you could  
7 sleep until noontime. Then we had to go to the  
8 dining room -- pardon me, let's say mess hall -- and  
9 have our meal.

10 And so then we had to do all kinds of  
11 little things until night, we had to go back to work.  
12 And we had to walk there through some side streets  
13 there. And we had to hold our arms interlocked, lock  
14 the arms so that we stayed together, not to go faster.  
15 Not the nicest thing in the world.

16 Q. I have a question here. When you say  
17 you had to walk through some streets, you mean  
18 through a city, through a town where other people  
19 lived?

20 A. Yes. Yes. Yes, we had to walk  
21 through city streets, but side streets, you know, not  
22 the main.

23 Q. Did the population, the people that  
24 lived in the city ever see you?

25 A. Some of them, yes. But we were just --  
26 we were inmates, you know? I mean, they didn't know  
27 who -- how it came, you know. We could have been  
28 prisoners of war or whatever.

1 Q. They had no idea that you were --

2 A. I don't know. The people we worked  
3 with, of course, they were civilians in that, we  
4 didn't know what to do, and whatever we did, we did  
5 wrong -- if not involuntary, then voluntary. But  
6 they didn't know the extent of it, again. They knew  
7 that there was something going on, you know, that we  
8 went into that camp. But the foreman, the non-Jewish  
9 foreman at one time said, "Now you should work harder  
10 because you didn't make any money." So apparently he  
11 didn't realize that we didn't make any money and it  
12 was really nothing because the money which we made  
13 was collected by the government.

14 Q. This was not in Germany; this  
15 population was Polish, actually.

16 A. No. It was -- no, the pop -- they --  
17 no. No. That's was -- the population was German  
18 there. The Auschwitz itself is in Poland, but it's a  
19 border area. And Auschwitz, I think, was always  
20 Polish. Yes, because it was called Oswiecim. And I  
21 remember the trains from Berlin went to Oswiecim all  
22 the time. But this area, it's a big industrial area  
23 with coal and other minerals, heavy industry, steel;  
24 that was before the First War, was German, most of it.  
25 And then after the First War, part of it was given  
26 over to Poland. But even in those areas, which was  
27 then Polish between these two walls, they were good  
28 German population.

1           Now, our camp was in an area which  
2 always belonged to Germany, so that was easy. So  
3 there we had all kinds of little experiences. Then I  
4 stayed there for, let's see, from October to the end  
5 of November, about six weeks. Then I got sick there.

6           Usually that was the end of anybody --  
7 everybody. But in the meantime, we had some French  
8 prisoners come into the camp, and they told us that  
9 the gas chambers were demolished. So we knew that it  
10 was already some close to the end. There was, see,  
11 there was -- yes. Then I remembered the man in  
12 charge, the inmate in charge of the bathrooms,  
13 latrines, or whatever, was from Berlin. And I did  
14 some things for him, you know -- some things which I  
15 thought I could do and I did.

16           So we were good friends. And then he  
17 said now -- oh, ja, that was in the -- in that, not  
18 in the camp itself, that was in the -- in that repair  
19 shop. So then he was, when we went on that night  
20 shift, then he said, "Come on at one o'clock, then I  
21 give you a paper to read." So I was informed, you  
22 know. I knew about the Battle of the Bulge right  
23 when it happened. So we knew, you know, we were  
24 informed.

25           But then when people -- that was the --  
26 must have been the end of December, sometime in  
27 December. Oh, ja, I was sick and I was in the sick  
28 bay there. And I had a bad foot or something. So

1 twice a week the SS medic came around and he decided  
2 who was healthy and who was still sick. So he said --  
3 he came around on Monday and then he said to this, he  
4 said Tuesday, Wednesday, nothing, you know. Okay.

5 So he came to me, and the doctor gave  
6 this story that I am all right again and I could be  
7 released from the sick bay immediately. But, of  
8 course, SS men wouldn't take any orders or any  
9 suggestions, even, from Romanian Jewish doctor. So  
10 he said, "No. Tomorrow." So (laughing) I had  
11 another day there. One of these little things, you  
12 know, which -- and I believe the doctor did it and  
13 knew what he did (laughing).

