

Rosenstein, Jerry

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Version 1

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Jerry Rosenstein

2 INTERVIEWER: *Joel Newberg*

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4 PLACE

5 TRANSCRIBER: Philippa Benson

6 Q Your name and where were you born?

7 A Uh, Jerald B. Rosenstein, also known as Jerry Rosenstein.

8 I was born in Bensheim, Germany, which is near Heidelberg in
9 May 1927.

10 Q And what was life like when you were a child, say in the
11 pre-Nazi years?

12 A Well, I was a very small child in the pre-Nazi years. I
13 do recall however the advent of the Nazis which was in 1932,
14 1933 at just about the time I was going to first grade and
15 there was always an aura of fear and fright around us. We
16 lived in a fairly isolated villa outside of town. My father
17 was frequently away on business. I was the youngest of three
18 small children and my mother was there alone with whatever help
19 we had and I remember when I was five, six, seven years old
20 that they threw bricks and tried to set the garage on fire at
21 night and I also remember, you know, of small incidents in
22 school already as a first and second grader.

23 Q You went to a regular --

24 A (Interposing) I went to a regular German public school,
25 ja, oh, sure. Uh, we left --

1 Q What kind of incidents - - -

2 A I recall particularly one incident where I was coming
3 home from night and an adult beat me up saying that I had done
4 something to his child who was a classmate of mine but the man
5 was obviously drunk, lower class and a Nazi.

6 Q This was - - --

7 A This was about maybe 20, 30 meters from our front door
8 where this happened on the street. I remember I was very
9 frightened and I ran home and there was -- just the maids were
10 home and nobody else and, uh, nothing could be done or was done
11 at the time. We moved away from there in 1935 for a few months
12 to a larger city called Darmstadt which is south of Frankfurt
13 where we lived for six months where I went to school. I believe
14 that school was a Hebrew school; was not a regular school, was
15 a Jewish school, and in the middle of 1936 we moved lock stock
16 and barrel to Amsterdam and immigrated. We did take all our
17 furniture with us. We had to sell the house in Bensheim at a
18 swans-fur-kalts price at the time. That means a price which
19 was artificially reduced.

20 Q And who did you sell it to?

21 A My parents sold the house to someone - - to some people
22 who were interested in buying the house. They were not parti-
23 cularly Nazi's or anything. They were just people who
24 bought the house.

25 Q Who determined like that the price had to be reduced?

1 A I imagine real estate prices at the time were all very
2 low simply for the fact that all these Jewish houses were
3 forced onto the market. Also, you know, remember those were
4 years when there wasn't much cash around to begin with.

5 Q Right.

6 A And I don't know what the price of the house was, how
7 much of a mortgage there was on the house or anything but I do
8 know that after World War II the then owners of the house had
9 to make a very large payment to allow for the difference, you
10 know, of the real market price and what the house was sold for
11 at the time. However, that payment was never made to us because
12 at the time nobody knew we were alive and it went straight to
13 the State of Israel.

14 Q (Chuckle)

15 A Which was just as well.

16 Q All right, so then you moved to Holland in '36 and - - -

17 A We moved to Holland in 1936. I went to school in Holland.

18 In 1938 my oldest brother, who was an ardent Zionist immigrated
19 on a liner to Palestine. During the war he entered the Pales-
20 tine Corp and he was a commander and he was killed in 1944 in
21 the Mediterranean invasion.

22 Q He was in the British Army?

23 A In the British Army. My second brother who was a year
24 and a half older than I was deported in early 1943 to Ausch-
25 witz where he died, uh, excuse me, he was deported in the

1 summer of 1942 already -- amongst the first deportations from
2 Holland and he was killed in Auschwitz to the best of our
3 knowledge sometime early in 1943.

4 Q What was life like when you got to Holland in '36, '37,
5 '38?

6 A Oh, was wonderful. I only have good memories. (Laughter)
7 We went to school and we lived well. My dad had a business
8 and, you know, there was of course the constant worry about
9 people in Germany and the pogroms and everything that was going
10 on in Germany and we had constant visitors from on the way to
11 America from our own town, from Bensheim, because my parents
12 helped most everybody to get out and one way of getting out was
13 to give them facilities to stay over in Holland on their way to
14 the United States until their visas came through. But we were
15 stupid enough not to do this. We stayed in Holland.

16 Life was very nice. I have very good memories of Holland.
17 I went to -- finish grammar school there and went to high
18 school for two or three years.

19 Q And then when did things change?

20 A It started changing, of course, the invasion was in 1940
21 and I believe 1941 we were not allowed to go directly to school
22 any longer and I had to go to a Jewish high school which was
23 quite a distance from the house. It was a long walk. Also at
24 that time we were no longer allowed to use street cars. We had
25 to wear the yellow star of course. And we were not allowed to *have*

1 non-Jewish help. Of course nobody could have cars. I believe
2 the Dutch people couldn't have cars either any longer and things
3 began to change very rapidly in Holland because there was no
4 Dutch government; you know, the Germans were the government in
5 force. And they had -- well, not what they hoped for, they
6 had some Dutch collaboration, there is no question about it.
7 Also they had exact lists of all the Jews in Holland. Well,
8 these are well known facts, I don't have to elaborate on that.
9 And we were just sitting there like pigeons with our suitcases
10 packed waiting to be picked up. We had no place to go.

11 Q All right. Why didn't you look for a place to hide out.
12 I mean, you know, people hear about Ann Frank and people that
13 were hidden by other Dutch people.

14 A Apparently my parents had no connections for this and I
15 really don't know to this day what their financial circumstances
16 were. I have a feeling there wasn't really all that much money
17 that they could afford -- that they could plan on something
18 like that because you would have to have a huge amount of cash
19 in order to be able to finance that. You couldn't have a bank
20 account or anything else. And I just don't know what there
21 was; I've never been able to figure it out.

22 Q So you were -- from the time of the invasion until when
23 you were sitting - - -

24 A From the time -- well, from the time the deportations
25 started until we were picked up. It was in the middle of '43

1 and we were kind of prepared to be picked up in the middle of
2 the night like everybody else because those things always
3 happened in the middle of the night and not during the daytime.
4 And, well, it happened and we were -- first we went to a theatre
5 in Eastern Amsterdam which was used at the time as a staging
6 place. We stayed there a couple of days and from there we were
7 sent to Westerbok and in Westerbok we were eventually
8 separated -- my parents went to Bergen-Belsen and I stayed on
9 in Westerbok for a few more months and then I was sent to
10 Theresienstadt. And a few months later by some fluke my parents
11 were also sent to Theresienstadt from Bergen-Belsen. We were
12 then more or less being united even though we lived in separate
13 places in Theresienstadt but we were there as a family unit.
14 And my mother stayed in Theresienstadt until the end of the
15 war. She was very lucky. She worked in a place called Der
16 Glimmer where they made some kind of silicate wafers for sub-
17 marine insulation and the few women who worked in there, I
18 don't know, a few hundred possibly, no more, were about all the
19 people that were left in Theresienstadt at the end of the war.
20 The deportations from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz started
21 somewhere in 1943, I'm a little vague on the dates at the
22 moment. And we were lucky that we were not amongst those first
23 because there were hardly any survivors from those first trains
24 that went from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. At the time that
25 we were deported from Theresienstadt we still had no inkling

1 exactly what Auschwitz was like or that it was a death camp or
2 what kind of a death camp. Surely the elders in Theresienstadt
3 must have had an inkling but they kept it to themselves.

