

PEGGY CANTERBURY

MOVING COURT REPORTER

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA 35401

Office 349-3870
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Res. 553-8831

Zade 25

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Irving Zale *S. Rafael*

2 INTERVIEWER: Jack Gaines

3 DATE: (Unknown) *FEB 1985*

4 PLACE: (Unknown)

5 TRANSCRIBER: Peggy Canterbury

6

7 Q I am Jack Gaines. I'm about to interview Mr. Irving
8 Zale with his gracious permission--he and his wife.

9 So if you don't mind, perhaps you could -- Please
10 start from your early memories of your childhood: where
11 and what were the circumstances of your home
12 environment. Just give me a little picture if you
13 could.

14 A Okay. Myself and my parents resided in Cracow when the
15 war broke out in 1939.

16 Q And you were--?

17 A At the time in 1939, I was fourteen years old. In
18 1949--1939 I should say--

19 Q Yes.

20 A --1939 when the war broke out we tried to escape from
21 the Nazis and we tried to go towards the eastern part
22 of Poland, but we were quickly overrun by the German
23 army and--

24 Q If you don't mind my interrupting you and asking you--

25 A Right.

1 Q --more specific questions, okay, and we can get back
2 to that.

3 A (Inaudible.)

4 Q Good, okay. Could you tell me your first awareness
5 that there was danger?

6 A Well, we knew from the politics and from reading the
7 newspapers that the Nazis were gearing up to swallow
8 up Poland and they were getting together with the
9 Russian allies.

10 Q You were fourteen years old?

11 A Right.

12 Q Was there a moment, can you recall now? It's a long
13 time ago--

14 A Well, I recall listening to the radio, listening--and
15 reading the newspapers in Poland and every--everything
16 was pointing out that there will be a clash with Germany
17 over the Danzig Corridor affair. It was just a matter
18 of fact when. But I recall vividly that in late summer
19 1939--1939--there was a war scare. People were starting
20 to buy up groceries, supplies. And whoever had money--
21 unfortunately my parents didn't--were trying to get--
22 secure passports from foreign countries to escape
23 Poland.

24 Q But you knew there would be a war?

25 A Oh, definitely. There was no doubt about it.

1 Q But what prompted you -- What was the first -- I mean,
2 we know now a lot of history. But what was the first--
3 if you can recall--the first sign that you personally
4 had that this was a terribly unsafe place? Other than
5 the war coming.

6 A Okay.

7 Q The war was everywhere.

8 A On the 3rd of September there was a very brief aerial
9 bombardment of Cracow and we know that the war was on.
10 We knew that on the 1st of September the war had broken
11 out because newspaper reports--

12 Q Yes. But to go from here to there, there was war over
13 there, too. Where was the first sign that you personally
14 had, not of war--of course, the war is part of it--but
15 that you were in danger other than by war. War is
16 to everybody. Was is--

17 A We knew -- We knew--

18 Q You. You. When did you.

19 A Okay. Let me go back briefly in time. We lived in
20 Germany from 1933 at the time the Nazis took power.
21 I was born in Cologne; my parents lived in Cologne.
22 And it was only in 1939, being Polish Jews, that we had
23 to leave Germany and go back unfortunately to Poland.
24 We had no place else to go. We knew what the Germans
25 stood for. We observed Nazis' policies from 1933.

1 through 1938. We saw the Nuremburg laws coming into
2 effect and we saw the gradual harrassment of Jews in
3 civil service and in business. So this was--

4 Q Your father--

5 A My father was self-employed, but we felt that Jews were
6 being singled out for the economic role--

7 Q What was he? What was his employment?

8 A He was a salesman for a men's clothing manufacturer.

9 Q Were there any signs in that company that--

10 A Oh, yeah. My father found it rather difficult to work
11 for a Catholic firm or an Aryan firm, so he had to--
12 he was only employed by Jewish firms. And as Jewish
13 firms became fewer and fewer, his livelihood decreased
14 and his earnings power decreased. And as I said, we
15 witnessed the coming--Hitler's coming to power from
16 1933 to 1938.

17 Q While you were there witnessing these, you saw the Nazis
18 in the streets?

19 A Yeah. We saw the Nazis in the streets; we read their
20 newspapers; we heard their speeches.

21 Q And people that you knew?

22 A Right. And people that we knew who were unfortunately
23 in a little better situation than we who could muster
24 the funds to escape and leave the country.

25 Q And those that didn't, like you, did you see any

1 evidence that they were doing what we know now they
2 did? Did you see--

3 A There was no -- Please remember that the harrassment
4 of Jews did not start until the Crystal Night. And we
5 were not in Germany at the time the Crystal Night
6 started. That triggered off the violent attacks against
7 the Jews. And then the deportations started. We did
8 not come face to face with that until we--until after
9 the war broke out.

10 Q So you and your family--particularly your father at
11 first--sensed that this was coming.

12 A Yes.

13 Q And like others--

14 A My father made every attempt to leave Germany, but you
15 had to be well off and you had to have the funds in
16 order to get out of the country and we did not have
17 anybody in America at the time. We did not have
18 anybody in any other European country, so the only way
19 was to leave and go back to Poland. And we knew we
20 were going out of--from the fire into the frying pan,
21 but we thought that under the circumstances this
22 would be the best thing to do.

