

Interview with Gert Silver
March 30, 2006

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: -- project at the Jewish Holocaust Museum in **Melbourne**. I'm **Geri Crest** interviewing **Gert Silver** on the 27th of March, 2006. Can you begin the interview by telling us where and when you were born?

Answer: I was born in **Berlin** on the 30th of August, 1928.

Q: Can you tell us about your family life in **Berlin**? Who was in your immediate family?

A: Well, there was my mother, my father, I had a seven year old brother, and subsequently had a seven year younger sister. So there were three of us, each separated by seven years.

Q: Mm-hm. The names of your siblings?

A: My brother was called **Paul**, my sister was called **Ruth**.

Q: And your parents?

A: My father was called **Erish**, my mother **Nancy**.

Q: And your mother's maiden name?

A: **Halen. H -- H-a-l-e-n.**

Q: Where did she come from?

A: From a place in **Poland** called **Kolamair** in **Galitsia**.

Q: And where did your father come from?

A: My father was born in **Berlin**.

Q: How many generation German was your father?

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A: I don't really know, I know that his father was already born in **Germany**, beyond that I have no knowledge.

Q: Mm-hm. So what did your father do?

A: He had a garment factory in partnership with a non-Jewish German woman.

Q: Explain. What sort of garments?

A: I thi -- I don't really know, I think they made ladies' clothing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But I don't -- I really don't know too much about what they manufactured. I went to the factory every now and then, out of curiosity, but I was too young to remember.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And your mother?

A: My mother stayed at home. She looked after the children and her husband.

Q: Mm-hm. Extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins?

A: My grandparents on my mother's side were alive. My grandparents on my father's side, as far as I remember, were no longer alive when I was born, or when I was young. And I had aunts and uncles and cousins.

Q: From which side?

A: Both sides, but mostly from my father's side.

Q: How many siblings did he have?

A: My father had a brother who had two children, and my -- my mother had a brother who had two daughters, cousins, first cousins, one of whom is still alive in **America**.

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Q: What's her name?

A: **Edna Wolfe**. She lives in **San Diego**, in **California**.

Q: And the other aunt and uncles and cousins?

A: All the others died, except one aunt, a sister of my father, who emigrated to **Chile**, and she obviously -- she survived the war there.

Q: And her name?

A: **Zallinger, Edna Zallinger**. Actually, an aunt also survived in **Berlin**. She was married - she was no -- not Jewish. She was married to my mother's brother, and she survived because she wasn't Jewish. And her two daughters also survived in **Berlin**, first cousins. One of them lives in **San Diego** at the moment, the other passed away some time ago.

Q: But the grandparents on your mother's side, they were Polish?

A: Yes, I would think so.

Q: Did you have a close relationship with them?

A: They died when I was fairly young, so -- maybe even before I went to school, so I remember very, very little of them.

Q: What language was spoken at home?

A: German.

Q: Any other languages?

A: No.

Q: Did you learn another language at school?

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A: Oh yes, I went to a Jewish school in **Berlin**, and from day one we were taught two foreign languages, Hebrew and English, and in fact we were forbidden to speak a word of German during those lessons, was total immersion lesson. And after two or three years, I was fi -- reasonably fluent in both Hebrew and English. So that's the time to teach children foreign languages.

Q: Did you maintain those languages, Hebrew --

A: To a certain extent. I mean, I can still understand simple Hebrew, and English of course, I -- I knew when I came here.

Q: Tell me about your Jewish day school.

A: I went to a number of Jewish day schools in **Berlin**. The Jewish schools in **Berlin** were just fantastic, when I compare them with the day schools in so -- in -- non-Jewish day schools in **Germany**. As the war -- o-or as **Hitler's** power progressed, more and more Jewish boys and girls who originally went to non-Jewish schools in **Germany** were expelled from those schools, and wer -- had to come to our school, they were a year or two behind us. The standard of education in the Jewish schools in **Berlin** was just fantastic.

Q: What was the name of your school?

A: Oh, my first school was in the **August Strasse**, then I went to the **Kaiser Strasse**, then I went to the **Gross Hamburger Strasse**. Schools closed, or they bombed. So I went to three different schools in **Berlin**.

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Q: And your siblings attended the same school?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they close to your home?

A: Well, my sister was seven when -- she was born in '35, so she didn't go to school at all. She was four when the war broke out.

Q: Were they close to your home?

A: Yes, oh yes, walking distance.

Q: Your neighborhood, where was that?

A: I lived in a neighborhood that wasn't -- you wouldn't call it ex -- exactly a Jewish neighborhood, but there were a sprinkling of Jews, but most of them, of course, were non-Jewish.

Q: So you [**indecipherable**] non-Jewish neighbors?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Did you have relationships with them?

A: Not really, I think ma -- almost all of my friends were Jewish, and I had no non-Jewish friends. And I doubt whether my parents had any non-Jewish friends.

Q: Mm-hm. What were your hobbies as a young boy?

A: I think I was just a good student. I -- I loved school. Holidays were something that I abhorred. And I don't really have -- don't recall any hobbies I had in those days.

Q: Did you belong to a youth movement?

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A: No.

Q: Were there youth movements that you were aware of?

A: Oh yes, there was **Maccabee**, there was **Ha-Koah**, there were seven Zionist organizations. I don't think I belonged to any of them.

Q: Okay. What about your parents, were they involved [**indecipherable**]

A: They were involved in the synagogue and I was -- and I sang as a boy in the choir of the biggest synagogue in **Berlin**, located in the **Oranienburger Strasse**. It's a very famous synagogue with its golden dome, and I sang there as a choirboy. So I went to all the services. My parents didn't go, only went to the services on the high holidays.

Q: And you went every week?

A: Yeah, because I was in the choir.

Q: How did you get involved in that?

A: I think they looked for choir boys, the -- the choir looked for boys who were interested in singing, who were reasonably musical in the Jewish schools, and I volunteered.

Q: So [**indecipherable**] Friday night and --

A: Friday night, Saturday morning. We often sang at weddings, funerals occasionally. I have very fond memories of my activity as a choir boy.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you play an instrument as well?

A: I played the recorder and the mouth organ, but very badly, both of them.

Q: Uh-huh, okay. What was the level of religion in your home?

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A: I don't know how you would describe it. Probably similar to the liberals here, and [indecipherable]. I thi --

Q: The celebration of festivals [indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, oh yes. Well, being in a Jewish school we celebrated **Purim, Sukkot, Pesach,** everything.

Q: Mm-hm. Your family, however, belonged to an Orthodox synagogue?

A: No, my family also belonged to that synagogue in the **Oranienburger Strasse** which wasn't exactly -- which wasn't Orthodox at all, nor was it Liberal. It's probably, if you compare it to a synagogue in **Melbourne,** it's probably like **Charnwood Grove,** or **Toorak Road.**

Q: Mm-hm. What -- what can you remember about any anti-Semitic incidences?

A: I remember a lot of them, I mean we were very often beaten up on walks on our way to school or from school by **Hitler** youth. And --

Q: What -- what -- what -- we're talking after 1933.

A: After 1933, between '33 and '39.

Q: Who's we?

A: Well, school kids, friends of mine, when we walked home from school, or when we walked to school, very often there were mobs of **Hitler** youth and they just beat us up, and nobody came to our rescue.

Q: How badly beaten? Can you give me some idea?

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A: I don't think we had injuries, but they were painful. We ran away.

Q: Did you fight back?

A: Always that we were outnumbered at all times, and none of the bystanders came to our help.

Q: How often did this happen?

A: Maybe once or twice a month. I mean, we looked out for them, and if we saw any **Hitler** youths in the neighborhood, tried to avoid them, but it wasn't always possible.

Q: How were they identified as **Hitler** youth?

A: Oh, they had the uniform.

Q: How old would these boys have been?

A: Probably our age, maybe a little bit older, 10 - 11 - 12. They just did it for fun.

Q: When you say you were outnumbered, what sort of numbers were they?

A: Well very often I walked to school with two friends, and very often there was a dozen of them. So we had very little hope.

Q: Did you report them to anybody?

A: We reported to that school, but the school couldn't do much either. When it happened occa -- more frequently than at other times, our parents, or one of our parents walked with us to school, and that provided protection. They didn't attack anybody who was accompanied by an adult.

Q: Did it happen to girls as well?

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A: I don't know. I don't know the answer to that question.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you see them often in the street, even if they weren't involved in --

A: Oh [indecipherable] **Hitler** youth all the time. I mean, it was a government -- it was **Hitler's** youth movement. They were proud to show their uniforms, so it was part of the day to day scenery in **Berlin**.

Q: What did it mean to you at that age, as a young boy?

A: The enemy.

Q: So how did that make you feel about your home?

A: I don't know how to answer that question. I -- I felt terribly uncomfortable and fearful at times. It wasn't a very pleasant experience to grow up in **Berlin** after **Hitler** came to power.

Q: How did your parents deal with it?

A: They were equally apprehensive, and to this day I will never know why my parents didn't leave **Germany**. I mean, if I read the literature today of how Jews were treated in the immediate pre-**Hitler** period, and after **Hitler** came to power, it was relatively easy to leave **Germany**. Why my parents didn't leave, I will never know, but they were not alone, I mean, there were possibly a hundred thousand Jews in-in -- in **Germany**, maybe even more, who stayed in **Germany**. Many of them thought that **Hitler** would never attack the German Jews.

Q: Do you know people that left **Germany** at that time?

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A: Oh, many of them, I -- many of them here in **Melbourne**.

Q: Friends of yours?

A: Yes. Yes, if I ha -- the signals were so clear, right from 1933 when **Hitler** came to power, but there was go -- there were going to be enormous problems. And why my parents didn't leave, I will never know. I mean, it wasn't always easy, reading the literature now, to get permits to emigrate -- or to immigrate, rather. To emigrate was relatively easy in the early years of **Hitler**. But to get permits to **America**, to **Australia**, to some of the other countries, was relatively difficult. I think the only country that admitted Jews in unlimited numbers was **Shanghai**, and I think the **Dominican Republic**.

Q: So the people that you knew that were leaving, where were they going to?

A: Some of them went to **England**, some of them went to **France** and were later caught in **France** during the war. Many of them went to **America**, my aunt emigrated to **Chile**.

Q: In what year?

A: Either '37 or '38. My uncle emigrated to **Shanghai**, and survived the war in **Shanghai**, returned to **Berlin** at the end of the war and died there. So --

Q: Natural causes?

A: Yes, yeah. So it was possible to leave **Germany**, but my parents, like so many others, obviously totally underestimated the consequences.

Q: What -- what comment can you make about your standard of living in **Germany**?

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A: We got progressively poorer. I think we were middle class when I was a child, and as the -- as the economical strains on Jews became increasingly difficult, I think our standard of living became lower. And of course, from '39 on, all food was rationed, with a special ration card for Jews, and we got significantly less food than --

Q: We'll come to that later.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: So what changes took place? You said you got progressively poorer. What -- what -- what do you remember changing --

A: We moved to, I think lower class residences, lower class districts.

Q: With your household?

A: Yeah. Well, we didn't live in a house, we always lived in apartments.

Q: Was that your apartment, or rented?

A: All rented, we rented, I think. I'm almost certain it was rented. And that was basically it. I-I know we became poorer, although parents normally don't discuss their financial affairs with their teenagers, their -- with their 10 or 11 year olds.

Q: So [indecipherable]

A: But don't forget I was 11 when the -- when the war started, I was four when **Hitler** came to power.

Q: So where did you move to?

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A: To the last residence that I've shown in that [indecipherable] in a district in **Berlin** called **Weding**, of all places. And we moved there, and that -- it was from there that I was deported.

Q: What happened with school?

A: Well, di -- the school was closed in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II.

Q: Until '39, you were at school?

A: Yes.

Q: Wi -- were you aware of things changing in your education with **Hitler's** rise to power?

A: No, not really. I think the education was -- was unchanged.

Q: Mm-hm. What about on weekends, did you have the freedom to --

A: Oh yes, I mean, I was free in **Berlin** until '43.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We had to wear the yellow star.

Q: From what year?

A: I think from 1941, either '41 or '42.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's go back to the period before --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- the war starts, before '39 -- '33 to '39. What other changes took place, if you remember them?

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A: I don't think any.

Q: Increased incidences in anti-Semitism, increased --

A: Well, as I told you, the -- the mob of the **Hitler** youth on our way to school and from school. Apart from that, no, not really. I mean, there were places where Jews couldn't go to.

Q: Like where?

A: Parks, primarily. Picture theaters and other venues, but primarily picture theaters and parks. There were even benches that -- where it was written, Jews are not allowed to sit here.

Q: And the picture theaters of that time?

A: We're just not allowed to go.

Q: Do you remember how that affected you at the time?

A: I don't think it bothered me a great deal, as far as I remember.

Q: Do you remember the effect it had on your parents?

A: I don't know. I'm sure they suffered, but they didn't show it.

Q: Mm-hm. What was the atmosphere like in your home?

A: Really it's too -- I think to a very large extent, unchanged. I di -- don't think I remember any changes. My parents, I think, tried to shelter the children from everything bad. So they shielded us, I think from many things that they must have been aware of.

Q: Were you called names in the street?

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A: Oh sure, dirty Jew, and that -- that kind of thing. I mean, that happened even when -- after we wore the star and we walked in the street, people out of the blue yelled at us, dirty Jew.

Q: So what happened, as you remember it, before the war began, and as it began in 1939 September?

A: What period?

Q: What -- what happened just before '39?

A: Well, I had -- I had a normal life, I went to school from 1934 to 1939.

Q: Mm. What happened in '39?