4 Q But you knew people were being deported out of the camp?

5 A Oh, definitely. I mean there were the long trains and,
6 you know, and it was a terrible situation and you knew that,
7 you know, if your turn came that you had to go and you knew it
8 was going to be a lot worse than Theresienstadt was.

9 So my father and I were deported some time in spring of,
10 spring or early summer of 1944 to Auschwitz and it was the
11 usual deportation train; possibly, probably a lot of other
12 people have described it. They were the 40 and 8, 40 men and 8
13 horses car type of railroad car and there were about 100, 125
14 people in each car. There were buckets of water but no food
15 and no sanitary facilities. To the best of my knowledge the
16 trip lasted somewhere around four, five or six days but I, we
17 are all very vague on that. It is just very difficult to
18 determine at this stage how long it lasted. It seemed forever.
19 And quite a few people did not survive the railroad trip.

20 When we arrived in Auschwitz -- did you want to know more
21 about Theresienstadt first?

22 Q Well - uh, yeah, what was your daily life like in -- what
23 did you do in Theresienstadt? You were at this time, - -

24 A I was at this time 15, 15, 14, 15, years old. 15, 16 or
25 so. Uh, what was my daily life like in Theresienstadt? I

1 don't recall all that many details from Theresienstadt. I
2 worked in potato fields and we were outside the camp on some
3 work details all of it which was not very difficult and I also
4 did some work in town even though I really forgot the nature of
5 all of that. There was a lot of -- there were a lot of
6 activities initiated by the inmates -- cultural activities.
7 There were school classes and there were music and a lot of
8 clandestine plays were put on. Lot of Kurt Weill was put on in
9 attics and I remember participating, not as an actor, but going
10 to all those things because the people that were involved were
11 people that I had known and my parents had known in Holland and
12 there were a lot of people there from -- who had originally the
13 Truffant directors from the German movies from before Hitler -
14 very prominent people at the time. Unfortunately all of them
15 went on one or two transports prior to ours and none of them
16 survived. I'm really not all that clear you know about life in
17 Theresienstadt. It was simply not so traumatic or, you know, it
18 was not as tough. Sure we were hungry, and sure there were a
19 lot of fleas, but it was bearable. It was survivable. There
20 was no extermination there, you know. People who shot and
21 killed were not killed -- shot and killed in Theresienstadt
22 proper but they were taken first to we called the Kleine Festung
23 meaning the small fortress which was a smaller concentration
24 camp just outside Theresienstadt where people were actually
25 killed and executed. It was more like Buchenwald or Dachau but

1 Theresienstadt itself is as well known was not like that. Aft
2 After the deportation to Birkenau we arrived in the middle
3 of the night too -- the railroad - the railroad siding was
4 well known, the pictures are shown --it was exactly like it
5 is in the pictures except the big lights were on and we were
6 told to line up five or six in a row and march up to the
7 selection table where I assume Mr. Mengele at the time was
8 sitting and those were marked for death were going to the
9 right and the others were going to the left. Just prior to
10 arriving there my father said to me let's just tell them we
11 are metal workers, which we did, and it was a very good
12 instinct. Both of us were within the limit of ages of the
13 people that were in the surviving group. My father was
14 possibly a little bit at the top age limit; I was in near the
15 bottom limit; I was amongst the youngest there. But all the
16 children and all the elderly and all the people that didn't
17 look healthy and most the females were all sent to the gas
18 chambers immediately.

19 Q Did you have any idea of --that this process was happening
20 -- that they were selecting out - - -

21 A No, we didn't. We did not know at the time that that was
22 an action selection process but five minutes after this we
23 knew, then, you know the kapos and the inmates that were
24 disciplining us or keeping us in order and telling us what to
25 do, they let us in immediately as to what those chimneys were

1 burning, what it was all about that these were gas chambers
2 and so on. And we could see by the people shuffling around
3 -- about, you know, the ones we could see how terrible it was
4 and we got the picture very very quickly. We were sent to a
5 barracks where we were told to strip and put all our posses-
6 sions in a pile-- everything that we had, which was done. We
7 were allowed to keep our shoes and that was the only posses-
8 sion we could keep. We were physically searched of course;
9 totally shaven of all bodily hair and tattooed -- showered
10 with some kind of a disinfectant shower and then we were
11 issued the blue and white prison type uniform, some kind of a
12 cap and no socks but we were allowed to keep our -- to take
13 our shoes back. Unbeknownst to me at the time my father had
14 some dollar bills hidden in his shoes and they came in good
15 stead much later on when we were in another camp.

16 We stayed in Auschwitz-Birkenau under the most traumatic
17 conditions for about six weeks -- six or eight weeks were in
18 Birkenau itself.

19 Q What was life like for you there -- what did you do and-- -

20 A We were very crowded into a barracks; we had to sleep
21 virtually like sardines in a can. We had to stand frequently
22 at parade on the parade grounds to be counted -- hop on one
23 foot -- all the silly things that they made you do -- dig
24 ditches, carry garbage, carry odeur, you know, offal, carry
25 -- go to the kitchen and carry the canisters with the soup

1 and, what was life like? A waiting for the next selection
2 process which at the time you knew was coming and at the time
3 you knew also that it was more vital that you survived that
4 one -- well it was (inaudible) (laughter) Erase that one.

5 Q But you knew that there would be periodic selections?

6 A Yes. We knew that then there were periodic selections
7 and those of course are much more traumatic for -- much more
8 difficult to get through because you shake in your boots
9 because you know damn well that -- what it's all about. The
10 first time you weren't quite sure; you didn't know what was
11 happening.

12 A lot of people killed themselves; a lot of people went
13 to the electric wire; a lot of people were killed; a lot of
14 people just simply didn't survive the first selection process
15 or didn't survive just being there. We also found out what
16 the term "musselman" meant. I don't know where they got it
17 from -- the literal translation of musselman at the time was
18 Moslem, I suppose, and there were people that no longer had
19 the will to live. There was a psychological and a physical
20 change in them and there was nothing that could be done to
21 keep them alive. They were simply earmarked for death already
22 by themselves.

23 Even if they were not going to the gas chambers just yet they
24 were dying and it was a very sad thing to see somebody become
25 a musselman and I don't know if these people were shunned, I

1 don't believe that they were shunned in any way, but they
2 isolated themselves physically and psychologically and it was
3 a phenomenon which was easily observed, I mean it was just a
4 fact of daily life there, and it was amazing how quickly you
5 got used to all these facts of daily life. You come from a
6 rather protected normal environment and you're thrown into a
7 place like Auschwitz and what is really amazing is that you
8 can adjust yourself psychologically to the conditions that
9 prevail in the place like that. At least I imagine those of
10 us who survived have that in common that we probably all made
11 a fairly rapid psychological adjustment to what was happening
12 to us.

