

HERMAN HAUSMAN

Tape No. 1

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INTERVIEWER: The mike is pretty close to the mouth and see what happens.

VOICE: I'd like to see everyone's name tag so we can recognize each other and see where people are from.

ANOTHER VOICE: How many years?

VOICE: 34 years.

INTERVIEWER: When was the last time you saw each other?

VOICE: We saw each other in New York -- New Jersey, New Jersey for somebody's wedding.

VOICE: When did you move out to California?

MALE VOICE: 27 years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Are there specific people you are hoping to see?

VOICE: My husband does.

MALE VOICE: I met already a second cousin that I haven't seen for 43 years and it was very exciting. I met some friends --

VOICE: He's very emotional.

MALE VOICE: -- That I haven't seen since 1940 or 1941 and I think I will meet many more people. This young lady here I know since 1940 or 1941. She's only 39 years old today and we were in the ghetto together and --

INTERVIEWER: Which ghetto?

VOICE: Benji's ghetto.

MALE VOICE: Bengi's ghetto and from there were were sent to Auchwitz and we met again after the war in 1946 I think in

Germany, in Strutot(?), Germany. And, from there I went to the United States in '47, saw this friend of mine with her husband. In the mean time she got married. She didn't want me at that time, you see.

VOICE: What are you talking about?

MALE VOICE: I said you got married.

VOICE: Oh, me?

MALE VOICE: Yeah.

VOICE: You were after me? I didn't know that. I probably did.

MALE VOICE: You see at that time --

VOICE: Wait a minute, she wants to ask --

INTERVIEWER: Are you feeling good about being at the conference?

VOICE: Absolutely, it's a must. We are getting older and we have to see each other. We have to find people that are -- maybe we can dig up someone. I was very fortunate I was not in the concentration camp. I was -- My family, I was a young child. I was born in Germany, Berlin, Germany and we went to Shanghai, China. We were in a ghetto there. We had it difficult, but it was not the Holocaust the way my husband went through and so many and yet it's so exciting because I met many of my husband's friends. I was lucky to meet her before. But we haven't seen each other for 34 years.

INTERVIEWER: Your name is Herman Hausman. And I wish it had all never happened but maybe you'll tell me what happened to you and when did some of this, maybe when did you feel anti-Jewish laws beginning or when were you aware that you were in trouble?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Well, I was born in Czechoslovakia and I was about ten when I started to realize the problems, political problems are surfacing in Germany and they carried away straight back to us.

And we knew about events because in our home my parents were reading the German papers and also we went to Czeck schools and to the Hebrew educational temples. But mostly I was about ten and it wasn't that great because we always that's far away in Germany and then Austria to Onshclus (phon.)

And actually, it spread when the war started in '39 I was about 18 years old and I started to realize there is going to be lots of trouble and unless we get out of Czechoslovakia and actually we couldn't make it altogether.

I had an uncle in Texas was well -- financially well off and even he couldn't arrange for the family to escape.

And then part of Czechoslovakia was annexed to Hungary with the agreement Hitler made when they -- but when they -- How should I say it? They cut off Czechoslovakia a part for Poland, a part for Germany and a part for Hungary.

And at that time the laws were already in Hungary that you couldn't visit the universities. You just had to occupy

yourself with labor to be existing -- so why? I'm speaking about my parents and myself and my brother was supposed to go to the University of Prague and naturally he couldn't make it.

And, as for myself I had to work with my father. But we had a wine yards and we made our own barrels for wine and sold the wine on the market.

Those were still the good times. We lived a normal in our homes in our own house. We made a living quite comfortable for that time.

Then, we had to -- There was an order that all the Jews had to go to -- everybody had to go by 19 or you had to go to the Army or the labor camp. There was no other way for the man. And we were drafted. Me and three brothers all at the same time. One was a year older and one was a year younger.

And at that time we still didn't have an idea how bad a situation is. Gradually, we started to realize that they were shipping us from one area to others to dig and for the Army for the defense lines. All we had was a shovel and sometimes we didn't ...(?) it depends how close the Russians were. Because we were at the Russian front. If they were far away and not advancing, we had better treatment. But if they been getting close to the German lines then we were the ones who were the scape goats.