A: Well, in '39 when the war broke out, the Jewish schools were closed, and I had to stay at home.

Q: Do you remember the day you were told not to come to school?

A: No. I think my parents just told me school is finished, school is closed. But I kept up my contact with my Jewish friends, and in fact, I was **Bar Mitzvah** in **Berlin** in 1941, two years after the outbreak of World War II. So there was a Jewish life in **Berlin**.

Q: Where did you celebrate your **Bar Mitzvah**?

A: In a synagogue called [indecipherable] in the **Oranienburger Strasse** [indecipherable] existed, was bombed by the allies and I had joined a choir in that particular synagogue.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: There were services in the synagogues in **Berlin** until '43. Many synagogues were closed, but some were opened.

Q: You said your -- the synagogue that you belonged to was bombed.

A: Yes.

Q: Was that of any s -- did you see it --

A: I didn't see it, but -- but I didn't see it while it was being bombed, because during the air raids, we were not allowed to go out. We had to go to -- either to air raid shelters, or stay where we were. But afterwards, in the next morning, I was told, I don't know by whom, maybe -- maybe by my parents, maybe my friends, that synagogue has been bombed. And then I walked there -- it wasn't a very long walk from home, and saw the damage.

Q: What was the damage? Was the whole building --

A: Was -- was the -- was the -- it was still smoking, and there was very little left of the synagogue. [indecipherable] the synagogue where I was **Bar Mitzvahed**.

Q: Was there a celebration after the service?

A: I think it was a family reunion, and friends.

Q: Mm-hm. Her -- tell me about the air raid.

A: Well, there were air raids almost from the beginning of '39 from planes from **England**. There were sirens when -- if they approached **Berlin**. And then initially, I think in the early years of the war, we were compelled li -- just like the non-Jews, to go to air

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raid shelters. Subsequently, we were not allowed to go to air raid shelters any more, we stayed at home.

Q: How often?

A: Hm?

Q: How often was there an air raid?

A: How often the air raids? I don't remember, they were very often, and they increased in frequency as the war progressed.

Q: Do you remember the impact it had on you at that time?

A: You became immune to it. I don't think it had any special impact on me.

Q: Your parents?

A: If it did have an impact on them, they didn't show it.

Q: They -- after an air raid, you would go out of the house the next morning and see --

A: And look -- look at the damage.

Q: -- more devastation.

A: Look at the damage. See what houses in the neighborhood were attacked. That's what we did the next day. Not all the air raids occurred during the night, some of them occurred during the day in -- in broad daylight. And they often lasted for an hour or two or three, and we went and observed the damage as soon as we were allowed to leave.

Q: Were the streets full of people out looking to see what had happened?

A: Yeah.

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Q: What were you doing on the day, every day, not going to school?

A: I stayed at home and visited friends, and read a lot.

Q: What sort of things did you read?

A: Everything I could lay my hands on. I borrowed books from the library, from the Jewish library. We had quite a -- rather extensive library at home.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And that was [**indecipherable**] I did a lot of that. My parents from time to time, kept on teaching me arithmetic, geography, and a few other things that they thought I should know.

Q: Up until what time was your father working in his business?

A: When we were deported in 1943, only my mother, my sister and I were deported, my father was not at home. And I thought, in fact, that he had survived the war, because I didn't know what happened to him. And immediately after the war, after liberation, I went back to **Berlin** in the hopes that he had survived underground, only to be informed then, in October '44, six months before my liberation, he was discovered by the Gestapo, sent to **Auschwitz**, and he died there. So he certainly worked when we were deported. How much longer he worked there -- I presume he stopped work immediately and went underground, because when the Gestapo deported a family, they put a seal on the door. And when my father came home in the evening, he would have seen that seal, he would have known what happened, and I presume he went underground, but I'll never know.

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Q: Mm-hm. What was the food situation up until the time of deportation?

A: Not very good. We got no butter, only margarine. Very little fruit, very little sugar, if any. No chocolate, no more goodies. And that was basically the rations. I mean germ -- ordinary Germans also had ration coupons, but the ration for Jews were significantly lower than for the ordinary population.

Q: Did you feel hungry at that time?

A: I don't think I ever experienced hunger, no. No, my mother was a good cook, and one way or another she always managed to prepare good meals. We had some friends, I think they must have been non-Jewish, I didn't really know them, friends of my parents, who occasionally supplemented our rations with a bit of butter and a bit of meat and some eggs. I mean, there was a large black market, and it's quite possible that my parents bought some food on the black market.

Q: So your family life, until '43, until the time of deportation was every evening you were all home together.

A: Yeah.

Q: And everybody went their own way during the day.

A: Yes.

Q: What was your mother doing?

A: She was at home, except that during the last month before deportation, probably late '42 -- no, mid-'42, she went to work in a -- also for **Siemens**, oddly enough. I think it was

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forced labor, because there were so many people on the front that the German factories, they came to get any labor that they could. And I think she worked on the assembly line there. So she went to work every morning.

Q: Was that her choice, or she --

A: Oh no, no, I'm sure it wasn't her choice, I'm sure she was compel -- I'm sure it was forced labor.

Q: Mm-hm. Were you aware about the deportations until --

A: Yes, very much so because every time I went to s -- not deportation actually, not -- I was more aware of emigration. I was not aware of deportations at all. But every day I went to school, and there were one or two students not there any more.

Q: This was bef -- this is earlier?

A: Yeah, this was before the war -- before the war, who had emigrated. But of deportations I was totally unaware.

Q: What can you say about your neighbors, your German non-Jewish neighbors?

A: I think they avoided us, is probably the best way to express it. None of them were sympathetic or anything. I think they just avoided us.

Q: You don't remember anybody offering you assistance, except --

A: No, no.

Q: -- for this food that you were given, you don't know who gave it to you, the extra food.

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A: No, no I don't think that we got any help from neighbors. But a -- I don't know where the help came from, but I know that my parents did get help.

Q: What sort of help?

A: Extra food. Butter, which we didn't get. Meat, which we either didn't get, or only in very small quantities.

Q: So your father was in his business until the time that you were deported

[indecipherable]

A: I guess so. I can't imagine that he went back there after he became aware that we'd been deported.

Q: Mm-hm. Did he have German people working for him?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you aware of anything about that --

A: No, not at all.

Q: -- situation?

A: I know nothing about it.

Q: Not.

A: No.

Q: You said he had a non-Jewish German lady partner?

A: Woman **[indecipherable]** yeah, yeah.

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Q: Do you know anything about their friendship, or business connection, what happened to that?

A: All I -- all I know is they were partners in business. That's all I know.

Q: You didn't know her personally, or her family?

A: No.

Q: Nothing to do with them?

A: At least I don't remember.

Q: Did you have any hired help from any -- from a German **[indecipherable]**

A: No, no, no.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: And from what time did you start wearing the star? You did mention that earlier.

A: I think it was either '41 or '42, I mean that -- that date is fairly well documented.

Q: Yes.

A: It -- it became a decree, you had to go somewhere to pick it up.

Q: Do you remember the day you went to pick it up? Do you remember the actual --

A: My parents picked it up, I didn't pick it up. And then they had to sew it on the left hand side on your jacket, or on the outer garment that you wore.

Q: Did your mother sew it on for you?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Do you remember that?

A: Very vaguely.

Q: What did she sew it onto?

A: Onto a jumper, onto a shirt, onto a jacket, depending on the season.

Q: In your -- in your case, what was -- oh, I see, it changed?

A: Yes, sure, because they -- it had to be shown on whatever your outer garment was. So in summer it was just a shirt, in winter it was a jumper or -- or a jacket.

Q: Was that significant for you to wear that?

A: I don't know how to answer that question whether it was significant [**indecipherable**] but it was a matter of fact. I had to wear it and that was it. It didn't cause particular trauma as far as I remember.

Q: What other comments can you make about walking in the street, until the time that you were deported, up until '43?

A: I don't think I can add to anything I told you.

Q: Did you see any other beatings?

A: Not that I remember.

Q: Did you see Jewish businesses or shops closed?

A: All I remember, 1938, the **Kristallnacht** --

Q: Yes?

A: -- when the -- ninth of November, from memory.

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Q: Yes.

A: The next day, or next days after that, I saw the windows of Jewish businesses smashed. Oh yes, that I remember vividly, the **Kristallnacht**.

Q: You saw it the day after?

A: I saw it the day after, I wasn't out when it happened.

Q: Who were you with when you saw it?

A: I don't remember.

Q: What did you see?

A: I saw windows smashed, and graffiti, anti-Semitic graffiti. Don't buy from Jews, Jewish pigs, Jews go to **Palestine**. That sort of thing.

Q: You hadn't heard of deportation?

A: Correct.

Q: Had you heard of anything else that was happening, from a radio, or from newspaper, anything that was happening elsewhere, your --

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I don't think it was generally known, and if my parents knew or suspected anything, they certainly shielded us from it.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you remember seeing changes in your father, the way he looked, the way he behaved?

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A: Not really, not really. I knew they were apprehensive, but they shielded us to the extent that they could.

Q: Mm-hm. And your relationship with your sisters during this time?

A: It was very good, I loved my sister.

Q: You said that your grandparents, your mother's parents, died when you were small?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they buried in **Germany**?

A: Yes, in **Berlin**.

Q: So, can you tell me what happened in 1943?

A: Well, the Gestapo came with a van and told my mother, my sister and me --

Q: Came to your house?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember when they actually entered into your house?

A: I think so, yeah, but very vaguely. They were just --

Q: Do you remember how many there were?

A: Two or three. Told us to go down, take some personal belongings with us. We went into a fel -- the back of a furniture van; there were already other Jewish people in there.

Q: People you knew?

A: No, I don't think so. And we were taken to an assembly camp in **Berlin**, which used to be a Jewish old people's home.

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Q: How far away from your home was that?

A: Oh, one or two kilometers.

Q: Mm-hm. How long did you have to pack up what you wanted?

A: Maybe a half an hour, an hour.

Q: They waited for you?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you take with you?

A: My mother did all the packing, I didn't pack anything. I don't know what she took.

Q: Did you have your own bag?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Mm-hm. Anything that you remember about --

A: I think you were only allowed to take one item of luggage. So what my mother packed, I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember taking anything particular with you?

A: No.

Q: So you and your mother and two sisters --

A: One sister.

Q: One sister.

A: I only had one sister.

Q: Only one sister -- got onto the truck, and your father was not home at the time.

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A: Correct.

Q: He was at work?

A: I don't know where he was, I presume he was at work.

Q: And do you remember sitting in the back of the furniture truck?

A: Yes. That was only a very short journey I took, perhaps 15 - 20 minutes. They picked up other people on the way to the assembly point.

Q: So how many people were in the back of the truck when you arrived?

A: Maybe a dozen. Maybe a dozen, maybe more.

Q: Women and men --

A: Yep.

Q: -- and children?

A: Yep.

Q: And what happened next?

A: Well, we were asked to disembark, and then a place called **Grosse Hamburger Strasse**, which was assembly point, which was before a Jewish old people's home. And there were lots of people there, and we were assigned beds in the dormitory, and we stayed there, certainly for several weeks, if not for a couple of months, I don't remember exactly. And more people came every day, and more people left every day. I guess my parents must have known what happened to those who left, but I didn't. I really didn't know what was going to happen. I had no idea.

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Q: Do you remember what you did every day?

A: Very little. We read books, we went to meals. We got -- we were fed well, talked. But nothing.

Q: You had beds?

A: Yes.

Q: And bathrooms?

A: There were communal bathrooms and communal toilets.

Q: You had no idea where your father was?

A: No.

Q: What was your mother like at this time?

A: She, I think, also tried to shield her children from her apprehensions. We just did nothing all day. My mother still went to work from there during the day. She was allowed out.

Q: By foot? She walked or she --

A: No, by public transport because her place of work was many kilometers away.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So she would have taken public transport. She came back in the evening.

Q: Was she paid for her work?

A: I presume so, but I don't know.

Q: Who was in charge of you during the ti -- this time?

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A: The **SS** or the Gestapo. The whole thing was run by the Gestapo.

Q: How were you treated?

A: Reasonably well. I mean, we didn't go out, we were not allowed out. Nobody beat us up. We were -- we just did very little.

Q: So you were there for a couple of weeks?

A: No, no, no, at least for a couple of months.

Q: Couple of months. And then what happened?

A: Then another furniture van came, took us to a railway station, and from there we had to go into a wagon where there were lots of other people, and then we were deported to **Auschwitz**, actually to one of the camps, that they called **hausenlager**, auxiliary camps near **Auschwitz**, called **Buna, B-u-n-a**. But the -- the -- the trip was awful, and one of the most traumatic experiences of all the war, because we were -- we were so many people, it was just like a suburban train at peak hour, was standing room only. There were people there of all ages, from old people to children as young as we were and even younger. We were perched in there, it was dreadful.

Q: How long was that journey?

A: I think 36 to 48 hours.

Q: And you had to stand all the time?

A: Stayed in there, and we were allowed out once or twice to empty our bowels and

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bladders, but not everybody could wait, so could you imagine the stench in those wagons, and during the trip? It was awful.

Q: Did you have something to eat?

A: No, no.

Q: Something to drink?

A: No.

Q: People die on the train?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see that?

A: Yes. Elderly, mostly the elderly.

Q: What were they -- what did they -- what did anybody do with their bodies when they died?

A: It was standing room only. You know, it was perhaps like -- I don't know if you have ever seen the subways in **Japan** where they have pushers to push people in. That's what it was like.

Q: So what happened when someone died?

A: Wherever he is -- I think they were probably put in a corner somewhere. I mean, not many died, perhaps three, or four, or five.