13 Q You were there six weeks, you said in Birkenau?

14 A It could have been more. It could have more; it could
15 have been eight weeks; could have been three months, I really
16 don't recall. It seemed forever. And then all of a sudden
17 we were put in a truck and we were sent to a camp named
18 Gleibitz Zwei, Gleibitz No. 3 which was one of the satellite
19 camps that was the original satellite camp was I believe
20 Monowitz and then there was Gleibitz and Krakowitz and I
21 forgot how many satellite camps that were up, you know,
22 around Auschwitz and there more -- you know, there were more
23 labor intensive camps. The gas chambers were mostly in
24 Auschwitz. They all had small crematoria for the people who
25 died to be cremated but they didn't have gas chambers in

1 those satellite camps -- most of them didn't. And there life
2 was very grim but it was at least not as terror stricken as it
3 was in Auschwitz-Birkenau itself.

4 We got up at sundown and we got to bed at whenever and we
5 worked in factories. There were two or three factories there,
6 one of them making railroad equipment; one factory made arma-
7 ments -- some kind of missile type armaments-- V bombs or
8 something like that and I was welding in that factory and I
9 was working in the railroad factory working on railroad axles
10 and wheels. Exactly what I was doing I don't remember -- had
11 to do with something with simple metal work. And at least
12 most of the factories -- it was wintertime -- and they were at
13 least reasonably warm in the inside, you know, you were always
14 working with welding equipment so on, you weren't freezing.
15 But of course, you know, in the camp itself conditions were
16 very, very cold. I suppose we got one or two meals a day.
17 The meal consisted of the ubiquitous type of liquids called
18 soup with something at the bottom -- if you were lucky you got
19 there when they reached the bottom of the barrel. And break-
20 fast was some kind of coffee or something called coffee and
21 rye bread. The food wasn't enough to die on but certainly not
22 enough to live on either. We were all very emaciated and very
23 undernourished. However, my father having been diabetic all
24 his life was healthy for the first time in his life in the
25 concentration camp. He was not sick for one day. Neither was

1 I. Life was very hard because of the physical labor involved.
2 Even though the factory labor wasn't always quite so difficult
3 sometimes I had to unload railroad cars and that was very
4 difficult and that's where I got a bad back injury right in
5 fairly much the beginning of our stay there.

6 Q When you injured your back, you just had to keep working -
7 you didn't have any opportunity to - - -

8 A No, no, there was no -- there was just a bad crack and a
9 back pain and it was a -- the real injury didn't show up until
10 a couple of years later.

11 Q But certainly no one said, gave you -- like there wasn't a
12 hospital setup if you got injured.

13 A You -- (laughter) it was just the other way around. If
14 you were sick or injured you pretended not to be sick or in-
15 jured because the chances for you to survive as a sick or an
16 injured individual were minimal, you know. They either would
17 send you back to Birkenau or some other unfortunate fate might
18 befall you so psychologically one was attuned to stay healthy
19 regardless and we did.

20 We were very much kept abreast of what was happening on the
21 outside world. News did filter through through all kinds of
22 means. My father found out from guards where the frontier
23 lines were. There were clandestine radio reports. Occasional-
24 ly some laborers would leave newspapers around the factories
25 and if they were German newspapers people could read them.

1 We almost always knew how far the Russians were away -- how
2 they were advancing. We knew a little bit less about what was
3 going on in the Western war but we certainly were quite
4 apprised of, you know, what was going on in the Eastern war
5 zones. At the time that we were ^{there} one day a guard said to my
6 father, "I think I served under you in World War I" and it was
7 indeed the case and he had recognized my dad, which was amazing
8 after all those years.

9 Q Your father had been in the German Army in World War I?

10 A He was an officer in the German Army and that man served
11 under him and he had remembered him. So my father gave him
12 those small -- those dollars that he had hidden in his shoe
13 and occasionally this guard would at night, would throw some
14 bread or other food across the fence to my dad when it was
15 reasonably safe to do so. He jeopardized his own life. I
16 want to interject here -- this man was not an SS man at all.
17 He was a retired man, living in Western Germany who had simply
18 been recruited for guard duty in a concentration camp. He was
19 too old to fight in the army. And he may not have even been a
20 Nazi and he certainly, you know, was an (inaudible) person --
21 There were a number of guards like that and we didn't have
22 anything to fear from those guards. You know, they were not
23 the young SS guards but many of them on the march to
24 Gleschheimer were shot by their own people if they couldn't
25 keep up with the troop.

1 At the beginning of January of 1945 the Russians were
2 advancing and we had heard in the camp already couple months
3 earlier or maybe a month earlier that the gas chambers had
4 been stopped -- the extermination gas chambers in Birkenau had
5 been stopped. Whether this was true or not we didn't know.
6 As a matter of fact, I want to come back to something that I
7 forgot about Birkenau. At the time we arrived there was the
8 time the big transports from Hungaria arrived with many Hun-
9 ganian Jews and many, many Gypsys. And none of them went
10 through the selection process. To the best of my knowledge
11 all of them went -- arrived them at -- directly to the gas
12 chambers. Certainly all the Gypsies went directly to the gas
13 chambers. And there was also this troop of Romanian midgets
14 that were used by Mengele in the experimentation block and
15 just this week Time magazine has written around these people.
16 Now some of those people survived and they were on the train
17 with us couple of months later between Krakow and Genowitz
18 which was in Eastern Romania. And I remember speaking to them
19 and they had undergone terrible hardships, particularly the
20 women with their -- with the experimental surgery and all the
21 things. And I forgot how many of the troop survived. There
22 were very many -- there was a whole circus group or a large
23 group that had gone there that the Germans had caught and I
24 believe there were five or six survivors but I do not recall
25 exactly any more.

1 But to go back now to the time we were in Gleibitz the
2 Russians were advancing and one morning at 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock
3 we were roused and told to march and, you know, on the road
4 to march and we marched for many days and we -- I don't recall
5 how many days -- two, three or four days, possibly five days
6 -- maybe less -- and we were told immediately that all
7 stragglers would be shot and that was indeed the fact - the
8 stragglers when ~~the~~ they were German guards, whoever, straggled
9 was shot. And there was no way to run away or do anything.
10 We just had to go -- you just have to remember we were in
11 enemy territory and (inaudible) there just wasn't anybody
12 going to take a chance in hiding you. We arrived in a town
13 called Bleshheimer one evening and told to find a barracks and
14 spend the night and the next morning I believe it was early
15 morning and I was outside the barracks for some reason or
16 other and I -- all of a sudden they were shooting from the
17 towers into the camp on anything that moved. Course we got
18 our asses right back into some safer ground and then there was
19 quiet for a while. Then we looked up and all of a sudden the
20 towers were no longer manned and the Germans had fled and had
21 left us. They had probably -- we understood later that they
22 had fled with a lot of other prisoners a couple of hours
23 earlier but we had arrived possibly a little too late and we
24 were within a group in the camp, I don't know how many people
25 there were left at that time that were there when the Russians

