

Interview with Erwin Baum

December 5, 1995

Tape 1, Side A

Question: Erwin Baum interview in Riverdale, New York, and December fifth. Well, first perhaps -- let's go back just a little bit to, if you could talk a little bit about the circumstances leading up to the time of, of the liberation. What was, what was happening to you at that time in, you know, '44, '45?

Answer: While in camp, or prior to the camp?

Q: In the camp. Why don't we start, start just talking about when, your arrival in the camp and a little bit, if you tell me, just give me a little bit of a sense what that experience was like on a day-to-day basis.

A: Yeah. Well, approximately in the Fall of 1942, I was transported from ghetto to Auschwitz concentration camp -- I arrived with my mother, my sisters and my two brothers -- where, at the time of arrival, men and women were separate immediately and when it came to select, to separate men, to put them in the right places, me and my two brothers were approached by the, by the German officer. He pointed my brothers to one side and me to another side. Within twenty or thirty minutes, I found myself standing with all the men and young children. On the other hand, on the other side, I saw where my brothers were, were about 45 young men. Something told me that I am in the wrong spot, I didn't like where I am, I didn't know why. When the soldier passed

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 2

2

me by, I just ran across to where my brothers were. Later on, about 45, 50 boys were ordered to kind of slow running, jogging, went into Auschwitz. On the spot where I was, they went all to crematorium, they were gassed. So did my mother, my sisters. At that time, there were no women needed for labor, so all the women were gassed from that particular transport. When I arrived in Auschwitz, I was the youngest of the camper -- of about 18,000 inmates,¹ and I was the youngest.

Q: You know, in, in seeing the videotape and reading the transcripts, I, I was struck over and over again by that you seem to -- had a, had a sharp instinct for when there was trouble or when to take advantage of a situation -- you know -- such as that, such as that you were in this one place and you felt like something was wrong and so...

A: There are a few, few moments like that you mention, in my life, kind of miracles. For instance, prior to arrive in the camp, as it is well known that I was raised by Dr. Janusz Korczak² in the orphanage, where I spent some years. Many times, while German occupation on the ghetto, I had the chance to go out of the ghetto, over a wall or by a certain tube or by the way of a sewer, to go to the Polish side, where I did not look very much Jewish and I spoke very clear Polish, and the doctor used to give me a few zlotys

¹ During 1942, there were some 24,000 prisoners in Auschwitz. Franciszek Piper, "The System of Prisoner Exploitation," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 429

² Janusz Korczak (1879-1942), physician, writer, and educator. In 1912 he was appointed director the Jewish orphanage at Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, Poland. Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1990), s.v. "Korczak, Janusz."

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 3

3

so I could buy some supplies. I me...mean, how much could I carry, but as little as I could and bring it into ghetto. And also I was torn apart, I didn't know whether to be with my mother, my whole family was hungry, or be with the children. So sometimes I spent nights with, with my mother, where also during the night I used to go over the gate to the Polish side and buy loaves of bread, throw over the gate, throw over the wall to my mother; she used to sell it. What I want to bring out, that one particular night when it -- they decided to evacuate the orphanage, to take the childrens to Treblinka, to gas chambers³, I was out of that ghetto, particularly that night. So, that happened to be what, one of the miracles that happened in my life, that I was not there at that night. When I arrived in there in the morning, the whole orphanage was gone, although I tried to join them and I was chased away by police that said, "You're not Jewish, get lost." There was another, another instinct while in concentration camp. If one was quite awhile in concentration camp, you got known and if the -- a good job, a good kind of opportunity came along, naturally the older inmates got priority. So I had a good job. I was working in a, in a place sorting clothes and while you sort clothes from the people that arrive from, from, from, from Poland to Holland, to -- or France, you always found an extra bite, something to eat. So I was pretty content. One day this German woman, a Nazi, uniform, I'll never forget her name, her name was Berta, she was wearing these leather

³ On August 6, 1942, Korczak, the orphanage staff, and some 200 children were sent to Treblinka concentration camp in Poland. Falkowska, Maria, *A Chronology of the Life, Activities and Works of Janusz Korczak* (New York: Kosciuszko Foundation, 1980), 49-50.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 4

4

boots and a whip, just flipping around her whip against her boots and was pointing with the, with the whip to certain men and young boys, and only with, with, with good skin on them, that the ribs were not exposed, the bones were not exposed, I had no idea why. And she pointed at me and my number was taken down by one of her helpers. Upon that, a request came from a camp that they need a few hundred men to build certain air strips. It was kind of emergency and they called the blockältester⁴. From that barrack, his name was Heinz, a young man, he got along with me very good and he put me on the transport. I was very angry. I didn't know why is he sending me away, when I have it good, when I have, I was not hungry. Well, I couldn't help it, my number was given and I had to go. Later on, when evacuation started, when the allies were approaching this concentration camp... all those camp were naturally liquidated, and I met up with this guy, with Heinz. I says, "I'll never forget you, Heinz. Why, why did you do it to me?" He says, "Bubi" -- he used to call me "bubi"⁵ -- "you know, you wouldn't be alive now." I says, "What do you mean?" "Remember Berta? Remember she took your number down? Do you know why?" I says, "No, why?" "She wanted to make a bag and a pair of gloves out of your skin." Naturally, I was shook up very much and then, then I was grateful to him. So there was another miracle in my life.

Q: So where were you, where were you, where were you at the time of liberation?

⁴ Block elder (German).

⁵ little boy, laddie (German).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 5

5

A: At the liberation, I was liberated in a concentration camp called Allach near Dachau, near, near Munich.

Q: You had been transported to?

A: I was transported fr... to many, many camps. From camp to camp, from camp to camp, because, as I said, the Germans were building little air strips, so always a few hundred men were in a certain, out of a village, like they had a, they had a shack made out of metal and they kept us there. But on the last days of war, like maybe it's known already to you that they put all the inmates on a dead march, and I was among also them, a dead march. We were marching and marching and marching and marching, thousands of, of people, of men, thousands of them, and everyday there were less and less and less and less. They left a certain time, I don't remember, a few weeks, after marching once, they told us to sit down and have our break. It was no coffee break, by all means, they gave us a few cold potatoes to eat and then they said, "Okay, let's go." Well, like the message passed from one to another, nobody would get up anymore. Like it was senseless, no use. So they got very angry and they ordered us to go up the hill and go against the trees and hands up. They said that they wanted to, to execute and also they gave the order, the, the high rank officer gave the order the soldiers, like "aim at the neck." And we heard that the guns -- you know, whatever they had to do -- we heard that noise and we keep our hands up and we wait and wait and wait and wait

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 6

6

and nothing happens, and then we hear one soldier looking through his binoculars said, "Mine God, four kilometers from here are the Americans." We heard that, and we stay and naturally you stay so long with your hands up, you get a little tired, so you kind of, we kind of look back a little bit and we saw no more Germans. So we drop our hands, we turn around, no Germans. So naturally we run down the hill, and believe it or not the tanks and trucks were rolling and we ran and, "Please, please, take us, take us, take us." Unfortunately, they had other orders than to take us and they passed by, they left us there, and the Germans came back and took us again. Took us again, put us in that camp and then not long we were liberated. We were liberated in, as I told you, in Allach when the allies came in, naturally they came in, they make pictures and everybody was running and asking, making motions with their hands for food, because we didn't know how to speak English. And they said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," but nothing happened, there was nothing there, and by that time the Germans left us a few days before. They were afraid and we were kind of sorry because like this, everyday we got a little bit whatever - we got. But like us, for three, four days, we got nothing, and the allies came and still there's nothing. But I, as I was used to sneak around and hassle to find always an extra bite, I went up on a -- it's bigger than a Jeep, kind of a little -- little truck, and I was looking, looking and I found and I ate a full box of what I thought it was chocolate and I ate a box of Ex-lax. I didn't know, I was happy, I found chocolate, I ate it and you could imagine what happened to me. I, I got very, very, very in bad shape, pain, and I walked

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 7

7

out of that, of that camp and there was this, on the road there was the field kitchen that the soldiers were fed, and I went and I was crying, "Pain, pain, pain," and there was one American soldier of Russian descent and he spoke a little kind of broken Polish, and I told him that I'm so sick. So he put me in his car, in, in his Jeep, and drove me to town called Mühldorf, put me in a hospital. They put me in a hospital. Oh, that was beautiful. They fed me a Farina with milk and sugar for about two weeks, and I, I just walked out of the hospital and went on my own. I went on my own and went into a little, a little village called, it was Mühldorf, I forgot the name, and I met with two other friends from concentration camp and there were, and, and on a, on a farm with two German older sisters and they just, they thought that they have to take in, anybody that comes in they have to take in and take care of them.

Q: Why? Because they, they think it was just the right thing to do or...?

A: Yeah, they didn't know, they thought that's the order, that the Germans, for them to pay back, they have to take care of, of people that were in the camp. Ampfing, that's the name, Ampfing, yeah. And we went to them and they took care of us, we ate and drank and they did our clothes. We were there for several months. We got on our feet, then we decided to go to big town, to, to Munich.

Q: What were you doing during those several months? These are the first couple of months after the whole experience, then...

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 8

8

A: Well, right away we had an idea of doing business. In the -- in this little village, Ampfing, there was a forest and there was also a concentration camp called the Waldlager. In there, they were producing parts for airplanes, cyclically, and there were those, many, many of those electrical mo...motors left. So we used to go in there, take motors and sell to the farmers in exchange for a cow or -- and, and, and we took that cow or a calf or a sheep, we slaughter it and we used to sell the meat to those camps that were set up by, by, by the UNRRA⁶ camps, and made, made some money and...

Q: But still, I mean, after you had, you had been in the ghetto and then been in, in

Auschwitz-Birkenau and then, I mean that was a long period of time and this was the first point at which you were freed from those kind of stresses on your life. What was that experience like, those first couple of months? Were you elated or did it seem...?

A: Well, those first few of months, why did we do those business, that kind of business, preparation, storage, buy food, put away, all in, in our mind was only not to be hungry, anymore. That's why we didn't want to wait, many of us, we didn't want to wait to get a handout, to wait from the UNRRA to give us something. I mean the first money came to my pocket and the first bakery I saw, I must have bought about thirty loaves of bread, and put it away. That was, you know, only in our mind, nothing else, nothing else mattered till later on, start, you know, we start to relive the whole bitter experience, try to look if anybody was left of the family, or whatever. And we came to Munich and got involved in business, doing business with, with the Germans, or with the Americans, kind of start, start, start a new life again. Till one day, I met somebody and I saw a number. By the number, we could identify which transport or which camp that person was, and I saw this number and I knew that he was in one of the camps where I was, which is Buna, and my brother was there. So I ask him, "You must have been in Buna." He says, "Sure, I sure was." "Did you happen to know Icek Baum?" He says, "Sure, I know him. Here's his address. He survived. He's in Czechoslovakia." Now, you can imagine how I felt. Immediately, I ran to a, to a translator that wrote a letter to the government of Czechoslovakia and I'm looking, looking for this person. Unfortunately, the answer came that "No one like this is known by the name." During that time, my brother Icek -- and there's my older brother who wind up in Belgium, he was liberated somewhere and they went to Belgium -- thank God they found each other, and they were writing letters to each other and crying over my death. In the meantime, I was a

⁶ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 9

9

hustler. I was successful in Munich. I was the first boy who could have a car, you know, I put a pillow under my seat so girls could see me and I was doing pretty well, and they were crying over me. But that never gave me any rest, that he told me my brother, and, and, and then I gave up hope. I said, "Well, must have been a mistake or something." Well, one day my brother Icek from Czechoslovakia decided to join up with his brother in Belgium. So he had to leave Czechoslovakia, come to Germany and somehow go to Belgium. On the train going to, going to Munich, he met up with a girl and says, "Why don't you accompany us to our camp?" And so he spent sometime with her. She says "Okay." On the train station, he meets again the same person who told me that my brother was alive. He says, "Did you find your brother?" "Oh, come on, I have no brother." He says, "Yes, you have a brother. He's got a golden tooth, wavy hair." Now, again, my oldest brother that did not survive had the golden tooth and wavy, wavy hair. But that didn't matter. But he brought them next day to me, you know, to Munich and I joined up with Icek and I says, "Edyl didn't survive." He says, "What do you mean, he didn't survive? He's in Belgium." So then, somehow, we got together, all three. I was very happy. Me, me and my brother Icek went to Belgium to be with my, with my, with my other brother, and we were in a home not, not doing much. But that didn't give me any rest. I used to go over the border, forth and back, back and forth to, to Germany, do a little business, and then one day I was caught on the border, you know, and Belgium gave me a deportation. I had to leave Belgium. So, somebody took me over to Luxembourg. I went to Luxembourg and while I was in Belgium, somebody from my hometown, from Warsaw, approached me. He says, "Hey, you're 19 years old, you're just walking the streets, not doing nothing. Why don't you come to my place down, I, I have a fur shop. I put you down by the machine. If you learn the trade in two weeks, you have a job and you can make something." I says fine. So, I learned the trade and it was very useful, because when I went to Luxembourg they gave me a job by a furrier and I was working there, and then the war broke out in Israel and my brother from Belgium decided to go as a volunteer. So I figured, my brother's going, what I'm going do all alone here? I went to Israel also, as a volunteer and became a Navy man.