Q: Were they taken off at one of the stops?

A: If -- if it occurred before a stop, yes.

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Q: And when you stopped, you were --

A: There were lavatories there.

Q: And you were well guarded by the **SS**?

A: Oh yes, it's machine guns and dogs.

Q: Did anybody try to escape?

A: Not to my knowledge.

Q: So you arrived in -- in -- did you s -- how did you know you were in **Auschwitz**?

A: I -- I found out later. I didn't know where I was when we -- when we disembarked.

But I found out fairly soon afterwards where I was. When we arrived, we were asked to leave the wagons. There was an **SS** man on a podium and they said women and children to the left, and men to the right. And I instinctively held onto my mother and joined her and my sister to women -- to the left where the women and the children were. And then my mother pushed me to the men. So I think she really gave birth to be twice. Once in '28, once in '43. My sister and my mother went straight to the gas chambers.

Q: How do you know that?

A: I was told by the other prisoners of what happened to the women and children.

Q: When did you know there were gas chambers?

A: Within days of -- I mean, I -- we were the last of the prisoners to **Auschwitz**. Don't forget, it was '43, so the tide of the war had already turned against **Germany**, and it

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didn't take very long for fellow prisoners to tell us where we were, and I asked what [indecipherable] where's my mother, where's my sister. They very quickly told me.

Q: Was there a good-bye to your mother?

A: No. She just pushed me to the men, and that was it.

Q: Did you turn around to look?

A: I don't remember.

Q: And your sister was with her?

A: My sister was with my mother, and she was seven years old. Eight or seven.

Q: So you were now with the men.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where did you go?

A: We went to where we shaved our heads. We were told to get rid of all our clothing, they tattooed numbers on our lower left arm. And then we were assigned to barracks.

Q: Can I see your number?

A: Yes, you can if you want to.

Q: Could you read it out, please?

A: 107294.

Q: You have something under the number, too.

A: That dis -- dis -- that came later, that wasn't the original -- that wasn't originally put there, but it designated Jews. The triangle.

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Q: When was that put there?

A: Subsequently, but I don't know exactly when.

Q: And what did the triangle mean?

A: That we were Jewish, because there were many Jew -- non-Jewish prisoners.

Criminals, Communists, homosexuals. So the triangle subsequent -- signified that we were Jewish.

Q: Do you remember that -- the incident of being tattooed?

A: Yeah, ve-very vividly.

Q: Can you describe it?

A: It was quite painful.

Q: Who did it?

A: I don't know whether it was a fellow prisoner or that was an **SS** man. I don't remember.

Q: You remember the pain of it?

A: Yes, it was painful. I mean, I think tattoos are painful, particularly when they are inflicted without consideration for the person who is being tattooed.

Q: How long did it take?

A: Oh, a minute or two.

Q: Do you remember what it felt like for you to see a number on your arm?

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A: There were so many new impressions, oc-occurring almost every day, every minute. It was difficult to dwell on any particular event. I remember so many events occurring, one after the other, it was difficult to dwell on one particular event.

Q: Your barracks were -- were they in -- in **Buna**, or in --

A: In **Buna**. First of all in **Buna**, where I worked for about two months, just carrying cement bags and iron rods and so on. And then I --

Q: Was it for construction purposes?

A: Yes, for construction, because I -- they built a -- a huge factory, a German industrial complex called **egay Farben**.

Q: What was that for?

A: They produced **Buna** there, **Buna** is -- is a gas, or a plastic, and that's where the name came from. And **egay Farben** was at that time, the biggest German chemical complex.

But I -- I stayed, luckily, only two or three months there.

Q: So the factory being built with -- near the camp where you were --

A: Yeah, tha -- yeah.

Q: -- and so you walked every day?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were the barracks like in **Buna**?

A: They were barracks, and --

Q: All men?

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A: Yes, only men.

Q: Can you describe what you remember?

A: I don't think there is a word in the English language that adequately expresses what it was like. You can use words like horrible and terrible, traumatic. But you can talk about the weather that it was horrible or terrible.

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't think there is -- is a word that -- an adjective in the English language that really adequately described those -- describes what it was like.

Q: You were sleeping on bunks?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there something to cover the wooden base?

A: There was straw. Straw.

Q: How many men to a bunk?

A: I think five, from memory. There were three tiers.

Q: Were you next to the same men every night?

A: I presume so, although I don't remember.

Q: You didn't have any particular bond with these people?

A: No, not really. Not really. We were so traumatized. We weren't normal, really. We fought for our life every day because when we came home from work, and we marched back into **Buna**, there was an -- an **SS** men standing there, and he decided whether you

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were fit to live another day, or whether you were so weak that they sent you to the gas chamber.

Q: That process happened daily?

A: Daily. Daily after --

Q: At the end of the day after work?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Were you lined up?

A: You weren't lined up, you marched in columns of five.

Q: Into your barrack?

A: Into the camp itself, and then we walked to the barracks.

Q: So at what point did he select people?

A: As we entered the camp.

Q: And how were -- how were they selected?

A: There was an **SS** man and -- an **SS** man standing on a podium, and we marched slowly past him. It was his decision, life or death.

Q: What were his words, do you remember?

A: He didn't say anything, he just signified left or right, left or right.

Q: To every person, got a direction left or right?

A: No, not every person, only those who -- who had to move to -- to the left.

Q: That was daily?

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A: Yep. Daily after work. But I was only in **Buna** for three months. After three months I was sent to **Auschwitz**.

Q: We'll come to **Auschwitz** --

A: Okay.

Q: -- in a moment. In the -- in the barracks there were **SS** guarding you all the time?

A: No, the **SS** were outside the barracks. The person responsible inside the barracks was a **kapo**. It was very often a non-Jewish [**indecipherable**] a criminal. In many cases there were -- some of them were worse than the **SS**.

Q: Do you remember the **kapo** -- the **kapo** that you -- in **Buna**? No.

A: By and large, I have, either deliberately or instinctively tried to put all of that behind me, and that was my way of coping with it.

Q: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. So what work were you doing in the factory, carrying cement --

A: Carrying cement and carrying iron rods and steel.

Q: How many hours a day were you working?

A: Probably 10.

Q: Was the work difficult?

A: Very difficult for a 14 year old.

Q: Were you a fit 14 year old?

A: I must have been. I must have been, I mean, we were carrying 50 kilo cement bags over fairly long distances. How I was able to do --

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Q: On your back?

A: Yes, on our back. How I was able to do that I really do not know.

Q: Were you closely supervised while you were working?

A: Yeah, sure. Particularly when you think that we were really underfed for many years. I mean, we didn't start being malnourished when we arrived in the camps. We already suffered from shortage of healthy food from 1939, and now we're talking 1943. I must have been very fit, and lucky.

Q: Do you ever remember getting into trouble for not working hard enough?

A: No, no.

Q: You did what you were supposed to do.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And the **SS** were guarding you and supervising you?

A: Yeah, all the time.

Q: When did you get fed?

A: Mid-day. We got a bowl of soup.

Q: At work?

A: Yeah.

Q: And what was the soup?

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A: Depends where you were in the queue. If you were unfortunate, you got very thin, watery soup. If you were lucky you were near the bottom of the container, and you had a little bit more cabbage, a little bit more potato, bit more solid food.

Q: Do you remember what it was like going back into the barracks and going to sleep at night?

A: We were exhausted. Went -- went to bed, and slept.

Q: And how were you woken up in the morning?

A: First of all the light was switched on, I think at six o'clock in the morning, and there was a lot of noise, people yelling, get up, get up.

Q: Did you have striped uniforms?

A: Yes.

Q: And that's what you wore all the time? What about the personal hygiene in **Buna**?

A: We were -- the Germans insisted that we were kept clean because they were worried about an outbreak of disease. So we were regularly deloused, and watched for fleas and lice.

Q: What was involved in delousing? Do you remember?

A: I think it was just a question of spraying us with something. Probably something like **Lysol** or something. Some chemical. They were worried about the health of the Germans in the camp, the **SS** and so on, not the prisoners. But there was very little personal

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hygiene, I mean, there were no toothbrushes, there was no toothpaste, there was no toilet paper. None of the basic things were there. Brush our teeth for years.

Q: What month was it that you were in **Buna**? What was the season?

A: Winter.

Q: What can you say about the weather, the cold?

A: Horribly cold.

Q: Did you have shoes?

A: Yes.

Q: What sort of shoes?

A: Terribly heavy shoes that didn't fit, but it didn't matter.

Q: Were they shoes or clogs?

A: Boots, boots really.

Q: They didn't fit?

A: Well, not really, I mean, not what you expect from shoes today. But they were all right.

Q: How did you deal with the cold?

A: Like everybody else. [**indecipherable**] it was just cold, and that was it

Q: Okay, so you were there for, you said, a few months?

A: Yes.

Q: And what was the reason for being sent to **Auschwitz**?

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A: I guess because I was young -- I was one of the younger ones, and then I spoke German. And in **Auschwitz**, I was sent to a **Maurerschule**, a bricklayer's school. They wanted to train us as bricklayers to build more factories and build more barracks. And that was an activity that was a lot easier than carrying cement bags and carrying rods, so I became a bricklayer in **Auschwitz**.

Q: Had -- did you walk from **Buna** to **Auschwitz**?

A: No, no, no. Tell you the truth I don't remember, but I would imagine that we were taken in the truck. But I don't remember.

Q: Were you aware of a -- of difference before you arrived? Were you aware of a difference between **Buna** and **Auschwitz**?

A: No. I had heard of **Auschwitz**, and I knew that **Auschwitz** was close by, but that was all I knew about it.

Q: When did you know that your mother and sister had been sent to **Auschwitz**?

A: Fellow prisoners told me what happened to the women and the children.

Q: In -- when you were in **Buna** you found out?

A: Yeah, within days of arriving, if not on the day.

Q: So you knew when you were arriving to **Auschwitz** that it was an extermination camp?

A: Oh yes, sure.

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Q: What -- do you remember when you arrived in **Auschwitz** what it looked like? Was it different to **Buna**?

A: Well, to -- we were already prisoners, so we -- we had already been tattooed, our heads had already been shaved, we already wear -- wore prisoners clothing. So it was just being transferred from one camp to another.

Q: Did they look different?

A: Much bigger. **Auschwitz** was much bigger than **Buna**.

Q: Did you have contact with other prisoners?

A: Only those with whom I worked, or who were in the same barracks as I. And I came across a number of boys who were at school with me.

Q: Were you able to recognize them?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: How did it feel having them --

A: We talked to each other. I'm still in touch with some of them today. Two live in **Israel**
[indecipherable]

Q: What are their names?

A: The one in **Israel** is **David Zeltz**, and **Stefan Cohen**. They went to school with me in **Berlin**, and we met in **Auschwitz**.

Q: Same age, same class?

A: I guess so. More or less.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did it provide you with any comfort?

A: It was nice to know somebody whom you had known before.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So where were you trained to become a bricklayer?

A: In **Auschwitz**.

Q: Where? On the job?

A: Yes, on the job.

Q: Who trained you?

A: Bricklayers, trained bricklayers.

Q: What nationality were they?

A: German, Polish.

Q: All prisoners --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- that had been doing this work.

A: Yeah, yeah. Peo -- trained bricklayers who were 10 years older than we were. So, professional bricklayers.

Q: So where in **Auschwitz** were you doing this? Where were the barracks being built?

A: In the main -- in the main camp of **Auschwitz**.

Q: And how many hours a day were you working?

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A: Same 10 hours a day, six days a week.

Q: Sunday was not a day of work?

A: Sunday was not a day of work.

Q: And what was Sunday?

A: Just talked, rested. Tried to find out from other prisoners what happened in the rest of the world, because we didn't know how long we would last, how long **Hitler** would last, what would happen in the end. Because by '43, particularly the second half of '43, there were more and more rumors that the tide of the war had turned against **Hitler**, and thus it was only a question of time before the war, before **Hitler** would be beaten.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It was just a question would **Hitler** survive us, or would we survive **Hitler**? But we talked about that, we t -- sometimes talked about the past, the good old times, when we were at home, and we had plenty of things to eat. And what we would do with ourselves if we survived.

Q: Were you hung --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning of Tape One, Side B

Q: Were you hungry in **Auschwitz**?

A: Sure, I was hungry all the time.

Q: How did you deal with your hunger?

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A: There was no way of dealing with it except experiencing it, and that was -- nothing you could do. If you're hungry you probably get yourself something to eat, couldn't get anything there. You trade food occasionally because we were given a ration of tobacco, which was called [**indecipherable**], was a horrible -- anyway, since I didn't smoke, I traded it with smokers for an extra piece of bread.

Q: Did you ration that piece of bread, or you ate it?

A: I tried and ate it as I could because if I kept it for the next -- until the next morning, maybe it would be stolen overnight. We had some very skillful thieves in the camp. So was always good to eat it and not keep it.

Q: There was no way of getting extra food from somewhere, other than that? You didn't know anybody that worked in a kitchen that might have had access?

A: No. I know that some prisoners did know people who were in the kitchen, I -- I didn't.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you feel that it was lucky to get this bricklaying job, for any reason?

A: Well it was certainly a lot better than **Buna**. **Buna** was awful. This was a lot easier.

Q: The work was harder?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Much harder.

A: The living conditions were the same as in **Buna**.

Q: Bigger?

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A: No, it was -- well, the camp was bigger, but the barracks and the working hours, and the -- and all that, were just like in **Buna**.

Q: Was there any heating, any fire to get warm?

A: No.

Q: So nighttime was cold, going to be cold.

