

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Bernard Offen

2 INTERVIEWER: Joel Neuberg

3 DATE: June 6, 1985

4 TRANSCRIBER: Bonnie J. Reynolds

5

6 MR. NEUBERG: And what is your name?

7 MR. OFFEN: Bernard Offen.

8 MR. NEUBERG: And where were you born and when were
9 you born?

10 MR. OFFEN: Well, I was born in Breck-els, Poland, in
11 1931. I am not quite sure of the month or date but my
12 current official birthday is March 7 but my brothers say
13 that is not the one.

14 MR. NEUBERG: So you have -- you have -- this is your
15 brother that you were dis- -- you were the same mother, same
16 father?

17 MR. OFFEN: Yes. They are older brothers of mine. I
18 was the oldest of the four. There was a sister in between.

19 MR. NEUBERG: You were born, right, '31.

20 What are your earliest memories of in Cracow?

21 MR. OFFEN: The earliest memories are I think about
22 five years of age about the holidays su-peem and Sukkot,
23 especially Sukkot and Passover. We used to build a big
24 su-saw.

25 MR. NEUBERG: Was your family religious?

26 MR. OFFEN: Sure. Yeah. I wouldn't -- I wouldn't
27 call us orthodox. We were religious, observing the holidays
28 and going to the Synagogue but my father was clean shaven.

1 He was a salesman by -- professional salesman but actually
2 in a trade and that was a shoemaker. He was a shoemaker and
3 basically we also survived during the war sometimes because
4 of his abilities. And I was learning with him to be a
5 shoemaker. And it was just the other day I remembered
6 making shoes. I could build a pair of shoes if I had the
7 tools. I really could.

8 MR. NEUBERG: Was -- So this life went on -- I mean,
9 you were five. So that was in '36. Did you -- Had you
10 experienced any anti-Semitism? What was your contacts with
11 gentiles like?

12 MR. OFFEN: Well, I was going to -- I wasn't going to
13 school at five but I was going to Hagar. I think I started
14 a little later going to Hagar. When I started going to
15 Polish school, which was probably about seven -- That's
16 right. I think I was seven. I always experienced
17 anti-Semitism growing up. We lived in an area that was a
18 lot of Jewish people but it was kind of a mixed area,
19 probably more Jews in there than non-Jews, and being chased
20 by Polish kids, throwing rocks at us, you know, chasing us
21 with sticks. There was always, always that going on.

22 MR. NEUBERG: Your first language was Polish. You
23 spoke Polish at home?

24 MR. OFFEN: Polish and Yiddish.

25 MR. NEUBERG: And later you studied in Yiddish and at
26 Hagar you studied in Yiddish?

27 MR. OFFEN: In Yiddish and Hagar was in Yiddish.

28 And my childhood I think was a happy one. We were

1 very poor. All of us lived in a room about this size, all
2 six of us, a little wider I think but that was the house.
3 That was the apartment actually.

4 Grandmother lived in the same apartment house, around
5 a part of this apartment. Father didn't get home for
6 Shabbat and he, he always did but sometimes late with the
7 money to buy the food and everything for Shabbat, there was
8 always Grandma. And so I -- My childhood was a happy one.
9 It was kind of -- yeah.

10 MR. NEUBERG: So you would have been about eight
11 years old in September of '39?

12 MR. OFFEN: Yeah.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Do you remember the fighting, the
14 actual invading of Poland?

15 MR. OFFEN: Well, I remember some of it. I didn't
16 see any of that fighting between the German and Polish army.
17 I didn't see any of that but I remember the Germans marching
18 into Cracow. And prior to that actually when the --

19 And there was rumors and there was also shortages of
20 food and a relative of my -- not sure if it was my father or
21 grandmother's -- was expelled from Germany. That must have
22 been around '38. It was close to the war he came to live
23 with us. I remember that but much closer to the time of the
24 actual war when the fighting was happening in Poland. I saw
25 planes in the sky and they were both around Cracow and all
26 kinds of rumors and the enemies. There was all kinds of
27 stuff going on. But the first time that I actually saw the
28 Germans was when -- Well, the war came quickly to an end and

1 they were marching through Cracow. In this case it was
2 Cracow and Pa-goosh-a. Pa-goosh-a was the suburb of Cracow
3 and there was a curfew put on and we had to stay indoors
4 while the Germans were marching with their horses and tanks
5 and trucks. And it seems they were marching for days right
6 through town. And I wander out from the street -- I was a
7 little kid -- to see. It was exciting to see, you know, to
8 look what was going on. I wanted to get a closer look and
9 that was the first time I got experience being shot at.