1 (sic) fled. And the conditions in the camp were pretty chaotic;
2 there was no food there and it was -- fortunately extremely
3 cold -- a lot of snow on the ground -- because otherwise there
4 would have been -- it would have been rampant with diseases,
5 there were so many unburied bodies lying about -- so many very
6 ill people. But -- I recall sort of in the middle of the day
7 that some civilians came to the gate of the camp, I don't
8 think anybody dared come in there and then a while later some
9 Russian soldiers appeared and once we saw some Russians driving
10 by or going by we felt it fairly safe. The next morning we
11 organized a group of 12, actually a nucleus of 12 people from
12 Holland -- we'd been together since Birkenau, since Theresien-
13 stadt already we were all in the same group and one of them
14 was a butcher and we got out of there and we started marching
15 east towards the Russian lines and we found an abandoned
16 English prisoner of war camp -- some barracks. We knew it was
17 English prisoners of war by the things we found in there.
18 There were even English cases of tea there and lots of dishes
19 and blankets and all the things we needed plus a little pig
20 foraging outside which was -- became our first decent meal.

21 That was about the middle or towards the end of January of
22 1945. We stayed there for about eight or twelve, twelve days
23 probably and kind of recuped our forces and scrounged around
24 for food and found enough food to really get us our strength
25 back to some degree. And from there we moved. Then the

1 Russians came and told us to move further east and we went to
2 Krakow. I can't recall whether it was Krakow or Katowice- I
3 believe it was Katowice. I believe it was Katowice we went
4 to, not Krakow.

5 Q How did you get to Katowice?

6 A By foot. We marched for a couple of days. You know, we
7 didn't have many belongings. What little belongings we had
8 were -- was easily carried and at night we found monestaries
9 or holy orders or something like that to spend the night. Had
10 some terrible experiences there. First of all the Russians
11 sometimes organized us and made us dig ditches and made us
12 work when the Germans were counter attacking nearby and the
13 Russians also didn't know quite to make of us. Remember
14 except for the officers you dealt with a very sadistic bunch
15 of troops -- totally undereducated -- some of them still
16 illiterate and a people that had ^{an} suffered/enormous amount in
17 the war and anybody who didn't speak in a Slavic language,
18 you know, was suspect. They just didn't really know who we
19 were or what we were and the fact that we only spoke Dutch
20 didn't help. You know, to them it was probably the same as
21 German. But some of the officers, of course, were more helpful.
22 There was an enormous amount of rape. All the women were gang
23 raped, particularly the nuns. They really had it for the nuns
24 and the amount of gang rape was just incredible. One of our
25 people was a physician and he had -- he was asked by the

1 superiors to examine some of the nuns and he couldn't do much
2 for them -- couldn't do much for ourselves.

3 We arrived in Katowice and some were -- must have been late
4 January, early February, 1945. There was some kind of Red
5 Cross type of organization that found that quarter of us were
6 civilians there. The civilians must have been thrilled to
7 death to have us, I'm sure. (Laughter) We didn't feel sorry
8 for them. We stayed there until we were notified one day and
9 this was about probably three or four weeks later that there
10 was a train being sent by the Red Cross to take us to -- even-
11 tually to the Black Sea but first we went to -- on a long,
12 long boring train ride to a town called Genowice which is in
13 Bessarabia -- Bucovina, I think it's called which is now part
14 of Russia. It's very much the eastern province of Romania.
15 The town was totally untouched by World War II. It was like
16 an island of peace. It was a beautiful white city built up in
17 the mountains -- very civilized with a large Jewish population.
18 The population was German speaking. They spoke a weird kind
19 of Austrian German very much dating back to the Austro-Hun-
20 garian Empire. For some reason totally unbeknownst or -- it
21 must be known -- or unbeknownst to me the entire Jewish popula-
22 tion there was left in tact. There were no deportations;
23 there were no persecutions; there was nothing. Apparently
24 there was a strong local Romanian government there that kind
25 of protected their people even though it was a Nazi government ;

1 it was allied with the Germans and at least -- it didn't -- it
2 could protect the Jews. These people -- the Jewish community
3 there took it upon themselves to quarter us with everybody --
4 and the Russians were there of course and the Russians super-
5 vised everything. But it was all over all a very good
6 experience again. We were disinfected there and -- but we
7 were housed very well for five or six weeks. People were very
8 nice. You know it was kind of a good respite for us. And the
9 Jewish population of that -- they were all preparing to leave;
10 they were all waiting for papers to go to Palestine. They all
11 were granted permission to leave at the time. It was just
12 prior to the formal annexation by Russia of this particular
13 part of Romania.

14 Sort of March or April of '45 we were put on a train, again
15 a passenger train, and we went down all the way to Odessa
16 which was also again a couple of days train ride I believe.
17 In Odessa we were put up in what was a hotel or a sanitarium
18 on the Red Sea outside of town -- a few kilometers outside of
19 town and where we were really in a good place but very, very
20 isolated. At the time the Russians needed to register us and
21 of course there was a lot of paper work, a large number of the
22 group only spoke German or Dutch and I had some English and
23 some of the Russian officers had some English so they asked me
24 to myself and four or five of us to work as interpreters which
25 was kind of fun because as a result we were given a free

1 evening in town under Russian guard, of course. We were taken
2 to the opera in Odessa. We stayed there for about five or six
3 weeks and it was spring time -- I remember we tried to bathe
4 in the Black Sea but it was much too cold and we probably was
5 too emaciated to do that. And then the Red Cross and the ship --
6 from where the ship came -- it was a regular passenger ship
7 they sent and for us and primarily for a very large group of
8 English prisoners of war that had also been going the same
9 route through Russia and were going back from Odessa to Mar-
10 seilles or to England. So at the time then we went on the
11 ship and it was five or six days we went through -- by Istanbul
12 now called Constantinople but we were not -- the ship didn't
13 stop it was just going through -- to Marseilles where there
14 was a welcoming committee on the dock and things became very
15 different then for us. First person I meet was a boy I went
16 to school with in Amsterdam who had been in Free France and
17 Southern France all during the war and there was this old big
18 train and, you know, we were fed and then we were asked to go
19 to bed on that train. That train was going back to Holland
20 and in the middle of the night my father woke me us and he
21 said we be in Strausberg and you and I we are getting off this
22 train. I said, "Why?" He said in Holland things are not very
23 good and in Paris they are very much better. We are going to
24 Paris. So in minutes, our belongings were thrown off the
25 train and there we stood on the platform and there was another

1 train, very elegant train full of Americans and we asked where
2 it was going and it was going to Paris. They said come on
3 aboard -- they knew we were deportees -- we still had short
4 hair, you know, we had come from the camp and everybody was
5 very nice. So the Americans took us on their train back to
6 Paris and we arrived at the Gar. d'este and at the Gar. d'este
7 there was enormous havoc because all the stragglers that had
8 come -- survived concentration camps were beginning to arrive.