A: Yeah, yeah. But di -- you fell asleep, you were exhausted.

Q: Do you remember the people that you shared a bunk with in **Auschwitz**?

A: I don't remember any of them personally. The worst part of it is if you had to get up in the middle of the night to relieve your bladder, then you became aware of how cold it really was.

Q: Mm-hm. You had to go out of the barrack?

A: No, you had to stay in the barrack, except that when the container was full, you had to go out and empty it.

Q: The container?

A: Of urine, where everybody emptied their bladder.

Q: And was that the only bathroom facility?

A: Yeah.

Q: There was no place to wash your face, wash clothes?

A: Oh, not -- not to wash clothes, but ye -- yet there were facilities to wash your face, your hands, sure.

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Q: Outside of the --

A: Outside.

Q: -- barracks.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have a blanket at night?

A: Yes.

Q: A woolen blanket?

A: It was either woolen or synthetic, I don't know.

Q: One blanket for all --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- five people.

A: No, no, no. No, one blanket for each.

Q: Did you have a pillow?

A: No.

Q: Straw on the wooden --

A: Yeah.

Q: How many people would have been sleeping your barracks?

A: I would imagine a hundred, maybe 200.

Q: Mm-hm. And once again, **kapos**?

A: Yes.

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Q: Do you have any memories of the **kapos**, how they treated you?

A: They were not very nice, but I tried to have as little as possible to do with them.

Q: Why do you say they were not nice? You must have seen something.

A: They screamed at people, they hit people. I wanted to avoid them as much as I could.

Q: And it was easy to avoid them?

A: I guess so. I mean, I successfully avoided them just about all the time.

Q: And what about the **SS** that was supervising the work? Did you avoid them also?

A: Yes.

Q: You didn't get into [**indecipherable**]

A: I tried not to attract attention. It was the worst thing you could do.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you see other people attracting attention?

A: Some people collapsed, some people didn't work fast enough. I tried to be as unobtrusive as I could.

Q: Did you form any friendships?

A: Friendship's probably too strong an expression.

Q: Connection.

A: Connections.

Q: Just people you discuss things with.

A: People -- well, sure, people -- the boys that I went to school with.

Q: Do you think you were able to show emotion?

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A: I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

Q: So you weren't ever beaten in the camps?

A: I was hit occasionally, but not really -- not, not often.

Q: What were you hit with?

A: A wooden -- I think a rifle butt.

Q: Do you remember why you were hit?

A: I don't know why I hit, but I still have marks of it today. I'm totally deaf on my right ear as a result of being hit over the head. It was the only memory of it.

Q: And was that instant?

A: The deafness?

Q: When did you lose your hearing? Yeah.

A: The deafness I think was instant. Luckily I've got good hearing on the left ear, so that you didn't notice that I'm half deaf.

Q: Mm-hm. And was there **appelle** in ausch --

A: Every morning.

Q: Can you explain that?

A: Oh, that was a ro -- a roll call, and we had to go out and the **SS** counted to make sure that nobody had died, stayed in the barracks, or fled, which was very rare. But some people died overnight, and the numbers had to match.

Q: How long did the **appelle** take?

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A: Sometimes only 15 minutes, sometimes was a -- was a discrepancy, it could take an hour or two.

Q: And where was that held?

A: Outside the barracks.

Q: Every day?

A: Every morning, every evening.

Q: Were you counted again when you returned from work?

A: Yes.

Q: Also in a -- in **appelle**?

A: Yeah.

Q: And so what -- what evolved if there -- if there was somebody that had died overnight?

A: Then they went to the barracks to see if there was somebody in the barracks who couldn't or wouldn't come to the **appelle**. Th-They -- the **appelle** did not end until the discrepancy was discovered, whether it took half an hour, or an hour, two.

Q: Who conducted it?

A: The **SS**.

Q: So the role of the **kapo** was inside the barrack?

A: Inside the barracks and occasionally also at work.

Q: Are you aware of anybody that tried to escape?

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A: I wasn't aware, but I knew that some people escaped, and some of them were caught, and they were publicly hanged.

Q: From **Auschwitz**?

A: In front of everybody. And all of us had to look --

Q: [**indecipherable**]

A: -- and observe -- we had to.

Q: When -- where it was public, where was it held, the hanging?

A: Probably at the place where they look -- where the **appelle** was held.

Q: Did -- you said you saw it?

A: Yes.

Q: How many people were hung that you saw?

A: Sometimes as many as six or eight, I think, sometimes one or two. And the **SS** watched that you didn't close your eyes. But somehow one develops a talent to look past it, look -- to have your eyes open in the direction but not to see it.

Q: Were they people that you knew?

A: No, not to my knowledge.

Q: During the day working, did you talk to people?

A: Whilst -- whilst -- we had our lunch, we talked to people. And also, if you work with others, you can talk to them.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: I mean, there were -- I wasn't the only bricklayer, there were many of us. And sure, you cou -- you could talk to the others.

Q: Are you aware of any resistance of any kind --

A: No.

Q: -- in **Auschwitz**?

A: No, not at all.

Q: Had you heard of resistance outside of the camp?

A: No. I was too young. I wasn't a man then, I was a child.

Q: It's a -- it's an unusual question, but what comment can you make about the **SS** in that circumstance in **Auschwitz**?

A: Some of the **SS** were German, some were Austrians, some were Ukrainians. The worst were the Ukrainians, the second worst were the Austrians, and if you can use the word best, were the Germans. If you were surrounded by German **SS**, you had a fairly good chance to get back to work -- back to the camp in the evening. If the **SS** in charge of you were either Ukrainian or Croatian or Austrian, the chances were greatly diminished.

Q: Did you encounter Ukrainian **SS**?

A: Yes.

Q: Where?

A: At **Auschwitz**. I mean, the **SS** -- was a different **SS** very often, from one day to the next.

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Q: Mm-hm. So --

A: But you could tell very quickly where they came from.

Q: Not only by their accents, but they --

A: By -- by the -- by their accent, by their treatment.

Q: Are you able to clarify why they -- why their treatment was worse?

A: I think the -- I think the Austrians are more anti-Semitic than the Germans. I think the Croats -- I mean, if they joined the **SS**, maybe they wanted to prove something, I don't know. But every day you had a German **SS**, it was good news.

Q: Mm-hm. The language that you used in **Auschwitz** --

A: German.

Q: -- only German?

A: German.

Q: All the time, just German?

A: All the time, yeah.

Q: Did you think that every day could be your last day?

A: Yeah, every day. Every day. At least when I was in **Auschwitz**. In **Bobrick** the situation was totally different. But I also had some lucky breaks. One day in the morning at the **appelle**, the **SS** in charge of the **appelle** asked, is there anybody who can speak fluent German and Hebrew? I could not for the life of me understand why the **SS** would ask that question, but at that time I spoke reasonably fluent Hebrew. And so I put my arm

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up, and also one or two of my colleagues from -- who were at school with me, also put their arm up. The others went to work and we were kept there, and we found out why they wanted us. It was the time that the Jews from **Saloniki** in **Greece** arrived in **Auschwitz**. And those -- the Jews from **Saloniki** only spoke Greek and Hebrew. They needed to be interviewed, they needed interpreters. What their name was, when they were born, what traits, what professions they had. So they needed somebody who could ask them in Hebrew and translate it into German. So I had a soft job for -- for simply a month or six weeks. That was one lucky break I had.

Q: Where was that [**indecipherable**]

A: In **Auschwitz**, in an office, inside.

Q: Was the food different?

A: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. It was definitely not worse.

Q: Were you working long hours, or shorter hours?

A: Sometimes we di -- we just sat to arrive -- to await the arrival of a transport. We had a chair. There were no chairs in **Auschwitz**. So that was one of the lucky breaks I had in **Auschwitz**. The lucky break. And then the other lucky break was when I left **Auschwitz** and came to **Bobrick**.

Q: I'll ask you that in a moment.

A: Yeah.

Q: The people that arrived from **Saloniki** and **Greece**, did you say?

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A: Yeah.

Q: Did they inform you about anything that -- that you hadn't known before?

A: No, but it -- what it enabled us to do is to save some lives, because we knew that if somebody was asked the question, what was his profession, that he said I'm a violinist, or I'm a teacher, he would probably be sent to the gas chambers. Somebody was a carpenter, or a locksmith, or a bricklayer, or a welder, they were safe. So very often, a lot of the **Saloniki** Jews told us that they're a teacher or a violinist, we translated it as a welder, or as a bricklayer, or as a laborer.

Q: With their knowledge or not?

A: Not with their knowledge, and not with the **SS** knowledge. Because they didn't understand the Germans and the Germans didn't understand Hebrew.

Q: Do you ever remember communicating to them in Hebrew --

A: Yes, of course.

Q: -- and telling them something that [**indecipherable**]

A: No, I didn't tell them anything, I just asked them what their name was, how old they were, where they were born, when and what their profession was. So my knowledge of Hebrew, you could almost argue, saved my life.

Q: Was this towards the end of your stay in -- in **Auschwitz**?

A: No, it was more or less at the beginning.

Q: So after a whole month there were Jews being brought into **Auschwitz** from --

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A: Yeah.

Q: -- **Saloniki** and **Greece**.

A: Yeah. Well, **Saloniki** is a city in **Greece**, and th-there was a large Jewish population. So we were all rounded up and all brought together within days.

Q: Would you be aware of numbers, how many were brought in?

A: I was just sorry that it ended, and I go back to become a bricklayer.

Q: So you were in **Auschwitz** altogether for about a year?

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Which -- did you ever have any contact with women in **Auschwitz**?

A: No, none at all.

Q: Were you aware of any behavior of the **SS** outside of the camps at night? Any brothels in **Auschwitz**?

A: There were brothels in **Auschwitz**, and I believe that some prisoners, **kapos**, were also allowed to go to the brothels from time to time. But at my age, I wasn't interested.

Q: Did you know where they were?

A: Yeah, I -- I saw them from outside. I --

Q: But you never fol --

A: -- I didn't e -- to tell you the truth I didn't even know what a brothel was, I was so naïve and so young.

Q: Did you see a factory being built until its finishing stages? The completion of it?

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A: No, because the brickwork was finished long before the -- the interior was done. We basically built the shells.

Q: How many shells were you involved in?

A: Two, three, four, I don't remember.

Q: Mm-hm. Were you aware of the gas chambers in location?

A: I was aware of their existence, and I was -- I knew where they were, but only from being told by others. I personally did not see any.

Q: You didn't see chimneys?

A: No.

Q: Could you smell anything from the gas chambers?

A: I don't remember. The gas chamber is mainly in a place called **Birkenau**, and I was never in **Birkenau**.

Q: So after you were in **Auschwitz**, what happened?

A: Then there was another roll call, and they were asking for young men who could speak German and who could re -- who could read technical drawings. Again, I didn't know why, but I put my hand up. And -- because we had done geometry at school. And by -- when the others, I think, went to work, we were taken to a place called **Bobrick**, which was a very small camp, maybe 150 - 200 people, not very far from **Auschwitz**, but run by civilians [**indecipherable**] **Siemens**. And the treatment was significantly better than in **Auschwitz**.

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Q: In what way?

A: The food was better. They wanted to make toolmakers of us, because that happened in '44, when a lot of people thought the war was nearly at an end, the allied invasion had already taken place, and the wa -- they needed to train toolmakers, and all the toolmakers were on the front. So we were trained as toolmakers. We weren't beaten, food was better, the accommodation was better.

Q: The quantity of food?

A: The quantities were better. I think the quality of the food was better. Nobody was beaten, nobody was threatened. They want to teach us.

Q: Civilians from where?

A: From **Siemens**.

Q: From **Germany**.

A: Yeah. They were going to make toolmakers of us.

Q: Were they -- so they were in civilian clothes?

A: Yes.

Q: What -- what was their stations?

A: There were no **kapos** there.

Q: What was their stations, the civilians? They were working.

A: Yes, they were running --

Q: They were free men.

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A: -- they were running the factory.

Q: And they were free men that lived nearby --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- tha -- that was their job?

A: Yeah. And they were friendly.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So **Bobrick** was my salvation.

Q: You didn't feel anti-Semitism from these people?

A: Look, everybo -- every German was anti-Semitic, I mean --

Q: That's how you felt?

A: Sure.

Q: So you stayed in **Bobrick**, you lived there as well?

A: Yes.

Q: And where did you train to make the tools?

A: In the factory.

Q: How big was the factory?

A: It was a huge hall, a very large hall. How big it was? Maybe 50, a hundred meters long, maybe 20 meters wide. **[indecipherable]**

Q: And what sort of tools were you responsible for?

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A: Well, we were supposed to be -- to be trained as toolmakers, and toolmakers manufacture a variety of tools.

Q: What sort of tools?

A: Tools to manufacture ammunition, tools to manufacture plumbing equipment, tools to make all sorts of metal objects. So we got lessons in geometry. We were given tools, rasps, files, drills. We were given pieces of metal to drill out triangles, rectangles and so on. That's what it -- that -- that didn't train us enough that we were **[indecipherable]** toolmaker. An apprenticeship as a toolmaker is many years, and I think I was in **Bobrick** probably for a period of eight or nine months.

Q: Who else volunteered with you from **Auschwitz**?

A: Some -- some of the young -- you needed to speak German, that was one of the pre-requisites, because the teachers only spoke German. So that was one pre-requisite. And you needed to have a -- an elementary or rudimentary knowledge of geometry, triangles, squares. That's all -- I had that.

Q: So how many of you from **Auschwitz** came over to **Bobrick**?

A: Probably 15 or 20.

Q: Your friends from school, did they come too?