10 MR. NEUBERG: They shot at you?

11 MR. OFFEN: They shot at me.

12 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

13 MR. OFFEN: I don't know if he, you know,
14 deliberately missed or whatever. I remember I ran off and
15 it was -- it was a big hole in the brick wall where the
16 bullet hit. I remember that. I went back to Poland in '81.
17 I went to look at that and this wall was gone. So, that was
18 my first experience.

19 MR. NEUBERG: When the Nazis took over, what happened
20 to you? What did you do, your family?

21 MR. OFFEN: Well, before then actually the Nazis
22 started marching through Cracow this little incident I told
23 you about. My father ran off because of what we heard what
24 they do with men. It wasn't so much Jews but what they did
25 with men. They were killing and -- but there was a special
26 fear we had -- we as Jews had too. So my father ran off.
27 He was going to run off to Russia. After some debate in the
28 family it was decided he was to try and escape to Russia.

1 And he did. And after several days -- I am not sure how
2 many. I think it was two, three days. -- he returned.
3 Said he couldn't get through. I am not sure if the decision
4 was he wanted to stay with the family. I am not sure
5 whether he could get through.

6 MR. NEUBERG: Or how it happened.

7 MR. OFFEN: Yeah. I remember him coming back.

8 And within several weeks after the Germans coming in
9 there were all kinds of regulations put in effect, the
10 curfew for one thing. The Jews couldn't --

11 My timing is not that good about when these effects
12 started taking place. It could have been months --

13 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

14 MR. OFFEN: -- before these. I remember events more
15 than dates.

16 MR. NEUBERG: Sure. That is fine. We are not
17 interested in pinning it down. Just want to know what
18 happened.

19 MR. OFFEN: So there were regulations about Jews not
20 being able to move all over town or ride in the streetcars
21 and ration cards had to be issued. You had to be registered
22 and shortages of all kinds of foods. But basically we were
23 still together in our house, in our apartment, the family.
24 My grandmother disappeared one of the first and then the
25 ghetto was started.

26 MR. NEUBERG: Your grandmother disappeared. You
27 don't know what happened to her?

28 MR. OFFEN: I don't know what happened to her and she

1 didn't know before. And her brother, I remember him very
2 well. He was 104 and he had a big, long beard and he was
3 pretty healthy man. He tended a great big garden. I loved
4 going over there. And I am not sure if she just died within
5 that time or whether disappeared but I know grandmother
6 disappeared. That was one of the first acts within the
7 ghetto. That was a larger ghetto in Cracow. Then well,
8 life was -- ceased to be normal. There was a lot of fear.
9 There was a lot of people disappearing.

10 MR. NEUBERG: Did you -- Were you conscious of
11 specifically being afraid that someone would come and take
12 you away?

13 MR. OFFEN: Absolutely. Absolutely. I remember on
14 some of the raids were Germans (inaudible) into the ghetto
15 with trucks to haul people away and I was hidden, you know,
16 under the beds in the cold cellar, wherever hiding place and
17 needs to be able to peek out and see what was going on and I
18 saw this German with his gun and (inaudible). And there
19 was, you know, the constant fear. Constant fear. I think
20 there was also that fear about the anti-Semitism that I
21 experienced at the younger age, you know, that started kind
22 of escalating, you know, the fear part.