Q: Can we just go back and ask you; I'm, I'm, I'm curious as to -- you're this young man, in, in Munich, say, and right after the war -- 19, 20 early 20s. What was life like there for you at that time? I mean, you know, were you, were you -- you say you, you were interested in meeting women or were you hang...hanging out with friends or did you --

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 10

10

who were you, who were you -- what kind of social at...atmosphere was there at that time?

A: Well, we had an apartment. Sure, I was interested, I was interested in girls and we had a maid in the house. You know, we used to socialize. We used to go out, there were concerts and, as I told you, I had a car and I couldn't register the car because there was that gasoline business. So I went to the, to the office of the Israel -- it was the Palestine, you know, Palestine consul -- and they had doctors to be driven around from camp to camp to, to check out the children, were they in good condition to eventually immigrate to Israel. I mean I was busy that I had my little world around me.

Q: Who were the other members of that world and...

A: Well, only, only us survivors. Only us survivors. We only mingled with the survivors, and then, naturally, started a business, buying American dollars, buying diamonds, buying watches, exchanging, doing this and that. Purpose, there was no purpose. We didn't know -- just for the moment, to have a comfortable life. 'Til, 'til I went to Belgium and then to Luxembourg and then to Israel, where I joined the Israeli Navy, also as a volunteer.

Q: Was it, was it worth -- was it chaot... were, I mean you told me the story about you and your, your finding your brothers. I mean there must have been -- everybody, all of your

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 11

11

friends -- must have had those stories of trying to find people and it seems like it must have been chaotic.

A: Oh, it was very, very chaotic. Very, very, very emotional. I mean, it was, it was unbelievable. It took about a year and a half to find them, you know. And while my brother was in Belgium, I got some connection with somebody who had connection with the Belgian consulate in Munich, and that man, that consulate gave to that man a list of names of people that did not survive. So we used that opportunity, because people didn't want to stay in Germany, Munich. They wanted to go. United States didn't open up the doors, yet. Canada, nothing happened. To Israel, nobody could go. So if there's opportunity to go somewhere, they wanted to go. So for 200 dollars, I was able to get an ID, piece of paper with a picture ID on the name of the person who perished in Belgium, and he could go home. So that person arrived in Belgium and Belgium the HIAS changed and gave him some, some papers. So we, we had the world and then, as when my turn came, I went to Belgium.

Q: What was it like being in, in Germany af...after the war? I mean, did you, were you, were you angry at the Germans?

A: Oh, we were, we were, we were very an... very, very angry. But, what, what can I tell you? We were very, very rough, very arrogant in, in the beginning. Like we went on a train and they ask for a, for a train ticket. We used to say, "Hitler paid already." We

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 12

12

never stood in line -- like, like taking advantage of the situation. But after awhile, we calmed down. We calmed down, because we say, "Hey, what's the use, after all, you cannot blame the whole, the whole nation for it. Here, now, the Nazis, I thought were arrested and taken care of, and the children of them are regretting, and then they're feeling with us, they're nice to us." So you know, they try to brainwash us, and as a young person, from bad to good, you got kind of a little bit brainwashed and, and, and calmed down, you know.

Q: What do you mean brainwashed?

A: That they say, "It's not my fault, I didn't know, my daddy, you know, it was very bad, he was forced into it. He didn't mean to do it. If he wouldn't join the Nazi party, he would go also to concentration camp." And, and I saw these things happen because there were certain times where, where SS soldiers were brought to concentration camp for not fulfilling the orders that they received. I didn't know exactly what the orders were. Like one very high rank officer came to concentration camp and he was stripped of the uniform, put on concentration camp uniform, shaved the head, and we had to speak to him. He says, "Well, I was a very high rank officer and I came home on vacation and my wife and the children were deported to a camp." He says, "Why?" Because apparently, his wife's grandfather descended from a gypsy. So that made her also a gypsy, they put in concentration camp. So he came back, he says, "Who am I fighting

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 13

13

for?" You know, so he came to concentration camp. So, this way the Germans of the war made us believe somehow that they were not completely to blame, that they were, were brainwashed, that, that circumstances brought them to that.

Q: And yet, it seemed reasonable at the time?

A: I mean, I was reasonable, because after all, I, I didn't read any books. I wasn't that my -- that much educa...educated. After the war, I didn't feel like going back to school and, you know, I wanted to roam around, to drive my car, to show off, go to dancing, be with girls, and my dream was to have a beautiful blue suit with white stripes. It was impossible to get it, but somehow I got it. So like after the war, whatever I wanted, it came to me, it fell into my lap, very easy. So I stopped thinking ab...about the past. I mean, it happened, it's unrepairable and when I found my two brothers, I was very, very, very, very happy and we kind of started a new life again. And as I said, the war broke out in Israel and my brother went. I says, "What am I sitting here in Luxembourg? There's no future here. I go to Israel." And I went to Israel and then I went to the, to the Israeli Navy as a volunteer.

Q: Why did you, why did you decide to...did you have strong militant feelings about...?

A: Not militant, I had the feeling for a Jewish state, for a Jewish state, that's Israel you know, that's all I knew. Because the camps, the UNRRA camps that I used to visit, you know, and all the girls, I used to socialize with a beautiful girl, and she says, "Oh, I'm not going to stay here. I'm not going to." Because people used to make, start making

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 14

14

applications to go to United States, you know, had to wait for a quota. And people say, "I'm going to Eretz, I'm going to Eretz Israel⁷, I'm going to Eretz Israel." And here, war breaks out and the word came around that young men should go to Israel to, to defend the country. So what was I then, 21 or 22, "What am I sitting here, sitting in Luxembourg? I'm with people that I, that I don't know, all alone, and I have a brother that came up from concentration camp. I want to be with him." So I went to Israel, then I was in the Navy and I met my wife, got married -- while I was in the Navy, a beautiful wedding -- and the war ended and then they had to liberate me because it was not aliyah⁸, was just a volunteer. And then I got angry in Israel.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Well, when I, when I got married and then I finished the army, I needed some work. I needed something, so I used to go to the authorities and say, "It would be fair to give me a little help. I'm here, I came, I fought, I did my duty." And, "Well, nobody ask you to come." And I -- my ego, you know. So I said, "In that case, I would kindly ask for an -- you needed an -- exit visa." So, took a while and I got an exit visa and I with my wife we return to Belgium. By then, I couldn't get any more help from, from, from the HIAS⁹, because I left once. They wouldn't help me, so I was...by the way, I came into Belgium not legal, just with a transit for three months and I used to have to be -- have to -- had to hide out because the police was always chasing me. "You have to leave, you have to leave, you cannot be here, cannot be here." But to Israel I didn't want to go back, to Poland I didn't want to go, so I made an application to go to United States or to Canada, whatever comes first.

⁷ land of Israel (Hebrew).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 15

15

Q: Let me ask you about, I was wondering about how you met your wife in the army?

A: Well, I met my wife through a, through a friend. We used to walk when we had our, our day off or a few hours off, we used to walk on a main street and there was a photograph shop and my wife's picture was there. So my friend went in there. He said, "Who is that girl?" So, he introduced her, so they went out, and if one goes out, I was going with my friend also, you know. So she kind of liked me better because my, my, my friend was a kind of little, little funny making, making jokes, throwing over garbage cans and all that, and I was more on the quiet side, so she liked me and she intro...introduced him to her girlfriend and we got married and, after, they got married.

Q: What was her, what was her background?

A: My background? For—

Q: Hers.

A: My wife's?

Q: Yeah, she also...?

A: She's, she's, she's, she's from Russia, Jewish girl from Russia, where her father was shot, 1941, and her mother married a Polish Jew, a Part... was in the Partisans. Now,

⁸ immigrant to Israel (Hebrew).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 16

16

because he was in Partisans, in Polish he was allowed to leave Russia. So he took the wife and his daughter out and they came to Poland, to Germany, and from Germany she went to Israel and that's, that's where I met her. So, I went back to Belgium and then thank God my papers came through to come to Canada, first. So in 1951, I emigrated to Canada, where I was 15 years in Canada and then I came to beautiful United States.

Q: Why did you -- you just went to Canada because—

End of Side 1, Tape 1

⁹ Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 17

17

Tape 1, Side 2

Q: You just went to Canada because you couldn't get into the United States?

A: Because, because I couldn't st... they wouldn't let me stay in Belgium.

Q: I know, but...

A: And I couldn't stay in, in the United States. I mean, the quota was not, didn't call for Polish Jews, so I couldn't come. So I took whatever I could, so I went into Canada and started naturally work as a furrier and then I...

Q: How come you didn't want to stay in Europe?

A: In Europe?

Q: Yeah. Why did you want to leave Europe?

A: Because I went, as I went to Israel and then to Belgium and I couldn't stay in Europe. I mean, I could have stayed in Germany, but the heart wasn't there, didn't want to stay in Germany. And Israel, I had a sour taste.

Q: And you didn't want to go back to Poland or...?

A: No, I didn't want to go back to Poland, no. Poland, there's nothing there. No, I didn't want to go back to Poland.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 18

18

Q: Why not? You didn't think of going back there and trying to restart your life there?

A: In Poland?

Q: Yeah.

A: There was nothing there. All the family, everything was gone. The house, we, we heard a rumor it burned down. There was nothing there, and, and I suffered prior the war in Poland very much. I -- as I said, I only have four years of education. I had to be twice in grade four -- in fourth grade because of the anti-Semitism. If there was a, a religious -- hour of religion, Jewish boys or girls had to go out of the classroom. When it was over, they came and start to beat me up because I killed Jesus. So I had a very sour taste about Poland, didn't want to go back to Poland. And in Belgium, I couldn't stay, so, and then Canada opened up, it was mass immigration, so I went to Canada.

Q: I'm curious as to -- how, how did the experience of, of, the experiences you had influ...influence the way that you and your wife decided to plan your life? I mean, did you -- do you think you kind of fell in love in the way that you...young people do here, or were you kind of hardened by the experiences you'd had and so didn't really have that -- kind of fall in love that way, or what was the...?

A: Well, I did fall in love with her because she was 19, I was about 21, two young people started to grow up together, used to each other, and I was there for her, she was there

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 19

19

for me, in the beginning. Then we came to Canada, started a new life, could -- tried to have a child, couldn't have a child, you know, tried and tried and tried. Business-wise, I became quite successful and finally in 1960 we adopted our daughter, which brought the greatest happiness in my life.

Q: What were you do... what was your career -- what career did you have?

A: Well, I started out as my trade as a furrier. But because I always was a hustler, I never felt like working for somebody else. So I started to work for myself, as a furrier. Then I changed, I opened up a driving school with somebody and I did driving school for ten years. Then—

Q: Did you taught or did you have a -- were you...?

A: No, no, I taught how to drive. Yeah, I taught how to drive and then I drove taxis and then a building boom started. People were starting, getting money from cl— from Germany for restitution, you know, reparation money, and they want to buy houses and I saw on every corner they, they're building houses. So, I went into construction business also.

Q: What, what kind of business was it, just...

A: Building, building, building houses.

Q: Contracting or...?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 20

20

A: No, just building from, from, from ground. Yeah, build -- built houses and sold them and made some nice money, and then I was approached by some distant relative of my wife, I should come to United States, that the, the opportunity would be better and there are many people that would invest because they saw my experience because if I started a, a project, I was the first one to finish it, the first one to sell them. So they kind of like it. So I came to United States and it didn't turn out to be the way they said it's going to be. So I naturally came here and I spent two years in, in United States, not legal, because I couldn't come, they wouldn't let me.

Q: How did it turn out not the way you thought it was, not the way they said it was going to be?

A: Well, instead of my benefiting from them, they wanted to benefit from me. For instance, I had to grab a bus, leave my wife and kid at home and come because a broker called and there's a piece of land available, I have to go and see it, so I left everything and I came to see it. I drove around a whole week and I did what I had to do and Sunday -- everybody -- we had -- were supposed to be full partners and then Sunday I had to go up and show them. "See, if we built here, we make you the garden apartments or two units," this and that, and everybody gave their opinion, not knowing what they're talking about. And that was going on for months and I -- even came a time when -- where in New Jersey, I actually made deposits to purchase some land for garden apartments and

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 21

21

again, you know, back and forth, back and forth. So one day I called a meeting. I says, "We are here, four partners. We are ready to invest about 100,000 dollars. But in the meantime, everyone of you is working and making a living and you're calling me. I come here, I spend time, I leave a wife and a child, I have nothing. I would like that everybody should give me 25 dollars and I give myself 25 dollars, so I can send 100 dollars home so they can live." "Oh well, you start to build, we sell, you make money." So I saw, so I just canceled out the whole thing, took back the deposits. But somehow I had to come to this country, so the only way was to clear the Labor Department. So I bought with somebody a little luncheonette. I thought it would be for a short time, so that I clear the department. So I came here, took me two years, until finally I got my green card, and I got stuck in that luncheonette for six years.