Everything was still bearable. We had mail with my father. He wrote us and then once he wrote us a postcard. The situation changed drastically. "We have German soldiers, they

are quartered in our home."

But that didn't actually -- It didn't affect us still.

The situation came, really took a drastic turn in 1944 in June when the government of Hungary accepted the conditions of Hitler to deport all the Jews and that was actually when the whole thing started. They emptied every village and every Jew from all the area in all Hungary.

Now, we still couldn't do a damn thing about the whole thing. But what actually bothers me mostly in that situation that it was a pitiless affair. That Germany was absolutely defeated in 1944. There was no chance actually that they could have won the war. Everybody knew it already and we still had to pay the horrible price for that -- for that affair.

There was no -- I am blaming the Jews, our elders of the town. I am blaming the people who were in Washington. They didn't do nothing for us. I am blaming Lester Pearson from Canada who let 5,000 Jews on. I am blaming Anthony Eadon.

All those are the worse people we ever had to deal with. And we paid a horrible price because we believed them that and I am blaming Pius XII, the Pope.

We didn't get help from nowhere. We were completely desperate and we couldn't turn anywhere for mercy. That's all I can say in the situation.

Now, when I have the time and I think about a situation -- I go every year to Europe, spend my time in Jewish communities. This year I will be in Vienna and last year I was

in the Budapest area and visited the cemeteries and the synagogues. It's a desperate situation. I saw the Amsterdam synagogue a couple of years ago and it looks very bad for the community now and they are still -- every community in Europe is still living under the shock of what happened in 1943, '44, and '45.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to you in '44?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: In '44 we been working in labor camps for the German government.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the names for those camps?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Yes. We been in Lyuta. It's in the Garbatian Mountains. At that time, most of the Jews were deported to Poland worked for the Germans there. Very few of the Germans from those groups.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see people die?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: When we went into Mauthausen -- My last year was spent in Mauthausen in Austria.

We walked in at night and they lead us to a tent area and they said, "You better sleep here. There's no room anywhere else." And the guide who lead us, he says, "Oh, those are the dead. You better lie down there. We have no time to clean up the dead." They were right on the ground. They didn't even -- we were so exhausted. We been so doped up with hungar and depression that it didn't even bother us that we couldn't even protest or anything. Everybody was for himself.

I know situations in Mauthausen people been eating meat

from human beings. I saw that from my own eyes.

You needed a super strength or something absolutely super human to survive and to bear, to bear in the situation. Not to protest or say, "You can't do that. Or you do that. You don't do that." Those are out of the question.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what you feel you had a super strength?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. I didn't have any super strength. I was just doped up.

INTERVIEWER: Doped up?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Doped up from depression, morally, mentally and physically.

INTERVIEWER: You were just going through like a zombie.

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Like a zombies robot, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you cry?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. We had no tears. We had no -- no nothing, energy for tears or nothing else.

While we been walking from the Hungarian border to the camp of Mauthausen and we saw a potato field and my brother run in there. He wanted to pick up a few rotten potatoes and the SS man came and he took a machine begun and went straight for them.

And I thought he is probably shooting over the head to scare them away but he didn't. He really pointed the gun directly at the level of their heart and my brother was hit too but he survived and many of them right there on the ground left there dead.

I visited back Mauthausen a couple of years ago and as I said -- it's still my hobby to visit cemeteries and synagogues in Europe after all those years -- and I was talking to some of the Germans who lived there in the area and they says, "I don't know about anything happened here." Absolutely denying that something like this happened here, people been dying here.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone else in your family survive?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Yes. My father went to Auschwitz. He lived to 93 and he came back from Auschwitz. 2,000 people survived Auschwitz and he was the one from the older generation that came out. He was 65 when he came out. My mother perished and my whole family about, let's say about 16 people perished.

The family branch who lived in the town for many hundreds of years was only about six or seven who came back.