14 So then I then, after I got back  
15 there, into that trot there, they needed 150 people  
16 in another camp. And, of course, they sent everybody  
17 who wasn't in sick bay and who was not too healthy or  
18 whatever. And I was selected for that, too. So I  
19 got from there into the -- oh, ja, ja. This camp  
20 commander, he looked everybody over and he said, "No,  
21 you are still -- you look pretty good."

22 So he boxed into the chest there and I  
23 said, "Yes, (with a cough) sir." He said, "Ah, you  
24 are not good either." So he sent me out. He wanted  
25 to keep me there. So and -- but, of course, you were  
26 only number, figure, for these people. So I got to  
27 this next camp which was a little bit farther into  
28 Poland.

1 Q. Do you remember the name of the camp?

2 A. Jaworzno. And there, when we came  
3 there, they found out that one of us had scarlet  
4 fever. And, of course, we were very, very careful  
5 about the contagious diseases and epidemics. So this  
6 thing was like we were put into quarantine. And  
7 nobody could come near us and we couldn't go to work  
8 for three weeks. We were then put out and we had to  
9 do some little things. And besides this, the camp  
10 commander there in Jaworzno found that we were too  
11 weak to work and he sent us -- they sent him the  
12 wrong people.

13 And so we got some extra food and we  
14 got some extra...(END OF TAPE 1)

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1 INTERVIEW WITH: HERMAN HIRSCHFELD

2 DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 1984

3 PLACE: SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

4 TRANSCRIBERS: JUDITH MOORE

5 CARMELIN VALDIVIA

6

7 (START TAPE 2)

8

9 Q I wish you would. I wish you would.

10 A. That may come later.

11 So the first night we were there in  
12 Jaworzno, there came a man in the inmate's uniform,  
13 you know, with blue stripes. And he said, "Are  
14 Germans? Are, here, any Germans?"

15 And I say, "Ja, I am a German Jew.  
16 Ja, of course. We are reformed from Berlin."

17 "What's your name?"

18 "Hirschfeld."

19 "Oh, do you know Herbert Hirschfeld?"

20 I said, "That's my father."

21 "I was his student."

22 So there was one thing which was  
23 unique, I think, in the whole system of concentration  
24 camps. He was a dentist. And he and another dentist  
25 from Breslau saw that the SS people had to go for  
26 dental treatment, always, back to Auschwitz, which  
27 was 50 or not more. So they, somehow -- I think  
28 through SUS-A-SUS or ways and means, which always



1 me a little.

2                   And then, I think there for three  
3 weeks, I think, we had to stay in the barracks in  
4 quarantine. Then I went over to -- when I was  
5 detailed again to work on that power plant there.  
6 And there I was told that this man -- which I told  
7 you in beginning -- who came to Lodz and was sent  
8 back to a work camp, that he was in the camp next to  
9 us. So there you can see how communication really  
10 worked in these days, that you knew about these  
11 things.

12                   Then I -- there we had to stand, of  
13 course, again, every morning, you know, to be counted.  
14 Whether it was snowing or raining, whatever, we had  
15 to stand there. When it was snowing, then the SS  
16 made it very fast. And at Christmastime, on  
17 Christmas day, I think, the Jewish camp leader had  
18 disappeared with a dog of the SS commander, which was  
19 very funny. Under normal circumstances, there, every  
20 tenth would be just shot or something. Nothing  
21 happened to us. So apparently -- I mean, that's my  
22 idea. Apparently he was sent away because he --  
23 either he knew too much or the people were afraid  
24 that he would be killed by us when it was over.  
25 Which he would, apparently.

26                   And so we knew that the Stils were in  
27 last days, you know, last weeks. And then, about two  
28 weeks later, my friend the dentist said, "Oh, come.

1 I have to check you again." So he put me in the sick  
2 bay again.

3 And on that day, everybody would be  
4 put in the sick bay who had anything. And then we  
5 heard some commotion. And, of course, we couldn't  
6 see anything, we couldn't -- and then after, then, in  
7 the evening -- that was in the morning -- the  
8 evening, we heard the command to take the guards in,  
9 you know, to remove the guards from the camp. So we  
10 knew that was the end.