23 Q Did you get there?

24 A Yeah. We left Germany a year before Germany decided to
25 take and throw out all the Polish Jews and forcefully

1 evict them over the border, so we took all our
2 belongings with us at the time in 1938.

3 Q From--

4 A From Cologne.

5 Q From Cologne, yes. And you went back to--

6 A To Cracow.

7 Q --to Cracow? And then in Cracow?

8 A Well, in Cracow is where the war broke out. And on the
9 4th of September 1939, we decided to go by--on foot
10 using whatever transportation there were trying to get
11 into the area around Lim-burg which we knew would be
12 occupied by the Soviet Union as a result of the
13 partition of the agreement between Nazi Germany and the
14 Soviet Union. But we never made it to Lim-burg. And
15 halfway into that direction the Nazis overtook us and
16 there was no other way but for us to return to Cracow.

17 Q These were soldiers?

18 A Yeah. The Nazi army overtook us and we knew there was
19 no other way for us to escape. We had no automobile.
20 We were dependent on whatever--

21 Q What did they do with you at that time?

22 A Nothing. There was a big movement of civilian popula-
23 tion going back and forth. At the time there was no
24 curtailment of travel. You could go wherever you wanted
25 to go.

1 Q I see.

2 A But we could not cross the Russian border.

3 Q So they turned you back?

4 A They turned us back, right.

5 Q And then?

6 A Well, then gradually in the winter of 1939, gradually
7 laws came out that were similar to the laws that had
8 been enacted in Nazi Germany, such as wearing of the--of
9 an armband that identified you with the Star of David.
10 You were given ration coupons for food that had a
11 different color than those given--

12 Q Those armbands, were they distributed or you had to make
13 them?

14 A Yeah, you had to -- Being Jewish, you had to obtain
15 them from the Jewish Community Center and you had to
16 wear them. And there were different--as I said there
17 were different rationing cards. You were--

18 Q And the fact of wearing that--

19 A Singled you out as being Jewish.

20 Q Yes. But I mean, in terms of going into stores or
21 employment or services, what was the--

22 A Well, you were curtailed at every possible--at every
23 possible turn. You were curtailed in employment, you
24 were curtailed and you were laughed at by Polish--

25 Q By the wearing -- So you were walking in the street with

1 a band, you were assaulted, you were ridiculed?

2 A Yeah. You were ridiculed by the Nazis--

3 Q Really.

4 A --and by the army and--

5 Q And the civilian population?

6 A The civilian population, of course, loved this. They
7 now knew who a Jew was and could--

8 Q They didn't know that before, you don't think?

9 A Well, it wasn't that obvious.

10 Q And without -- You saw -- You never sensed, I wonder,
11 someone who wasn't feeling that way? They all
12 generally felt that way?

13 A No, it was generally a very disquieting way of moving
14 around.

15 Q But you didn't, for example, ever detect any sympathy?

16 A Well, yes. But it wasn't openly -- It was when you got
17 together with people at their homes that they said,
18 well--

19 Q But as a Jew you did that?

20 A Oh, yeah. There was still cohabitation, co-living with
21 Polish people that lived in your building and you still
22 were able to talk about these things.

23 Q And they were quite civil?

24 A Well, some were, some weren't. Others -- There was some
25 sympathy and some feeling of why do they have to do this

1 to you and you shouldn't have to--

2 Q You didn't hear that?

3 A Yes.

4 Q And you had kids, I suppose, your age at that time?

5 A Yeah.

6 Q How were they--

7 A My colleagues--my friends were of the same--in the same
8 predicament. We felt that we were really branded.

9 Q Is this Jews or non-Jews?

10 A No, we were branded as Jews.

11 Q Oh, you had no non-Jewish friends?

12 A No, we did not. Not at the time.

13 Q Right.

14 A We were living in Cracow only for about a year and a
15 half. We had some relatives there, some of whom were
16 able to escape and make it into the Russian part of
17 Poland at the time. Others were still living with us.

18 Q Yes. And those that made it to the Russian border,
19 were they safe?

20 A We heard from them. There was exchange of cultural
21 service between Nazi-occupied part of Poland and the
22 Soviet part of Poland.

23 Q Did they survive?

24 A They survived, but -- Yes, they survived. Like my
25 uncle escaped and he survived. The Russians caught him,

1 but they sent him to a labor camp and their labor camps
2 were not like the Nazi labor camps.

3 Q Were unlike?

4 A Yeah.

5 Q Right.

6 A So let me go on, if I may--

7 Q Yes.

8 A --quickly from the diary that I kept. The thing that
9 I recall also particularly was--and what is my greatest
10 memory of the war--is the forced-labor situation. I
11 was very fortunate inasmuch as I was never exposed to
12 the--to an extermination camp. Throughout my war years
13 I managed to work, and I worked and I worked. And I will
14 go over this much more for you.

15 In 1940 there was a very severe--1939 and 1940
16 there was a very severe winter. There was extreme
17 masses of snow being accumulated in the streets and
18 causing horrendous traffic jams. And the people that
19 were required to remove the snow and forced into
20 removing the snow were the Jews. We had to report to
21 the Jewish Community Center every morning. We were
22 given spades and shovels and told where to go and we
23 were supervised by either Nazis or Polish police in
24 order to remove the snow in the streets.