INTERVIEWER: How do you cope with this?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I just -- I am still living in a nightmare sometimes when I wake up in the morning. But it's not true I am a free man and I enjoy all the liberties that America can offer; religiously, financially, physically and morally everything, whether it is -- You don't have to have any permission for anything here. Just follow the path. Whatever you can do, do for yourself.

INTERVIEWER: What made you come to the United States?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I always wanted to come to the United States since I was 12 years old because of the situation here that's a religious and economical state where you can really

expand and grow.

INTERVIEWER: When did you come here?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I came over in '52.

INTERVIEWER: What happened between '45 and '52?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I lived in Paris, France. Even there, we had everyday we been offered free meals and we been survivors gathered to exchanging stories how they -- where he was, where he is going to go, where he is going to immigrate, what he is doing. It lasted about three years after the camp was already closed and we still been swimming in that same nouveau and the same strata of concentration camps.

INTERVIEWER: Does it get easier at all as years pass?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Well, you see the things clearer now. It's not easier but it's clearer and you can pat around it. You can actually award certain things, but you don't want to get involved. I don't think if this would happen again and that I would be such a warranty at all that horror that I saw my -- not only my parents, but the communities there with such brave people there who didn't know anything but dignity and follow the law of the Tamud.

Those were the only goals in life to study and be honest and but making a living was out of the question. People were very poor absolutely barely making the necessities of the daily life to survive.

But the Tamud was the synagogue, the family to hold together the family was the first goal.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you the expression that "the Jews went like sheep to slaughter," you've seen it. What did you see in relation to that expression? You saw bravery.

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I saw people who actually we had been always educated to obey the elders of the family. That was actually one thing. Very rarely you should see a Jewish boy rebel against his parents. And, you had to follow the guidance of the family.

Today, if the kids realize something is wrong they wouldn't follow. We been actually even coached them, by their own parents to obey. So, somehow we felt this is the right thing.

This is the way we are undermench (phon.). We are not really equal to anybody. This is our fate like leading an animal to slaughter.

At that time, even if I rebelled I couldn't have any people supported me in my rebellion. I would be completely alone.

INTERVIEWER: Is one of the Jewish leadership -- Was that called the udenroden (phon.)?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: The udenroden was established by the Germans to cooperate and guide the people to certain, to first of all deliver the gold, the diamonds, the silver and money and what ever they needed for their physical existence, mattresses, some paintings, whatever they had from the famous Flemish masters.

And naturally when everything was taken away there, there is

only one thing left to send them to Auschwitz. This was another distress. Actually is what happened was there was situation -- Oh, do I have to remark that if anybody, young man at that time would go to a Jewish merchant, wealthy merchant, and say to him, "I need a certain amount of gold coins" -- What they had. Every Jew had in the big towns -- "or some diamonds to buy some machine guns." I'm sure he wouldn't have given him nothing to buy a gun or something. He would have thrown him out but even to fight those Germans with the tanks, they are so powerful.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see much of a resistance movement among Jews?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: We been contacted once by a Russian doctor where we were up the Garbatian Mountains that we should leave the camp. Because during the day time we been lead actually lead to different working crews to different areas in the town. Some were cutting wood, some were digging ditches, some were cooking, some were leading the horses in the wagons. And he says, "You better leave now. It's still time. Join the partisans and for resistance purposes."

Unfortunately, between the group we been 208 Jews together. Most of them were half Christian and half Jew. Some of them had grand,grandparents who were Jews and they been thrown together with us.

We had yellow arm bands on our left hand and they had white as a sign that they been mixed blood. There wives still home and they been Christians. He didn't even know that he is a Jew man

and he said to me, "I'm sorry I'm not --" We had councils and we were sitting on. He says, "You want to go, you go." I said, "I cannot leave my wife and children. I says I have a wife home and I'm not Jewish. What do you want me to do?"

So, after several councils we were holding, we decided not to join them because we would have to -- everybody would have to leave the camp or none. And with that decision, we stayed on.

INTERVIEWER: How about at Mauthausen?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Mauthausen was a horrrible place. There is nothing, nothing to say about it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see people -- Were there people that were hung there or --

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No, we didn't have any access. If I would have seen that, I wouldn't have been here probably. Those were restricted area and only people who were condemned were taken and never came out. They came out in a cadaver.