9 They were all arriving at the Gar. d'este and there were
10 people standing with pictures. You couldn't even get out of
11 the (inaudible)-- it was a very traumatic experience.

12 Q Trying to identify - -

13 A Trying to identify -- find people. And how can you? I
14 mean there were all these healthy looking people with hair on
15 their head -- how would you ever recognize anybody, you know,
16 compared with how they looked like now. We were put on Red
17 Cross transportation -- some were taken to the Bleu ba ta
18 raspaie where the French had taken a big, big hotel and made
19 it into centre de repatriacion and there we were given food
20 rations and temporary identification papers right away -- some
21 kind of a passport and clothing and then I was sent to a
22 centre outside of Paris in the suburb of Lon-gen-so-man
23 strictly to be fed and for rest and food and medical examina-
24 tions. The French had a fairly good organization place at
25 least to do, you know, so that people that had no place to go

1 found it a very nice place -- or a decent place and it was
2 this big villa outside Long-gen-so-man where we were boarded
3 at the time - it was very lovely, very nice with lots of
4 nurses and lots of staff and lots of wonderful food and we
5 stayed there for -- four or five weeks and then both my dad
6 and I got extremely ill. I got a very bad case of pneumonia
7 and my father who had been eating normal food again which he
8 absolutely shouldn't have done, of course, started accumulating
9 fluids in his body; his kidneys wouldn't function; his bladder
10 wouldn't function. He had to go to the hospital. He was
11 hospitalized for a while. I got better and we rented a small
12 apartment from people we had met at the centre.

13 Oh, let me interject here. We had, my dad had some money
14 in Paris. That's why we went to Paris to begin with and, you
15 know, he knew he had accounts receivable there; he had some
16 ready cash to lay his hands on. When we arrived in Paris
17 after a few days we went to see one of his old business friends
18 and the business friend said I just received a card from your
19 brother from Egypt - the first communication we had from him
20 during the war and he handed it to my father. it was (inaudible)
21 My father burst out crying; it was the first information we
22 had that my oldest brother had just been killed a few months
23 earlier. Surely we had not ever thought that my oldest brother
24 wouldn't be alive, you know. We knew that my other brother
25 couldn't possibly be alive but ^{that} my oldest brother would be dead

1 that was very hard to take for us. Particularly for my father.
2 A friend of ours was in the American Army. He was with the
3 Signal Corp and he was stationed in Paris and he, of course,
4 came over immediately when we -- when it was --when he heard
5 from the United States that we were in Paris and he got me
6 transportation to Amsterdam; got me an American Army uniform
7 -- all these things could be done then (laughter) Remember
8 that many, many allowances were made in 1945 and 1946 for
9 people who had just come out of a concentration camp. I mean
10 -- you were just a little bit beyond the law and besides it's
11 been such -- it had been such an unlawful time in Europe that
12 people really didn't worry too much about crossing borders
13 illegally or anything else. Anyway, he got me the pass on the
14 American train to Brussels and from there took a streetcar to
15 Antwerp and then I hitchhiked all the way to Amsterdam. I
16 found my mother in Amsterdam and then we had to reverse this
17 process. She couldn't go in an American Army train. She
18 couldn't hitchhike but friends of the people she was staying
19 with in Holland had a property on the Dutch border between
20 Limberg and Belgium and they were going down to get food
21 because food was very hard to get in Amsterdam and they had a
22 car and I don't know how they managed to have gasoline but
23 they had gasoline right after the war. So they took mother
24 down with them and I crossed the border at night and put on a
25 streetcar to Brussels. I made my way back to Brussels hitch-

1 hiking to Antwerp and then on the train and again dad had a
2 business friend in Paris and we had used that address as a
3 mutual address and the people were there and they welcomed us
4 and from Brussels it was fairly easy to get Red Cross trans-
5 portation then to -- back to Paris; as a matter of fact I
6 think I went to the American Army again and got a pass for my
7 mother and myself on an American train. And that's how we got
8 back to Paris as a family and we lived in Paris; I went back
9 to school and we lived in Paris for about a year and a half
10 before coming to the United States.

11 I believe I told you more what happened after the war than
12 what happened during (laughter).

13 Q So you left Paris -- deciding - how did you decide to come
14 to the United States?

15 A Well we had -- remember we were the only ones on both sides
16 of the family that were left in Europe -- everybody was either
17 in Isreal or in England or primarily in Dad's side of the
18 family in the United States. And all the friends from our
19 home town -- all those people that had stayed with us in
20 Holland on their way to the United States was a very close
21 group of people; to this day they're pretty close. They all
22 absolutely insisted; there was no question in anybody's mind.
23 We had nothing to say about it. (laughter) It was like "you
24 guys have had it with Europe." I know my parents were rather
25 reluctant to come to the United States. I didn't have any

1 say in the matter and I believe I was totally in favor of it
2 but you know it was just one of those givens in life.

3 Q And then you came to the States in - - -

4 A 1946. September, October of 1946.

5 Q And what did you do at that time?

6 A I went -- I got a job. Listen, we had no money. (laughter)

7 We had just enough money to pay our fares with to come to the
8 United States and that was about it. I got a job working for
9 a distant relative who had an import-export company and I went
10 to school at night. My mother started working making belts
11 during the daytime -- handmade belts -- and she worked for the
12 catering firm at night and my dad started his own business.
13 He was in surgical instruments and he started his own business
14 right away. He had some product that you manufacture here
15 under license which was an artificial hip joint and it went
16 very well. And dad got himself established by 1950, '51,
17 sufficiently mother had-could stop working. He died in 1959.
18 He'd done well enough that mother never had to worry about
19 anything.

20 (something missing with change of tape.)

21 - - '49? And you came here?

22 A I came to Los Angeles first for six weeks. Didn't like it
23 and couldn't find a job and came to San Francisco to see the
24 city for a weekend and found a job Monday morning and stayed.

25 Q And since then - say between 1950 and when you started

1 working actively (inaudible) what was your attitude towards
2 your previous experience?

3 A Well, I kept it very much buried. I couldn't really deal
4 with it at all for years and in the early fifties I had a --
5 well, 1951 and 1952 I had my tattoo removed because until that
6 was removed I wouldn't be anyplace with a short sleeved shirt.
7 I simply couldn't deal with being asked about this. And in
8 the early fifties about '56, '57 I finally had some money and
9 I also was in quite a bit of trouble emotionally and I went to
10 a psychiatrist and went into analysis for a couple of years at
11 great expense but it did work; at least I learned how to deal
12 with it all. However, learning how to deal with it all doesn't
13 mean that I wanted to deal with it and I didn't keep it buried
14 to myself as much but at least I didn't go public. That came
15 much later. That came later A, because of my dear friend
16 Lonny Darbin pushing and a few other people pushing and number
17 2, that so many of us are really -- you know -- getting older
18 and losing their memories and forgetting facts and that the
19 big push was the revisionism that started coming out. That of
20 course, I think, forced all of us to come out in the open and
21 discuss these things - and go public -- and go on record at
22 least -- I think the weight of accumulative testimony will
23 probably be more important than what an -- what any individual
24 has to say on the subject. Because, you know, all of us have
25 certain recollections and we certainly have buried certain

1 recollections. I would think -- there isn't anybody around
2 that can really be an absolute witness. You know.