Q: What do you mean? You bought -- you owned it?

A: I owned the luncheonette, yes.

Q: Where was it?

A: On one, on Hudson Street, near the printing, near the Holland Tunnel, the exit of the Holland Tunnel. So I was stuck there for six years. It was the worst six years of my life, I must say, as a free man. I had to get up three o'clock in the morning and work and work and work and work, and finally I said if I'm not going to sell it, I'm going to burn it. I

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 22

22

was so fed up. So finally in 1972, I was lucky to sell it and then my brother-in-law was in Russia and they married off their daughter and I always wanted to go, and like before I always, my dream was to go on a cruise. So I remember I was signing the papers Friday to sell the store. Saturday morning, I still had to go to the accountant to iron out some things and then a telephone call came in and they say there are two spots for 499 dollars on a cruise, you can go if you can make it by one o'clock. I made it, we went on that cruise, it was very nice.

Q: Where, where did you go?

A: To the, to Nassau, to the Bahamas. It was very nice, and then I went to Russia to attend the wedding of my brother-in-law's daughter. And what else did I do? And then got enrolled in a, in a soap distribution. I used to sell cleaning products, and finally I went downtown and I saw the way that people are dressed, the people -- young, young kids. It gave me an idea to start an antique clothing store, clothing from forties and thirties, and I open up that store and since I'm a furrier, I was handling also furs. Became quite successful and I was able to purchase the building and was doing financially, financially very nice and at home, things weren't that great.

Q: Why? What was...

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 23

23

A: I did, I didn't know that my wife is looking for her physical satisfaction somewhere else. I didn't know. I thought she doesn't need men, she's cold. But, so she had a fling here and there. I didn't know to any extent, until about 19, in the eighties, I got my married, my daughter married, naturally made a beautiful wedding. She has two children now. About 1987, my wife met a, a person who was homeless. I mean, partially, practically homeless. She was taking advantage of many people and she open up the door for her, to bring her in here. Slept on the floor and tried to manipulate my wife, a very shrewd person, very shrewd. I will not mention the names, but when the time comes I have to, I have to. And she used to convince my wife that it's all right to see other people, you know, kind of help her, bringing her up to some, to some, to some point, and at the same time tried to take money from her. "Borrow me here, borrow me there, borrow me here," and "don't worry, do what you have to do, I'll take care of him." And she was so shrewd, she convinced her. She brainwashed her and you know, but I didn't like her, her...

Q: And she was living in the apartment?

A: That's right and I didn't like her mouth. Very, very bad mouth, so one day I wrote her a letter that if -- that she should leave us, leave our life and go, you know, and at that time when my, when my, my daughter left for, for California, I had the relapse. Because in 1983, I had a car accident and I had a disc, a herniated disk, but with exercise, and I fell

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 24

24

into a depression when my daughter left me. And when I told this woman to go, she start begging me, "don't, don't." My wife says, "Leave her alone, leave her alone, she's okay, you know, she helps out." I didn't know that my wife is using her as a cover-up, as a cover. Well, then when she pumped out from my wife whatever she could, she went to work on me, you know. "Oh, you're so nice, your wife is going to Florida, everything is fine, no worry, she cooked for me, she made me meals," and all that, and she says, "oh you're like my father and I give my life for you," and blah, blah, blah, talk and talk and talk a lotta nonsense. But one day she says, "Do you ever cheat on your wife?" I says, "No I don't." Why? Because, well, I had a complex because my wife used to reject me, so I didn't have the, the, the, the courage to approach other women, because I couldn't stand rejection. So I said, "No, I don't do it," and, and we left it at that. And then again, and again, and again, when she couldn't take anymore money from my wife, she started, "Oh, I need an apartment, I need this, you help me." Okay, so I helped -- a few hundred dollars here, a few hundred dollars there, and then she dropped, when she saw the moment is ripe, you know, that I am so depressed, she dropped a bombshell on me. She says, "You never cheat on your wife?" I says, "No, does she?" She says, "Yeah. You know this and this guy?" "Well, I think I do." And she told me, let's go, let's go, let's go to a detective office and I know exactly when and where she can be caught with this man. And she used to take telephone and put my wife together with that man. I mean, she plotted the whole thing. And, naturally, I go to this detective and I give a

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 25

25

deposit, and she tells him exactly when and where -- they get caught. They get caught, I got grounds for divorce. Right? I got grounds for divorce. But here, I'm a wealthy man. See? So she says, "She's going to take everything away from you. Why don't you transfer it to me?" Transfer the building, you know, and make promises everywhere, "I do it for him because of my love and whenever he wants it I'll give it back to him," you know? And she says, I says, "I want to make a settlement. Give her so much and so much to my wife." She says, "No, no, no. You'll give her as little as possible and leave the rest to me." Anyway, she manipulated my brain, she manipulated her brains and I was then under so much depression I used to take tranquilizers, Xanax, you know? And whenever I got depressed, she even had these pills in her bag and she used to give me, just to keep me calm. And she dragged me to a lawyer. Naturally, I signed over everything, you know, with a promise she is going to give it back to me, just because she put my wife on the telephone and she spoke to her and I heard her say, "Oh, okay. If he's going to find out, gonna to be divorced. I'm going to take everything and find myself a young lover and live my life." She prepared all that and I should hear it. So, of course, that aggravated me. So, I didn't want that to happen, that she should get everything. Whatever stocks she had, she made her sell and give me a check. I'm telling you, she took the building and hundreds of thousands of dollars and all that, and she was nice to me. She gave me a few years that I never had in my life. Actually the divorce went through. Right? She gave me, you know, and

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 26

26

always money here, money there. And when the money start, you know, there was nothing much to give, she kind of pulled off and she looked somewhere else. So here comes along a woman friend that we knew together, that is in the process of dying, you know, of cancer. And so she went to work on her. "Oh, I'm gonna to be for you here. I'm gonna to help you." This and that, and that poor woman had a, had a bad relationship with her only son. She left with a second husband. For years, she couldn't get along with her son. However, her son has three children, very poor, and he made a bat mitzvah for her, for his daughter, and me and this person were invited and he didn't speak to his mother. His mother was dying of cancer. He didn't speak to her. But there come a moment when they were playing the hora, you know, dancing the hora. So he is -- the boy -- dancing the hora. I take his hand and his mother comes in. So I joined the hands of his mother and the boy and I say, "It's time." So they got together and start talking, you know? But in the meantime this woman get sick. So this person, again, start to brainwash this woman. "Get away from your husband." Blah, blah, blah. "I take care of you." And so sh— this woman made her the executive, you know?

Q: So, so you said, but you said before that there are, there were a couple of years that, that it was okay, that—

A: I mean I, I, I accepted what she told me. I said -- I, I thought, "What's the use having everything, everything on my name, she wants it on her name to protect from the other one, shouldn't take it." So she gave me a few nice years. But when she met up with this woman and this woman started, oh she started on this woman also, make her

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 27

27

executive over the -- full power of attorney, take out money from here, from there, everything, everything and her, she let up on me. She started to neglect me completely and I wasn't happy because I saw then, I realize, I saw, and this woman used to fa— the sick woman used to fall into a coma. And one time she woke up, she says, "Erwin, I hope she's not going to do to my son what she did to you." I said, "What are you talking about?" And she went back. You know, apparently this woman saw something. And I saw, look, she's making this woman sign this, and sign here, sign power of attorney and take money and transfer from here, and transfer there, and make the boy give her money. I didn't like it, and here three months she neglects me. So I approached her once, I says, "Look here, it's nice to take care of the person, but you're neglecting me. You're leaving in the morning, you come home three, four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock and run back." I says, "I don't feel good. I, I, I had chest pain and I had to go to emergency." She says, "Well, I'm not going to worry about you now."

Q: So, in, in, in the meantime she had control, had the control of all your money and...

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, and why I trusted her, people also ask me why I trusted her. My depression led to a heart bypass, to an operation. So I go to the hospital. My wife didn't have the time to go with me to the hospital, because she told her, "It's okay, you don't have to go. I'll take care of him." Now, before I go down to operation, before I close my eyes, I don't see my wife, I see her. When I come out, I don't see my wife, I see her. So, I mean that's how she plotted everything and that's how she made me trust her in full. You understand? So now, go back to this woman and so...

Q: I just was wondering about the, I was a little concerned about the [tape skippeed].

A: This woman would argue back and forth. I says, "Look, you always promised, whenever I want the building, whatever money I gave, I mean hundreds of thousands of dollars,

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 28

28

now I have nothing." I says, "Just transfer the building back to me." Because she took a big mortgage on the building also and messed it up. I took a mortgage of this apartment I gave her. Now I'm responsible for it. She says, "I'm not giving it back. I'm not giving back nothing. I give, I gave you, I took care of you." Well, naturally I started a litigation. I started a litigation and we came to a settlement that she, she will pay me for the building like -- on the time of transaction, somebody advised her that it couldn't be just like this. She got to kind of make a sale, so 160,000 dollars, she gave me a second mortgage. I wasn't aware that it's so powerful. She says, "The only thing you can get, you can get payments on the mortgage." So, well, we agreed on that. She made a few payments and then she, she defaulted on payments. So now I'm in litigation again with her, and she's such a person so vicious, you know. Wha— on every sentence, there's threat, she's threatening, oh, she'll do something, "I'm going to destroy him, my mother, my mother will come. She's going to make his family disappear." Threatening and threatening and threatening. And that's where it's at now. I was a rich man and she, she made me a poor man. She's holding everything and wouldn't give it back, and now we're in litigation, and she took her mortgage and the bank is foreclosing on her also, because I put a sheriff to collect the rents, so there's no income.

Q: Could you, could you tell me about -- I wonder if -- do you see any relationship between how -- what happened with this person and the earlier events of, of your life? Perhaps

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 29

29

in terms of what happened with you with, with the, the -- your relationship with your wife and, and, you know, you said that she, you felt that she was, she was cold and—

A: Yeah.

Q: I mean do you think that just happened because, you know, because of the relationship or is there something about your earlier experiences that may have—?

A: Well, I don't know about what happened with my earlier experiences, because I thought that I was the happiest man in the world, you know, I was married for over forty years and I kept my wife on the pedestal, and in everybody's eyes we were the perfect couple, the perfect example. Everything is nice, so maybe she, she had a fling here and there somewhere, which is, I don't know, it might be, it might be natural, or not. But naturally, I wasn't happy at home -- very happy -- because she was not very attentive. Like I had to go to a doctor for a, for a angiogram report. She did not have time to go with me. And these little things bugged me very much and I felt an oppression. When I divorced her, you know, and this one was here -- came to my life. I mean, I was treated like a king, I must say. My juice was squeezed freshly in the morning. Right? My clothes was always prepared, what I should wear today, what shall I wear tomorrow, the best food. It took me on a trip to Europe, to Italy. I mean, the burden is on me now, because she falsified my signature on the credit cards and all that, the burden is on me. But she

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 30

30

opened up my eyes. I, I saw things that I have never seen. But it wa— everything was planned, everything was, was planned in a, in a, in a most vicious way.

Q: What do you mean that she opened your eyes with just things?

A: She showed me a world that I have never seen. I mean, she gave me love. She gave me compassion. She, she opened up her heart and her body to me in a way that I have never, never experienced, and, and I was happy, you know, I was happy and I had a good life, until I saw that all was material, you know? As long as there was money coming from here, some stock here, some bonds here and then she got everything -- there was nothing more to gain, to get, and she needed it. She could spend thousands in a day.

Q: Did you talk to her about, tell her about your earlier exp...experiences, about your time in camps and...?

A: Yes I told her, but she, she, she wouldn't -- she doesn't believe in Holocaust and that she doesn't believe in it. She says, "Oh, yeah, even you're acting when you talk about the Holocaust. It's not true." You know, that's in a fight or -- later I understand why. Because she was married to a German and then she was married to an Arab, so it's a good combination to, to be anti-Semitic.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 31

31

Q: Do you think that that was something, that, that she felt, "Well, you were a Jew and so it was—"

A: I don't know why. But this was apparently, this was her, her way of life, to get things out of other people. Because now, it clears my puzzle, because when she just came into our life, she used to ask my wife if she could get 10,000 dollars. Because when she left Europe, she shipped a lot of antiques to San Francisco, which are in storage -- you know -- and unless she gets it out, it will be auctioned off. So apparently she ripped off somebody else over there.