A: Yes, and others, yeah.

Q: How were you transported from **Auschwitz**?

A: Like on the back of a truck.

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Q: Do you remember leaving **Auschwitz** and how that felt?

A: I didn't know it was coming. I was apprehensive. But after a day or two in -- in **Bobrick**, was a great relief.

Q: So why did you volunteer?

A: For the same reason that I volunteered when I was asked whether I speak Hebrew and German.

Q: What do you think prompted you?

A: Maybe the hope for betterment.

Q: The accommodation at **Bobrick**, was it --

A: Was better.

Q: Better?

A: Better.

Q: In what way?

A: First of all, there were not so many of us, I mean, it was a small camp. There were 10 or 20 in one barrack. It was a lot better than a hundred or 200. And the hygienic facilities were better. There were toilets -- at **Auschwitz** there were no toilets, just empty land. And altogether it was significantly better.

Q: The **SS** was still supervising?

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A: Yeah, but they had very little to do with us. We were basically, mostly in contact with the civilian Germans. The **SS** were there to -- I guess to stop people from fleeing, absconding. But they were on the outside, they didn't take much interest in us.

Q: Did anybody try to escape?

A: Not to my knowledge.

Q: Did it seem that it was possible to escape from there?

A: I don't know, I never discussed escape with anybody.

Q: You were there for six months?

A: I was there til the January '45 -- til the 18th of January, '45, I remember that.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then we marched for some 50 kilometers to **Gliwice**.

Q: Who?

A: All of us.

Q: You were all asked --

A: Yeah, to -- to leave for **Gliwice**. We walked for 50 --

Q: Do you -- do you know why?

A: Well, because -- we were told because the Russians were coming.

Q: So the **SS** rounded you up?

A: Yes.

Q: Was this during the day?

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A: Yes. So we walked. On the way we met lots of columns of other prisoners from **Auschwitz**, and we walked 50 kilometers.

Q: And in what period of time?

A: I asked -- I asked some of my friends how long it took. I think it took 24 hours, maybe a bit more.

Q: Did you stop at any stage?

A: Yeah. Yeah, we stopped occasionally, but by and large we walked. 50 kilometers.

Q: Was that traumatic?

A: Yes, very, because people collapsed left, right and center, and those who collapsed were shot in the head by the **SS** there and then. So, the great incentive to march on, when you saw that.

Q: How many people [**indecipherable**] and others, so --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- on the side of the road? You saw people shot in the head?

A: Oh yes, many.

Q: How did that affect you at the time?

A: Very traumatic, but we kept marching on, hoping that the march would end. We didn't really know where we're heading for, and how long it would last. Just kept walking and walking.

Q: Did you assist anybody that was having difficulty?

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A: Not really, not really.

Q: Did you have anything to eat or drink?

A: We took food with us from bub -- from **Bobrick**, we were given food to take with us, and it sustained us til we got to **Gliwice**.

Q: And what -- what was at **Gliwice**?

A: In **Gliwice** we slept in the snow in January, for -- we stayed, I think for a day or two, and then we were taken in open wagons to **Buchenwald**.

Q: Who did you see at **Gliwice**, who was already there?

A: Lots of people from **Auschwitz**, lots of people I guess from other camps, I don't know, and those from **Bobrick**. There were many thousands.

Q: Doing what?

A: Waiting.

Q: Sitting around?

A: Yeah.

Q: And [**indecipherable**] open?

A: Open.

Q: In January?

A: January in **Poland**.

Q: Day and night?

A: Bitter cold.

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Q: Day and night?

A: Yeah.

Q: In the open?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there snow?

A: Yes, quite a lot. We slept in the snow. Then --

Q: Were there only older people in **Gliwice**, do you remember seeing younger people?

A: Well, there were younger people, people my age.

Q: Any younger?

A: Possibly, possibly. I mean, not much younger.

Q: But there were thousands of people --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in [**indecipherable**]

A: Yeah.

Q: How is it closed off? Was there a big fence?

A: To tell you the truth, I don't remember.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was just an open area. Maybe there was a fence, maybe there was a --

Q: Anything significant that you saw there that you can tell us?

A: No, no. We were totally exhausted.

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Q: And your impression was just a -- a mass of people --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- sitting --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and waiting.

A: Yeah.

Q: Wa -- waiting for?

A: For what was going to happen next.

Q: What did you --

A: You didn't really know.

Q: You didn't know.

A: Didn't know. We had no idea what was going to happen. And then the trains arrived, and we were taken in open trains and -- through **Czechoslovakia to Buchenwald.**

Q: Do you remember how long the journey took?

A: Probably a day, maybe a day and a half.

Q: Were you still alongside your friends from school?

A: I don't know whether anybody was in my particular wagon. I don't recall that.

Q: Once again, is this --

A: Oh yes, it was --

Q: All the --

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A: -- all the time, but not in the wagons. In the wagons went [**indecipherable**]

Q: So you arrived in **Buchenwald**.

A: In January, '45.

Q: When did you know that it was **Buchenwald**?

A: I think I saw a sign, concentration camp **Buchenwald**.

Q: So what happened next?

A: We disembarked and we were -- went again to a barracks, and in my case I basically did nothing, no work or anything until three months later when we were liberated.

Q: So for three months --

A: Just it -- we had to do no -- we had to -- we -- on o -- on occasions we were sent by a truck to **Wymar**. **Buchenwald** is on top of a mountain, and **Wymar's** at the bottom of **Buchenwald**. We were taken to **Wymar** to clean the streets, particularly after the city was bombed. But that was just about all the work we did.

Q: How often did you do that?

A: Not very often. Maybe once a week, twice a week.

Q: Were you fed in **Buchenwald**?

A: Yeah, same kind of diet as in **Auschwitz**.

Q: How -- can you compare it to **Auschwitz**?

A: Compare it to **Auschwitz** -- well, we didn't work, so that was one advantage.

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Q: Wh-When you tra -- on your way to **Buchenwald**, you traveled through **Czechoslovakia**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any contact with --

A: It was one of the very pleasant experiences because for one reason or another, the opened wagons stopped in **Prague** under a bridge and some Czechs threw food parcels into the open wagons. And the **SS** who saw that, chased them away and wanted to stop them from doing it, so the **SS** chased them from left to right, they came back on the other side and kept putting -- throwing food parcels and food into the open wagons. I'll never forget that. Ordinary, civilian Czechs.

Q: How long did -- so the train stopped under a bridge?

A: Under a bridge, maybe for an hour or two and I don't know why it stopped there, just happened to stop there.

Q: So **Buchenwald**, what was the atmosphere in **Buchenwald** compared to the other places?

A: Well, we knew that the end of the war wasn't too far away.

Q: How did you know?

A: We were told by fellow prisoners who had access to information that I didn't have. And we were told, just last a little bit longer and you will be alright. So we tried to survive.

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Q: Do you remember your frame of mind in those last three months, knowing that it was coming to an end?

A: Optimism and hope --

Q: How di --

A: -- and hope.

Q: You did live with hope?

A: Mm.

Q: Did you feel that it was going to be the end of the war?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was your physical condition like at this time?

A: Very bad. Very ba -- I do -- it was okay, and after I left **Bobrick**, because **Bobrick** was an easier camp, but after **Bobrick** and [**indecipherable**] my health, I think, deteriorated significantly. And at the end of the war, when the liberation came, I was in a very bad state. And I had typhus, but I survived it. I overcame it.

Q: Had you been sick before that?

A: Only once in **Buna**. I had a high temperature. I was sent by the **SS** to have an ice cold shower. I was told either you get cured, or you die. I got cured. That was the only time I got sick in the camp.

Q: Did you have -- ever have sores, sprained muscles, or calluses, or grazes?

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A: Yeah, but you took those, they were part of day to day life, and you didn't even bother with them.

Q: So, can you describe the liberation in **Buchenwald**?

A: Well, I was in a -- physically in a very bad state, and all I knew was I saw suddenly American soldiers in the camp --

Q: Suddenly.

A: Yep.

Q: From nowhere?

A: From nowhere and they told us you are free now.

Q: Where were you when you saw the American soldiers?

A: Somewhere in the camp, we were walking around. And I was lucky --

Q: And he was on foot?

A: Yeah. On foot and --

Q: One soldier?

A: No, no. There were tanks with Americans, trucks with American soldiers, soldiers on foot. And I was very lucky, I could communicate with them, I spoke some English.

Q: What could they say?

A: You are free now. **Hitler** is finished. The war, for you, is over. And then --

Q: How did that feel for you?

A: I was overwhelmed. And they took us, shortly after they arrived --

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Q: What -- wh-what did you do immediately?

A: They asked if we were hungry. It's a silly question. So they took us to some of their **PX** depots outside **Buchenwald**. That's where the -- the American soldiers were fed. And, you pick what you like. So I, like many of us, we ate butter by the spoonful, and washed it down with sweetened, condensed milk. That's when I got really sick.

Q: Why did you choose that?

A: My body obviously needed it. I need fat, I needed sugar. That's when I really got sick.

Q: After one --

A: Shortly after I ate that. What it did to my stomachs and my intestines, I never forget.

Q: Where were you then?

A: In **Buchenwald**.

Q: You stayed in the camp?

A: Stayed in the camp until after the war was over, because we were liberated one month before the war was over, and then shortly after that I went to **Berlin** because I had hope that my father had survived. Didn't take me long to find out that he hadn't. Then I went back to **Buchenwald**. I didn't really know what to do, I had no relative. I was 16 going on 17, I was -- I didn't know what to do with myself.

Q: What -- who looked after you when you had ty -- typhoid?

A: A hospital there.

Q: In **Buchenwald**?

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A: Yeah.

Q: You were in hospital?

A: Yeah.

Q: For how long?

A: I don't remember how long, a matter of days, not very long.

Q: How were you treated?

A: Very well by an American doctor, by a Russian doctor.

Q: And they had medical supplies for you?

A: Yes.

Q: What sort of medication were you offered?

A: I don't remember, I was so weak. And then, in June --

Q: So you left the hospital and went back to the camp?

A: No, the hospital was in the camp, really.

Q: Yes, you went back to where you -- to --

A: To buch -- yeah.

Q: And you stayed there until --

A: Until I heard there was a notification from the Swiss Red Cross that anybody under 18 wants to go to **Switzerland** should raise their hands, I did. And in ju --

Q: Why did you want to go to **Switzerland**?

A: I had always dreamt of **Switzerland**.

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Q: From -- how did you know about **Switzerland**?

A: From the time I was at school, I was taught, and also in the camps on Sundays when we talked, that people who had money in **Switzerland** were able to escape. So I thought **Switzerland** was a paradise.

Q: Were you given other options?

A: No. I could have stayed in the camp, I could have gone into a displace -- displaced person's camp, but I didn't need any other options, that was the one I really wanted.

Q: You chose independently, you didn't check to see --

A: Oh, many of my friends also chose the same thing, all the **Buchenwalder** picked the same thing.

Q: Picked the [indecipherable]

A: Yeah. So then, on the 23rd of June, we arrived from hell to paradise.

Q: By train?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was your first impression of **Switzerland**?

A: I couldn't believe it. Ever been to **Switzerland**? It's a paradise.

Q: What about the feeling of -- of not living in fear, frightened for your life?

A: Didn't take very long to get accustomed to it. Came very quickly.

Q: What did liberation mean to you at that time, if you can remember?

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A: I don't know if I can express the feeling of relief, it's probably the best expression I can find.

Q: And the acknowledgement that you had no family, and --

A: When I thi -- when I was liberated, no, I thought my father had survived. It was only later on that I found out that he hadn't. And then I remembered that I had an aunt in **Chile**, and subsequently I found, long afterwards, that I had another aunt in **Germany**, and I --

Q: How did you find out?

A: That's quite a story. You interested in hearing that story? I --

Q: **[indecipherable] Switzerland?**

A: Yeah, I -- in '49, I got married in **Geneva**.

Q: We're not up to '49, though.

A: No, but that's how I found out, in '49.

Q: Okay, we'll -- we'll come to that. We'll take a short break. Let's go back to the time that you arrived in **Switzerland** in June of '45.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: The way the wor -- one thing I haven't asked you, if you don't mind me going back --

A: Okay.

Q: -- **[indecipherable]** get here. I just want to ask you, when you were in the camps, the difference between the cold months and the warm months. How did that impact on you?

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A: The clothing that we got was identical for summer and winter, and we were very cold. People had frostbite.

Q: Right.

A: Some people after the war had to have toes amputated. Somehow I managed.

Q: The warm weather? Were you --

A: It was never that warm that it was uncomfortable, the cold was much more of a problem than the -- than the warm.

Q: Did you appreciate the warm weather when [indecipherable]

A: Sure, sure.

Q: It made a difference to your well being?

A: General well being. Also, the days were longer, and we preferred the summer to the winter.

Q: I understand your hunger, what about thirst?

A: Hunger was more of a problem than thirst.

Q: Alright, let's go back now to --

A: Yep.

Q: -- [indecipherable] 1945, June [indecipherable] that you arrived, you said it was like paradise.

A: Yep.

Q: And you felt free.

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A: We were sent to a place called **Rheinfelden** where we were medically examined from head to toe.

Q: What sort of place is this?

A: **Rheinfelden** was a Swiss army camp, I think, not far from **Bazen**, where -- that's where we arrived in **Switzerland**. We were medically examined by Swiss doctors and Swiss nurses. And we very -- we were assessed. Some people had to go to a sanatorium, some people got a clean bill of health, which included me. So then we were sent to a rehabilitation to recover, because we were all underweight, and we had ru -- all of us had one problem or another. And --

Q: Where was the sanatorium?