23 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

24 MR. OFFEN: And I am trying to think what happened
25 then.

26 Uh, we started -- we had to register for labor and so
27 I got to be in one of those labor battalions where every day
28 we coming out from the ghetto to work, cleaning streets or

1 whatever. And I was still with my father (inaudible). Put
2 in the same labor gang and sometimes later on I got to work
3 in a -- some kind of a salvage yard, German military salvage
4 yard where trucks and other war equipment was being salvaged
5 from. I think it was from the Russians (inaudible) But now
6 I am talking about, I think --

7 MR. NEUBERG: Latter part of '41 (Inaudible)?

8 MR. OFFEN: Yeah.

9 MR. NEUBERG: Okay.

10 MR. OFFEN: And finding food, pieces of food here,
11 there which I used to stash away to bring home.

12 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

13 MR. OFFEN: And so we were still -- however were
14 still as an unit.

15 MR. NEUBERG: Living in the same place.

16 MR. OFFEN: In the same place. My brothers were,
17 however, going out into different labor batallion life and
18 then there were shootings going on in the ghetto. There
19 were raids especially. And I remember one particular raid
20 where this old man got shot off the street and -- and when
21 he fell, he hit the stairs with his head. It was like
22 concrete or some steps and broke off a piece of it. When I
23 went back in '81, I looked at that and I told them that. It
24 kind of stands out in my mind.

25 I also worked in a brush factory. I used to make
26 brushes. We have them with wire and bristles. I started
27 already escaping from the ghetto and smuggling food to the
28 house.

1 MR. NEUBERG: Where would you get the food?

2 MR. OFFEN: I went out into the Polish market
3 place --

4 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

5 MR. OFFEN: -- and bought stuff and traded and stuff.
6 I was still flexible, quick, you know.

7 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

8 MR. OFFEN: And I used to bribe the guards or sneak
9 under the wire. It was still fairly loose. Still guards
10 around but, you know, if you knew what was happening,
11 then --

12 That time was around '41 that both my brothers
13 disappeared and didn't hear from them for quite awhile.
14 Then we heard from some other people that they were in a
15 salt mine called Na-nee-ch-saw not too far from Cracow.
16 That's all we heard.

17 And then the ghetto was constantly -- there were
18 raids happening. The population was shrinking, was reduced
19 to much smaller size in the area and we had to move. We had
20 to move to a new location with all our belongings. So my
21 father, sister, my mother -- father, sister and myself
22 remained together still and moved to this new place in the
23 ghetto. And my father and I were doing -- repairing shoes,
24 you know, and that was helping a great, great deal to stay
25 alive.

26 MR. NEUBERG: You were repairing shoes for --

27 MR. OFFEN: For people, you know.

28 MR. NEUBERG: For anybody?

1 MR. OFFEN: Sure. And on one of those occasions when
2 I -- when I went out in the ghetto to buy food, you know,
3 and bring it back, when I came back my mother and sister
4 disappeared.

5 It's terrible. It's a painful process to think about
6 that.

7 So, -- So when I got home from one of those suggling
8 expeditions, they were gone and my father told me what
9 happened to them. And there was another raid and they were
10 rounded up and disappeared.

11 MR. NEUBERG: Were they -- At that time were they --
12 Did you know they were taking people out of town or
13 were they taking people -- were they transporting them in
14 any way?

15 MR. OFFEN: They were transporting them and the
16 rumors were they were being transported for work in the
17 east. That was the only thing we knew.

18 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

19 MR. OFFEN: There were people being shot here, there
20 but not in mass. Nothing -- nothing like that we knew
21 about. And after each raid in the ghetto people received
22 letters or postcards, people who disappeared and
23 basically -- basic message in there was things are hard but
24 we're alive and, you know --

25 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

26 MR. OFFEN: -- and we're all right. Made them write
27 these letters and they were dead by the time people received
28 them. This is all hindsight information. So, -- so they

1 disappeared and we didn't know where to. And my information
2 was up to several months ago that they were taken to
3 My-dawn-a. That's where they were killed. I just talked
4 with my brother recently. He says he's got some information
5 that possibly they might have been sent to Auschwitz. So I
6 don't know.

7 So my father and I continued in the ghetto for --
8 This must have been already '42, '43.

9 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

10 MR. OFFEN: And we worked in a shoe factory and then
11 we were ordered to report to this place for transportation
12 to a different camp, to Plaszow, which was a nearby camp.
13 And so --

14 Pieces of information are kind of falling into place
15 now. Like I didn't remember getting from the ghetto to the
16 Plaszow camp a long time and it just came to me as I was
17 thinking about that.