Q: How old is she?

A: She is now about 35, 36, 38. I don't know.

Q: And she was from Europe originally?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about your daughter. Tell me about your daughter.

A: My daughter's my best thing that happened to me. She's, I mean, the way she wrote this poem, we, we are very close. She's very against her mother -- very much of what, what she did, and now she says, "Now she's a woman, now it comes back also."
Because she say, as a small child, my wife was never, she was never, she was never a

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 32

32

mother, she was never a wife. The child was in first grade, all she had is a string with her keys on her neck. She had to go from school to this neighbor, to this neighbor, to this neighbor, to this neighbor. I had to manage, to close my restaurant, my luncheonette, as early as possible so I could run home and catch her, so I could be with her. When the child woked up at, at night and she never, she never cried out "Mommy," she always cried out "Poppy." So up to this day I was always for her. You should see the letters she writes to me, you know, so my experience with my daughter is very, very, very, very close, very close, very good, and my two little grandbabies, I mean, that's my life.

Q: Can you tell me about the, you showed me the poem earlier. I wonder if—

A: Yeah.

Q: ...you could tell me—

A: Yes.

Q: ...about what, about what she wrote and, and how that, how that happened -- she gave it to you?

A: How that happened? She was, she was here in 1989. Her husband's brother got married on a wedding. And I think that, about that time, the Holocaust experience

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 33

33

started to come out of the people, because we hold it, we were all holding it very, very suppressed.

Q: What time was this? Was it like...

A: That was 1989. Prior to that, my daughter would never want to hear about the Holocaust. I mean, it didn't ring the bell. But then, one day she, she watched a movie, "The Last Solution"¹⁰. Certain things in it start to come toget...together and I don't know what it was, maybe I was, I was preparing an interview or something and I had an idea, "Why don't you write something, your experiences? What do you think about your father?," I ask her. So before she left, just scribble up on a little paper, to express feelings about me. So that's how she did it.

Q: So tell me about what, what you meant, that, that up until 80 -- late, mid -- late '80s that you kept a—?

A: Couldn't, couldn't, couldn't, it was too painful. Couldn't talk, because many times, going back again to the, to the -- with this person and my wife, I used to -- even now I have nightmares, you know? It's never escapes my mind. I'm seeing a psychiatrist, even at this time now, I just, you know. I wake up or I don't, I have to sit home and I cry, you

¹⁰ The interviewee may be referring to "The Final Solution," a 19 minute installment in the *Witness to the Holocaust* series directed by C. J. Pressma. R. R. Bowker, *Bowker's Complete Video Directory 1995*, v. 2, *Education/Special Interest A-R* (New Providence, NJ: A Reed Reference Publishing, 1995) 569.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 34

34

know, because it, it haunts me all the time. So I used to wake up and cried, I cried at night, at sleep. My wife wouldn't come in. This person came in to wake me and calm me. And prior to that person, when she came to our life, my, my, my girl -- my daughter was sleeping here and she heard me and she didn't know what's what, and that's how she expressed herself here.

Q: So your daughter would -- wasn't she, she wasn't aware that when she was growing up, there was -- you know -- you were, you were still haunted by this experience? Or she didn't know that you were going...?

A: We didn't talk about it very much. But only later on when I used to have those nightmares. Because before this we lived in a two bedroom apartment somewhere else, she has her own bedroom so she couldn't hear. But, yes, she heard me crying and she used to run, "Daddy, Daddy, what is it, what is it, what is it?" And I woke up in a cold sweat.

Q: And you would tell her?

A: I tell her that I just had this nightmare, this dream, of what was happening to me and then there, there was...

Q: And how did she resp— what, what -- and how did she respond?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 35

35

A: Well she, I don't know how she took it because she never expressed her feelings to me.

Because if you tell your story to somebody, it's to the other person, it's just like reading a book. It doesn't affect you very much because you did not live it. You see, us, survivors, you know? I'm talking to you and somehow I can not touch upon the, the feeling that it happened to me, you know? Because it was so tragic, so awful, what I went through, that it's just humanly impossible to comprehend, you know? So it's just like reading a book about somebody's experience. So you cannot expect anybody to have any, any feelings about it. Only it's being bombarded to the minds now, second generation and third generation are getting, you know, the, the, the, the experiences of the -- of their beloved is getting soaked into their, into their brains and, and the fear emerges, "God forbid it should happen to my children." because a teenager will not feel it unless they have their own children and start to be afraid of what will happen to their children. Because seeing movies, "Schindler's List," or reading books, or, or talking like I used to talk. I don't know if she heard me or not. That, that, that, that, that, that I watched them -- my sister, they told her to, to, to, to give the child, she wouldn't give the child so, so, so the guy pulled it out, throw down from the balcony, she screams and he shot her right in the mouth, you know? It's too heavy for a child to comprehend that it happened to her own family.

Q: Anyway, you wouldn't want -- I mean you -- that's not the kind of thing that you would tell—

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 36

36

A: And I wouldn't, and I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I wouldn't, you know.

Q: So at, at that point, when she became—

End of Tape 1

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 37

37

Tape 2, Side A

Q: So at that, that point, when she became more aware that you had these experiences, did she then start to ask you about it or, or...?

A: It was no need, it was no need to ask because it became all of a sudden it became knowledge, you know? Television, papers, books, libraries, you know? And people, I mean the people that we were associating with, you couldn't escape, you know, you could not have a conversation even up to day, you know. I go, even if I go see or socialize, I go out to evening with American people, so what comes first to their mind? Where are you from? Because of my accent. I tell them, well, to me, you are a refugee because you have an accent, you speak funny -- have an accent, oh, "where are you from?" "Poland, Warsaw." "Oh, my mother, oh my father, oh my uncle was in Warsaw. How did you survive?" So you cannot get away with it. It just lingers on and on and on and on. Like I talk to my psychiatrist. He says, "You have to try to get away. I says, "How?" No matter where I go, I come to you, I speak about it. I go to my doctor. I sit on, on a bus, on a subway, have a conversation about, about, about President Clinton, how wonderful he is and about Mayor Giuliani¹¹, what a wonderful thing he did to, he didn't let Arafat¹² to the party. "Oh, where, where you from? I see that you're a

¹¹ Rudolph W. Giuliani, 107th mayor of New York City.

¹² Yasser Arafat (Mohammed Yasser Abdul-Ra'ouf Qudwa Al-Husseini), president of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee and of the Palestinian National Authority.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 38

38

European." So and then it starts, but it does not escape and the children are around and then they hear it, they listen. So there was never necessary to talk one on one to child what happened to me, because I wouldn't want to lay it on her.

Q: So, but you mentioned awhile ago that, that you thought that she -- the time when she became more aware of it was also the time when she had her own children.

A: Right.

Q: Can you tell me how—

A: And now, now, now she's a—

Q: how did you see that -- what happened to her?

A: Well, she, she, she became, she became aware and very protective of her children.

God forbid -- and, and her hope and prayer is that Holocaust should not be repeated.

Not so much afraid of herself, as of the children. Me -- like me now, God forbid something should happen to he— to, to them, rather it should happen to me. She became a mother, you know, very, very fearful because, of course, I mean she's intelligent woman, she hear of the skinheads and the, and the, and the neo-Nazis and all that.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 39

39

Q: Can you tell me about the -- your -- is this fir— have you been in therapy for a long time or...?

A: Yes, yes, for the past few years, I am.

Q: For past few years. But had you before at all?

A: Also before also, also before also. And in and out, in and there, but—

Q: For how -- which time frame?

A: Like in 1983, after that car accident, I was always in pain, always in pain, always in pain, and they tried everything on me and then figured that I need some therapy. So I went, I had biofeedback and, and psychiatry and all that and, and it helps me. And then, you know, taking those pills, those Xanax and Halcion, you know, they were bad stuff.

Q: What did -- so wh...wh...when -- how did the therapist respond to—

A: Well, just talk and give me, give me some, some pills to calm me down, and I figured out that the best healing you have to heal yourself, you know. I got fed up with going, because every time I go to therapist, I get all worked up, you know, and it comes back again, the picture again, 'til the next visit. You see, like I have to see my therapist on the seventh and already I'm like this, I have a few weeks of, of peace and it doesn't leave me. So I figure now maybe it's like two years almost, maybe, maybe I should take a

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 40

40

break a few months. Maybe, maybe it's going to help me. She keeps me on those Prozac pills. But it doesn't do much to me, you see. I learned to accept, because I can't switch it off. No matter what I do, I can't switch it off.

Q: What do you mean? What, what can't you switch off?

A: The memories, the haunting, I can't switch it off. You see, like it gets, it gets dark, you switch a switch, a switch, a switch. You have light, you switch it off, it's dark. I cannot do it in my, in my brains, you know, it's just there, it's just there. I just see this Bertha, this woman pointing at me, you know, get his number down. I see this, this, this, this, this, this Ukrainian with a, with a, with a brown uniform, waiting for me at the end of the road with this branch, who got me here. Because we were, we were in ghetto. Out of Warsaw, my mother had two sisters in another part of town or a hundred kilometers from, from Warsaw, where the hunger was not so great and there was a little bit possibilities for food. But a lot of people found out and a lot of people came. So one night, they ordered all the Jews out in the field in the ghetto and they said to produce an ID card that you're a residents. My oldest brother, which is not alive, he succeeded to have one because the president of the ghetto's daughter used to socialize with my brother, so he fixed him a card. Comes me, my mother, my sisters, my brothers, we didn't have it. So what happened? About, they made like a -- like about a hundred of them here and a hundred of them here, standing on a row and everybody was back

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 41

41

there and everybody had a whip or a br...branch and who didn't have that ID card, had to walk through there, around through there, to a destination over there. One of my sisters and two brothers were so lucky that they were the first ones, so one soldier took them and walked them through, without being beaten. So the other ones knew where to go. Came the turn of my older sister, she got beaten up like don't ask. Came my turn, I was small boy, I got a long coat, and I was running like a snake, you know? And almost at the end, there was one waiting for me and got me straight on my face, here. Actually, I had like, you know, swollen upper lip. It lasted about three days. No water even to wash it off. Lost my teeth and everything else. I mean all of those things, I...

Q: Ha...has that -- did those things affect you as much when you were, when you were young or—

A: Of cour—

Q: ...back in the fifties when you first came—

A: It affects you—

Q: ...or you're away from Europe, you're in Canada?

A: It affects me, Mr. Shapiro¹³, when I hear the Ukrainians speak. You know, when I hear the Ukrainian language, that's, you know, it affects me. Because they were worse

¹³ Benjamin Shapiro, interviewer.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 42

42

than, than the Nazis and the Germans. The Ukrainians, the Croatians and naturally the Polacks, the Polish people, bad. Because of a Polish boy in concentration camp, I was hanged by my hands this way, 20 minutes, and it gave me a disc and up, up to this day I have pain here. Because for us -- being good workers -- private, private, private people, truck owners, when we put, very fast, stones on the truck, as many trips they made, they made more money, used to give cigarettes to give to this commander, about 75, I guess. If there, if there were a few cigarettes left, my kapo, kapo, you know -- did you hear about the kapo? Gave me a name of somebody that passed away -- died -- so I could go again and get the cigarettes. So I went again and this Polish boy says, "Hey, he was here already." You know, he was here. So I start to run and they caught me and they hanged me there.

Q: So, so those -- but you said that you can't turn off the memories of those.

A: Yeah.

Q: So it's not just that things remind you of those, that they're always just there.

A: Yes, they're always there, yeah.

Q: Do you think about them, do you think more now than you used to when...?

A: Well, I cannot, I cannot, I mean it's always there, more or less it's always there. You know, a certain part of my life is now, five minutes something else can come about. All depends of the, of the environment where I am. If I see, if I see, for instance, a river, comes to my mind, oh yes, in Warsaw, Poland we were living not far from a river, you know, and people used to pass by to play tennis and stop by, buy some candy, some cigarettes from my, from my mother. And then I see a small house, I remind myself of a little village where my aunt used to live, with a, with a straw roof. I used to go every

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 43

43

summer. And if I hear the, the, the, the Ukrainian language, I, I get frustrated, I start shivering. Then, then, then it all comes back. When I hear even a Jew speak German, oh my God, you know? Polish I can't stand. So it's everything connects to everything immediately, like I'm involved in everything, everything.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Like ever...everything -- how can I express? Open up the TV. Most of, most of what you see is shooting, right? So, I saw it everyday of my life.

Q: So what is that...how does that...