25 Q Did anyone refuse to?

1 A You could not refuse. They had a log. They knew who
2 you were because they had ID -- Every Jew got an ID
3 card. And of course these ID cards were cross-
4 referenced by the police authorities. And you were
5 given a snow-removal card that you had to be--that had
6 to be stamped every day that you had to go to your
7 reporting station. We shoveled snow from early morning
8 till late at night and there was no compensation for
9 that. The only compensation that we did get was that
10 at the end of the day they gave us a half a loaf of
11 bread. That was your reward. And then you could go
12 home, sleep, and then next morning you had to report
13 again. These are some of the vivid things that I have
14 in mind. And this was applicable to young and old.
15 Anybody from the age of, I believe, sixteen to sixty
16 had to go out and shovel snow. And unfortunately the
17 weather did not cooperate. There were tremendous
18 blizzards and snow accumulation went right through the
19 winter. The situation of forced labor for Jews in
20 Cracow became gradually worse inasmuch as -- There was
21 no ghetto yet in 1941. But Jews were required to work
22 in different parts of the city for factories. And
23 some of the factories were brick manufacturers. There
24 was a soda ash plant in the outskirts of Cracow. There
25 were other plants that were given to the German

1 armament industry that also employed Jews. And Jews
2 were forced to work there. There was no compensation.

3 Q And there was no way of objecting?

4 A No, there was no way of -- Now, in 1942 after we had
5 already worked at a local brick-making factory, there
6 was an edict passed that a ghetto would be formed in
7 Cracow and people would be required to either move out
8 of the city altogether or move into the ghetto. We
9 knew what a ghetto would be in the long run, and we
10 were playing for time. And so my parents decided to
11 move into the province into a little village on the
12 outskirts of Cracow. From 1941 through the middle of
13 19--through the winter of 1943, we lived in this village
14 on the outskirts of Cracow, but we were also in the
15 employ of a local brick-making plant where we reported
16 in the morning. We worked about an -- I believe it
17 was about an eight- or ten-hour shift, and then we
18 could go home. In 1943 this situation deteriorated to
19 such a point that the local--the local plants which
20 employed Jews could no longer do so. And all Jews
21 were herded into a--into a forced-labor camp. We were
22 herded into this forced-labor camp in February of 1943.

23 Q Was there any explanation, any--

24 A No. They just liquidated -- I should supersede this.
25 When this occurred the ghetto had also been closed down

1 by that time, and people were taken out of the ghetto
2 either into extermination camps or transferred to the
3 forced-labor camp in Plaszow on the outskirts--

4 Q Did you know they were going to extermination camps?

5 A No, we did not know that. We knew that the people were
6 singled out for resettlement, what they called
7 resettlement, into other parts of Poland.

8 Q And you believed them, of course?

9 A There was no verification to the contrary.

10 Q Sure. And no one, I suppose, never even thought of
11 extermination?

12 A Right. Right. Okay. On February 15, 1943, we were
13 transferred to the forced-labor camp at Plaszow. That
14 means my mother, my father, my uncle Theodore. And we
15 all were assigned to different duties and different
16 assignments according to what our capabilities were. I
17 have left a disposition about what the forced-labor
18 camp in Plaszow was with the Holocaust Library. That is
19 on file.

20 Q This that you read from, when did you write this?

21 A I wrote this immediately after the war was over.

22 Q Where were you then?

23 A I was back in Cracow. Now, from the 15th of February
24 1943 through the 15th of November 1943, I worked in a
25 metal plant in the camp. We would make small things

1 like shovels, spades, buckets from metal that was
2 supplied to us. And for a brief period of about four
3 weeks I was also requested--required--to every day
4 march into the ghetto and clean up the ghetto. This
5 involved a six--a four- to six-mile-long trek to walk
6 under supervision by Jewish Ka-pov or Polish police.
7 And we would go into the various homes and we would pack
8 up whatever the occupants had left behind. And we were
9 required to do this very meticulously because different
10 items like silver, books were collected together and sent
11 to one central location. The Nazis were very
12 systematic about this.

13 Q (So you had regulations... ???? Inaudible)

14 A We saw--we saw furniture we had to remove and place it
15 in another location. It was a very, very sad task
16 to do this kind of work. Because we know that the
17 people will never come back into their apartments. They
18 will never find their things. And it was just
19 heartbreaking to see that we were breaking their homes,
20 we were ripping their furniture. And we had to do it
21 quickly, systematically and with German accuracy. On
22 November 15, 1943, there was -- In the camp there
23 occurred a quick Action.

24 Q Which camp is this now?

25 A Plaszow. Plaszow in Cracow. There was a raid on

1 various establishments--on various working establish-
2 ments where a certain number of people were taken out--
3 were taken without any notice, herded into a compound
4 just like the way they were at work. That means they
5 had no ability to secure any other personal belongings
6 which were left in the barracks. And they were left
7 waiting for about half--four to six hours.