11 And everybody who could walk was sent  
12 on his way back into Germany on a very, very  
13 AT-MAY-WEEK. We called it the Death March then  
14 because first they had to walk to some kind of  
15 railroad station, I don't know where. Then they were  
16 put into these gondolas, you know, open freight cars  
17 in this very, very grim winter and snow and ice. And  
18 we talked to people who survived, and there was maybe  
19 one third of the people survived. Now, of course, I  
20 stayed there in the warm sick bay.

21 And then when this whole thing was  
22 over or when the camp was emptied from the people,  
23 except from us -- in other camps, by the way, they  
24 blew the sick bay up; which they didn't do in our  
25 case, as you can see again. And then we moved out of  
26 the sick bay into all kinds of -- into private rooms,  
27 more or less private rooms.

28 I had made some friends with some

1 Dutch people, and they didn't want me. I don't know.  
2 They weren't -- they were very exclusive, and I was  
3 Jew, not Dutch, you know? I was only German.

4 But in any event, then a few days  
5 later we heard the shells going back and forth over  
6 the camp and one shell hit the camp. And there this --  
7 my friend KOO-KOOKT was hit, two days before the  
8 thing was over. And then there was no question. You  
9 know, there was no talk about it. I was taken in his  
10 place in this time. So we were four Dutchmen there.  
11 And you won't believe it, but we had quite a bit to  
12 eat because the basement was full of staples, flour  
13 and --

14 Q. Let me ask you a question. You mean  
15 at that time there was no -- nobody was running the  
16 camp anymore? The guards were all removed and there  
17 was just nobody?

18 A. Nobody. We were just on our own, we  
19 were about -- the camp had a -- there were about  
20 3,000 people, a little over 3,000 in the camp. Now  
21 we were about 300. And we stayed all, more or less,  
22 in that sick bay. And many people died because they  
23 had to wear clothes (inaudible). Now, it was so  
24 bitter cold that -- and then, of course, the bathroom  
25 toilets just didn't work any more, you know. But  
26 since it was so cold, even the bacteria died. And  
27 that was our luck, you know. So we took just the  
28 dead people and stabled them outside in the snow.

1                   For water we had -- our snow outside  
2 was two feet high maybe -- and for water we had  
3 something which looked like a swimming pool. It was  
4 not a swimming pool; it was a pool for fire  
5 protection, you know, filled with water. And that,  
6 of course, that was maybe -- oh, maybe a foot thick  
7 with ice, so we could hack it up and get the water  
8 out of there. And since the camp was above a coal  
9 mine, we always had enough coal because part of the  
10 3,000 people went into the coal mine and always  
11 brought coal up there. So we had enough fuel, so we  
12 could heat our room and we could cook. And that went  
13 on for about a week.

14                   Then one day an SS man came in and  
15 said, "Who wants to come with me?" So we asked,  
16 "Where to?" He said, "Back home." So we just  
17 laughed at him and he left.

18                   So that was already -- no, that was --  
19 then a few days later, the first Russian patrol came  
20 in, and he gave -- he looked very shabby. And so we --  
21 and the first question he asked was, "Do you have any  
22 margarine?" He didn't ask for butter, he asked for  
23 margarine. And the funny thing is we could give it  
24 to him because there were, as I told you, there were  
25 staples in the basement. So we gave him something.

26                   And then we had all kinds of little  
27 experiences with the Russians. They brought us on  
28 then to the next larger city, and we were there in an

1 auxiliary hospital. It used to be a school. And in  
2 the basement of the school, there were all kinds of  
3 books, among them Mein Kempf, biography of Hitler.  
4 That was the first time I read it. And then, okay,  
5 then it was over.

6 Q. Now, I have, then, before we continue  
7 with what happened right after the war, I want to ask  
8 a couple of questions about camps. Number one, in  
9 some camps, they had underground resistance movements.  
10 Were you aware -- were there any movements like this  
11 in the camps where you were and were you aware of  
12 them?

13 A. Yes. In Jaworzno, the last camp I was  
14 approached by somebody. If I would be willing to  
15 help organizing the resistance cell in my barracks  
16 among the newcomers, yes. So there was definitely a  
17 resistance movement. We never had the time to do  
18 anything about it because they left before we could  
19 do anything.

20 Q. And my second question is: through  
21 all these sufferings that you had to go through in  
22 Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, did you ever -- did you  
23 believe that you would survive? Did you have that  
24 faith and that hope?