3 Q But -- we're getting -- like you say, it's a collective
4 memory - - -

5 A Okay, we got it?

6 Q We got it. This time we're going to keep it.

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Rosenstein Jerry

1985

Version 2

Interviewer: Joel Neuberg

Date: 5/23/85

San Francisco

From Germany

Transcriber: Gerald Rosenstein

Transcription of interview June 1985 - File Name: BIO

Gerald B. Rosenstein born in Bensheim, Germany near Heidelberg during May 1927.

Q: What was it like to be a child in the pre-Nazi time ?

A: Well, I was a very small child in the pre-Nazi period. The advent of the Nazis, which was 1932-1933, just about the time I was going to first grade, and there was always an aura of fear and fright around us. We lived in a fairly isolated villa outside of town. My father was frequently away on business, there were 3 small children, and my Mother was alone with whatever help we had.

I remember when I was 5,6 or 7 years old, they tried to set the garage on fire twice at night, and I also remember small incidents in the first or second grade.

Q: You went to a regular school ?

A: I went to a regular Volksschule.

Q: What kind of incidents ?

A: I remember particularly one kind of incident, where a stranger accused me of having done something to his child, who was a class mate of mine. He was obviously lower class, and a Nazi. It was about 20 or 30 meters from our door where this happened on the street. I remember I was very frightened. There was just a maid at home, nobody else, nothing could be done or should be done at that time. (I left out from this tape that I was beaten by that strange man).

We moved away from there in 1935, to the nearest larger city, called Darmstadt, which is South of Frankfurt, and where we lived for 6 months during which I went to school. I believe that school was a Hebrew school, not a regular one. In the middle of 1936 we moved lock, stock and barrel to Amsterdam, where we emigrated. We did take all our furniture with us. We had to sell our house in Bensheim at a "Zwangungsverkaufpreis", a price which was artificially reduced.

Q: And who did you sell it to ?

A: We sold the house to some people who were interested in buying the house, they were not particularly Nazis or anything, just people who bought the house.

Q: Who determined that the price had to be artificially reduced ?

A: Real Estate prices at the time were artificially low, just

because of the fact that many Jewish Houses were forced on the market, also remember, those were years when there was not much cash around to begin with. I dont know what the price of the house was, how much of a mortgage there was on the house, , or anything. But I do know, that after WW2, the then-owners of the house, had to make a very large payment, to allow for the difference between the real market price and what the house was sold for at the time. However, that payment was never made to us, because at the time , no one knew that we were alive, and it was made to the State of Israel, which was just as well.

Q: Than you moved to Holland in 1936 ?

A: We moved to Holland in 1936. I went to school in Holland. IN 1938 my oldest brother , an ardent Zionist, emmigrated with an Allyah to Palestine . During the war her entered into the Palestine Corps, where he was a Commando, and he was killed in 1944 in the Mediterranean Basin. This was in the British Army.

My second brother who was 1.5 years older than I , was deported in 1943 to Auschwitzx where he dies - excuse me, he was deported in the summer of 1942 to Auschwitz with one of the first deportations, and he was killed in Auschwitz, to the best of our knowledge, in early 1943.

Q: What was life like in Holland in 1936, 1937 and 1938 ?

A: I only have good memories. We went to school, and lived well, my Dad had his business. There was of course the constant worry about the people in Germany, and the Progroms there, and what was going on over there. We had constant visitors from our home town on their way to America , because my parents helped almost everyone there to get out . One way to help is to give them facilities to stay on their way to the United States until their visas came through. But we were stupid enough not to do this, we stayed in Holland.

Life was very nice. I have very good memories of Holland. I went to grammar school there, and I went to highschool, for 2 or 3 years,

Q: When did things change ?

A: Things started changing in in 1940, and I believe in 1941 we were not allowed to go to regular school any longer. I then went to a Jewish high school, which was quite a distant from the house (apartment...) it was a long walk - also, at that time, we were no longer allowed to use streetcars . We had to wear the Yellow Star, of course, and we were not allowed to have non-Jewish help. Of course nobody could have cars, I believe the Dutch could not have cars either. Thiong changed very rapidly in Holland, because there was no Dutch

Government, and the Germans were the Government in force. They had some Dutch collaboration, there is no question about that. Also they had exact lists of all the Jews in Holland. These are well-known facts, I don't have to elaborate on that.

We were just sitting there like pigeons, with our suitcases packed, we had no place to go.

Q: Why did not you look for a place to hide out? People hear about people like Anne Frank, people who were hidden by the Dutch people.

A: My parents had no connections for this, and I really do not know to this date what their financial circumstances were

I have a feeling there was not really all that much money, that they could contemplate something like that, because you have to have a huge amount of cash in order to be able to finance that. You could not have bank accounts, I just don't know what there was, I have never been able to figure it out.

Q: So you were... from the time of the invasion untill when?:

A: From the time the deportations started untill we were picked up, which was in 1943 - we were kind of prepared to be picked up in the middle of the night, like everyone else. Because that always happened during the middle of the night, and not during the day time. First we went to a Theater in Eastern Amsterdam, which was used at the time as a staging place. We stayed there a couple of days, and from there we were sent to Westerbork, and in Westerbork we were eventually separated. My parents went to Bergen-Belsen. I stayed on in Westerbork for a few more months, and I was then sent to Theresienstadt. A few months later, by some fluke, my parents were also sent to Theresienstadt from Bergen-Belsen.

We were then reunited, though we lived at different places in Theresienstadt, as a family unit. And my Mother stayed in Theresienstadt untill the end of the war, where she worked in a place called THE GLIMMER, where they made some kind of silicate chips for submarine insulation. The women who worked there, possibly a few hundred, no more, where about all the people that were left in Theresienstadt at the end of the war.

The deportations from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz started somewhere in 1943, I am a little vague on the dates at the moment. We were lucky that we were not amongst those first deported, because there were hardly any survivors from those first transports which went from Th. to Ausschw.

At the time we were deported from Theresienstadt we still had

no inkling what Ausschw. was like, that is was a deathcamp, or what kind of camp. Surely the elders in Theresienstadt must have had an inkling, but they kept it to themselves.

Qu: You new people were being deported out of the camp ?

Answ: Oh, definitely - there were the long trains, and there was a terrible situation, and you knew you had to go when your time came to go. You also knew it was going to be a lot worse than Theresienstadt was,. So my father and I were deported sometime in spring or early summer of 1944, to Auschw. It was the usual deportation train, probably a lot of others have described it; there were the 40 men or 8 horses cars - there were about 100 to 125 people in each car, there were buckets of water, but no food or sanitary facilities. To the best of my knowledge the trip lasted about 4, 5 or 6 days, but we are all very vague on that. It is just very difficult to determine at this stage how long it lasted; it just seemed forever. Quite a few people did not survive the railroad trip.