8 Q Were you among them?

9 A Yeah, I was among them. And we didn't know what was
10 going to happen, where we were going to go, or what we
11 were going to do. I was unable at that--on that
12 15th of November to even see my parents any longer.
13 The only person that I--that was with me at the time
14 was a gentleman--in quotation marks, gentleman--who was
15 a friend of my father who had some sort of insight in
16 the dealings of the camp--camp authorities, who told
17 me that I should be very fortunate to be singled out
18 for this selection and that--

19 Q He was a Jew?

20 A He was a Jew but he was a collaborator. He was a known
21 collaborator with the Nazis in the camp. He told me
22 that I should not worry about it, that when the war
23 was over he would see to it that I would be reunited
24 with my parents. We stayed in this holding section
25 of the camp until seven o'clock in the morning of the

1 18th of November. I may be off by a day. At seven
2 o'clock in the morning, they loaded us into freight
3 cars and we didn't know where we were going. Of course,
4 there was no--at that time there was no awareness of
5 extermination camps. We didn't simply know that such
6 things existed, that they were doing all these
7 horrible things.

8 Q So you were assuming among other things that--

9 A That we were going to another camp or perhaps we were --
10 Well, we knew that there were other ways of disposing
11 of Jews. We didn't know about the gassing, but we know
12 about shooting--mass shooting.

13 Q You thought that they were going to shoot--

14 A We thought that this could be perhaps--we could perhaps
15 meet death.

16 Q Were you given any food or--

17 A We were given nothing. We were taken out from our
18 places of work just the way we were without being able
19 to have any additional personal belongings on us,
20 without having any food, anything. Nothing. And we
21 were herded into these trains, into these cars. There
22 was nobody in this entire group that I had--that I
23 knew before except for this Mr. Yo-lis. That was the
24 name of the friend of my father who was the collaborator.
25 I--The only person--and I was very young at the time--

1 that I became friendly with was an elderly gentleman
2 who also knew Mr. Yo-lis, but who somehow took a great
3 liking to me and he took me under his wing and he kept
4 me calm. And he became my wartime friend. I kept
5 corresponding with him until he passed away a few
6 years ago.

7 Q Where was he?

8 A He was -- He came to the camp from Yugoslavia.

9 Q Where did he go--when you were corresponding with him?

10 A Oh, he went back to his hometown in Yugoslavia after
11 the war was over.

12 Well, we finally arrived late in the afternoon
13 at a ammunition plant in Czestochowa. Czestochowa is
14 the city, as you may know, of the miraculous black
15 virgin that the Polish people revere so.

16 Q How do you spell that?

17 A Czestochowa. That's spelled C-z-e-n-s-t-o-c-h-o-w-a.

18 And--

19 Q That's the name of a town?

20 A This is a city in Poland in the Silesian Basin in
21 Silesia. It's about -- Now it's probably an hour's
22 drive from Cracow. In those years it was a six-hour
23 train ride. And we were herded into this plant. And
24 this was a, as it turned out to be, the Hasag--
25 H-a-s-a-g, capital H-a-s-a-g--ammunition factory which

1 was part of a chain of ammunition plants in Saxony
2 and in Poland. We were given as a daily ration 200
3 grams of bread and two ladles of watered-down soup. We
4 were working there making ammunition, shells--
5 ammunition shells. I estimate that there were
6 approximately five-hundred people in that plant,
7 because after we arrived there were additional--there
8 was an additional influx of people from other smaller
9 forced-labor camps in Poland that would bring the
10 total to five-hundred people. Out of the five-hundred
11 there were about fifty females which were kept in
12 separate--Jewish females--kept in separate quarters.

13 Q (Inaudible.)

14 A The women--the women were in charge of doing the
15 laundry. They were running the laundry for all the
16 inmates in the camp.

17 Q (Inaudible.)

18 A Okay. From the 15th of November 1944, the camp had an
19 anniversary party. We were treated to an elaborate--
20 what I thought was an elaborate show.

21 Q These are by the Nazis?

22 A No, this was -- The Nazis requested that whoever had
23 any talent puts up a show. We were given extra food.
24 Our ration was tripled from--no, doubled; was doubled.
25 Everybody received a portion of sugar and there was

1 coffee and all the amenities the Nazis could think of
2 were available. In the meantime this acquaintance of
3 my father, Mr. Yo-lis, became of course the commandant
4 of the camp. And from that point on he refused to have
5 anything to do with me. He didn't know me anymore.
6 He had his own little apartment in the camp. His
7 wife was brought in miraculously. I don't know where
8 they got her from. Anyway--

9 Q This had anything to do with the party?

10 A No, no. He was a big macher in the camp. Yeah, he
11 arranged all this. He whispered into the Commandant's
12 ear that it would be nice to have a thing like that to
13 boost the morale, you know, and so on and so forth. I
14 had--

15 Q Did you entertain for them?

16 A No.

17 Q But they did have -- This was just a general--

18 A This was an anniversary party.

19 Q But I mean, they had singers and dancers and music and
20 musicians?

21 A Yeah, recitals and so on and so forth. While I was in
22 the camp, because of the severe restrictions on food
23 and that terrible workload, I had contacted a rash on
24 my skin. I never knew to this day what caused it, but
25 I was in a hospital for two weeks. And I must say that

1 I received rather good care, considering what could have
2 occurred in other places. The work schedule was also
3 such that I was able to work at night rather than--
4 on the night shift rather than on the day shift. The
5 night shift had one advantage: The night shift was
6 supervised by a secondary echelon of Nazi officials
7 who were not as demanding and not as rude and not as
8 violent as the day shift was.