18 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

19 MR. OFFEN: And we marched to -- with the belongings
20 that they allowed us to take to the Plaszow camp. And then
21 my father and I continued working in this barracks, shoe
22 factory and that was real close by to an execution pit. It
23 was kind of up on the hill and --

24 Then what happened was that I was separated from my
25 father. They were rounding up a whole bunch of kids and
26 they put us on the horsedrawn wagon and taken us out of the
27 camp and I heard that they were taking us to the cemetery to
28 shoot us. It was then I jumped from the wagon and hid out

1 for a few days. I heard an uncle of mine was working on
2 this construction site. They were building some bridges or
3 railroad. There were some -- They were demolishing some
4 houses for the bricks and whatever.

5 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

6 MR. OFFEN: So I heard that he was working there. So
7 I hid out on that site and in the morning when he came with
8 his labor gang, you know, they were brought to the site. So
9 I contacted Uncle Myer. He didn't know what to do with me.
10 So I remained at the site for a few days. And he had no
11 idea what I could do. And then it was decided I should try
12 and sneak into this camp he was in, sneak into a
13 concentration camp.

14 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

15 MR. OFFEN: This was really (inaudible).

16 MR. NEUBERG: Well, it's a way to live.

17 MR. OFFEN: And today, or a number of years ago when
18 I was applying for my pension from the German government I
19 told, you know, I was in this camp -- this camp was U-log.
20 By the way that was near Plaszow. They said, "Well, we
21 don't have records of this one and we should not mention
22 that even because it doesn't coincide with them and they
23 will give you problems and all that. Just like I had to
24 deny my experience of what was happening to me.

25 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

26 MR. OFFEN: I had to lie.

27 MR. NEUBERG: Right. Information to fit their
28 pattern?

1 MR. OFFEN: To fit their pattern.

2 So, I snuck into this camp U-log and I remained there
3 for -- I don't know. It was at least six to nine months.
4 At least in my memory it was six to nine months.

5 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

6 MR. OFFEN: But for several weeks I had to remain
7 hidden and like the whole camp emptied out in the morning.
8 They all went out to work. And I had to go up into the
9 rafters and lay very, very still because they were
10 patrolling the camp with dogs. And so I was laying there
11 curled up. And this is one of my still painful experiences
12 was laying out there, as I was right in front of a window.
13 And behind the window they were executing people. So it was
14 like I was watching and they were -- they were Lithuanians.
15 And so that went on for several weeks.

16 So finally they were able to -- to get me on the
17 rolls because, you know, there were people dying. They had
18 to do some switching -- their names anyways. And I was able
19 to be officially there.

20 It was soon after that that I contracted typhoid
21 fever -- typhus. To this day it is a mystery to me how I
22 got through that one. I know my Uncle Myer got me some
23 medicine and he say -- I don't know what happened to him.

24 Anyway, so I was at -- I was given kind of a light
25 job out of the camp. I was tending -- tending pigs for the
26 Germans. There was another young boy with me. I forgot his
27 name. So like we were -- some of the stuff that was being
28 fed to the pigs we ate, you know, and brought back some

1 to -- to whoever, you know, my uncle and --

2 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

3 MR. OFFEN: So that was like work for me. And I
4 don't know how it is that --

5 A pattern of being given light work was true in a
6 number of instances throughout my camp experience, like
7 someone was looking out for me, you know. Like when I was
8 marching with other people they usually put me in the
9 middle. We were marching five abreast. Always five
10 abreast. They put me in the middle so I didn't get hit and
11 kicked as easily. Not as easily as --

12 MR. NEUBERG: Do you feel like people were doing this
13 because you were a child or younger and were taking care of
14 you?

15 MR. OFFEN: Absolutely. It is absolutely clear to me
16 that I was -- or I represented a son or daughter for them
17 and they gave me little pieces of bread or some pieces of
18 clothing or put me in the center, you know, where I won't be
19 hit as much or -- you know. It's like they were looking out
20 for me. And that through the process of helping me they
21 were hoping they would survive in some way at least. If I
22 survived that I will --

23 MR. NEUBERG: You're in U-log?

24 MR. OFFEN: U-log, yeah.

25 So then that camp was being liquidated and what
26 happened is that I was marched back with the other people,
27 back to Plaszow. So I was reunited with my father.