Did you want to know more about Theres. first ?

Qu: Well, what was your daily life like, and what did you do in Theresienstadt ?

Answ: I was at that time about 15 years old. What was my daily life like ? I don't recall all that many details from Theresienstadt. I worked in potato fields, and we worked outside the camp on some work details, most of which was not very difficult, and I also did some work in town, even though I really forgot the nature of all of that . There were a lot of cultural activities initiated by the "inmated", there were school classes, there was music, and there were a lot clandestine plays, Kurt Weill was put on in attics, and I remember participating, not as an actor, at all those things, because the people that were involved were folks I and my parents had known in Holland , and there were a lot of people there who had originally been with UFA, actors and directors from the German movie company, from before Hitler - who had been very prominent at the time - unfortunately most of them went on two transports prior to ours, and none of them survived (Kurt Gerron, Martin Greifenhaken).

I am really not that clear any longer what life in Th. was like, it was simply not so traumatic or as tough - surely we were hungry, and surely there were a lot of fleas, but it was bearable, it was survivable, there was no extermination there. People who were shot and killed in Th. were taken first to a place called Die Kleine Festung - meaning The Small Fortress, which was a smaller concentration camp just outside Th., where people were actually killed, or executed, which was more like Buchenwald or Dachau, but Th. itself was not like that.

After the deportation to Birkenau, we arrived there in the middle of the night, too - at the famous railroad siding, well known from existing pictures - and exactly as it is in the pictures, except the big lights were on, and we were told to line up 5 or 6 in a row, and march up to the selection table where Mr. Mengele at the time was sitting. Those marked for death were going to the right, and the others were going to the left - Just prior to arriving there, my father said to me, let us just tell them we are metal workers- which we did. It was a very good instinct. Both of us were within the limits of the ages of the surviving group. My father was probably near the top age, and I was at the bottom limit, I was amongst the youngest.

All the children and all the elderly, and all the people who did not look healthy and most of the females were sent to the gas chambers immediately.

Qu: Did you have any idea that this process was happening? That they were selecting?

Ans: We did not know at the time that this was an actual selection process - but 5 minutes afterwards we knew - the Kapos and the inmates who were disciplining us or keeping us in order - they let us in on it immediately, what the burning chimneys were all about - that it was gas chambers, and so on. We could see by the people shuffling about, the ones in sight, just how terrible it was. We got the picture very, very quickly.

We were sent to a barracks where we were told to strip, and put all our possessions in a pile - everything that we had, which was done - We were allowed to keep our shoes, it was the only possession we could keep - We were physically searched, of course, totally shaven of all bodily hair, and tattooed, showered in some kind of disinfectant shower, and then we were issued the blue and white prison type uniform, some type of a cap - no socks - but we were allowed to take our shoes back - unbeknownst to me at the time, my father had some dollar bills hidden in his shoes and they came in good stead much later on.

We stayed in Ausch/Birkenau under the most traumatic conditions for about 6 weeks, or 8 weeks.

Qu: What was life like for you there? What did you do?

Ans: We were crowded into a barracks, we had to sleep virtually like sardines in a can. - we had to stand frequently on the parade grounds, to be counted, tortured with all the silly things they made you do, dig ditches, carry cabbage, offals - go to the kitchen and carry the cannisters with the soup - and - what was life like? - Waiting for the next selection process, which at the time you

knew was coming and you also knew that it was much more vital that you survived that one.

Qu: You knew there would be periodic selections ?

Answ: Yes - we knew that - and those of course are much more traumatic and difficult to get through - you shake in your boots - the first time you did not quite know what was happening, but this time you knew....

A lot of people killed themselves, a lot of people went up to the electric wired fence, a lot of people were killed, did not survive the selection process, or did not survive just being there .

We also found out what the term "Muselman" meant. I don't know where they got it from, the literal translation was Muslim - they were people who no longer had the will to live. There was a psychological and a physical change in them, there was nothing that could be done to keep them alive. They were simply earmarked for death, already by themselves.. even if they were not going to the gas chamber just yet, they were dying. It was a very sad thing to see, someone becoming a Muselman - I don't know if these people were shunned, I don't think they were shunned in any way (this is to be corrected, they were....) They isolated themselves physically and psychologically. It was a phenomenon easily observed, a fact of daily life there.

It is amazing how quickly you get used to all these facts of daily life, I came from a rather protected, normal environment and you are thrown into a place like Auschw. - what is then really amazing is that you can adjust yourself psychologically to the conditions prevailing there .

I imagine most of us that survived had that in common, in that we all made a rapid psychological adjustment to what was happening to us .

Qu: You were there 6 weeks, you said, in Birkenau ?

Answ: 'It could have been 8 weeks, I really don't recall. And then we suddenly were put on a truck, and sent to a camp named Gleiwitz III, which was one of the satellite camps. The
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A: From the time the deportations started untill we were picked up, which was in 1943 - we were kind of prepared to be picked up in the middle of the night, like everyone else. Because that always happened during the middle of the night, and not during the day time. First we went to a Theater in Eastern Amsterdam, which was used at the time as a staging place. We stayed there a couple of days, and from there we were sent to Westerbork, and in Westerbork we were eventually separated. My parents went to Bergen-Belsen. I stayed on in Westerbork for a few more months, and I was then sent to Theresienstadt. A few months later, by some fluke, my parents were also sent to Theresienstadt from Bergen-Belsen.

We were sent reunited, though we lived at different places in Theresienstadt, as a family unit. And my Mother stayed in Theresienstadt untill the end of the war original satellite camp was - I believe- Monowitz - Gleiwitz, Krakowitz, I dont recall how many satellite camps there were.

These were more labor intensive camps, the gas chambers were in Auschw. All had small crematoria for the people who died there to be cremated, but they did not have gas chambers. There life was very grim, but it was not as terror-stricken as it was in Auschw.Birkenau -

We got up at sunrise, and we worked until - whatever- in factories - there were 2 or 3 factories there, one making railroad equipment, one making armaments , some kind of missile type armament - V bombs or something alike, I did welding in that factory and also worked in athe railroad factory on axels and wheels - exactly all I was doing I cannot remember, it was mostly simple metal work . It was winter time, and they were (the factories) reasonably warm on the inside. We were always working with welding equipment and so on, so we were not freezing.

In the camp itself conditions were very - very cold. I suppose we got one or two meals a day, the meals consisted of ubiquitous type of liquids called soup - with something at

the bottom, if you were lucky you just get there when the bottom was being scraped - breakfast was something called coffee, and dry bread - the food was not enough to die on, but certainly not enough to live on. We were all very emaciated and undernourished - However, my father, having been a diabetic all his life, for the first time was healthy. He was not sick for one way in the camps. Neither was I.

Life was hard because of the physical labor - even though the factory labor was not always so tough. But sometimes, I had to unload railroad cars - that was very difficult and that is where I got a bad back injury - fairly much at the beginning of our stay there.