A: That brings me that I witness those sceneries -- that affects me. Hanging, you know, I remember. Why, why hanging? Because three men, one of them I knew very well, Leon Fo...Fox, he was working in the barrack of clothing, he distributed clothing. And because of the clothing, he could find for himself nice civilian clothes, and in the clothing he'd find dollars and, and gold coins and he was able to bribe the SS to get him out of the camp. So him and two others escaped. But Auschwitz was no such a thing as escaping. One day, two days, three days, four days, they caught 'em and brought 'em back. And here they hang 'em in front of everybody, you know? So when I see any hanging in a cowboy film, you know, that comes back.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 44

44

Q: Do you think that you're -- in the choices that you made in your life in terms of the kinds of things you were doing or that you wanted to do, I mean did you ever -- do you feel like that you were able to do what you wan...wanted to do or would have liked to do?

A: I was—

Q: I guess like when I was growing up or most kids, when they're growing up, you know, they have these dreams of what they want to be, and in a way if you didn't have that chance -- how do you, you know -- I mean...

A: Well, I was successful of doing what I wanted to do, you know, even, even though in the camp, even though in the camp.... When they put us to Auschwitz and there was Russian and there was hunger, so to me it was no big deal. What else is new? I was hungry before the war. Before I went to this orphanage, I was hungry. So here it was already at least you guaranteed a few meals a day. Now, there were good days, there were bad days in the camps. When there were good days, was fine. When it was bad days, we used to talk. So they asked me -- they used to call me Bubi because I was the youngest there -- "Bubi what do you think? Are we gonna to survive? Are we going to make it?" I says, "I will. I don't know, you." I had that in my mind, implanted somehow. When they put the numbers, swear to God, you know, I should have learned this from my children, I'll talk to my brothers, "You know, we're gonna to show this in the United States." I didn't even know if there is a United States. I thought there's Warsaw, there's

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 45

45

Poland, that's it. I didn't even know. So I had that, how shall I say it? The foresight of surviving, of getting out of it, you know?

Q: Do you feel that you still, I mean especially given the troubles you've had recently, do you still have a sense of that, that, of that foresight of survival, that you'll get through and...?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: Is that helpful to you still?

A: Yes, it helps me to get through. You see, what a person did to me, you know? And, somehow, I learned to live with it. Although I'm litigation, I'm going to get something out of it. I know I will. I know I will survive, somehow. See, thanks God, I'm not in too poor health. I'm gonna to be 70 years old, you know. I have my daughter. I have my two brothers. See, I don't know what to ask out of life more, because of what I didn't have.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Like, like, like I say, I was hungry before the war. Now, thanks God, my refrigerator is full of food, you know. I'm seeing a few people around me that are very, very nice to me, you know. I'm invited fo— to dinners and here and there. I go to synagogue twice a week. I'm very close to the Rabbi, although I cannot pay any membership. But

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 46

46

someday I will, you know? I always hope that, that, that, that, you know, God will let me enjoy the rest of my years as peaceful, as normal as possible and do the best I can.

Q: Do you think that over the course of, of your life that you, that you, that you -- that hadn't made -- you know, what you said about how you -- because you didn't have any food and that just having food, having food was enough and to be able to sustain yourself is enough...

A: That was the dream in the camp. What was, what, what was our dream? Our dream -- like most of us, when there was a day off like Sunday, we didn't work, we were able to be in camp. Outside the camp, we didn't see it. But while in camp, we saw the fire above the chimney going very, very high, because of the fat of the human flesh. Not only there was the, the, the -- how you call -- the, the smog, but the fire. And in people's mind, well, one day, what do you want before that happens? Enough bread, just bread to satisfy your hunger and then I don't care what happens. Like before they execute a person, your last wish, that was our last wish. Now what I would, now what I, my only regret is, which I'm angry, why didn't my wife let me go 25 years ago? If I wasn't what she wanted me, I could have remarried. My daughter always cried out, "Why don't I have a sister or a brother?" I could have give her all that. That's my, that's my, that's my pain. That's what I'm angry. And then, sometimes, I have an argument with God, to have an argument with him.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 47

47

Q: What do you mean?

A: Why, why did he take away my, my beloved? I mean my father had to die, he was 48 years old, he was a sick man. The war broke out, my mother was only 50 years old. One of my sisters had a little boy, two years old, I mean young. Why did he take 'em all away and left me with all this hurt, this feelings? And then I forgive him. Sometimes I have not, then I forgive him. Well, somebody had to remain to, to, to tell the story. It shouldn't repeat itself.

Q: Do you ever question or think about how, how it is that people can be evil to that extent, or how people can...? Did that ever -- is that something that happened then, or that you thought about -- that you think about since then?

A: Circumstances brings it to them. How could people do it? Right? Germany before the war, I mean now I'm big scholar. What did I know? Germany before the war was in big depression. Right? No work, no food, no nothing. Here comes Hitler. Prosperity starts, everybody has everything, then he builds the Volkswagen for them. Whatever he does is right. So he says, "The Jews are our enemies. They're no good. It's their fault. They wanted the war. We have to get rid of 'em."

Q: But what is it about? I guess I'm thinking about, do you ever think about what it is about certain, certain people, that allows them to do things that are, you know, horrendous?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 48

48

A: Well, something, something penetrates to the mind, that dictates them it's the right thing to do. See?

Q: But all the things -- I mean the things -- some of the, the things that you've seen, experienced, how could, how could anyone even justify that?

A: Yeah, people think it's the right thing to do. Like this person, you know, who did so, so bad to me, took, you know, made me penniless. And this poor women, you know, took money from her and then she says to her son, "You know, I have to put some money on your account." So she put money on his account. Then she says, "You know something? You better withdraw the cash and let me hold it for you because your wife will leave you and get off, you'll have nothing." So the boy gives it to her, you know? He trusts her, because she's so manipulating. And now a year and a half later, the boy ask her -- you know, they also had the fight -- he ask her, "Are you ever going to give me the money?" She says that I got it, that I took it, you know? And then the poor boy believes it. So...some people that can manipulate other people's brain to do the right thing, and she thinks she does the right thing. Because she spend with me those few years, you know, I deserve that she should make me penniless and not give me back nothing. So it's very hard, it's very hard to say why, why people hold up other people, why people rape other people, why people kill other people. It's another sickness. Why, why, why people do good thing to people? You see? Like when I, I go back and I think, I good, I good -- I did good things, even while I was hungry, I did good things. And there are people up to this day, thanks God, to verify it, you know. While we were working in camp, there was a certain Kommando. We used to clean up, it was called the clean-up commander like. People came by transport. They had to leave all the luggage and everything and we used to put it on trucks and then go to the other location. We sorted clothes here, this, that and a big b...box, put the money in there. But while helping the people coming off the train, there was a few boys of us, what told us to do, I don't know. But when we saw a woman, in the 60s, a woman in the 20s, 30s, holding a child, we asked them, "Please have the child -- let your mother hold it." Why? A woman with a ch— an old woman had no chance, had to go. She was no, no, no good for labor. She had to go to gas chambers. A woman with a child -- because no children, no babies in camp -- go to gas chambers. But if we took the child and give to the older woman, we save the young woman -- she went to camp. Who told us to do? Why? No reason. We did it. There is one, there is one instant I experienced that I shall never forget for until I close my eyes. The end of 1944, Hungarian transports used to come. Two

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 49

49

thousand day, 2,000 at night. I mean the crematoriums were so busy, they couldn't acc...accommodate all this killings. So they dug big, big holes, put people on the truck and straight in the fire. Here comes this transport at night and we're getting called out. I mean, I was hard as a rock over there. I didn't care, because I knew it might happen to me. If my cousin, whoever came, I knew he was going to die. Only looked if he has a piece of bread. Like from France or Belgium, they came. They used to bring sardines. We wanted a piece of salami. What happened to him will happen anyways. But here comes a transport and I do my thing. I see a girl, 18 years old, whether it was her baby or not her baby, I don't know. I say to, in Yiddish, "Gib dos kind tzu di mameh, un kim mit mir."¹⁴ She goes like this, she takes me by my shirt, she says -- and the, yeah, the people knew what's going on. The flames from the crematoriums were noticed on the ramp. People were putting on tallasim¹⁵ -- "Shema Israel"¹⁶ were praying and screaming and the Nazis were running around, calm down, calm down the people, calm down with the dogs, I mean. And this girl, like that. "Look" she says, "I'm 18 years old. I didn't love in my life, yet. Why are you taking me to dead already?" You know, if she would have put a knife in my heart, I would be happy. It got me so down. So I got to talk to her. "No, no I don't -- it's no good for you to have the baby. Give it to mommy, give it to mommy." And we couldn't talk because if we would have be...been spotted, it would be the end of us. So, somehow I managed to surrender the baby and I managed to get her in the right place, where she went to camp, you know? And a few weeks later, I, I kind of visited that camp. I had a way of getting in, to exchange with somebody else who was working there, and the girl got, got crazy in that camp. I thought I saved her life. So this, this will haunt me to the rest of my days -- this moment.

Q: Have you been, you know, active at all politically or, or with terms of, you know, trying to continue to kind of he...help people that way, or, or in your life since then—

A: I mean, I mean—

Q: ...or have you been too busy just trying to—?

¹⁴ "Give the child to your mother and come with me" (Yiddish).

¹⁵ Prayershaws (Ashkenazi Hebrew).

¹⁶ "Hear, O Israel" (Hebrew); declaration of God's unity and watchword of Jewish faith.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 50

50

A: I mean, I mean, no, no, I can't because it's, it's too, it's too, very -- too, too, too, too, very, very emotional. I mean, if I'm being questions, I can go on and blabble and talk, you know, I can answer the questions. But to be involved, not really. I mean, if the Rabbi has a demonstration somewhere, I go besides him, you know, help him out. Like there was this incident that a Polish priest accused the Jewish star of being equal to the, to the Nazi or the Russian. You know, we went and protested that they should retrieve this, this -- you know. But otherwise, not really, no. I mean, I'm a member of the Holocaust survivors, where we meet, you know, and talk about things. But nothing, nothing big, nothing much, because there's nothing I can do. I mean, to talk to people, what can I tell them? What can I tell them that they don't know, yet? I mean -- and to -- and there is plenty of us to educate the youth and there is plenty books available now, that children can read. And sometimes children of American parents, from synagogue want to interview me, I do it. I, I speak to them, because they have a project to write or whatever.

Q: I wanted to talk a little bit more about the, the period of your life in the '50s, after you got to Canada and kind of—

A: Yeah.

Q: ...seemed like there was period there where you kind of really started to settle and rebuild a—

A: Yeah, yeah.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 51

51

Q: ...rebuild your life. And I was interested in, in, in that period particularly, and I was wondering if you're interest in, in having a child was in all related to your earlier experiences. Was that...?

A: Yes, it was. It was very important to me to have a child, because I always wanted a family. Because being, being from a family of seven, you know, and then I have a -- my, my brothers, like one brother has two children, the other brother has three children and here I'm, I'm childless. And I always loved children, you know, I wanted to have a child and tried and tried and tried. Nothing happens and one day she got pregnant and lost it, you know. So, I was kind of very depressed about it and it was very much on my mind, until we found out about this adoption agency -- the Jewish agency, of course -- and going through a lot of investigations and thanks God I succeeded to have my daughter.

Q: Did they have any, did the people who do investigations, the people in the adoption agency were interested in you and...

A: They were, yeah, but not directly to me. They were speaking to other people.

Q: Do you think that, did you find out what they were interested in particularly or were they...

A: My character, my character, my character, and if I'm, if I'm a suitable father. My character, but, of course, they all, all gave their best opinion. I didn't know, I didn't know, until I found out this past Jewish holidays, because I always go for the holidays to

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 52

52

Montreal, to my -- to be with my brothers for Passover, now I went. And there some people, even my partner that wa— I was in driving school business with him, he's still there. When what happened with my wife, I kind of closed the doors. I didn't want to speak to nobody, because of -- I don't want 'em to start pumping me with questions. Because I wanted this chapter, I want it to be forgotten. But then I figure, "These people didn't do me any wrong. They always inquire about me. It's time to get out of the closet." So while I was in my brother's house, I invited two of my closest friends. Ah, well [indecipherable] you cannot. So we start to talk and they told me, you know. "You know, when you were adopting Mona, they came to us to vouch for you and they asked me, 'What do you think Mr. Baum? Is he going to make a good father?'" They said, "Of course, he's going to make a wonderful father." "How about, is she going to make a good mother?" And the answer was, "Mr. Baum will be a very good father." You know? That's what they told me.

Q: So they had the feeling already then?

A: They have a feeling, yeah, that she wasn't much. But things got, that, that was my, my luckiest break, you know, to, to have her.

Q: Could you tell -- I was wondering about if you ever feel that people see the, the number or that—?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 53

53

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you ever get tired of, of people recognizing you as that, or seeing you and saying, "Oh, well, that's what he is and that's..."