28 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

1 MR. OFFEN: And again I worked in the shoe factory.
2 It was then also that I saw these trucks coming with all
3 kinds of people and they were being executed at the top of
4 the hill, behind the barracks. And being still the curious
5 kid, I walked up to the top of the hill and, you know, when
6 the SS and Germans went away, I saw the sight of bodies
7 burning. They stacked them up like cordwood, with wood and
8 people and set it all aflame. It burned for days. For
9 days.

10 That's another time that was a very fearful time for
11 me when I really saw that. I really closed down like --
12 It's like a horse that has blinders on, you know.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

14 MR. OFFEN: Like I had my hands up, you know. It was
15 like seeing -- seeing just a very narrow thing. You don't
16 look to the side. And I was operating like that for a long
17 time I think. And then when Plaszow was being liquidated,
18 we were sent to Mauthausen. Of course didn't know. We were
19 on the train a long time. And my information is also now
20 after the war that my brothers Nathan and Sam were also put
21 into the same cattle car with my father and I. And to this
22 day I don't remember them in the same cattle car.
23 Apparently from this salt mine Ya-leach-ca they were -- and
24 they had them by first name, you know, -- last name rather,
25 Offen, all in that car. They had the system.

26 MR. NEUBERG: But they came from this salt mine all
27 the way back to where you were?

28 MR. OFFEN: Somehow they were put along the way some

1 place.

2 MR. NEUBERG: Right. Okay.

3 MR. OFFEN: You know.

4 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

5 MR. OFFEN: They had their systems going alphabetical
6 order.

7 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

8 MR. OFFEN: So we ended up at Mauthausen, which is in
9 Austria.

10 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

11 MR. OFFEN: I remember my brothers in Mauthausen but
12 I don't remember them at the --

13 And we were separated there and my brothers went to
14 Gusen which is not too far from Mauthausen. I don't exactly
15 know where that --

16 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

17 MR. OFFEN: And my father and I were sent to
18 Auschwitz. So -- Again journeying in the cattle car. I
19 remember there's about three, four days.

20 MR. NEUBERG: Do you know when this was? '44?

21 MR. OFFEN: This was already '44. This was '44.

22 MR. NEUBERG: Was it spring or winter? Do you know
23 what time it was?

24 MR. OFFEN: This was summer.

25 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

26 MR. OFFEN: This was summer. I remember heat. I
27 remember sunshine. No snow. And we're sent to Auschwitz.
28 So we -- so we ended up in -- in Auschwitz. And my father

1 went -- depends which way we are looking at this we were
2 coming when we got out of the cattle car. We lined up and
3 my father went to the left and I went to the right and that
4 was the last time I saw my father.

5 I even with everything was happening, I still did not
6 know what was happening. There were dead people in the
7 cattle car but we had no idea about the kind of mass
8 killings that were going on. Perhaps my father knew. I
9 don't know. I didn't. I found out what happened to my
10 father soon afterwards from other prisoners.

11 The word "prisoner" doesn't kind of fit. Prison
12 means being punished for something you did. So --

13 MR. NEUBERG: Inmates.

14 MR. OFFEN: Inmates. From their talking together as
15 to what happened to my father. I remember the chimneys
16 belching fire and smoke. They -- I remained in Auschwitz
17 for, I think it was, a couple months, three months. And
18 again I was protected by this -- this coe-poe Jew. He took
19 me into his -- You know, he had this separate room. Sexual
20 abused me. So that's some of the things. That is hard to
21 talk about.

22 MR. NEUBERG: Yes.

23 MR. OFFEN: But I would not perform for him. He
24 turned me out and took someone else in. But even when he
25 turned me out there was a selection I remember and it was
26 Mengele. He came to the barracks. He told me how to act
27 and what to do, told me not to look at him.

28 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

1 MR. OFFEN: He told me not to look at him.

2 Another thing about looking, I always remember when
3 we were -- when we came out of the cattle car is that there
4 were some prisoners that were telling me in Polish to tell
5 them that I am older than what I actually am. To lie about
6 my age. So I did. So I have three different dates and
7 that's part of my confusion.

8 But about the selection with Mengele, so this coe-poe
9 told me what to do. So I got by another selection. It's
10 like it's be-chard, you know.