25 A. Up to a certain point. And then, that  
26 was about the beginning of January 1945 back in  
27 Jaworzno. There I could figure out I would last  
28 another three weeks. But after two weeks, I was

1 saved. So I never found out about the three weeks.

2 Q. Now what happened to your wife? She  
3 was in Auschwitz and you saw her there?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And then you were transferred to  
6 another camp; what happened with her?

7 A. Now, she was, again, selected to get --  
8 to go to another working camp. But somehow she was  
9 very lucky because that camp was not under the  
10 jurisdiction -- was not a satellite camp of  
11 Auschwitz, so she never got a number. It was a  
12 satellite camp of another camp called Grossrosen,  
13 which was a little bit to the west of Kielce. And  
14 there she was put to work in a textile mill under  
15 very, very restricted conditions.

16 They lived on one floor of that mill,  
17 that plant. Didn't get very much to eat, and had a  
18 very tough time. Were not quite as lucky as I was,  
19 that the Russians came there already -- came to me  
20 already in January, you know, the VE day was in May,  
21 you should, you know, consider that. And so there it  
22 was such a dead corner, nobody really cared about  
23 that that she had to suffer there until the beginning  
24 of May, a few days before VE day. And then she was  
25 free, she wasn't in that way liberated, you know. I  
26 mean, just as the SS left the PORTS came in or the  
27 Russians.

28 And then there was some turmoil. She

1 went to, again, to another larger town and didn't  
2 know what to do. She met a Russian soldier or  
3 officer, I don't know exactly. And, in any event,  
4 she asked him for help, which was the wrongest thing  
5 to do because they just loved to rape girls, even in  
6 those circumstances. But he was, I think, again, one  
7 of these very few good people there, and apparently  
8 he was Jewish, too. So he looked after her a little  
9 bit, and then she met some people, non-Jewish people,  
10 and went on a trek through the country because she  
11 want to go back to meet me again. She hope at least  
12 that she could find me. And, which she eventually  
13 did.

14 Q. So what happened with you after the  
15 Russians came in, you know, and you were sort of  
16 liberated? What happened then?

17 A. Liberated is a very good word. You  
18 put it very nicely (laughing). Now I was in this  
19 auxiliary hospital, or we were in this auxiliary  
20 hospital and then, of course, we had at first we  
21 didn't get too much to eat and we complained about it  
22 and we were told no, that is not possible, you cannot  
23 eat so much because then you get sick and your  
24 stomach have to get used to eating. But, of course,  
25 we didn't tell them that we had eaten there all kinds  
26 of stuff there which we had found there in the  
27 basement.

28 But in any event, the food was a

1 little bit better than afterwards and then we got a  
2 choice, now many of us only a few were from Germany.  
3 There were some Dutch people, some French, some --  
4 one Greek, and many Poles. And, of course, the Poles  
5 just had to go back -- the Hungarians were there, too.  
6 They just went home. But what about us?

7           So we heard that we could go another  
8 camp and then we would be transported around Europe  
9 or something because Germany was still at war at that  
10 time and but I had enough of camps, so I didn't want  
11 to go into another camp. And so, I stayed there.  
12 Eventually this hospital was destroyed or very much  
13 smaller. There was a small Jewish community already  
14 there and I went there; I lived there for a while.

15           Q.           Where was it exactly, the place?

16           A.           The place was called Sosnowiec, which  
17 was right across the border from the German part of  
18 Kielce, but it's a big difference. It's pretty  
19 close, about, not quite ten miles from Katowice, and  
20 Katowice was built up by the Germans, it was Polish  
21 then, between the two where it was and is now Polish  
22 again. And that was a European city. Sosnowiec was  
23 already in Asia, in the Orient. There was really big  
24 difference. And so I stayed there, as I say, then I  
25 stayed there in the Jewish community. I got some  
26 food from them. We just -- there were then some  
27 other people like me who wanted to go back to Germany  
28 and we found there were two ladies who spoke Russian

1 and Polish, which was very good. And then came the  
2 first, of course, newspapers were all in Polish  
3 language. So we had to use an interpreter to find  
4 out what happened.