A: No, what -- because nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be ashamed of, you know. Nothing to be ashamed of. That's one reason. Second reason, if anyone of the people who did it to me, "Hey, I made it. You did not succeed. You didn't get this one." Know what I mean? I have something to, like I say, "Here, you may touch me, I'm real and I was there." My idea, because in 1981 was the first gathering in Jerusalem of the concentration camp survivors,¹⁷ and I heard that there are many that don't believe it ever happened. So I said, "Well, you come talk to me. I was there. Here it is, my picture." You know, just to prove. It's not that I am proud of it, you know, but there it is.

Q: You're still speaking in the sense of that maybe some -- you know, how celebrities feel, that people are always recognizing them—

A: Oh, well—

Q: ...and then they kind of, you kind of -- you don't want people to just assume that's the most, the biggest part of your life or that—?

¹⁷ The World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors was held in June 1981. World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (1981: Jerusalem), *From Holocaust to Redemption: Bearing Witness: A*

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 54

54

A: Yeah, it is, it is.

Q: It is what?

A: It is the biggest part of my life, because, you know, my youth was robbed. You know, I was robbed of the best years of my life. Couldn't go to school, you know, and after when I was growing up, I didn't know, I was floating around. A boy 19 years old, all alone in the world, you know. What the hell are you doing? You know? You cannot come home and see that—

End of Tape 2, Side A

Tape 2, Side B

A: A boy 19 years old, all alone in the world, you know. What the hell are you doing? You know? You cannot come home and see that Mama made dinner for you or have a brother or sister to talk to. All alone. That was, that was wrong. You know, that's—

Q: What is -- what were you, were you -- did you, did you have at all that sense then?

When you talk about that period, you almost talk about it as though it was a happy -- not a happy time, but it was...

Documentary Volume Depicting the Proceeding and Event of World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Israel June 1981 (New York: World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, 1984).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 55

55

A: I was try..., I was trying to disguise it, to be happy, you know? "Well, let's live now," but it wouldn't escape me. It wouldn't escape me, especially, especially to see people who do have family, because right after the war, people came from Russia, people came out of hiding and here were those families. Where are, where are mine? See? One of my youngest, one of my sisters, went to Russia in 1941. She went deep into Russia. Now, there were mil— thousands and thousands coming out of Russia and I cannot find her. And I'm sure the Germans didn't get where she was, because one year later after she went, she wrote us a postcard. We got one postcard. She and her husband. "Oh, we are in, in Siberia, voluntarily." Because my brother-in-law was working as a mechanic for Singer Sewing Machines and she was learning to be, to -- as a welder. So, they were workers and I write to Red Cross and everywhere else and I cannot find them, you know? If I would have a sister and I was her joy, you know? She is, she is two -- four -- six years older than me -- she was already a teenager and I was a child. She used to work as a cashier in a bakery before the war. Whatever money she make, she used to take me to amusement park, on rides and buy me pastry and all that -- and I don't have her.

Q: So, so you'd say you think you were kind of trying to disguise it.

A: I disguise it, you know, I inflict fake happiness. You know what that means? Fake happiness. Because loneliness is a terrible thing, especially when holidays come

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 56

56

about. You know, that's why I run at least to be with my brothers, you know, because this—

Q: How long do you think that, that continued for?

A: How long it will continue?

Q: How long did it continue, that, that kind of—

A: Disguise?

Q: Yeah.

A: It's still there. It's still there, you know, like I, like my brain would be split in two. This one is happy and this one is trying to repair it, you know? Where -- what the fuck are you happy about? What are you happy about? You're all alone, you know? You suffered so much, you know? You cannot -- American people, other people, are blessed with one thing; whether it's Thanksgivings or Yom Kippur, you can go to cemetery, visit your beloved ones, beloved ones. Where can I go? You see, there are certain times, that's very tragic. 1988, the Polish people from Warsaw decided to invite people, kids that were in the orphanage by Dr. Korczak. It was 75 years of existence of the home. Naturally, I was invited. I go with my friend David¹⁸ from, from California. I

¹⁸ David Kohl

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 57

57

go there and, naturally, we go -- first of all we go to visit the home. So I walk in to the, to the home, where there were my happiest time I spend there. Five meals a day. I was hungry before the war. There were five meals a day. You know what that means? Clean clothes, clean beds. I mean, respect at the school. "Oh, this boy's from Korczak." Respect. I walk in. First of all, I take a look. There was this big, big armoire we had and everybody... every kid had a drawer with a number. This is gone, feeling like you were a little boy and you had your favorite toy. They take it, but they give it to you back broken. You know what I mean? That feeling surrounds me. But anyway, time for introduction and "Oh, I'm from there, I'm from there, I'm from there." All the kids that were there, were already prior to me and were out before the war, because they accepted children from seven to 14. After 14, they went -- Dr. Korczak gave them two suits, pair of shoes, a job and a room -- room for next one. They were all gone. I was the last one to be in the period with Dr. Korczak together. Now I hear people come to introduce themselves, "I am so and so, and I am so and so." And here comes this tall, skinny man in the 70s. He says, "My name is Aleksander, Misza, Aleksander, but they used to call me Szura." Now, Mr. Shapiro, if there would be a hole I would fall right in there. This was my Mr. Szura. He was my counselor. He used to do my homework with me. When there was a parent meeting, he used to go for me. So -- you know? And I showed him one of the picture and he recognized me. Now, we embraced and hugged. Unbelievable, you know? I found somebody that was, like, very close to me.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 58

58

And of course we go in the hall, we sit down and everybody gets assigned to, to a seat at table. Now, why would I get assigned at a table where I was, where I was as a child there, at the same chair, they made me sit there, you know? They didn't know. Kind of a coincidence. And then we start telling stories about experience, you know -- what -- "Who knew Walter (ph) Korczak?" and I says, "I remember Dr. Korczak of two, two special events." One nice one, and one not so good. The nice one was that Dr. Korczak was very, very much conc...conscious about the kids eating. He used to walk around and make sure that the child eats. Walk around, so. The child takes a piece of bread, takes a bite and he holds it, so he used to grab from the piece of bread, put it in his mouth as a joke, as a gesture. The second moment, war broke out, the bombs are falling, no food. But Dr. Korczak managed to bring always a little bit more. Now, here it says on the blackboard, "Two slices of bread each." Everybody gets two slices of bread. Dr. Korczak gets two slices of bread. What happens? He gives this two slices of bread everyday to another child. Doesn't eat. You know? Things like that. And then they took us -- I want to come back about the cemetery -- they took us to visit the camps. Visit the camps, and then the thing was over and I tell to my friend David -- since we hired this Polish guy with a car, with a Mercedes -- "Why not go to Auschwitz?" I want to got to Auschwitz, to Birke..., where I was. I didn't know why, you know? Although I, I knew why, because I was never -- I did never feel liberated. Because, when I was a child, they push me into camp, you know? I had to go in and the thing

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 59

59

was closed. Like in the, in the, in the, in the country -- in the small villages, if a train has to pass, they have a kind of, to close off the road.

Q: A gate, kind of.

A: Yeah, on a pole, that's what they close, I couldn't get out. Here I go to Auschwitz and I walk in, because I want to walk in. Right? I walked in, I go to, to the crematoria, I say my kaddish¹⁹ there, because that's where my beloved -- you know? And here, there is a car waiting outside for me and I walk out, and I'm free! I liberated myself. So I feel liberated, now. Since 1988, I feel liberated.

Q: So you, you, you felt different before—

A: I felt different—

Q: ...your whole life before that?

A: I felt different before, because -- why? Because I know the Russians liberated the camps. Their object was to liberate the camps. Unfortunately, our American people, they had no orders to liberate the camp. They went to occupy the territory. They came into my camp, is like a person purchase, buys a building and the tenants are there. So we were there, whether they want it or not, and beside there was no provision for us, no

¹⁹ Holy (Aramaic); mourner's prayer.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 60

60

nothing, and beside running down from the hill, they wouldn't take us, they left us. So I didn't feel I was liberated. They came in, they took away the camp. I went to the hospital. So I never felt like they came in for the purpose of liberating us.

Q: I was surprised about that -- about the hospital -- that they -- what kind of hospital was it that they would -- just a civilian German hospital?

A: Civilian German hospital, yeah. Matter of fact, there was a German lying next to me. He didn't get nothing, you know, because there was no food. But for me, was -- there was a Jewish administrator already placed in there, you know.

Q: But, but how come it wasn't -- how come the hospital wasn't just full of other people from the camps?

A: Be...becau...becau...because there was, there was, there was, was -- right away in the camp -- was made like a hospital in the camp. I mean beds and the sanitars²⁰, you know, came, took care of 'em, because they were dying like flies from overeating or whatever, you know, there was, you know, but I walked out.

Q: So it's almost -- I mean, you were almost kind of really lifted out of that whole experience?

²⁰ medical orderlies (Hebrew).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 61

61

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: By this soldier.

A: By the soldier, yeah. By the soldier, I was -- I says "schmerzen²¹" in German, "pain, pain, pain," -- crying.

Q: You never went, you never went back to Auschwitz until—

A: No, no, 'til 1988. I never went back there. Never went back and it felt good, I went to the crematoria site. I said my kaddish and I, and I walked out.

Q: What was it, what was it like being back there and seeing those places after all that time?

A: Reliving the whole thing, reliving because naturally they appoint a, a, a, a guide. You know, whatever he was telling me, I says, "Oh, come on. That's how it was. That's where it was. That was my bunk. That's where I slept. That was my barrack. Here they put a number on me, you know, and here is the place where they made all experiments on the people, you know, on the -- like removing testicles from the men or giving, giving all kind of experiments to the women." I knew all that, I knew, all of a

²¹ Pain (German).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 62

62

sudden everything came back to me. Although, although in Birkenau, they, they, they were able to preserve some barracks, but somehow they were all there when I came in.

Q: They were all—?

A: They were all there, I mean in my mind they were all there. I could say, "This is the A lag— A camp, B camp, C camp, here's the Gypsy camp," you know. "Here's this block - there were the people that were brought from Theresienstadt, you know, they allowed people to come in with their families, with their husbands and fathers and childrens and they were making movies.²²" I say "Here's block nine, where they kept two Greek Rabbis, with the beard and the tallis²³ and prayer books everything, so they could film them for propaganda." All that, all that came back. I didn't see myself as, as coming from United States. I see myself as being there, like walking from place to place. And, then, all of a sudden something shook me up, "Hey, come on, time to go home."

Q: And so, then, then you left.

A: Oh, it was very hard, was very hard. You know, we were invited to this Mr. Alexander, to his home and talked and cried and hugged and talked and cried and hugged and...

²² In September of 1943, the "family camp" was established in Auschwitz-Birkenau where Jews from Theresienstadt were allowed to remain with their families and keep their civilian clothes. Presumably, the purpose of the "family camp" was to mislead the Red Cross as to the nature of the Auschwitz camp and the treatment of Jewish prisoners. Nili Keren, "The Family Camp," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 63

63

Q: What were you talking about?

A: About what our experiences -- and he still continues to take care of children, to take care of an orphanage. Because he survived in Russia and his wife saved his life. He's got a Polish, a Catholic wife. She saved him. She hid him, and he still, talking about the experiences.

Q: Do you talk about the experiences much with, with other camp su...survivors?

A: Yeah, everybody has a different story, you know and we try to compare. If we hit on one who was in the same camp, "So, you knew this one, you know that one, you knew this one, you knew that one." And everybody -- not only a book -- I mean every survivor has a whole library. There's so many things.

Q: Library of other people's stories or—?

A: I mean everybody could open up a library, write many books, you know? If I would have the possibilities to ever, to write a book, don't you think I could write a book? I mean, if somebody would want to write it or like, a lot of books come out that does -- don't make much sense. But I think that mine experiences, I don't know if they must be greater, but.... And then I was kind of disappointed in the museum in Washington, also. They

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 64

64

are making a big fuss of Anne Frank. Okay, so she's a girl, she wrote a diary. But why isn't there nothing about this Dr. Korczak? Dr. Korczak was one Jew in Poland who had a program on the Polish radio. He was, he was a doctor, he was writing books for children. Never mind all that. By the end of the last moment, they had papers for his freedom.²⁴ Can you imagine? Germans trying to liberate a Jew. There was so much pressure for him, and he refused. He wanted 200 passports because there were 200 children then, and they went all to gas chambers, to Treblinka. I mean, a little bit more, could be, should be elaborated about him. There is nothing, although I gave 'em material, plenty material.

Q: What do you think that that has -- do you think that that has -- I mean someone like that has a larger effect on the world than just what he does for his particular children, just by being alive and performing those acts that he can treat something on a larger—

A: Who? The doctor, Dr. Korczak?

Q: Yeah, someone like that. Yeah.