11 MR. NEUBERG: It's destined.

12 MR. OFFEN: Yeah.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Arranged.

14 MR. OFFEN: So there were many, many miracles like
15 that. So I -- from Auschwitz I was taken to Landsberg.
16 Around Landsberg there were numerous camps -- work camps.

17 MR. NEUBERG: This was, what, in the fall or toward
18 the end of the summer I guess.

19 MR. OFFEN: That was the fall.

20 MR. NEUBERG: The fall.

21 MR. OFFEN: Because I remember winter in Landsberg.

22 MR. NEUBERG: Okay.

23 MR. OFFEN: Yeah.

24 MR. NEUBERG: So were you in any way aware of the
25 Russian front approaching your camp?

26 MR. OFFEN: I was aware. I was aware because we
27 heard big guns going off in the distance and at night. And
28 so we knew the war was coming closer. So they shipped us

1 into Germany from Auschwitz. So again when I got to this
2 camp, and it had a certain number. There wasn't a name to
3 it. I think -- (inaudible) There were numerous camps
4 there.

5 And so I was given a job. We all marched out in the
6 morning on the construction site. So somehow again I ended
7 up having this job in the blacksmith shop stoking the fire
8 and building a fire under a big diesel engine -- engine
9 truck to warm it up because the oil is heavy. And this
10 German there was always wearing brown uniform always brought
11 me -- and a swastika -- brought me little pieces to eat. It
12 was those little -- little pieces of kindness and protection
13 that I had.

14 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

15 MR. OFFEN: And that is (inaudible) maybe welcome
16 home the other one is. You know -- I was being shot at, you
17 know.

18 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

19 MR. OFFEN: You know, it's like in God's hands. It's
20 mystery of that.

21 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

22 MR. OFFEN: So I ended up working in blacksmith and
23 then ended up driving a locomotive on this construction
24 site. And I was just pulling those little dump carts from
25 one end to another. And I was just running this little
26 locomotive which is -- so another way of where -- that's
27 pretty much close to the time of liberation.

28 MR. NEUBERG: At Landsberg you were liberated.

1 MR. OFFEN: No. No. We were marched -- one day we
2 were -- just assembled us and they started marching us and
3 later on we found out we were toward Munich, you know.

4 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

5 MR. OFFEN: And along the way we were like marching
6 day and night. One time we were straight by planes. It
7 turned out to be American planes made an error. They killed
8 a number of prisoners --

9 Prisoners. Here I go again. Inmates.

10 And at that time some escaped into the woods. I
11 didn't. I didn't know what was happening. And then after
12 the raid we continued on and they put us overnight into some
13 barracks -- some kind of army barracks. And then in the
14 morning the guards were gone. It was just like that. There
15 was a little place called Ball-fauts-hausen. That's the way
16 I remember it --

17 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

18 MR. OFFEN: -- pronounced.

19 MR. NEUBERG: Ball-fauts-hausen.

20 MR. OFFEN: Ball-fauts-hausen. And it was near
21 Munich. And I was one of the more able inmates. Most of
22 them were more emaciated (inaudible). So we found out, you
23 know, there was no guards and we didn't know what was
24 happening.

25 So a few of us got together and we decided that we
26 would go exploring and see what happened. So I went out and
27 down the road in the way -- direction in which we came and
28 there was a blown bridge there. So I had to go kind of up a

1 river and cross where I could. And then I discovered this
2 little farm, village and some bombed outhouses there. I
3 crawled in there and there was still kind of fighting going
4 on there. I didn't know what I was looking for. And so
5 I -- I was carefully looking out because I was hearing tanks
6 and firing going on. And when I saw the soldiers that
7 didn't look like Germans -- I didn't know who they were, you
8 know.

9 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

10 MR. OFFEN: And I came out of there and I was making
11 noise. I was talking in Polish and really making myself
12 visible, you know.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

14 MR. OFFEN: And they couldn't understand what I was
15 saying. So they got someone. They knew I was talking in
16 Polish because some of them heard some Polish. So they got
17 someone who could speak Polish. And I told them about me
18 and where I was coming from and that there were other people
19 there.