9 Q Did you have a choice about that?

10 A Well, I had a choice. I selected to work at night. I
11 could also sleep in the daytime, but that had also its
12 disadvantages because if they needed a special cleanup
13 detail, the people that slept at night and worked in
14 the daytime--and slept in the daytime and worked at night
15 were the ones to be grabbed for extra duties. So
16 sometimes my sleep in the daytime was interrupted and
17 we had to perform special chores in the camp. So they
18 had you coming and going.

19 I want to make this very brief. The experiences
20 in a forced-labor camp were terrible. But they were not
21 nearly as bad as they could have been in a concentration
22 camp.

23 Q I'm really interested in your experience--

24 A Yeah.

25 Q --and not generalizations.

1 A Okay. Yeah.

2 Q Tell us--

3 A The end of 1944--in the fall of 1944, I was approached
4 by Polish workers in the plant. They were Polish and
5 we mixed with Poles, particularly at night shift. Poles
6 would come in and if a Jew had some money, they would
7 sell them bread. They would bring in fruits and
8 vegetables, but you had to pay them. I was approached
9 by such a Pole who says, "Well, if you like some extra
10 bread, some extra provisions, I'll be glad to supply
11 them to you." His risk was as great as mine. His risk
12 to bring bread into the camp and sell it to a Jew was
13 as risky as my taking it from him. Not having had any
14 money--

15 Q Which was--What was the (inaudible)? Punishment?

16 A Yeah, punishment. He could have been punished many
17 different ways. And the Jews certainly could have been
18 sent to another camp.

19 But I took the bold risk of telling him, "Well,
20 I don't have any money." So he says, "Well, if you can
21 get me some drills, some screwdrivers, some supplies,
22 I'll give you the bread." At the time in late 1944,
23 I was in charge of what they call the magazine, which
24 distributed all kinds of tools to the foreman on the
25 floor. And I had access to drills, hammers, chisels,

1 you know, whatever was needed. And I took them--

2 Q And in their meticulous way the Germans had records of
3 everything?

4 A Well, they didn't have such meticulous records.

5 Q I see.

6 A And I took the bold step -- And I was working with this
7 elderly gentleman that I mentioned to you from
8 Yugoslavia.

9 Q Yeah.

10 A We took the bold step of gradually feeding him--
11 feeding the Pole some of the supplies. And we were
12 given extra bread. He brought us some vegetables, some
13 fruit. And actually gradually our--at least our daily
14 rations were supplemented from this kind of left-handed
15 deal.

16 So it's the end of 1944. We also know that there
17 was a Russian offensive brewing on the western--on the
18 eastern part of the Vistula River in the Warsaw area;
19 that the Russians were getting ready to attack Nazi
20 Germany. We just didn't know when. And the reason we
21 knew about this was the night shift superintendent of
22 the, in the labor camp--and I want to make this very
23 clear--was as sympathetic to the Jews, to us, as he
24 could be. He looked sideways at many things. I'm sure
25 he knew that we were selling tools to Poles. And there

1 is one memorable day that occurred in December of
2 1944 that I will never forget as long as I live. It
3 was Christmas 1944, and we worked on the night shift.
4 And he called us--he called me and this other gentleman
5 from Yugoslavia into his office. And he asked us do we
6 know what's going on outside. We said, "No, we don't
7 read any newspapers. We don't have any access. We
8 don't know what's going on." He says, "Well, I tell
9 you. Next Christmas you will be liberated. But where
10 I will be next Christmas I will not know." And he
11 started telling us about this major Russian offensive
12 and how the Germans were trying to block it out in their
13 newspapers and how they were trying to ridicule
14 everything. And then he tells us -- Out of the blue
15 sky, he takes out a card from his wallet and he shows
16 it to us. And it was an old Communist Party of Germany
17 membership card. It was a very low number. He says,
18 "If anything will save me, it is this card." This,
19 gentlemen, was such a dramatic occurrence. Here we
20 were: Jews in a forced-labor camp. We didn't know
21 what was going on. We only had rumors flying around.
22 And here is the supervisor of the camp at night, an
23 official of the company, who takes two Jews into his
24 confidence and tells them about this.

25 Q He must have been real scared.

1 A Now, we didn't know what was his motives, but today
2 after so many years, of course, I know that if he's still
3 around someplace, then he's probably a high official
4 in the East German government. Anyway, on the 15th
5 of January 1945, we hear shots. We hear shootings
6 going on all around the camp. This occurred during
7 the night. The Nazis together with this Mr. Yo-lis,
8 the German--the Jewish superintendent of the camp,
9 quickly come running through the camp shouting,
10 "Everybody get together, everybody get together. We're
11 moving out. We're going, we're going. The Russians
12 are coming. We're leaving here. The town is going to
13 be shot at, bombarded. We want to take you to safety."
14 Well, we had one very strong individual among the--
15 in the camp. He was a real what we used to call a
16 Mongol. A Mongol was a person who always tried to
17 dive and jive and move out of whatever was danger.
18 And he told them point blank, "You go shove yourself.
19 You go. If you feel like you want to go, you go. We're
20 staying right here. If the Russians want to bombard
21 the town, we'll die here, but we're not going one step
22 out of this camp. We're going to stand in here."