INTERVIEWER: What was your work there at Mathausen?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Not much. At that time we been just having a shovel putting the ground from one end and then pushing it back just to keep us a little bit busy. But they didn't give us any -- We didn't have nothing to eat and and nothing to work. It was the collapse already of the German Reich at that time and I got to the Mauthausen.

INTERVIEWER: Were you surprised you survived the war?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: At that time, I took it for granted I survived because I was young. I was still only 21. But, now

when I look back and I see all those people who died around me a lot of them I knew and I don't know where they are and they are somewhere inside of graves. I start to ponder actually what was the purpose of life.

Today, I have my wife with me and I have two children. We just married. We are quite well off financially, I would say, but still the memoires you cannot erase.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel being at the conference?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: It was my wife's idea. I says, "I don't want to see the people yet." She says, "We better go and take a look at that." So we are quite often around.

INTERVIEWER: This is one of my favorite interviewes I've done. I'm so glad that you came. Why don't you want to see the people? It would remind you too much?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I don't want to see actually how they aged number one, because we are all aged about 40 years now, 35, I don't know exactly. And, I don't want to again listen to the miseries. Whatever they have to say. It's not going to be pleasant. You can still see the imprint on their faces on some of them. You cannot erase that. So --

INTERVIEWER: You came mostly for your wife?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I mostly came because she suggested it and she wanted to see Washington at the same time, to see the Capitol. But I live without coming here. I am still living with it because every year I visit the graves in Europe and synagogues and speak to the members who are still survived. They are all in

the sixties and seventies and everywhere they telling me we will die, we will go. There is nobody here any more who will be having any memoires what's happened or what's going on.

A certain synagogue in Kesthay. It's a vivid memory how they went to their deaths. Was the head of the -- The chief Rabbi and everybody was following him. He was an attorney. He was a professor of philosophy and he was a Chief Rabbi. One of the greatest in Budapest. His name was Bukler (phon.) The stories they are telling me about him and the cantor of how they kept together the family of the Jewish community is very emotional and very moving. And everytime I go back and I come back to the United States and talk to my Rabbi about it. So, then actually you never forget any of the things. You are still with them.

So, I really don't have to come to the gathering to be reminded of what happened 40 years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anyone you hoped to see that you don't know if they are alive or whatever?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Actually, I have no idea whom I'm going to see. It's only my first hour here that I've arrived here and if I find somebody okay.

I maintain contact with people in Vienna, in Budapest and in Paris who are survivors and we exchange or write ideas.

One friend of mind wrote a book about a town of Moonkauch (phon.) It's quite interesting. How They Banished Us From Our Town. That is the title of the book.

In fact, I'm going back to see him and he is going to visit us in our hotel and be our guest because I am keeping some notes on certain things. For maybe for a future documentary.

INTERVIEWER: You would like to write a book?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. No. A film documentary on the affair in Mauthausen. I saw the documentaries on Auschwitz but Mauthausen is a very memorable place too. They should have a documentary on that, on those stairs, on the white stairs with the lake down and skeletons and the lake.

And then Gooskechen, (phon.) Mauthausen, they are all interrelated those two areas. Evensee. Evensee, Gooskechen, Mauthausen. Go ahead ask me any questions.

INTERVIEWER: What else would you like to see in the film? What -- How was Mauthausen memorable?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Well, the barracks. The extermination centers. The piles of ashes. The range where the young SS men were trained how to handle guns on live humans. Not only Jews, non-Jews too. And the stairs, the white stairs was the latest as I said before. The SS barracks. How they lived the SS compared to the inmates. Also how the super race tried to impose their will on other people. Everything came to a sharp contrast right in Mauthausen or in other concentration camps.

INTERVIEWER: What were your barracks like?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: At that time we were -- we had no room. The barracks was overcrowded. We been sleeping on the ground in tents.