5                   So when we read about the death of  
6 Roosevelt, we thought, "Oh, no. It will go on and  
7 on, I guess." So we were kind of desperate but then  
8 we heard that Berlin was taken by the Russians and  
9 then a week later -- oh, that was celebrated by the  
10 Poles. They shot all the ammunition they had and  
11 were drunk, you know, there was -- from the 1st of  
12 May, which was a national holiday, until the -- this  
13 was a whole week, you know, when there was -- when  
14 Berlin was captured. And then VE Day, and then came  
15 the next Thursday was Ascension Day, which was  
16 Catholic holiday.

17                   And so these first 10 days of May were  
18 just one celebration. Everybody was drunk, including  
19 the police chief because we went to the police chief  
20 and asked him if he couldn't do anything for us that  
21 we could go back to Ger -- now we want to go back  
22 home, you know, because things were different now.  
23 And he couldn't help us. He offered us a job in a  
24 camp, a concentration camp for Germans, but we didn't  
25 want that. I had enough of camps, I still had enough  
26 of camps.

27                   Then we went to the Red Cross in  
28 Katowice and there men asked us, "Are you a member of

1 the United Nations?"

2 "No," you know.

3 "Well, then, I cannot help you."

4 So, we were there, two or three people  
5 there, we went out, and he said, "Just a moment. Of  
6 course, that's the official answer I give you. What  
7 you do on your own, that's your business."

8 So we made up some identification  
9 papers in Polish, and had from the Jewish community,  
10 you know, and then we get Russian translation made  
11 for us of that and with that we went to the railroad  
12 station in Katowice and got on a train. Of course,  
13 we didn't have to pay anything, and we went first to  
14 Posen and the next day, we went to Berlin.

15 Q. I have a question here. I'm sorry I'm  
16 interrupting you, but you keep talking about the  
17 Jewish community in Katowice and I'm really surprised  
18 that there was any Jewish community left at that  
19 point.

20 A. No, it was not left, it was back. We  
21 were back.

22 Q. They came back from out of the camps?

23 A. Out of the camps, from underground,  
24 from wherever -- out of the woodwork. People like  
25 me, you know, who just gathered them together and  
26 there and especially these Poles there in Sosnowic  
27 they were -- this was always Polish, so there were  
28 some people, I don't know how many, there were not

1 too many, but people who came and then they were in  
2 all these towns. There was one center where you  
3 could go and register and look if somebody came  
4 through who you knew or your wife. And so I went  
5 through and looked for my wife's name. Of course, I  
6 didn't know that she was so far away. But it sounds  
7 very simple, it's not quite as simple and I could  
8 embellish and elaborate for hours on that.

9 Q. Well, we're not finished yet, we're  
10 going to continue. So after that you got on the  
11 train and you went to Berlin?

12 A. Yes. And that was the only week where  
13 trains went through to Berlin; otherwise, we would  
14 have to -- we figured out, you know, there was inside  
15 Poland, there was already train. Trains were running  
16 (inaudible). So, but we didn't know from Poland and  
17 Poland, as it was between the wall, and Berlin how it  
18 was there. So, but that was only about 100 miles.  
19 And we figured now we would be able to walk 100 miles.  
20 But as it happened, during that week, there were  
21 direct trains from Poland to Berlin.

22 Q. Okay, so you came to Berlin. What did  
23 you find there?

24 A. Ruins. But that's not what you want  
25 to hear. We arrived in an Eastern suburb, and we  
26 went there to the BOWLES office, and we got some food  
27 and some shelter for one night, and the next day, I  
28 had made an appointment, you know, after the war we

1 will meet at the house of some friends in the  
2 Northern suburb of Berlin, non-Jewish friends, which  
3 is obvious. And so I went on my way and it was  
4 really -- I mean Berlin was really a shambles at that  
5 time, but they were the Russian soldiers, who then  
6 wanted to get you to work, you know. They came and  
7 said HOBOTSKY, HOBOTSKY And so I showed my big thing  
8 and apparently he could read a little bit so he said,  
9 he gave me a slap on the shoulder and said,  
10 "Tovarish," and off, like that, again.