20 So they sent two GI's with me and they took some
21 food. They couldn't get to us for a number of days and some
22 people died during that time because they couldn't get
23 through any help. And I -- I brought them back. I became a
24 mascot for a tank unit. I wish I could remember what the
25 tank unit -- with the eighth army I think but not the unit.
26 And I remained with them for a little while and I started
27 regaining my strength.

28 MR. NEUBERG: This is still near Munich.

1 MR. OFFEN: This is still Munich. Ball-fauts-hausen,
2 yeah.

3 And I started looking for my brothers and they didn't
4 know I was alive. But I knew they were alive because by
5 that time there was some book published with survivors'
6 names and the underhour organization. So I saw their names
7 and that same day I went to the train station and I got on a
8 cold train headed for Austria, for Strassburg and looking
9 for my brothers. I got to the -- After a couple days I got
10 to Strassburg and the camp they were in, that they were
11 listed in as being but they were no longer there. They left
12 for Italy and it was a whole chase kind of --

13 MR. NEUBERG: Following --

14 MR. OFFEN: -- following them around from camp to
15 camp. I had to get a visa and transportation to go there
16 and that was at least a month maybe -- couple of months
17 before I was able to get that. I finally got that and
18 transportation and I went to where my brothers were supposed
19 to have gone. So I went there and they said, "Yeah, they
20 were here. And it was then that they joined the Polish
21 army." They -- They met a Polish Jewish doctor from the
22 Polish army. He said, "Look, you guys are very bad shape."

23 MR. NEUBERG: Joined the army in order to get home.

24 MR. OFFEN: Joined the Polish army so they got
25 hospitalized. And of course I didn't know that. That's
26 hind information. I didn't catch up to them as yet.

27 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

28 MR. OFFEN: There were two other camps, military

1 camps. They said, "Yes. They came in. They joined the
2 army. Think were sent to the hospital. Yes." And I went
3 there. And, "Oh, yes. They were here but they have been
4 assigned to this unit over here which is near Ba-ree." And
5 so I went checking out there. Yes. They said, "Yes. They
6 stationed right here but they are not here." And it was --
7 Was it Yom Kippur? It was Yom Kippur. And they went on
8 leave to this town of Baud-ie and I caught up with them at
9 the Synagogue.

10 MR. NEUBERG: Great.

11 MR. OFFEN: Still -- I still get -- So that you know,
12 they were two big guys in uniforms.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

14 MR. OFFEN: And it was total surprise to them.

15 MR. NEUBERG: That you were still alive?

16 MR. OFFEN: Yeah. And --

17 MR. NEUBERG: Then how did you come from Poland to --
18 to the United States?

19 MR. OFFEN: That's another long --

20 MR. NEUBERG: Well, you can condense it.

21 MR. OFFEN: I became independent of the Polish army
22 since they were -- and the Polish army was sponsored by the
23 British. They were under the control of the British. So
24 they were being pulled out of Italy to England to be
25 demobilized. So we ended up in England.

26 MR. NEUBERG: So they went into the Polish army in
27 Italy.

28 MR. OFFEN: Right.

1 MR. NEUBERG: Okay. You never did go back to Poland?

2 MR. OFFEN: No.

3 MR. NEUBERG: Then you went to England.

4 MR. OFFEN: England. And while we were in Italy
5 there was this woman that we met who wanted to get to
6 England. She had family there. And so we had some papers
7 forged and said she's our sister. We had a sister so it
8 wasn't too hard a role to play. So she came with us to
9 England and I stayed with some of her family in London for
10 awhile. She still lives in England. And lived there for
11 four and a half years. Then we came to the United States.

12 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh. And then --

13 So when you got to the states you were 18 years old
14 or so?

15 MR. OFFEN: I was 21. I was 21 on the boat.

16 MR. NEUBERG: And you really -- In England you went
17 to school for awhile.

18 MR. OFFEN: Yeah. I went to school and just learned
19 English. It was a conversational English. And when I got
20 here within -- Let's see. '51 -- Within about nine months I
21 got drafted and sent to Korea.