INTERVIEWER: Did they shoot people indiscriminately?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. You had -- Not indiscriminately. You violated a small rule and SS men happened to be around you did it, so he already arranged for you for whoever it was to get exterminated to get immediately. It depended only how, throw them down the stairs or to hit them over with a bat over the head or give them a delicate fine way of giving them a bullet immediately instant death.

INTERVIEWER: You saw some of that?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: You couldn't see it from very close. We saw it from a far, from a far away range. We didn't even like to look there. We wouldn't like to be caught looking there what's going there. It was none of our business.

INTERVIEWER: You spent a lot of the day trying avoid breaking rules and noticing --

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Absolutely. We tried to do everything not to attract anybody's eye even a cappo. A cappo is a German, even a Jewish guard who had the confidence of the Germans. That would have been sufficient sometimes to get yourself punished.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember feeling frightened?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. At that age, I don't think I was frightened. I just had to watch out not to stick my head above the crowd.

INTERVIEWER: Who did you decide what to tell your children?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: They don't ask any questions. They find

out more from reading the papers than from what I have to say. It doesn't mean much what a father has to tell their children.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a hard time talking about it?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. Once in a while we discuss it but it's not much of a discussion. I don't like to ruin the atmosphere of the family reunion. They are both married so.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever go to speak about it like at high schools?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I am getting invitations to go to Rotary Clubs and others but I am not to the university. I got an invitation to the university of where I live in town. I don't accept any invitations. This is the first time I ever give an interview.

INTERVIEWER: Really.

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Is that because it brings you back to such bad memories?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. Here I don't want to be expose myself in my town as I am something special.

INTERVIEWER: Are you afraid that there will be anti-semitism towards you?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: No. In the Jewish community I just want to be like any other Jew in the synagogue and everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: So, a lot of people don't know that you've been through this?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: They know I'm a survivor and I'm a refugee.

That's all they know.

INTERVIEWER: Is it painful now to talk about or is there a part of your brain can just tell the story?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: This is a difficult question to answer because you have to realize that you if talk not everybody absorbs it the same way. There is no need to talk to people that are not interested. So, if people are interested -- Those that are interested we can discuss. We have something in common.

Just to talk about it, it's just like throwing peas against a marble. It won't absorb anything.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of people say people weren't interested at all.

HERMAN HAUSMAN: I find lately that never did I see so much printed about it and radio and television the last three years about the Holocaust than since 1945. It started to catch on now in the past couple of years in films, in books and I think we have to ascribe that in a way, the way the Russians are treating the Jews and the Goraks, Shranski and hundreds of others who are innocently imprisoned. I think somehow it carries over the system what happened and we just didn't do anything about it.

INTERVIEWER: Some people say that anti-semitism is on the rise again. Do you agree with that?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Everywhere anti-semitism is on the rise when an economical situation has a low swing on the lower bottom. That happens, in looking back at the history of the Jewish, the Jewish life and the Jewish communities in Europe.

INTERVIEWER: Have you experienced it lately?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: Personally, I don't. But I couldn't say that I did nor that all my troubles in the United States are limited but overseas as I travelled in Europe and other places I didn't notice it.

There are always individuals who are always having some contemptuous words for the Jews, or Hebrews or Israeals, but it is not supported by a branch of the government like it was supported by Austria and Germany and actually imposed and in a different sense in European countries.

INTERVIEWER: Do you do any sort of voluntary work with Jewish communities?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: My wife is -- she belongs to the Hadassa and Nabreath and all of them. She supports -- I support my -- I do my voluntary work supporting it with money. Donating the money for the Jewish welfare organization. My time is limited for my job is seven days a week and I cannot actually absent. I got invitations to tour, to speak to the towns from the Ambassador to Isreal. Everybody.

I already was attending one seminar and I had an invitation to go to Jeseruleum. I attended that. But my home town I am not -- I am not very active except just donations.

INTERVIEWER: What's your job?

HERMAN HAUSMAN: We are in the film industry. Film business.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that makes sense that you will do a

film. That's wonderful.

HERMAN HAUSMAN: You have to ship the whole crew to Europe and you have to ship the experts, the sound man and it's not such an easy task.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. Well, let me see what's left. There's just another minute or so.