23 Q And they didn't force you to--

24 A They couldn't force us, because the situation was such
25 that the supervision of the camp which was resting with

1 Ukrainian lackeys, they already left. They were the
2 first ones to run. Some Germans had left already. We
3 saw movement. The situation was very fluid. And on
4 the 17th of January 1945 at seven o'clock in the
5 morning we saw the Russians. We knew that the
6 situation was ending.

7 Q What was their reception at the end?

8 A We left everybody at the camp. We went into all the--

9 Q When the Russians came?

10 A When the Russians came, they didn't give a damn. They
11 just went on to Berlin.

12 Q Right, but they weren't out to kill you?

13 A No, no. And what happened is after that I hitched a
14 trainride part way--

15 Q So the camps were freed then?

16 A The camps were freed. Everybody left. Everybody got
17 out of the camp and people tried to go wherever they
18 wanted to go. I--I hitched a ride on a train to--
19 half way back to Cracow with this colleague of mine.
20 And when we came back to Cracow I found some of my
21 relatives who were in hiding on Aryan papers. And
22 that's the end of my war experience.

23 Q And when this man made that bold declaration that he
24 wasn't going to leave, was everyone behind him?

25 A Yes. The only person that left was Mr. Yo-lis, the

1 Jewish camp director, and a handful of people that he
2 was able to take with him.

3 Q Out of five-hundred?

4 A Out of five-hundred, I think less than twenty. And
5 later on we found that they all perished.

6 Q Yo-lis included?

7 A Because the Nazis eventually got hold of them, they
8 loaded them up on trucks, and they -- From what I
9 gathered, they all went to a concentration camp in Germany.

10 So I consider myself real lucky. And as I said, the
11 only thing that I ever remember is that Christmas
12 interview...(inaudible).

13 Do you have any questions?

14 Q I had during the course of it.

15 A Go ahead.

16 Q Do you have anything?

17 UNKNOWN QUESTIONER: I don't think he mentioned,
18 but I'm curious to know what happened to
19 the rest of the family.

20 A Well, my father was left in the concentration camp in
21 Plaszow and he was later evacuated to Mauthausen, a
22 forced-labor camp in Austria, where he perished. My
23 mother was later taken out of the Plaszow concentration
24 camp, and I understand my mother just died two or three
25 days after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Because

1 another relative of mine who was in Bergen-Belsen met
2 her there.

3 Q After the war?

4 A Yeah. But my father passed away before in Mauthausen.
5 Mauthausen was a beastly camp.

6 Q Did you find out who was in charge?

7 A Well, Mauthausen was a camp -- You see, the camp that
8 I was in was not under the supervision of the SS. We
9 never saw SS in the camp. It was under the supervision
10 of the German army and the Hasag industrial complex.
11 And we were kept there to work for the German armament
12 industry. We weren't kept there to really be
13 exterminated. That's in retrospect; what I've read in
14 books. There were camps strictly for that purpose: to
15 keep Jews in forced labor, to work for the Nazi war
16 machine for as long as they were capable. And the army
17 and the private industry, the German industrial complex,
18 was given a certain amount of leeway by the SS to run
19 the camps as best as they could run them. But other
20 camps were strictly extermination camps.

21 Q (Unintelligible.)

22 A I came back in 1945 after I left the camp. I went back
23 to Cracow. As I said, I found my aunt and uncle and
24 later on my--my--my cousin came. They all were in
25 hiding. I stayed in Cracow for another year and a half.

1 And then my uncle who was already in America--came to
2 America during the war--brought me to this country.

3 Q And the conditions generally in Cracow when you went
4 back?

5 A Well, in Cracow after the war things were manageable.
6 Of course, the Poles were as much hit by the war as
7 some of the Jews were. And--but I realized that there
8 was no future for Jewish people in Poland so the
9 sooner I got out the better it would be for me.

10 Q (Unintelligible.)

11 A After the war when I instituted -- Are you both from
12 the same team?

13 Q Yes.

14 A Oh. After the war when I instituted compensation from
15 the German government, I was requested to file
16 documentation that I was in a concentration camp. And
17 then research was being conducted by the West German
18 government into the whereabouts of my parents. And at
19 the time I did have an uncle who lived in Germany.
20 He was the uncle that escaped to the Soviet Union that I
21 mentioned earlier. And after the war was over, he came
22 back to Poland and quickly left Poland and went to
23 West Germany because that's where he was from originally
24 and he decided to go back into business. He handled
25 all my restitution affairs. And in the process of the

1 restitution affairs, the--they produced a death
2 certificate, believe it or not--a copy of it, that the
3 Nazis prepared for my father. He died of a heart attack
4 in Mauthausen. And for my mother a death certificate.