A: I mean he was the, he was the, as a young man, already his life was devoted for children. He says, "I'm not married yet, but I love children already." Doesn't matter,

²⁴ Reputedly, Korczak had been provided with papers for his release by CENTOS (Federation of Associations for the Care of Orphans in Poland). Betty Jean Lifton, *The King of Children: A Biography of Janusz Korczak* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 344.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 65

65

although my orphanage where I was, were only Jewish children. But he also took care of other children. No matter what, a child could come into the orphanage with, with blisters and boils, he kissed them on the head and took them in. It was an amazing, I mean unbelievable person. Sure, he's got an effect, because there are not many like him. And I was, was one -- to me, to me -- he asked me -- I mean I have no name for him. You want to ask me, how will you call him? A hero, sure, a grandpa, Superman. Just a wonderful, wonderful man who was -- soft, little hands, lil...little pillows, you know, he touched you. You know, when he came into the room the whole house lit up. He sat down there was one child here, one child on this knee, one child on the shoulder and the hands, you know, on the shoulders.

Q: Were your experiences something that your wife and you talked about much over the years?

A: Well, not, not, not really, because she had nothing to do with the concentration camps. She was in Russia during the war and she had her own bad experience. She was hiding out. She lost her father. Her brother was taken to the army. They didn't know where he is, when they left Russia, they didn't know about him. Although later on he was found and we brought him over here. But Holocaust survivors, no, she didn't have that much experience.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 66

66

Q: Was she -- was it something that she would discuss in terms of your relationship at all or did she, you know, feel that—

A: Well, I don't—

Q: ...did she ever tell you that she felt that, that—

A: ...felt that—

Q: ...you were changed by that experience?

A: Not really, no.

Q: Or there were things that...

Q: Not really, no. It didn't, it didn't, it didn't affect her because I couldn't make her, make her feel like one of me -- like, like she should, you know, feel for me because she hel— she heard stories from other people. So, my story to her was just another story, because she happens to be a non-compassion person. No compassion, you know, no compassion whatsoever. Whether I was sick or her mother was sick, "Ah, it'll be all right, be all right," like.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 67

67

Q: Do you think that do you think that, that, that the fact that, that you became involved with someone like that or became married to a woman who was like that -- do you think that—

A: I didn't know then.

Q: You didn't know then?

A: I didn't know then, because when I met her, you know, three months later we were married. Three months later we were married and then some pity, pity overtook me, because she had a stepfather -- you know, and they were in Haifa, only one room, there was not much room -- and her stepfather kind of pushed her to get married, no matter who it is. So one day, she, she used to tell me, she got together with a, with a -- that boy, you know. And a wedding was arranged to take place like a day or next day, and then she broke out in tears to her mother, "Mom, I don't love him. I can't, I can't." So her mother says, "Okay, you don't love him, don't get married." And when she met me, there was love, I think she loved me too, but it was, it was different. It was different, you know, we're two -- we're quite...quite comparable and I must say I'm a person that -- I'm a, I'm a giver -- always giving, always giving. I mean when I, when I used to go with her to a party, no matter if I came home dead tired from, from my work, I made sure that she's being served together -- the smorgasbord, whatever -- I make a plate first for her. You know, always kept her on a pedestal. And she was a taker.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 68

68

Q: Are you, are you a religious man at all, or—?

A: No, not religious, but confused, you know, because sometimes, where was he? You know? And then when I'm in trouble, I'm turning to him, "God, help, God help me please." And, sinc...since a couple years, I started to attend synagogue and that makes me feel good.

Q: Why? What makes you feel good?

A: I have no, I have no idea. Becau...because it's my like second home, you know. I got, I got friends there, you know, and we sit together. They're all survivors and we pray and sometimes I'm lucky, I'm being called to the Torah to say the prayer and it's -- it warms my heart a little bit, you know. And I'm being invited sometimes for supper at night, dinner. I'm seeing a lady and I can make kiddush²⁵. You know kiddush? Although I didn't know Hebrew to pray, but now I educated myself.

Q: You've learned it?

A: Yeah, educated, because as a little boy, I knew a little bit. I didn't want to go to cheder²⁶ because the Rabbi used to beat us. So mother was trying to get it to the home, but then

²⁵ sanctification (Hebrew); a blessing said over wine on the Sabbath or other religious holiday.

²⁶ Orthodox primary school (Yiddish).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 69

69

again it was interrupted because she didn't have any money to pay him. So certain words I remember and now I, I taught myself again.

Q: But you said you were, there's some confusion, that you're confused in some sense about God.

A: I'm confused about God -- of, of seeing things happen that should not happen, you know. I was touched by it personally, you know? But then I don't know whether it was his fault or it was -- but I always turn to him. I always turn to him, I always turn to him. Is -- Well, well you can be mad at your father also, you know. "Why, why did you do this? Why?" And then when you need him, you go to him.

Q: So, you -- but you believe in Him?

A: I think that He's there, I think, I think He's there, you know? He couldn't save, He couldn't save everybody, must have been busy, too busy at that time when everything happened, overlooking other things, so.

Q: Do you have any notion of an afterlife or—?

A: No, not really, not really, you know, it's gone, it's gone. There should be some indication there is something. Nobody, nobody came back, so, I mean it would be so good, some

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 70

70

beloved would come, hey don't worry, come and join us or are they so selfish, you know? "It's there for me, I'm afraid there's no more room for anybody else."

Q: Do you have -- have you ever had a sense that after what you had been through -- I mean it seems that you were able to at least have a sense for yourself that life was worth living, that there were things that were, you know -- you wanted to have children, you wanted to have, have work and build a comfortable life for yourself, a career for yourself and—?

A: Yeah, sure, li...life was worth living. God, God gave me, God gave me a gift of life and I took the best advantage I knew how and I had good times. Like I said, I became very, very successful, although it went down the drain. I don't know whether it was God's will or it was, it was kind of a vicious act of somebody, to take advantage of the situation when, when I was going through heart surgery and I was going through a depression -- but, but that, that's okay. But again I turn to God and I say that God, in his way, will punish the guilty and award the, the one that's being mistreated. I believe that somehow everything will come to an end and it will straighten itself out when I'll be on my feet again and be able to go see my children as often as I can, which is -- this is my priority.

Q: Do you think it's easier for you to be friends with other survivors because you have this kind of common—

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 71

71

A: Not only that's in common, I'm a easy person to, to have friends, I'm -- you know, I must say, if I make acquaintance with somebody, they seem to like me immediately because I'm so easy going -- very, very easy. I don't complain, I don't criticize. To me, they're -- people are beautiful. People are beautiful and they're basically good people. There are someone bad, so then again, they have poisoned blood in them, you know, that you cannot extract. But basically people, people are good people -- people are not, are not vicious, in general. So—

Q: Have you maintained your attachment to, to Israel, do you think, or do you still have a sense of—

A: Well, I had, I mean I feel for Israel very much. I feel, but as again, I have a sour taste in my mouth of -- the, the refusal of getting a little bit of help -- like you help me to get it to get a room, help me to get a job, because it was available. But the time was called proteksia²⁷. It means, it's not what you know, it's whoms you know, you know. Like at 1949, the, the, the, the job you could get is to unload ships -- hundred kilo sacks, work eight hour shift -- if you were lucky enough to get it. But some people got two shifts, you know, again. So I was angry about it and I went to the authorities. I said, "I'll do anything. I want to stay. I want to...." "Nobody ask you to come." That hurt, you know, I risk my life, so God let me live. But I did my duty. So did my brother.

²⁷ patronage, influence (Yiddish).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 72

72

Q: Do you think you would have stayed if you—?

A: I would have stayed if I could get a little -- establish myself, get a room and support myself -- earn a living. I would have stayed, of course, I would have stayed. But I had the choice and people were trying to leave Israel. There was no possibility, and I thought I was privileged just because I was a volunteer, so they could not hold me there.

Q: Were there a lot of other survivors there at that time?

A: Oh, yes. I mean, the Haganah²⁸ you know -- right, or I'd say 85% survivors, you know, they came in. They got a gun, one gun for a few people, didn't know what to do with it, but just got it, you know. The war was won by, by God -- miracles, miracles, you know. Didn't have nothing to shoot with, you know? We went on a, on a, on a boat -- on a metal boat, and they taught us how to make machine gun noise with our heels. And there I thought, my God, what is this, what they have?

Q: You mean so that—?

A: A noise, a noise like you make [stamping] -- stamped on the deck -- "da, da, da, da, da" with your foot -- with your heel on the metal, and it's noisy, sounds like a machine gun.

²⁸ Underground Jewish militia in Palestine that became national army of Israel after the establishment of the state of Israel. Random House Dictionaries, *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), s.v. "Haganah."

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 73

73

Q: And what was the value of that? So that people would think—?

A: To make them think that we shoot them with machine guns. They left everything they had and ran, so we could get -- grab their ammunition, because they had more than we did.

Q: What do you feel -- do you think people felt like after the experiences in camps? That they had nothing to lose at that point or—?

A: Well, first of all, nothing to lose. Then, second, was a challenge, the challenge to be in the army among your own. Because before the war, if Jewish boys were supposed to be drafted to the Polish army, they did everything possible not to go. Chop off a finger, chop off a toe, go on a, on a, on a diet to lose a lot of weight, fu— and not to go to the Polish army. And here was different -- volunteered, volunteered. But once you were in the army, we were trying to get out. By all means, we were trying to get out. So, you know, that, that we were not stable, we were not stable, you see. Couldn't call a home, Germany. Some people went to Poland, back. They were killed there, right? In 1956, there was this killing and all that.²⁹ So we had no place, no, no place that we could call home. So when Israel became a country, "Oh, we're going home, we're going home to

²⁹ In a later conversation the interviewee clarified that this passage is meant to refer to the Kielce Pogrom of July 4, 1946.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 74

74

our homeland." And then you came -- then, then you saw a different story; where there are two Jews, three opinions. It was, was very hard.

Q: Have you ever thought of going back there since then?

A: To live there? Well, if my daughter would go, I would probably go to live, yeah. My, my late friend that passed away, he, he bought a condominium there and we were planning to be together, spend a lot of time together in Israel -- maybe I would live there. But now they are as they are -- they are already 3,000 miles away from me and to go to live there, I would be too far again from them, so.... And then I have my two brothers and we're not getting any younger, you know, so I don't want to spread out too much. I'm the youngest, each two years apart, so whenever there is an occasion, I just -- be together.

Q: Do you, do you ever talk with your brothers about your experiences?

A: Only, only, yeah, only experiences and—

Q: What do you mean only what? You only talk about—

A: I mean there is no -- nothing else to talk about. What can we talk, politics?

Q: No, about your lives now or—

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 75

75

A: Well, we know, we know the lives -- we know. They know my life, I know their lives. So that's -- oh, we pick, we pick a topic like, you know, hear about the persons; "Oh, how is, how is Moisha doing?" "Oh, remember, he was here and..." then, then we go on, we go on with experiences.

Q: Just remembering—?

A: Remembering -- repeating the experiences, yeah. Like my oldest brother, my oldest brother Edyl, he, he had worse than all of us because he is a nosy person, you know, he walks around. So when we came to Auschwitz, he started walking around and I always -- I said, "Let's be together, so when they put our numbers we have 'em close by." So like my older brother has "630," I have "631" and I told Edyl, "Be behind, you're going to have '632.'" But he wandered off, half an hour later I don't see him. And months later we find out that they took him to another camp called Jawischowitz coal mines, in the coals, working in the coal mines at night and getting -- going to work in chains. Terrible, terrible, terrible. Now, I was working on that cleaning Kommando. I had access to money, access to jewelry, and my brother, Joe -- Icek -- was in Buna, also working already, two, three yea...years in a camp, he organize and he knew some authorities. So, truck drivers were going from my camp to his camp bringing supplies, shoes and clothing from us to them and he send me a little letter, through a driver. He says, "If I could get—"

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 76

76

End of Tape 2.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 77

77

Tape 3, Side A

A: He says, "If I could get hundred dollar bills, a lot and some jewelry or watches, I could pay off some people to bring our brother from his camp to our camp." So I -- whatever I -- nobody saw, because we were ordered to put all the valuables in a big box, but I gave to the driver. If I gave him five hundred dollar bills, so maybe he gave to my brother one or two. But he accumulated and he succeeded. They called him as a specialist from one camp and they brought him to, so they were together for the, for the last few months.

Q: So—

A: So we talk about those things, how he came as a muselman³⁰ and how my brother made them clean the, the kettle of the food and how he scraped out and swallowed a piece of wire and they had to, had to operate on him -- you know, the Polish sanitars operate on him and there was no, they couldn't put him to sleep, they didn't know what to do, or how to do, they just open up, they thought he's got appendicitis. So they looked in -- nothing wrong, so they cut op— cut open the stomach -- the belly cut open and they look and look and they find a piece of wire and there's an air raid, you know? So, they let him lie on the table like that, you know, tied up hands and feet, no, no

³⁰ Muslim (German); camp term used to refer to prisoners who had lost the will to live and were near death.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 78

78

narcotics, no nothing and then when the raid is over, they come and they stuck a chicken feather in his eyes, "Oh you're still alive?" They threw the intestines in, sew him up and my poor brother is still suffering because everything is tangled up in there, so he's got to live on baby food.