A: Well, I wasn't in the sanatorium, the sanatorium was in **Davos** mostly, and in **Montada**.

Q: I'm sorry, for rehabilitation. that you went to.

A: Yeah, I went to a place called **Zugerberg** near the city of **Zug**. I stayed there for awhile and then it became a question of what now? Do you want to emigrate, do you want to learn something? Can you -- have you got relatives for you -- outside **Switzerland**? They made it quite cl --

Q: And -- and who was coordinating this?

A: Oh, the Swiss Red Cross.

Q: What language did they speak?

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A: German, German.

Q: And how did they treat you?

A: Very well. Very well.

Q: So they were ordinary Swiss civilians, not --

A: Oh yes, civilians.

Q: Civilians working for the Red Cross?

A: Yeah.

Q: Any Jews that you encountered that were working for the Red Cross?

A: No, but we had plenty of contact with Jewish organizations. They came to visit us, they wanted to know if we needed anything, if we wanted extra clothing, extra food. They were extremely generous to --

Q: How did that feel for you?

A: Wonderful.

Q: Which organizations do you remember?

A: The Zionist organizations, the ultra-Orthodox organizations. Every spectrum of Judaism was represented.

Q: Did you use anything that they were offering you?

A: Clothing. Food we had plenty of, this was provided, there was plenty of food. They gave us shirts, jumpers, shoes, money, chocolate.

Q: Did you need money at this time?

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A: We -- we had nothing. I mean, when we arrived in **Switzerland** we didn't have one cent.

Q: So how much money did they give you?

A: I don't remember. Not -- not a lot, but enough to go into the cities and do some shopping.

Q: Yes.

A: And ice cream.

Q: Yes.

A: Piece of chocolate.

Q: So who are you living with here?

A: This was an or -- a home, run by the Red Cross in **Switzerland**, with a Jewish woman running it. And --

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: Yeah, Madame **Gratz, G-r-a -- G-r-a-t -- t-zet**. She was in charge of us. There was also i -- non-Jewish Swiss woman who headed the whole thing. **[indecipherable]**

Q: And how -- how did you respond to them, were they --

A: They were wonderful to us, and in all the five years that I've been in **Switzerland**, I did not encounter any unpleasantness of any kind.

Q: How old was the Jewish lady that was running the home?

A: Oh, she would have been in her 40's, I would imagine.

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Q: Mm-hm. With her family --

A: She was our house mother.

Q: With her family there too, or she had a separate place?

A: She had two chil -- she had two children --

Q: Living here?

A: -- with her, yeah.

Q: Did they become a big part of your life?

A: Yes, yes, and one of them I'm still in touch with. He's a professor at the Hebrew University of **Jerusalem**, teaching European history.

Q: What is his name?

A: **Micah Gratz**.

Q: And hi -- was he a son?

A: Yeah. He was a little boy then.

Q: He was the son of this lady. And what made you keep in touch with him?

A: I am involved in a number of Israeli activities here, and one day when I visited the Hebrew University, I had heard that he was there, and I met him there. His mother died **[indecipherable]** then, of course.

Q: Had he remembered the home?

A: He said he remembered me.

Q: And how did she come to run this home?

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A: I guess she was engage -- employed by the Red Cross.

Q: Do you know where she had been during the war?

A: In **Switzerland**.

Q: Protected?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm. So who else was in this house with you? How many of you were there, and -- and where were you all from?

A: Most of them were Polish Jews. I mean, the number of German Jews in the camp was very, very small compared to the number of Polish Jews.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I think in our whole group in **Switzerland**, there were probably only half a dozen German Jews. The rest were Polish and Hungarian.

Q: Were you able to communicate with them?

A: I learned Yiddish in the camp, I even learned a bit of Polish in the camp. Oh yeah, there was no problem.

Q: You're calling it a camp?

A: No, I had learned Polish in the ca --

Q: Oh, you had in camp.

A: -- in **Auschwitz**.

Q: Uh-huh.

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A: And well, there was no problem communicating. And I had learned Yiddish in the camp.

Q: Yes. So how many people were in this home in **Switzerland**?

A: Maybe a hundred, maybe 150, no more.

Q: In one home?

A: Yeah. In the -- in the villa, in a huge villa in **Switzerland**.

Q: And you ate meals in this --

A: Maybe there -- maybe there can't have been a hundred, there must have been fewer, maybe 50 - 60. Some boys who live in **Melbourne** were there. I mean, a fellow who works here for you, **Jake Cheskue**, he was there with me. Maybe his memory is better than mine.

Q: And what was your reason for being here? You wanted to stay in **Switzerland**?

A: Yes, I never wanted to leave **Switzerland** ever. [indecipherable] be there.

Q: What were you doing at this time?

A: Well then we were -- we got career counseling.

Q: By who?

A: By somebody appointed by the Red Cross, or the [indecipherable] and we were examined for **IQ**, and for what we knew and so on. And I think I did reasonably well. I was told that if I had private tuition for two years, I would be able to enter university at age 18. And when that fact became known, the Swiss said, there's no way. You can't stay

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here for two years to -- to learn and then another six years for university. This is a transit situation for you. We give you two alternatives.

Q: Who -- who gave this to you, this information?

A: The Red Cross.

Q: The Swiss government wouldn't allow you to stay?

A: No, I think [**indecipherable**] it was the Red Cross. So you have two alternatives.

Either you can learn to become a carpenter, or you can learn to become a dental technician, or you leave. So I chose to become a dental technician. And so for two years I had an apprenticeship as a dental technician, and as soon as that was over -- they asked, what are you go -- what are you doing about leaving?

Q: Who's they?

A: The Swiss foreign police.

Q: How did you have contact with them?

A: Oh, in **Switzerland** if you change residence and all that -- I brought some documents along with me. Every time you changed address you had to have police -- we did, not the Swiss, but we had to have police permission, and we had to register.

Q: So for two years you were learning an apprenticeship?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where?

A: In **Geneva**.

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Q: Living where?

A: My address in **Geneva**?

Q: What -- what -- what were the conditions?

A: In a private residence.

Q: You rented a room?

A: I rented a room, furnished room.

Q: Part of a family home?

A: Yeah.

Q: [**indecipherable**] family?

A: Part of a family a part --

Q: A Jewish family?

A: -- a Swiss non -- no, a Swiss non-Jewish family.

Q: What was their attitude towards you?

A: They were very nice.

Q: Did they know your background?

A: Yes, of course. That -- the Swiss Jewish community provided us with money, on -- with a monthly allowance, so we could buy clothing.

Q: Did you have a social life with other Jewish people in **Switzerland**?

A: Oh yes, oh yes. With non-Jewish --

Q: With other -- with other Jewish people in **Switzerland**?

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A: Oh yes, a lot.

Q: Where -- where was that centered? Where did you --

A: In **Geneva**, there was a Jewish center there that one time or other, I was president of the Jewish youth movement in **Geneva**.

Q: What was the idea of the Jewish youth movement?

A: Just for each other to -- to talk, to discuss the future, to meet other -- to meet girls. Don't forget we were teenagers, and we were interested in girls in those days. Basically that.

Q: Mm-hm. And so how -- can you just give a description of what y-your state of mind was at this time?

A: Well, I was apprehensive after I finished my apprenticeship that I would be asked to leave. And then, by co --

Q: But you were happy in **Switzerland**?

A: Oh, very, very. As I said, I never wanted to leave. I was quite happy to spend the rest of my life there.

Q: And did you choose to mix mainly non-Jewish -- with Jewish people there?

A: Yes, yes. Yeah.

Q: How did you relate to non-Jews?

A: I had no problem with them.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: No -- no problem whatsoever.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah.

Q: What about efforts to contact family members from **Switzerland**?

A: Well then I made contact with my aunt in **Chile**.

Q: How did you make that contact?

A: I happened to know -- remember her address that I wrote to her.

Q: You remembered it from when she left, from when you were a little boy?

A: Right from when I -- from when I lived as a child in **Berlin**, I remembered her address and I wrote to her.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she was very kind to me. She sent me money and clothing, all sorts of things.

And I wanted to emigrate to **Chile** if I ever had to leave **Switzerland**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I started to learn Spanish in preparation for --

Q: In **Switzerland**?

A: Yeah, for emigrating to **Chile**, but in the -- I couldn't get a visa from **Chile**, permanent residence, so that was out.

Q: How did you deal with that, was that disappointing?

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A: It was disappointing mixed with a sense of relief, at least I don't have to leave **Switzerland** for **Chile**. So then alternate choices became available, **Israel, Australia**. And hopefully I could pur -- persuade whoever had to be persuaded to let me stay there. But I was unsuccessful. Today I am grateful for it.

Q: Mm. Are you aware of anybody that managed to stay in **Switzerland**?

A: Yes. I am still in touch with some of them.

Q: And how -- how were they able to stay?

A: I don't know. Some of them had better connections than I did.

Q: Like what sort of connection?

A: I don't know, I think it then was a question of having the right connections, and having perhaps more perseverance than I did. Trying harder than I did. But, I mean not many, maybe half a dozen at the most. One of the boys with whom I was in the camp went to **Israel**, became very successful in **Israel**, and then acquired skills that several years later were in short supply, and **Switzerland** -- was able to get back to **Switzerland** to get a working permit, and today is a Swiss citizen of immense wealth.

Q: What was his line?

A: He originate -- he trained in **Switzerland** as watchmaker. When I trained as a dental technician, he trained as a watchmaker, and as watches became electronic, there was no future really for watchmakers, because all you had to do is change a battery. So he went to **Israel** and started a watchmaker's school for **ORT**. And as there were fewer and fewer

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enrollments, for the same reason, that watches became electronic, he learned something else, I think either to repair typewriters or to repair something, I'm not quite sure. O- Optical instruments. He's a very clever boy. Boy, he's my age. And that skill was in short supply in **Switzerland**, that's why he applied to the Swiss government for permission to go back to **Switzerland**. And he got a job in **Switzerland**, then established his own manufacturing industry there. I saw him just three months ago in **Switzerland**.

Q: For the purpose of the interview, can you explain what **ORT** is. You said he set up a school.

A: He set up a school for watchmakers.

Q: Yeah.

A: Don't you know who **ORT** is? **ORT** is a Jewish organization to train tradesmen.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: And they wanted to establish a school for watchmakers in **Jerusalem**. And he was a Swiss watchmaker, Swiss watchmaker Jewish, so he started it.

Q: Mm-hm. So **ORT** was established after the war?

A: No, no, no, **ORT** goes back long before the war.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It started in **Russia**, I think. It's a huge Jewish organization. Even today it's big. It stands for, I think, **organisation pour la reconstruction de travail**. That's what the

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initials **ORT** stand for. I subsequently worked for **ORT** in **Geneva** but we'll do that on Thursday.

Q: Okay. [**indecipherable**] take a break.

A: Enough for today?

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of **Gert Silver's** oral testimony at the **Melbourne** Holocaust Museum. Could you continue by telling us about your working life as a dental technician?

A: Well, I actually only worked as a dental technician for a period of three months. It so happened that when the night course was completed, the person, a Mr. **Schubert** who ran the course, left **Geneva** to return to **France**. And as they didn't have an immediate replacement for him, they appointed me to run the course for the next generation of intakes, on a temporary basis. So I worked there for three months, and then a replacement was found. After that, by sheer coincidence, I found a position in a Swiss export/import firm, owned by a **Geneva** -- a Jewish man called **Michael Smeedof**, and he wanted me because I spoke Spanish. The reason why I spoke Spanish, I had to learn Spanish in **Switzerland** because I had originally intended to emigrate to **Chile**. And he needed somebody who could speak Spanish, and because he couldn't find anybody else, he got a working permit for me, which wasn't easy. And I enjoyed that position thoroughly. It really opened my eyes, and I saw there was more to life than fixing people's false teeth.

Q: What sort of business was it, what was the --

A: It was an export/import business, I --

Q: What was their product?

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A: -- in textiles mainly. They exported raw cotton to **Spain**, had it printed in **Spain** and then sent it to -- sold it to clothing manufacturers all over the world. And I worked there for a number of months until they found a replacement for me, and then my working permit expired, and the Swiss police were again pressurizing me to leave **Switzerland**.

Then --

Q: In what form were they pressurizing you?

A: Oh, I just got telephone calls and letters, what -- how are my preparations going to leave **Switzerland**? It was a soft pressure. And then I found a job at the Israeli consulate in **Geneva**. And at the consulate they were able to get a working perm -- a temporary working permit for me. And I worked there, I think probably for six or eight months. Then my working permit expired, and they found a Swiss replacement for me. That Swiss replacement was a young woman from **Bern [indecipherable]**, and I had to train her before I left the position. We got on so much -- so well with each other, that we ended up getting married in October '49, and she's still my wife today after 56 years. I then left **Geneva** --

Q: You married in **Switzerland**?

A: Ye-Yeah, not -- not straight away. I then left **Switzerland** for **Marseilles**, because the consulate found me a position at the -- at the consulate in **Marseilles** from where many of the emigrants embarked for **Israel**. I worked there maybe six, maybe nine months, I don't remember exactly. Then I returned to **Geneva**, and in '49 we got married in **Geneva**.

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Q: Can you give us some details about your wedding ceremony and celebration?

A: It was a -- it was a ceremony held in the **Grande Synagogue de Geneva**, a big synagogue in **Geneva**. It was very emotional. Many of my friends were there. I had no family, but very many family members of my wife, who had come from **Bern**. And --

Q: Where was your wife during the war?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: Where was your wife during the war?