5 Q Had they generally kept statistics of their victims?

6 A Yes. In certain camps, as I understand, records were
7 kept very meticulously of where the prisoner--who the
8 prisoner was and where he came from and what he was
9 doing when he was admitted to the camp and if he died.
10 Nobody died from extermination; they all either died
11 from lung disease or heart infraction or some other
12 medical causes. My uncle was in a forced-labor camp
13 in the Soviet Union. And I visited him last summer and
14 we had a lengthy talk. And I'm glad I did have that
15 talk with him because he passed away this February. And
16 he told me stories about Russian forced-labor camps,
17 which are also hair-raising stories to hear, where the
18 same shenanigans went on as I described to you earlier.
19 If you worked in a camp and happened to have had access
20 to some materials that the Russians who worked in the
21 camp--they came, they went in and out every day--needed
22 and if you could provide them with them, that they
23 would in exchange offer you other things. So he worked
24 in a soap factory and the Russians needed soap. Maybe
25 there was a rationing of soap in the Soviet Union. He

1 gave them an extra cake of soap so they gave him an
2 extra loaf of bread. Things like that. But he would
3 get paid at the end of the week. They paid him a small
4 amount of money that he could buy -- There was a
5 commissary in the camp where they had just the basic
6 stuff, but they paid them next to nothing for all the
7 work they could do.

8 Q Which was still a lot more than you got.

9 A A lot more than we had. We never saw -- I never saw
10 any money in my hand from the time that I went into the
11 forced-labor camp in Plaszow till I got out of
12 Czestochowa.

13 Q I'm interested, too--among other things--in that time
14 when you were free. You had no money; you had no
15 clothes. What did you do--

16 A Would you say that again?

17 Q Well, the period after you were free--

18 A Yeah.

19 Q --to reconnect with the world?

20 A Well, after I was free and I went back to Cracow--

21 Q How did you go back to Cracow?

22 A Well, I told you. I hitched a ride on the train. I
23 hitched a ride with a cousin on a wagon. I walked part
24 of it. I met--

25 A And these people were cooperative?

1 A Oh, yeah. The Poles were cooperative. The Russians --
2 I remember one instant when I requested a ride on a
3 Russian troop train and he asked me where I was going
4 and where I was coming from. I told him I was coming
5 from a forced-labor camp and he says, "Why don't you go
6 back to the labor camp." He says, "Why do you have to
7 go where you want to go? Go back where you came from."

8 But to answer your question: After the war I was
9 able to get a job in Cracow. I worked for a radio
10 repair shop and I had the idea of eventually becoming
11 a radio mechanic with him, and they paid me.

12 (END OF SIDE ONE OF CASSETTE)

13 Q (Inaudible)...who have been through the kinds of things
14 you have who don't discuss it with their families or
15 won't mention it for many years until recently.

16 A Well, yeah. Now, you see, my family--

17 Q Has that been--

18 A My family hasn't been exposed to this diary, which I
19 kept after the war in Germany. I was a little more
20 fluent in German, being born in Cologne, having gone
21 through a German school and (unintelligible) a junior
22 college before the war broke out. I was in Poland
23 for a relatively short time. I spoke Polish because my
24 parents spoke Polish at home. I quickly learned Polish
25 because I was young. I had an inclination to pick up

1 languages even at a younger age. But I never
2 translated the diary into English and I hope that one
3 of these days I will do that. I wrote certain other
4 articles of my impressions in the camp which are on file
5 with the Holocaust Library, and my wife has done that.
6 And I have another diary which is exclusively written
7 in Polish. After the war I figured I'd sit down and
8 start writing. Now this is written in Polish and I
9 should translate that in English.

10 Q Of course none of that was written at the time. You
11 couldn't--

12 A No. This was written right after the war, immediately
13 after I got out of the camp.

14 Q (Inaudible.)

15 A Right after I came out of the camp. This was written
16 in the summer of--the summer of 1945. And I have all
17 kinds of annotations and ...(inaudible)

18 Q Was there something that prompted you?

19 A It is in Polish and I hope once I will master my --
20 I will master my time. It is very difficult. I will
21 have to concentrate to recapture it. And ...(inaudible)
22 original ... (inaudible)... This is on file with the
23 Holocaust Library. (Inaudible)... Here's an article
24 that I wrote on the camp--about life in the camp.

25 Q What gave you the -- What were your intentions in

1 writing this down?

2 A Well, the experiences were so horrible. The people
3 that I came into contact with--whether they were Jews
4 or Nazis or Ukrainians or whoever--were so, so
5 unbelievably deranged that I felt--that I felt a sense
6 of prosecution to set society straight, to know that
7 these events took place.

8 Q They were unbelievably deranged?

9 A Deranged, deranged. Their mentality.

10 Q The people you had experienced?

11 A Yeah. To read this today--to read this out and translate
12 this to you to tell you some of the perversion that
13 some of these supervisors had. And I must say that
14 there were Jews in this, too, that felt they could buy
15 time from day to day by collaborating with the Nazis;
16 that they would make their lot better. Well, in some
17 cases it worked out; in other cases they went before
18 the people that they wanted to take care of.

19 There is no torture here. There is just this
20 deranged attitude of being stepped on at every possible
21 turn in the road. You were made a nobody, with a
22 capital "N".