11 So I made it -- at first I found that  
12 there was already a Jewish community in Berlin again.  
13 And even the Jewish -- you know, there was a Jewish  
14 old age home, which was used -- in one street, there  
15 was on one side there was a Jewish hospital and on  
16 the other side Jewish old age home. And that was  
17 used as a center, as an office and so on. And so I  
18 went there and checked in with these people and at  
19 least so that they had my name there that I'm back.  
20 There were people who, either they lived underground  
21 or they were mixed marriages, they were not touched  
22 or they came back from the camps or so in the  
23 meantime. And so then I went farther on my way and  
24 ended up there in the home of our friend, and when my --  
25 when everything -- not everything, almost everything,  
26 was over because then we hadn't found each other yet.  
27 So about a month later, I went to another friend of  
28 hers, girlfriend of hers.

1                   In the meantime, I had already  
2 discovered where my bicycle was at, so I could ride  
3 around Berlin on a bicycle. It was very nice, you  
4 know, very much better than to wait for the public  
5 transportation, which wasn't there -- all but quite  
6 there. And I visited this girlfriend there and I was  
7 just ready to leave when she called me and said,  
8 "Look out the window."

9                   And there was she, standing there. So  
10 she made it. She had made it to Berlin. She knew  
11 that we would meet there, but she didn't know how to  
12 get out there without any transportation. And that  
13 night we made it back to where I lived, too.

14                   And I think the next day I got a job  
15 at a girls' high school. I had check, of course. I  
16 had checked with the school boards in these different  
17 boroughs and I was told, "Oh, right now we don't have  
18 anything," which was in the beginning, and three  
19 weeks later, or two weeks later, I went in -- No, I  
20 said, "Oh, now that is what you do for the victims of  
21 fascism," and so on, you know. And people who come  
22 from the concentration camp. and I was pretty, I  
23 think -- anyway, the next day I got a job. Very nice  
24 school.

25                   Q.           This was in Berlin? In what section  
26 of Berlin? With the Americans or with the Russians  
27 or with the British?

28                   A.           At that time it was -- everything was

1 Russian. And then it became British and after short  
2 while became French. It was in the French sector, it  
3 was in the Northern part of Berlin. Very nice  
4 school, and the next -- I don't know if I should say  
5 that on the tape -- the next year and a half was one  
6 of the happiest times of my life.

7 Q. But you were still in Berlin? You  
8 still lived in Berlin.

9 A. In the school, in the -- as a teacher  
10 in that school.

11 Q. How long did you live in Berlin?

12 A. Afterwards, until beginning of '47, for  
13 a year and a half, about.

14 Q. And then you emigrated to the States?

15 A. Then we emigrated to the States, yes.  
16 Yes. So then, of course, I -- we were both active in  
17 the Jewish community. My wife especially as a singer  
18 in a so-called synagogue choir, which consisted of  
19 four people and the -- and I became then a little  
20 active, too, in the youth organization because there  
21 were some young people, too. And then the American  
22 Jewish Army chaplain found out that there is a  
23 synagogue with a choir. And he asked the choir to  
24 sing in his services at the chaplain center. so we  
25 got in touch with the chaplain center there and we  
26 went there and there I learned my English. And then  
27 we had to go through all that red tape to come here,  
28 you know.

1 Q. Okay, before we finish this interview,  
2 is there anything that you would like to add that you  
3 missed or some -- or --

4 A. Oh, I missed quite a bit. I missed --  
5 and I must say, maybe I glossed over the real hard  
6 times in the camp, especially there in Auschwitz, and  
7 in the next one in Gleiwitz which before I came to  
8 Jaworzno. And there were, there were things which  
9 are (inaudible) I think you are tired, too.

10 Q. That's all right.

11 A. So it's -- there were all kinds of  
12 little experiences and I don't know. What do you  
13 have in mind?

14 Q. Well, whatever you want to tell us so  
15 that it remains on tape and so that we have it for,  
16 like for historical documents. that's what we -- the  
17 tapes are for. I mean, I can't decide for you  
18 because I don't have your experience and I don't know  
19 what you want to say.

20 A. Of course, there in these camps, I  
21 never saw any executions, let's say, you know, many  
22 people saw that thing. I never saw it, but I saw --  
23 once when we marched out to work -- which was when I  
24 worked in the railroad repair shop, we had to look at  
25 two dead inmates, who were shot trying to flee, you  
26 know. I mean, little things which we tried to forget  
27 and which -- but they are somehow relevant in one way  
28 or another.