22 MR. NEUBERG: So, you served in the United States
23 Army?

24 MR. OFFEN: Yeah, for two years.

25 MR. NEUBERG: Two years in the 50's.

26 MR. OFFEN: Uh-huh.

27 MR. NEUBERG: And then you went --

28 MR. OFFEN: Then when I came out of the army I was --

1 went back to school and completed high school. And I got
2 married. I have two sons. One is 21. One is 18 in
3 Detroit. I was married for 17 years. Very unhappy
4 relationship and I was traumatized in ways that I am still
5 discovering the depths that it effects me to this day.

6 MR. NEUBERG: What kind of work were you doing --

7 MR. OFFEN: When I was in Detroit?

8 MR. NEUBERG: Yeah.

9 MR. OFFEN: I was -- I was doing appliance service
10 for awhile. Washer, dryer, refrigerator service. I was
11 also -- Then I ended up having a laundry -- coin laundry.

12 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

13 MR. OFFEN: I had that for about 14 years. After I
14 did the service I went to the coin laundry business.

15 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

16 MR. OFFEN: And then I sold that and I started
17 traveling, which is going onto six years now and doing the
18 slide presentation that I have been doing now.

19 MR. NEUBERG: How did you decide to do that? I mean,
20 before that had you talked about your experience?

21 MR. OFFEN: No. No. The truth is also about that,
22 the experience of the Holocaust, there were no places in
23 which a survivor could share his story. It was kind of,
24 "Yeah. We know all about that and please don't talk about
25 that, you know. There were no --

26 MR. NEUBERG: That was the 50's or even when you got
27 to England?

28 MR. OFFEN: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

1 There was no place that in the Jewish community could
2 start sharing that. It was --

3 As a matter of fact, it was about seven, eight years
4 ago that I was able to share that in -- my story with a
5 group of people and that was in the Unitarian Church.

6 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

7 MR. OFFEN: And to this day it is still painful that
8 Jewish communities are not open to hearing, you know, the
9 stories.

10 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

11 MR. OFFEN: It's like sometimes I have the feeling
12 of, you know, the three monkeys.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

14 MR. OFFEN: Come let us look, you know.

15 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

16 MR. OFFEN: We want to hear.

17 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

18 MR. OFFEN: Speak to us, you know. It's such a clear
19 message about that, you know. It is painful. But I kept
20 doing. I kept doing.

21 And in actuality what moved me to start doing that,
22 to become public about that, was in the event about five
23 years ago -- a little more than five years ago. And that
24 was an article in the newspaper about that we were within 15
25 minutes of launching a war against Russia.

26 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

27 MR. OFFEN: And that was revealed several months
28 after the event happened.

1 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

2 MR. OFFEN: And then the apologies were that there
3 was just a faulty chip. That it was not really serious, you
4 know.

5 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

6 MR. OFFEN: And that's when I realized I find myself
7 again in a potential planetary gas chamber this time and the
8 Nazi is not going to be there. If I am looking for the Nazi
9 with a swastika --

10 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

11 MR. OFFEN: -- he is not going to be there. We don't
12 know who that Nazi mind is going to be.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

14 MR. OFFEN: That is going to produce that effect, you
15 know. We don't need walls for gas chamber. We are all in
16 it. So and we don't have to be Jews to be exposed to that
17 treatment. No selection process any longer. There is no
18 potential for going left or right anymore.

19 So that's what moved me to say, Hey, this is
20 a-mesh-e-gaus (inaudible). Please get me a rocketship. I'd
21 like to get off this crazy planet. You can have it, you
22 know. And you know I kept saying that about the rocketship.
23 It's no joke. And then I realized immediately is that if --
24 and I am clear I can convince enough people with money who'd
25 want to do that.

26 MR. NEUBERG: To leave.

27 MR. OFFEN: Because -- because the things that are
28 happening.

1 MR. NEUBERG: Uh-huh.

2 MR. OFFEN: But then where would we point that rocket
3 to? Where would we go to?

4 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

5 MR. OFFEN: There is no place to go.

6 MR. NEUBERG: Right.

7 MR. OFFEN: So here we are and we better look at
8 that. What produced the -- you know, what produced the gas
9 chambers. What produced the Holocaust. What brought that
10 Nazi mind into being. How come the Nazi mind is still in
11 existence? What are the systems that keep it going? You
12 know.

13 MR. NEUBERG: Right. Okay. Good.

14 -oOo-

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28