Qu: When you injured your back, you just had to keep working?

Answ: Oh yes - There was no opportunity to be ill. It was just a bad crack and real pain, but the real injury did not show up until a couple of years later.

Qu: There was not a hospital set-up if you got injured?

Answ: It was just the other way around. If you got sick or injured, you pretended not to be sick or injured because the chances for you to survive as a sick or injured individual were minimal. They either might send you back to Birkenau, or some other unfortunate fate might befall you. So, psychologically, one was attuned to stay healthy - and we did.

We were very much kept abreast of what was happening in the outside world. News did filter through, through all kinds of means, my father found out from guards where the frontier lines were - there were clandestine radio reports - occasionally some laborers would leave newspapers around the factories and if they were German newspapers, people could read them. We almost always knew how far the Russians were away, how they were advancing - we knew a little bit less what was going on on the Western Front - but we certainly were quite apprised of what was going on in the Eastern war.

At the time we were there - one day a guard said to my father "I think I served under you in World War One". It was indeed the case, he had recognized by Dad which was amazing after all those years.

Qu: Your father had been in the German army in World War 1?

Answ: He was an officer in the German army - and that guard had served under him and remembered him. So my father gave him those Dollars he had hidden in his shoe - and occasionally at night, that guard would throw some bread or other food across the fence to my Dad, when it was reasonably safe to do so. He jeopardized his own life -

I might interject here, that man was not a nazi, he was a retired man living in Western Germany who had simply been recruited for guard duty in a concentration camp- because he was too old to fight in the army. He may not ever have been a nazi, there were a number of guard like that, and we did not have anything to fear from those guards. They were not the young SS guards. Many of them, on the march to Blechhammer, were shot by their own people (stragglers) who could not keep up with the group.

At the beginning of January 45 the Russians were advancing. We had heard in the camp already, a couple of months, or possibly a month earlier, that the extermination at the gas chambers in Birkenau had been stopped. Whether this was actually true we did not know. As a matter of fact, I want to come back to something I forgot:

At the time we arrived in Birkenau, the big transports from Hungary arrived, with many Hungarian Jews, and many, many gypsies. None of them went through the selection process. To the best of my knowledge, all of them went directly to the gas chambers. Certainly all the gypsies. There was also a group of Rumanian midgets, who were used by Mengele in the experimentation block. Just this week Time magazine has written about these people. Some of them survived, and where on the train with us - a couple of months - later - between Krakow and Czernovitch - which was then Eastern Rumania. I remember speaking to them. They had undergone terrible hardships, particularly the women with experimental surgery etc. I don't know how many of the group survived, there were many, it was a circus group caught by the Germans. I believe there were 5 or 6 survivors - but I do not recall exactly.

To go back now to the time we were in Gleiwitz, the Russians were advancing. One morning, 4 or 5 am, we were aroused, and told to march, on a road. We marched for many days, I don't recall how many, 2 - 3 or 4 days possibly 5 days - maybe less- we were told immediately that all stragglers would be shot, which was indeed the fact - including the German guards.

There was no way of running away or doing anything, you must remember we were in enemy territory and marked, there was not anyone going to take a chance and hiding us - We arrived in a camp called Blechhammer one evening -were told to find a barracks and spend the night - the next morning, I believe it was early morning, and I was outside the barracks for some reason or other.

All of a sudden they were shooting from the towers into the camp, anything that moved, of course we got our asses right back into the barracks or some safer ground - than it was quite for a while, and we looked up, and found the towers were no longer manned and the Germans had fled. We understood

later they had fled with a lot of other prisoners, a couple of hours earlier. We were within a group at that camp - I don't recall how many people were left at that time - the conditions in the camp were pretty chaotic, there was no food there-it was fortunately extremely cold, a lot of snow on the ground - because otherwise it would have been rampant with disease - there were many unburied bodies lying about -

I recall that sometime in the middle of the day, some civilians came to the gate of the camp- I don't think anyone dared to come in there- and then a while later some Russian soldiers appeared- we saw some Russians driving by. We felt fairly safe the next morning, and organized a group of 12 - actually a nucleus of 12 people from Holland - we had been together since Birkenau, and Theresienstadt already. We were all in the same group.

One of them was a butcher - We got out of there and started marching East, towards the Russian lines, and found an abandoned English prisoner-of-war camp, some barracks; we knew it was English POW by the things we found, even an English case of tea - lots of dishes and blankets, all things we needed - plus a little pig foraging outside - which became our first decent meal.

That was about the middle or end of January 1945. We stayed there for about 12 days, to recoup our forces- we scrounged around for food, and found enough to help get our strength back to some degree. Then the Russians came and told us to move further East. We went to Krakow. I cannot recall now if it was Krakow or Katowitz, believe it was Katowitz.

Qu: How did you get to Katowitz ?

Ans: By foot. We marched for a couple of days . What little belongings we had was easily carried. At night we found monasteries or holy orders or something like that- to spend the night. We had some terrible experiences there - first of all the Russians organized us a few times, made us dig ditches when the Germans threatened a counter-attack, and the Russians also did not know what to make of us. Remember, except for the Officers, you dealt with a very sadistic, uncultured bunch of troops, mostly undereducated, some of them still illiterate - and people who had suffered an enormous amount during the war - and then you got the problem of the Slavic language. We were just suspect, they really did not quite know who we were and what we were - the fact that we spoke Dutch did not help, to them it was probably the same as German.

Some of the officers of course were more helpful.- There was an enormous amount of rape, all the women (German) were gang raped, particularly nuns- they really had it in for the nuns. The amount of gang rape was just

incredible. One of our people was a physician, and he was asked by the Superior to examine some of the nuns, but he could not do much for them. We arrived in Katowitz somewhere late January early February 1945. There was some kind of red cross type of organizations, that was active and found us quarters there with civilians. The civilians were scared to death - we did not feel sorry for them - We stayed there untill we were notified, about 3 or 4 weeks later, there was a train sent by the Red Cross to take us, eventually, to the Black Sea.

But first we went on a long, long, boring train ride, to a town called Czernovitch which is in Bessarabia - Bukowina I think it was called - now part of Russia - than the Eastern province of Rumania. The town was totally untouched by World War II, it was like an island of peace - a beautiful white city up in the mountains- very civilized, with a large Jewish population - which was German speaking- a weird kind of Austrian German, dating back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

For some reason unbekonst to me, the Jewish population had been left intact - no deportation, no persecutions, nothing. Apparently, there was a strong local Rumanian Government there, which kind of protected its people, though it was a Nazi Government, allied with the Germans- but could protect the Jews.

The Jewish Community there took it upon themselves to quarter us with everybody. The Russians were there, of course, and supervised everything. It was nice, were there 6 weeks.

We then went by train to Odessa, where we were housed in a hotel or sanitarium outside of town on the beach, well supervised, and eventually, during May 1945, by Red Cross ship to Marseille - We were on a train going to Holland, but my Dad decided in the middle of the night, at Strasbourg RR station, to declare our independence, and we got off and onto an army (American) train to Paris.