1           And it's very hard to describe the  
2 atmosphere in these camps, the atmosphere of fear and  
3 of -- I don't know if it's despair. Now, when I was  
4 still in Auschwitz, we were still there only a few  
5 days then we met a young man, he was still a kid --  
6 maybe 17, 18, and he said he was in all kinds of  
7 camps, wherever. And so we asked him which was the  
8 best one, and he said, "Believe me, wherever you are --  
9 wherever you are not is better." That is, I think,  
10 that's a very true statement of things, and that is,  
11 I think, that we can take it there and --

12           Q.           Do you ever talk about your experience  
13 to other people or are you kind of -- blocked it out?

14           A.           That is another question which we --  
15 where we are different from other people because we  
16 can talk among each other about it. And so we can  
17 talk about it even to other people, not that we try  
18 to force it or that we volunteer. And we know --  
19 okay, let's say we talk to other people about it, but  
20 we don't want it here. But we talk about our  
21 experiences, especially the experiences which we had  
22 together, sometimes just in a word or two, you know,  
23 in renewal.

24           Q.           Did you attend the gathering in  
25 Jerusalem or in Washington?

26           A.           No. That is -- that's another thing.  
27 I have my theory about that. These are mostly people  
28 who didn't make it together, and they are eager to

1 meet people and talk to people who went through the  
2 same thing they did. We are very fortunate that we  
3 don't need that. And that sounds a little snobbish,  
4 let's say, but it isn't, you know. It is just a very  
5 plain explanation. Not that we don't want to meet  
6 those people. But we don't need it.

7 Q. Okay, if there is nothing that you  
8 would like to add, I guess then we will --

9 A. I don't know. Of course, I will get  
10 all these ideas in bed and I will give you a call and  
11 then say, "Now you have to come back."

12 Q. Okay. All right. I mean, if you  
13 would like --

14 A. But, of course, you know there are all  
15 kinds of things which I didn't mention which may be  
16 important, but what can you do in two and a half  
17 hours?

18 Q. Well, I'll tell you, you think about  
19 it and if, really, you feel that you know there is  
20 some additional things that you would like to tell  
21 us, you can always call the library or come.

22 A. Of course, what I said about my wife,  
23 that was very brief and I think I don't know what  
24 happened there when she was on her own. But, in  
25 general, you know, maybe we are a little exceptional.  
26 First, in this thing, in the fact that we found each  
27 other again, and so many things happened to us which  
28 didn't happen to other people, and which were really

1 out of the ordinary. And I'm thinking of meeting  
2 this dentist and other things where we could see that  
3 our guardian angel's working.

4 Q. Well, each experience is, of course,  
5 unique. There is one more question I wanted to ask  
6 you. You mentioned your mother. Were there any  
7 other members of your family that went through camps  
8 and what happened to them?

9 A. Oh, yes.

10 Q. You know, whether they survived or not  
11 was my question.

12 A. No. First, there is, I think I  
13 mentioned that my mother-in-law, her mother, was sent  
14 to Riga and never arrived there. So that's number  
15 one. Then I had a sister with a son who was, at that  
16 time, on time of deportation about 20 years old. We  
17 were sent to Auschwitz. that we know. My sister --  
18 or we never heard from my sister. My nephew wrote  
19 once or twice, a letter or postcard, from Auschwitz  
20 to my uncle, who was married to a non-Jew and lived  
21 in Lodz. And so we know that he was alive for some  
22 time until maybe the end of 1943, but then everything  
23 is lost about that. And that is my immediate family.

24 This uncle of mine who was married to  
25 a non-Jew, he came in the beginning of '45, I think, to  
26 Theresienstadt, but he survived and died when he was  
27 about 90 years old. So, I mean -- my mother, by the  
28 way, was about 75 when she died. There was a sister

1 of my mother's in Theresienstadt, who survived. She  
2 lived with us for a short time in Berlin until we  
3 went in here to United States and she died in old age  
4 home. And one of my father's sisters came to  
5 Theresienstadt, but was shipped out immediately  
6 afterwards, so she died, too.

7                   So, you see, we have a nice catalog,  
8 you know, from my wife's family, I think from both  
9 her father and her mother's side, were people who  
10 didn't come back -- were quite a few.

11                Q.           Okay. Thank you very much. And in  
12 the future, if you want to add something, just let us  
13 know.

14                A.           Okay.

15                                (THE INTERVIEW WAS CONCLUDED)

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