A: Oh, she is Swiss, she was born in **Switzerland**, and she -- she stayed in **Switzerland** all her life.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And she's a Swiss citizen. And then --

Q: Can you explain what you meant by it was very emotional?

A: Oh, I can't tell you. I think [**indecipherable**] and it was probably just a -- a normal, pleasant ceremony by the [**indecipherable**] **de Geneva**, a man named **Saffron**, who passed away only a few years ago. And after that, something eventful happened. The brother of an uncle of mine had survived as a Jew in **Berlin**, and he invited my wife and me to spend our honeymoon in **Berlin**. So we traveled t-to **Berlin** --

Q: When did you make contact with the man?

A: Long before '49, I found him.

Q: How did you find him?

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A: How did I find him, well I had found my aunt in **Chile**, and her first husband had survived the war in **Shanghai**, and returned to **Berlin** after the end of the war. And my aunt told my uncle in **Berlin** who I was and where I was. So we made contact with each other.

Q: He -- who contacted who?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I don't remember. So anyway, we spent our honeymoon in **Berlin**, and I walked around with my wife for hours, showing her where I was born, where I went to school, where the synagogue was where I sang as a -- and also one day we went for a walk and I showed her where an aunt of mine had her hairdressing salon before the war. And as we stood there, two German women came and asked us is there anything we're looking for. So I told her, yes, before the war, my aunt had a hairdressing salon here. And they said, she's living on the second floor. That was unbelievable. So we walked up.

Q: What -- what -- what was her name?

A: **Paula Hakker.**

Q: And how was she your aunt?

A: She was married to my mother's brother.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you have much to do with her before the war?

A: Yes, yes, very much.

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Q: You had memories of her?

A: Yes.

Q: What sort of memories?

A: Oh, I -- I don't know, just re -- just as children. We play -- we played with -- I played with her two daughters, my cousins. And --

Q: I-I'd like it if you could just relate as much detail about that meeting with these two German women outside the hairdresser.

A: Well, they basically -- as I've told you, they asked me whether I was looking for anything, and I told her.

Q: Were they --

A: They were bystanders.

Q: They were bystanders.

A: They were bystanders. So I went up there, and there, lo and behold, was my aunt with one of my cousins.

Q: One of her children?

A: Yes. She had two daughters, two -- and they were -- both daughters were my first cousins. One daughter was there with my aunt, the other dau --

Q: What -- what -- and her name?

A: The name of my cousin? **Vera. Vera Hakker.** And the other, her sister, **Vera's** sister **Edna** was at that time in **Sweden.** The reason why they, my aunt and my cousins had

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survived was because my aunt wasn't Jewish. Her husband, my mother's brother was Jewish, and he had perished during the war, but she had survived, and so did her two daughters.

Q: She stayed there the whole --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- during the war?

A: So suddenly I had two first cousins. **Vera** has passed away in the meantime. **Edna** lives in **San Diego** in **California**. She's a year older than I. So suddenly I had left --

Q: What -- what was the reunion like?

A: Oh, we cried. And **Vera** had a son, so I suddenly had a second cousin as well. And after awhile we went back, the honeymoon was over for --

Q: How long did you spend then, in **Germany**?

A: A week, I think. Then I went back to **Geneva**, and I brought my cousin **Vera** to **Switzerland**. She then got married in **Switzerland**, to a man called [**indecipherable**] **Templehoff**, and came to live in **Switzerland** with her young son. And that son, my second cousin became Swiss, did all the schooling in **Switzerland**, became a very high ranking officer in the Swiss army, and lives there, has two children, who are my third cousins. And between his two children, I think they have five children, so I have fir -- second, third and fourth cousins in **Switzerland** today, from nothing.

Q: You're in contact with them?

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A: All the time. I visit them regularly, we are in contact by email, by telephone.

Q: Mm. What sort of contact did you maintain with your aunt who stayed in **Germany** after you left?

A: My aunt didn't stay in **Germany** all that much longer. Her daughter **Edna** in **Sweden**, emigrated with her husband to the **United States**, and my aunt followed her shortly after. She's passed away a long time ago.

Q: Mm-hm. Over the years did you go and see them, or did they come to see you?

A: Nobody came t -- oh, my cousin came to see me here in **Australia** on a number of occasions, but I have been to **Switzerland** numerous times, and I always visit them.

Q: At that time in **Germany**, with this stroke of good luck, did it encourage you to make out -- any other attempts at finding other relatives?

A: Well, I did, but I -- I found out very quickly from the Jewish community there that they'd all perished.

Q: Mm-hm. What had your aunt told you, if anything, about her perspective of the war years in **Germany**?

A: I'm not sure that we talked much about it.

Q: Mm-hm. Was it uncomfortable --

A: No, I-I don't know --

Q: -- because she wasn't Jewish?

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A: -- we just talked -- no, no, no, no, not at all. I don't know, we may -- if we did I don't remember. I mean, don't forget, this happened in '49.

Q: What had happened to her husband?

A: He was deported. He was deported, but the uncle of the brother of the uncle where -- who invited us to have our honeymoon in **Berlin**, he was married also to a non-Jewish German woman, and he survived. And I don't know whether the name **Rosenstrasse** means anything to you. The last Jews to be deported from **Berlin** were those married to non-Jewish women. And they were all one day rounded up and put into a building that was located in the **Rosenstrasse**, and the -- their German wives arri -- assembled in front of the headquarters of that establishment and protested day and night, day and night, to release their husband. And in the event -- in the end, the Gestapo gave -- g-gave in and released them all. And a film has been made of that, I don't know if you've seen the film. And my aunt was one of those women in the **Rosenstrasse**.

Q: Have you discussed that with her?

A: N-No, no, no. No. She just told me about it, maybe I did discuss it with her.

Q: At that time, when you were in **Germany** she told you about it, when you --

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: My uncle told me, and she did. But it was only in recent years, maybe two or three years, that a German film producer produced a -- it wasn't a documentary, it was a film.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: About what the non-Jewish wives did to get their husband released.

Q: What sort of numbers were involved?

A: I think several hundred.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: If you like I'll lend you the movie, I -- it was also shown in **[indecipherable]**

Q: I have seen it. But for the purpose of this interview, is there anything else that -- significant that you remember your aunt telling you about her efforts --

A: No, not really.

Q: -- at that time?

A: Not -- not that I remember.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Then we went back to **Geneva** after the honeymoon and we found a position in the **ORT** Institute.

Q: Just one more question about **Germany**.

A: Yeah?

Q: What was it like for you revisiting **Germany**, your childhood?

A: I -- I -- I -- to tell you the truth, I don't remember what it was like. It was certainly not a pleasant experience. I've been back to **Germany** many, many times after the war,

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mostly on business, and partly to visit my uncle until he passed away. I don't -- I feel terribly uncomfortable in **Germany** to this day.

Q: Why?

A: Because of what happened to my family and to me. I mean, I get a pension from the German government, and every year I have to go to the German consulate here to make sure -- because I'm under certificate of life, that I'm still alive, and I dread that experience. I get it over with as fast as I can.

Q: When you say you're not comfortable there, is it the local population that makes you uncomfortable, or the memories?

A: Already when I see the soldiers at immigration.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I can't get out of **Germany** fast enough.

Q: What was it like seeing your home?

A: That was -- didn't exist any more when I got there, it was bombed. So you could argue that if **Hitler** hadn't sent me to a concentration camp, I would probably have been -- I would probably have died during the allied air raid bombardment.

Q: Mm-hm. And your aunt's hairdresser looked the same?

A: We didn't go in it, she didn't own it any more at that time, it was somebody else. But that building survived the war intact, and it looked as a va -- as I remembered it.

Q: Any other significant landmarks that you remember that survived?

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A: No.

Q: That were intact?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: Okay, so after a week you went back.

A: We went back to **Geneva**, we found a position at the **ORT** Institute in a place called **Arni** near **Geneva**. They needed a married couple, one of whom was to re -- run the administration, which I did.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And one to look after the well-being of the students and other tasks, which my wife did. And we worked there for about a year.

Q: Had your wife received an education?

A: Oh yes, my wife had a normal education --

Q: Normal.

A: -- in **Switzerland**.

Q: Yeah.

A: She was a law clerk.

Q: Mm-hm. So where were you living in **Geneva**?

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A: At the institute in a place called **Arni**. It was an institute by **ORT** to train teachers, not to train students, but to tra -- to train teachers.

Q: So there was accommodation for the employees?

A: Accommodation in the institute.

Q: As well as for the student?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And then one day --

Q: And anything significant that you can tell us about the work that you were doing?

A: No, not really, not really. It was uneventful, except for one event which eventually led us to come to **Australia**.

Q: Just before we get there, sorry, where were the students from?

A: From all over, from **France**, from **Belgium**, from **Bulgaria**, from **Holland**. From many, many European nations.

Q: People that had survived?

A: Yeah, young tradesmen who learned to be teachers to take up positions in various **ORT** schools throughout the world.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They didn't teach tradesmen [**indecipherable**] the people who got there were already tradesmen, to a very large extent.

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Q: So what age were they?

A: 18 - 20 - 22. Se -- many of them were older than my wife and me.

Q: Mm-hm. Had you discussed any of their experiences?

A: I'm sure we did, but I don't remember.

Q: Okay, so you were starting to tell me about some --

A: Then one day we were told that some prominent visitors from **Australia** would arrive to have a look at the institute. It happened to be **Leo Fink, Mina Fink**, and their daughter **Yvonne**, who was a young girl then. And we got on very well with each other, and they suggested, why don't you come to **Australia**, seeing that you can't stay in **Switzerland** forever? And the idea appealed to us, and we decided there and then to apply for a landing permit to emigrate to **Australia**. We got it finally, and --

Q: After how long?

A: A matter of months. We had to go through health checks and all sorts of things. And we left **Europe** from **Italy** in October '49, and arrived in **Melbourne** on Cup day.

[indecipherable] 1950 -- in October 1950 we left, and we arrived in **Melbourne** on the first Tuesday in November, on **Melbourne** Cup day.

Q: The other people on the boat with you -- it was an Italian ship?

A: It was a -- it was a Greek ship, which left from **Genoa**, the **Sirenia**, and it was full of refugees.

Q: Did you make friends on the boat?

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A: Some friends of ours from **Switzerland** were on the same boat, mainly because we were -- spent time with each other, we didn't make many friends. Acquaintances perhaps, not friends.

Q: All refugees --

A: Yes.

Q: -- emigrating to **Australia**?

A: Mm. Before I left, I visited a man named **Jack Salmonovitz** in **Geneva**, whom I had met during my stay there. He was probably at that time the wealthiest Jew in the whole of **Switzerland**, and the owner of a very large multi-national firm, with offices among -- in just about every port in the world including **Melbourne**. I visited him and told him that I was going to **Australia**, to **Melbourne**, and if he had a position there for me, I'd be very interested perhaps to join his firm. So he gave me a letter of introduction to the **Melbourne** office, and I was engaged on the spot there and then. So I had a job within days of arriving here. And I worked there from 1950 to 1958.

Q: What was the name of the company?

A: The -- the English name was called General Superintendents Company. The French name -- and it was a firm from **Geneva**, was called, **Societe Generale de [indecipherable]**. It's a huge firm, nobody knows about it. I'm sure you haven't heard about it, or you. It has a monopoly probably bigger than **Bill Gates** with **Microsoft** today.

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There are very, very few competitors in the field in which they operate. And it was a fascinating eight years that I spent there.

Q: Wha -- what exactly is their field?

A: That takes some time to explain. When overseas buyers, for instance, buy a cargo of wheat, or a cargo of iron ore, or a cargo of **[indecipherable]** from **Australia**, they pay for it the minute the ship leaves the Australian port, without knowing really, whether the iron ore or the coal or the wheat correspond exactly to the specifications that they had contracted to buy. They needed somebody on the spot -- the buyer needed somebody on the spot here in **Melbourne** to confirm that. To sample the cargo, analyze it and advise the buyer, in those days telegraphically, what the business with **[indecipherable]** whether the cargo complied with the specifications. And only then did the overseas buyer pay by telegraphic transfer. And that firm did that for -- throughout the world, and is today still one of the largest firms in **Switzerland**. Their shares are probably 10 times as much as the biggest banks in **Switzerland**. The firm is now quoted on the stock exchange, and then the **Salmonovitz** family probably have only a small stake in it. But it grew into a huge firm.

Q: Mm. Who had started that business?

A: Mr. **Jack Salmonovitz** as a young man when he worked at the port of **Antwerp**.

Q: In what year?

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A: I don't know. That was -- it's a legend, I don't -- I'm not even sure if it's true, there's so many anecdotes going around about that man. But the anecdote that I heard was that he was working as a port laborer in **Antwerp**, and he saw flour being loaded at one end of the ship, and being unloaded half an hour later at the other. So he got to the shipper of the flour and says, are you happy with what's happening? He says -- the fellow apparently told him, I don't know what's happening, but I lose half my cargo every time. That gave him the idea of starting an inspection company. Now, that's a legend, I don't know if it's true. There are many anecdotes about him.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But he was a wonderful man, died in his 80's, and a wonderful family.

Q: So he wrote a letter for you?

A: He ge -- sent a letter of introduction to me, to the **Melbourne** office.

Q: And who did you see in the **Melbourne** office?

A: The s -- the boss. Fellow by the name of **Falby, F-a-l-b-y**.

Q: An Australian man?

A: An Englishman, actually.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And he engaged me, because a lot of the international correspondence was conducted in German, and in French, and th -- they only had Australian employees, none of whom spoke a foreign language.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: So they needed me. And I worked there for eight years, and rose to the position of manager, in the end.

Q: In the same company?