23 Q And you felt impelled to record it?

24 A And that's what I felt impelled to record. And I also--
25 I also wanted to record -- These are some of the

1 highlights -- I also felt to record--and since then this
2 is a fact of history--the workings of the camp, the
3 Plaszow concentration camp, which has been documented
4 in a book by Schindler, Schindler's--

5 Q List.

6 A Yeah. Here are -- I saved these. These are extracts
7 from a Cracow newspaper of the trial--of his trial.

8 Q Whose trial?

9 A Goeth's trial.

10 Q Pardon?

11 A Goeth. Amon Goeth, the camp commandant. See, I wasn't
12 in Cracow anymore when he went to trial and my relatives
13 sent me these articles.

14 Q What did they do with him? What was the result of the
15 trial?

16 A He was shot.

17 Q He was found guilty?

18 A Yeah, he was found guilty. Some of these I photographed.
19 This was quite a lengthy process. The Poles really
20 outdid themselves, I think, to apply jurisprudence to
21 the case. They had all the witnesses (...inaudible...)
22 But he was eventually sentenced.

23 I read Schindler's book. He covered an aspect
24 of the camp that I'm completely unfamiliar with, but
25 his description of the camp commandant in Plaszow is

1 very accurate. Things happened in the camp after I
2 left, of course, that I'm not aware of that Schindler
3 could be right or wrong--I don't know--in his book.
4 But he was a beast, this man. There was nothing --
5 He--he--he would go out to examine the camp and find
6 something--somebody not doing right, somebody--he didn't
7 like somebody, he'd pick up the revolver and shoot
8 them. And the situation at Plaszow deteriorated after
9 I left. There were more--there were more shootings,
10 there were more mass executions than during the time
11 that I was there.

12 Q You were about to read that short piece--

13 A From what?

14 Q (Inaudible discussion.)

15 A No, this was in Polish.

16 Q Does it say that he was an SS man?

17 A Yeah, of course. Okay. This is a -- Oh, incidentally,
18 I want to tell you one other thing. Are you still
19 recording here?

20 Q Yes.

21 A You know, each year when we celebrate the Seder and when
22 we say we were slaves to Egypt and we were freed from
23 Egypt and we were doing chores, well, I just read a
24 small section from my diary that I did translate in
25 English that I read at the Seder. Because I feel--I--

1 I do not have to go back to Pharoah's time when we did
2 servitude for an oppressor. I only have to go back
3 forty years. This right here.

4 Q&A (Inaudible and unintelligible.)

5 Q You had no sisters and brothers?

6 A No. Okay. This is at the end--this is at the end of
7 a workday when everybody--all the prisoners came out
8 of--came back into camp, they had to group themselves
9 in a central -- Do you speak Polish?

10 Q (Inaudible.)

11 A They had to group themselves in a--on a central field
12 in order to be dismissed from work and return to their--
13 to their barracks. On this particular day the group
14 gathered on this meadow and -- We all met on this
15 field before going back to our barracks. But today the
16 Commandant singled out from the group two people who,
17 according to a Kapo's statement, attempted to break
18 out of the camp. They were two young girls. We had to
19 face the summary execution of these girls on the
20 scaffold. (Inaudible.) And Goeth, he would personally--
21 he would personally -- He always wore white gloves.
22 You never saw him going around the camp without wearing
23 his gloves. And he would be the one to officiate at
24 this execution. (Inaudible.) And so as the sun set
25 on the horizon, we were witnessing another one of his

1 bestial acts.

2 Another thing that was brought out in the book
3 by Schindler and which I can swear to is that he would
4 show up during the course of the day at different work
5 stations--at the different working stations with his
6 German Shepherd dog. And he would at the slightest
7 whim command--turn the dog on you. He would jump
8 on the prisoner. And the dog would either bite his
9 flesh or rip at his coat.

10 He also would do surprise visits to different
11 areas in the camp and if he saw something or somebody
12 (inaudible) or somebody goofing off, he would take
13 out the pistol and shoot him. But there were days...
14 (inaudible). And he had these Jewish cohorts who
15 assisted him; he had -- They were Ukrainian police that
16 did some of the dirty tasks...(inaudible)... And he can
17 be accused of having--being one of the most brutal
18 individuals that ...(inaudible)...come into contact
19 with him. Out in camp there were work stations, and the
20 prisoners themselves would organize themselves in such
21 a way that we would always have a lookout. I mean,
22 you just can't work uninterrupted for eight or ten
23 hours a day, so we would always have a lookout.

24 Q And the lookout--

25 A And the lookout would report if he saw him coming, and

1 there everybody was busy hammering away and banging
2 away in order to make as much noise as we can. In other
3 areas of the camp, they would increase whatever their
4 tasks were. It was just like a terrible, terrible
5 feeling that this man on a whim could take out a pistol
6 and shoot if he didn't like you or he saw you goofing
7 off.

8 Q Okay. Thank you.

9 A Okay. As I said, someday I'll get busy and I'll start
10 translating all this in English. I did make a--

11 And the location of the cemetery -- All the
12 tombstones -- You can record this if you want. The
13 tombstones were all erased and they were used for making
14 roads and paving the streets of the camp. And the
15 mortuary which was the, you know -- What do you call it?
16 Where they lay the bodies--

17 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: The mortuary.

18 A The mortuary. He converted that into a gala ballroom
19 and would give parties there.

20 So how many of these interviews have you conducted
21 so far? Am I the first guinea pig--

22

23

24

25

(END OF INTERVIEW)