Q: Are, are you close with your brothers?

A: Very, very much, oh yeah, very much, very close, very close. The sister-in-laws didn't get together, but who cares?

Q: What do you mean?

A: I mean sister-in-laws, like always, you know, whether it's envy or jealousy or what, but I'm very close to my brothers, we call each other several times a week.

Q: Did they have, have they had successful marriages, or—?

A: Yes, yes, my eldest brother has a successful marriage -- he's got three children. My middle brother also, he, he lost his wife, but he's got now another one -- which, which is better, she takes care of him -- I mean, I'm so happy with her -- he's a sick man. He's got one kidney, I brought him to Montreal and because he had knowledge of electricity, so I got him a job with electrician, with a man that I saved his life in concentration camp so he, he owed it to me. So, he gave him a job with him and they would put, to put up

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 79

79

fixtures, you know those fixtures on a concrete ceiling, so had to with a gun, to shoot in place. And the jo— the boss didn't give him any protection and something went through his eye, he lost an eye. So he lost a kidney, he lost an eye. Now he had already two bypasses, twice. Now he has asthma on top of that, very sick boy. So I'm very concerned about him, but what, what can I do? I mean -- that's why I want to be as close as possible, as long as God will let us live and be together.

Q: Do you ever think of remarrying now?

A: Me? No, not really, no, no, I mean. I met, I met somebody, it was close to be married and then some misunderstanding came about with signing some papers -- you know, about this and that -- I says, "forget it." No, this way I see whoever I want, when I want. I like, like my freedom.

Q: Okay. Is there anything that you felt like that we, we should have talked about, about, about your experiences just after the war, was there anything you—

A: That's, that's about summarizes, you know. I told you in short and you'll work it out somehow, you'll stretch it out, I think you know plenty, now. I mean, this was a—

Q: There's one thing that kind of sticks in my mind about, about the, the, the early time which was the time you spent, those couple of months at the farm—

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 80

80

A: Yeah?

Q: Afterwards, what else was going on in -- and what else -- what did you see happening around you then?

A: Nothing was happening, it was -- everything was too new, too fresh -- too new.

Everybody found out -- the few survivors there was, there were maybe 75 boy survivors -- you know.

Q: From?

A: From, from, from the camps, you know? Then, then the UNRRA camps started to open up around Munich and people used to, there was a Feldafing and a Freimann and all that and people were there and boys and girls getting married. I mean like -- and they had entertainment but I never did -- I didn't want to be a part of it -- I didn't want to be in a camp any more, I wanted to be on my own. So three of us got an apartment in Munich like the HIAS told us, "If you find a place where a Nazi used to live, you tell us." And—

Q: So you were anxious just to -- you didn't want to be—?

A: I didn't want to be a part of a camp, wou... to get rations.

Q: Like a displaced persons camp?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 81

81

A: That's a, DP camp, yeah, I didn't want to be. I used to go visit them and I also used to drive around the Rabbi to give chuppah kiddushin³¹ -- you know, whoever got married, they need a Rabbi -- I drove him with the car. So I was always a, a special person, I wanted to be unique.

Q: And it sounds like you, you were able to avoid being -- I mean a lot of people couldn't -- had nowhere else to go, so—

A: That's right, but I was on, I was on my own. As I said, we got an apartment -- we were three partners -- three b—

Q: I mean, how did you, you know -- you got out of the camps and you had no money—

A: Didn't need it.

Q: You had no clothes, you had nothing.

A: Yeah, first of all, as I said, being on the farm by that woman, we used to do business with the meat, right, because one of the boys was a butcher, so we used to take him -- motor from the camp, sell them to a farmer and get a cow or a calf and that. We went to the DP camps, you know -- and the DP, DP camps, these people used to get packages and cook for themselves, but apparently they didn't get enough meat, or whatever, so

³¹ canopy, consecrations (Hebrew); Jewish wedding ceremony.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 82

82

we used to bring it in and sell it to them and that's how we got, we got money. The German money we exchanged by dollars, you know -- watches, whatever, so we got a feeling of business. So when we went to Munich, and that was everybody was doing -- trading, you know? The American soldiers used to get the scrips -- that was the army money --and the ration money, people used to go to Poland and bring stuff. So we used to handle for them -- back for them, back, back -- until they went to, to Belgium. We had the maid, who cooked for us, I mean food was very easy, was very cheap for us, was available and was a easy life.

Q: And, and, and the—?

A: We had the maid, who cooked for us -- I mean food was very easy, was very cheap for us -- you know, was available and was a easy life.

Q: So the, the, the, the women -- the two sisters on the farm—

A: Yeah.

Q: ...that's what enabled you to skip away from—?

A: ...to sk... give us the start. I mean, they didn't tell us to go, because they didn't know any better -- they were old, in their high 80s. They thought that, you know, whoever comes -- like butter, I mean, was like getting God knows what -- there wasn't that much

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 83

83

after the war. But they used to make theirselves, and if somebody came from the outside, "you have butter to sell?" they didn't know -- because he's a survivor, you know? They give him the butter, and we say, "Why did you do that? You didn't have to give it to." She says, "I didn't know, I thought I must give him." because he came with the American uniform on.

Q: How did you find these women?

A: Well, these two boys were there already and I came out of the hospital -- I saw them walking in the streets -- I say, "Oh, can I, where are you, can I be with you?" They say, "Yeah, come on, join us." So they brought me in, introduced me and says, "Noch eine," one more. She had no choice.

Q: And they were also from the camp?

A: Also from the camp, yeah, also from the camp.

Q: And you knew them?

A: We knew the— I knew them in the camp, I recognized them. One lives in Trenton, he's still there, he must be -- what, 85 years old -- Leon. And the other one went back to Germany and there's me. So we were there, we were not starving. Didn't need much, didn't need much money. We didn't -- I mean -- we didn't have the brains. We had the

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 84

84

brains we would buy property -- didn't, didn't, didn't, you know, didn't sink in. Although some did -- remained -- they're the very, very wealthy men, because you could have get it for nothing. So I bought a car for a few thousand marks. I mean, money was, was very easy to get. Didn't know because could have buy blocks and blocks of property, or movie houses -- or whatever -- or land. But, we did not try. Just today -- what's tomorrow happens -- today have nice, nice dinners, nice food, you know. Didn't worry about the diet, you know, went to the farm, bought a two week old little piglet, you know, slaughter it. Brought it into the bakery -- they didn't have it, the Germans -- so the bakery, after the bread was baked, over was hot, he put in a little piglet, brought it out, was like goosemeat, you know, was machaya³². The German woman, she cooked for us, so we lived a, a good life, a good life. Then there was some entertainment -- you know, European people -- theaters and so on.

Q: While you were enjoying that, were you also having nightmares even then or did that come to you later?

A: Not in the, not in the beginning, not in the beginning because the mind was occupied; "what you do tomorrow," you know? I would like -- every day, like I got in touch, I got in touch with the Bul...Bulgarian, what was she? A diplomat and he could go to Switzerland you know, in and out, and he brought me from Switzerland these thin, gold

³² delight, pleasure (Yiddish).

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 85

85

watches to sell for him -- because he couldn't, you know, he was afraid. He used to hide them under the mat in the car and that was my -- I was looking forward. I was selling for him, and for that money he wanted to have things that were hard to get; Nescafe, American cigarettes, nylons for the woman that he was seeing, and all that. So I was busy supplying. Like every day was something else, and I had a car, that was, I mean that was like being a president, nobody could have a car, nobody could have a car because you needed a special -- like we have the inspection sticker now -- you needed a big thing to show that you are legal and you -- you're getting coupons of gas. Now coupons, you were allowed about 20 liter a month, but again -- where a pack of cigarettes or some -- you know, I got, I got 100 gallons of gas. So I was hustling and organizing, being busy in my own world, not thinking. I knew that nobody's left; I have no brothers, I have no sisters, I have no family. And I was young and I starting to getting attracted, you know -- my strength came back, you know -- I wanted to be with girls, and—

Q: So when did the, when did the -- you know, when did you start having dreams?

A: After I got married, after I got married -- after, after I got married, I mean in Israel, you know, when I was settled already -- I mean not hustling, not running, you know? Went, went to Canada and start working -- doing one thing and you know, you sit on a sewing machine and you sew, so you just don't see this -- you think. And what woke me up

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 86

86

actually, in Montreal there was an, an, an, an, an, an advertising in that paper that there's a theater -- a piece playing about Dr. Korczak. Of course, I went to see that, you know? I went to see that and that play did not make any sense whatsoever, not what happened there, you know? With the small child -- baby -- there was no babies, nothing. So after that I went on the stage and I says, "You made a play -- I'm a survivor of Dr. Korczak." Of course, they were right away excited and before I know, I have a telephone call -- they want to have a radio interview with me. So with the Canadian radio -- the outfit came too, you know -- so then I, I started to talk, you know -- because I have a whole -- I don't have it, my daughter has a whole transcript about my talking about Dr. Korczak experience. And after that I get a phone call or a letter from New York -- Mr. Levine, I think, who was writing books -- he wanted to write something for *Reader's Digest* about.... So he paid my trip. I came over and he had me oral interview also four hours. And then as I talked -- the more I talked, the more these things came -- to come back and haunt me, because I had to open up and talk and talk and talk and talk.

Q: Do you wish that you didn't?

A: No.

Q: ...rather you wouldn't have—?

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 87

87

A: No, no. I mean if I wouldn't have those I would take it with me, it would be buried in there, you know? But our aim -- not only mine -- but our aim is for the world to know, to know -- and especially the young generation -- how, how.... "Be careful, it might happen, don't be so sure of yourself. Even here, it might happen." It's to prevent, because such a horrible tragedy, you know? And then you have -- it's the extension of us, our children -- then there's grandchildren. You saw your parents go, now we start to feel how our parents feel -- like they're, they're, they're now parents that children were taken from them, they survived and the children didn't. Now I think it's the worst punishment for a mother or a father to give up a child, you know what I mean? I mean I wouldn't want to live to see my daughter -- something happen to her. I'd rather go. So it's okay, it's okay to talk. It, it, it must be just to do our best we can and leave the rest to Ha-Shem³³.

Q: So, do you -- these dreams come to you every night?

A: Oh, mostly -- yeah. It doesn't escape me for a moment because there isn't a day -- unless I sit home, I won't open the TV or anything -- then maybe I can think about something else. But whatever you do, whoever you see, "Oh, how are you?" So here you are -- I know him from here. Why do I know him? Because we were talking about - or we were there and we met, you know?

³³ the name (Hebrew); term used to refer to God.

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 88

88

Q: And it comes to you at night?

A: Of course, even we go to functions, like we were, we were -- I was invited -- a lady friend of mine was invited to the Elie Wiesel Bond Drive at the Hilton. Beautiful event -- you know, beautiful food and all that -- but you sit down at table, "Oh, this one is from Munich, this one is from here." "Oh you're from Munich, but where are you originally from?" Bingo, and the conversation goes on. Then you come home and you take the whole thing with you. So doesn't escape -- I, I mean, as I said, I cannot sit in a closet. "That's what it is," I tell to my psychiatrist, "That's what it is, I cannot change it, I cannot erase it, you know?" It makes me shiver, I wake up with cold sweat -- goose pimples, but then I say, "Hey look, that's what it is, you know?" I have to accept it.

Q: What, what do they, what -- she says that you should be leaving that behind, though?

A: She says, "Try to, try to be involved in other activities." I says, "Doctor, what activities? I cannot open up my mind. If I could adopt your accent -- okay, then I could talk about baseball, about football, about American way." The minute I open up my mouth, I'm being asked 'where are you from?' because every American has a parent or a grandparent from where I come from -- either from Russia -- either from there -- and here the conversation. I cannot be -- say, "I don't want to talk about." You cannot do to these people -- you cannot put the people down, because right away you're a snob, right? So you cannot help it, so you're being punished by, by, by the people you're

Erwin Baum
December 5, 1995
Page 89

89

surrounded with and nobody means any harm to you. And that's what it is and sometimes people want to talk about it, and it's good to talk about it -- it kind of, kind of relief, and after I'm finished talking, you know, then I say, "Hey, despite of all that, I made it!" What else can I say?

Q: Okay. I think that's what I need to talk to you about.

A: Okay. Are you going to write it out?

Q: Yeah, it will be. I won't, but they will.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: They'll, they'll transcribe it all.

A: Yeah, so how is it?

Q: Oh, great, I mean, it's fine.

A: Yeah. There aren't any happy, happy events that I could talk about. It's all mostly pain or -- so, you know. The most happy event is when -- my daughter's wedding -- when I ordered the first dance with her, and I told them to play "Daddy's Little Girl." It was nice. Made her a beautiful wedding and I'm happy about it.

Conclusion of interview.