A: In the same company [**indecipherable**]. I was really very happy there.

Q: Where were you living when you first arrived?

A: In a rented room in **Oakley**.

Q: A room?

A: Yeah.

Q: In somebody's house?

A: Yeah.

Q: Somebody Jewish?

A: No. A friend of mine who arrived here in **Australia** before me from **Geneva**, had rented that room for me. But we didn't stay there very long, only a matter of weeks.

Q: Who greeted you at the port when you arrived?

A: A number of officers from the Jewish welfare society and a couple of friends from **Geneva** who had arrived here before.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they took me to the place in **Oakley**. So after eight years at that firm --

Q: Did you own a car?

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A: I -- I didn't own a car when I arrived, but I was given a company car in 1956.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: And in '58, I was headhunted by one of the clients of that firm, a Jewish export/import firm by the name of **Heine** Brothers. It was owned by a man called **Walter Heine** who hailed from **Leipzig**, who came to **Australia** on the **Donera**, and he start -- as soon as possible after the war, he started that export/import firm. We had long before become close friends, and I was in -- initially very reluctant to join him because I enjoyed the position I had with General Superintendents, but in the end I succumbed, he was a very persuasive man. I earned a lot more there than I earned for the Swiss firm. And I joined him, and I've been there ever since.

Q: Still there?

A: I still have a peripheral involvement with the firm, although not on a day to day basis. He passed away in 1978 at -- and his widow and his two sons recommended that I become the chief executive officer until his two sons, who were teenagers at that time, or very young, were old enough to run the firm. And so I became chief executive, chairman and chief executive in 1978, and I progressively retired from the mid-80's, first of all relinquishing the position of chief executive [indecipherable] executive chairman and I gradually retired from there. I still have an association with them, but only marginal.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: But the two men who know [indecipherable] -- well, the firm in its original state doesn't exist any more, it became a Merchant Bank, which it was eventually taken over by a Dutch bank that operates in **Australia, ING, [indecipherable]** the world's eighth largest bank, I think. We were listed on the stock exchange in the end, and we were taken over. That was it. So the two **Heine** brothers, the two young men -- well, they're not young any more, one of them is already a grandfather, they pursue their own interests now.

Q: What can you say about the local Australian population, in the years [indecipherable]

A: I must say I feel extremely comfortable here. I have, in the course of my career at **Heine** Brothers met people in the highest places, from the governor general and prime minister, down, and met Australians at all levels throughout my business, and I do not think I've had one unpleasant experience in all those years. So I'm very grateful that the Swiss insisted that I leave.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: In retrospect. Now, I'm a Swiss citizen. I could, if I wanted to, go back and live there, but I wouldn't dream of it.

Q: Mm-hm. So looking back you have no regrets coming to **Australia**.

A: None whatsoever. And nor has my wife, who is a native of **Switzerland**. We're both very happy here, and we're happy with the choice we made.

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Q: Do you think that your effects, the effects of the war, the experiences that you endured, do you think that that has had an effect on you as a parent bringing up children in **Australia**?

A: I'm not sure that I can answer that question. I belong to that category of Holocaust survivors who do not talk to their children about it, for a number of reasons, first of all, I think this was my way of coping with it, not talking about it. And secondly, it's really, I think impossible for anybody to fully comprehend what happened there, and I didn't want to burden them with the trauma, I wanted them to have as normal an upbringing a-as possible, without being neurotic about what happened in the past. Perhaps I've done the right thing, perhaps I've done the wrong thing, I don't know. I mean, my children know all about it, they've seen the sp -- the tape that I -- came from the **Spielberg** interview, so it's not that they don't know about it, but we don't talk about it.

Q: How do you think the events shaped you as a person?

A: I've heard that question [**indecipherable**] very difficult to answer I don't know what - what sort of a person I would have been, had I had a normal upbringing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I really don't know how to answer that.

Q: Mm-hm. Is there a message that you would like to leave to your children and to future generations?

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A: Be alert. I think anti-Semitism is rising throughout the world. We are probably today no longer target number one, Muslims have taken over that spot. But you never know what's around the corner. I'm a great supporter -- perhaps a one -- the one thing that shaped my attitude is that I am a great supporter of **Israel**. I -- not only have I done business with **Israel**, but I've also been chairman and treasurer of the **Australia Israel** Chamber of Commerce. And I still -- and I was a board member for many years -- and I still visit them at least once a week, and I have a very intense involvement with their activities.

Q: Do you visit **Israel**?

A: Many times. I was there just three or four months ago.

Q: Mm-hm. For business or for pleasure?

A: For -- for pleasure, but wasn't actually pleasure. My wife's brother lived in **Israel** since 1948 and he became very ill, so we went to visit him, before -- before it was too late for him, or for that matter for us.

Q: Did you take your children to **Israel** when they were growing up?

A: Yes, my children, I've taken my children to **Israel**, and I think they enjoyed their visits very much, and I think they were very profoundly impressed.

Q: Mm-hm. Have your children been to **Germany**?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: With you?

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A: No, no, on their own.

Q: Do you know what their impressions were?

A: I think [**indecipherable**] looked at **Germany** as a non-Jewish Australian would, without being burdened by what happened to their father. I think, but I don't know. I didn't ask them, they didn't tell me.

Q: Did you give your children a Jewish education?

A: Only to the extent that they went to non-Jewish schools, but I took them every Sunday morning to Sunday school at the temple in **Abber** Road.

Q: Mm-hm. Can we just take a short break? Can you tell us about your Jewish identity in **Australia**?

A: Well, I've always been involved in Jewish organizations ever since I arrived in **Australia**, and I have only had two positions in **Australia**, and both were for Jewish firms. The **Geneva** firm was Jewish owned, and **Heine** Brothers was Jewish owned. I've never in my whole life worked for a non-Jewish firm, although the clients of the firm were overwhelmingly non-Jewish, and I got on extremely well with every one of them. So I feel consciously very, very Jewish, but I have no problem in dealing with non-Jews.

Q: Did you mix socially with both?

A: Most of our social contacts of most of our friends today are Jewish, but we have a small number of non-Jewish friends with whom we are very, very close.

Q: Mm-hm. What about your children?

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A: My children -- my son is a doctor, and he lives in **Castlemaine**, about 150 kilometers north of **Melbourne**, he has a clinic there that employs six doctors and he is very, very happy to live in a small place of 8000 inhabitants with one traffic light. He wouldn't want to live in **Melbourne** any more. My daughter is a nurse. She has four children. She also loves living in small places. She lives in **Victor Harbor** in south **Australia**. Again as a -- a place with a population of 8000 people. She has four children, one of whom is 26, she works as a food technologist at **Nestlé**. Number two is a paramedic in **Adelaide**. Number three is in his final year of studies of agriculture at **Adelaide** University. The youngest, a girl, **Emily** is in her final year at school. My son has three children, and they're all at universities in **Melbourne**. Two at **Melbourne** University, and one at **Monash** University.

Q: Do you have a lot of contact with them?

A: Well, with the **[indecipherable]** their own lives, but we see them regularly.

Q: What about the i -- the Jewish identity of your children?

A: My children know that they are Jewish, they know all about Jewish customs, they've been involved in Jewish organizations. My son in **[indecipherable]**. My daughter was very involved, my son was **Bar Mitzvah**, my daughter was **Bat Mitzvah**. But they have both married out. I think their children know relatively little about Judaism. That's something I'm not particularly proud of, but I've learned to live with it.

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Q: Did they have **Bar Mitzvahs**, the boys? Your grandsons?

A: No, none of them, no.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So you say you're not -- you're not proud of it, it's -- you've learned to live with it.

A: Yes

Q: Is it something that was --

A: Th-There was nothing else I could do about it.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Did they grow up mixing with Jewish chil -- socializing with Jewish children?

A: No, they -- they went to a -- non-Jewish schools. My son went to **Trinity College** in his final years, and my daughter went to **[indecipherable]** secondary school. And whilst many of their friends were Jewish, they also had many non-Jewish friends.

[indecipherable] since they were at university, somehow, I don't know, Judaism drifted.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: They found non-Jewish partners, and that was it.

Q: Mm-hm. And is your wife of the same opinion as you?

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: So at this stage in your life, do you still participate in the celebration of festivals, Jewish festivals?

A: Sure.

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Q: Synagogue?

A: Yeah, yeah. We had a **Seder**, celebrate Hanukah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We go, not every year, to the synagogue. We're still members of the synagogue. We don't go very often, but o-on occasions.

Q: And your children and grandchildren participate in the Passover **Seder**?

A: When they are in **Melbourne**, yes, yeah.

Q: Otherwise, who do you spend it with?

A: With friends.

Q: With friends?

A: Mm.

Q: Mm-hm. I'd like to ask you, is there -- is there a message that you would like to leave? I asked you before, but is there anything that -- that you've thought of subsequently, to your grandchildren and to future generations, based on your experiences?

A: Well, I don't talk to them about my experiences. I tell them very often something that my father hammered into me when I was a young child. He said never mind the 10 commandments, just live after the 11th commandment. I asked him what the 11th commandment, never do unto others what you don't want others to do unto you. If you follow that, all the other 10 commandments are included in that. That I've been telling them ad nauseum since they were very little. And I think they live by that.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I think it's very important to me.

Q: You've commented several times about the loss of family, and your desire to continue and to have your own family. Are there any particular messages you would like to give them about family values?

A: Not really, I mean I got married at 21 and many people today ask me how come you got married at -- at that young age. And remember, I had nobody at that time. My father, my mother, my brother, my sister, they're all dead, and I was intent on starting a new generation, a new family. And I'm very glad I married when I was 21. I'm very glad we had our children when we were very young, so that we have now lived to see our children in -- into middle age.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you do anything to commemorate lost family members?

A: We put the outside candles, and that's all.

Q: For your parents --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and siblings?

A: Yeah, well, not for -- not for -- and actually not for my parents, for my wife's parents because their date of death was known, they died in **Switzerland**. But I don't know when -- when my parents died, and there's no cemetery for them.

Q: Mm-hm. So there's no time during the year when you would light a candle for them?

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A: No, but I think of them all the time.

Q: Mm-hm. What are the messages that you remember from your parents?

A: I think my parents gave me a very good, Jewish education. I think they instilled values in me that I try and installed in my own children, and I have nothing but fond memories of my parents.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Thank you. Can you tell us about this photo?

A: That photo was sent to me by my aunt, who had survived the war in **Chile**, and she told me that's my father and me, when I was very, very young.

Q: Could you have a guess at how old you might have been?

A: Maybe two years, three maybe. No more than that. That is a picture of my mother and my sister. So that would have been taken, assuming that my sister there was one year old, she was born in '35, so that photo would have been taken in 1936, 70 years ago. Amazing that it survived. We are worried about the longevity of tapes. That is an article that appeared in a Swiss newspaper, on the day, or after the day of our arrival in **Switzerland** on the 23rd of June, 1945. We arrived from **Buchenwald** and the article, in the German language, describes basically how we came there, why we came there, and basically a little bit of background that we had all spent time in a concentration camp, and that we came to **Switzerland** for recuperation. This is a photo taken by a press photographer in **Switzerland** on our arrival before we disembarked from the train, also on the 23rd of June, 1945. And this is wa -- this was also taken on our arrival in **Switzerland**, and I am

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almost certain that I am the person who has his hat out of the window on that photo. Another photo taken on the 23rd of June, 1945, this is probably, at least as far as I'm concerned the most precious one, because three of the boys who are on that photo, except the one on the extreme left, came to **Melbourne**. The two on the right, **Jack [indecipherable]** and **Montek Akerfelt** have regrettably passed away in recent times, and **Joe Baker** is still very much alive, and a very prosperous businessman in **Melbourne**. Another photo taken on the same -- on the occasion of our arrival. The only person I recognize on that photo is **Moneek Freidman** who is the boy on the extreme left.

Q: Okay. One here, one here.

A: Ah, here.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Again a photo taken by the press photographer. Regrettably, neither I nor any of the persons whom I have consulted, know the name of that person. That's my wife, **Rifka**, and we've been married now for 57 years, and hopefully it'll last. This is my daughter **Ruth**, her son **Anthony**, her daughter **Emily**, her son **Adam**, and her son **Daniel**. These are the three children of my son. This is **Elizabeth**, this is **Jeremy**, this is **Rachel**. All of them students at **Melbourne** University at the moment. This is a document confirming my status as a refugee. This is a diploma confirming that I have successfully completed my apprenticeship as a dental technician in **Geneva**. This is a do -- my -- the first

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document issued to me after the war in 1946. This was issued by the Swiss government. Until then, I had no documentation whatsoever that I existed, or who I was. This is a passport photo of me, taken in 1946, 60 years ago. You can tell the difference. This is a travel document, issued to me by the Swiss government in 1947. I needed it because it was the first time I left **Switzerland** for **Berlin** to visit my uncle. This photo is of my son **Denny**. He lives in **Castlemaine**, about 150 kilometers north of **Melbourne**. He's a medical practitioner by profession, but a very dedicated and enthusiastic musician, and at the moment he is the director of the **Melbourne** Mandolin orchestra. You asked me earlier whether I recollect the interview by Professor **Boder**. That interview took place, I believe in August 1946, approximately 14 months after my arrival in **Switzerland** from **Buchenwald**. During that period, and in the month after that, we were interviewed almost on a weekly basis, by the Swiss government, the Swiss Red Cross, Swiss newspapers, Swiss radio stations, Jewish organizations in **Switzerland, America, Canada, Australia** and **South America**. We averaged, as I said, about one interview a week and I really do not recollect that particular interview.

Q: Thanks very much.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview