

interview with BENNO FISCHER August 23, 1983

The general mentality. Why, because Hitler brought us to this state of dehumanization. People didn't react like normal people. When you walked across the street and you'd bump someone and say I'm sorry, right? There the goal was basically survival. And that's why people, friends, people who knew each other from the same cities. Somebody he knows dies he cries because he knows, tomorrow I will die.

In the camp did you know every day whether you would live or die, or did you come to know the politics of the camp so you knew how to escape death?) You see right here in the description of the walks, we left here 2500 from the camp, and from this 2500, 4 or 500 survived. Why?

Because A. many died from the march because it was such big and strenuous effort; many were shot, and theoretically, I see that the Germans wanted to get rid of us. Because the American front, the Russian front was coming closer..they didn't know what the hell shall they do with us....You see there is one other thing, I didn't know if I mentioned it here. The first group which left were the Jews. This camp where I was, in the camp perse we were not segregated. We were with French people, Yugoslavs, Russians, Poles God knows who, from all over Europe. But when they took us out, they took out the Jews first. And then I found out after we had left, they took the others out on a March too, toward Germany, deeper into GERMANY. They didn't want that the Allies should see the conditions in which we lived. (They didn't know where they were going..) No. This is why when we went to the last stage of this march, they (the Germans) ran away. You remember...They left us in the forrest and they ran away. Because they themselves were afraid if they should get caught.

(I wonder why the Germans even endured the Marches themselves, why did they do that?) First of all they were the SS men. They had from an order from the higher up, take them out. Who the hell knows who's above them, some other guy, and above him some other guy, you know. They were told to eliminate the Jews from this camp, and take them and March them, they told them were to go. They were like soldiers and they did it.

(In the camp itself, they didn't distinguish the Jews from the others? I know you lived with everybody else but before the March during the 2 1/2 years or however long you were there, did they give you extra hard labor or do anything in particular to distinguish you as Jews?)

No, in this particular camp I worked in a plane factory we were building the planes. And the Jews had little signs, it would say Jew here with the number, but in the work place, they didn't make any distinction.

(How many were there in your family, brothers and sisters?)

I had four brothers and four sisters, and a father and a mother of course. But my father passed away in 1929 or 30. (Anna said he was a physician.) Yes, but this was a normal death.

(How did he come to be a physician at that time?)

He went to a Russina school, this was Russia. You see as you remember the history, Poland got its independence in 1918. And before the most eastern part of Poland belonged to Russia. The western part belonged to Germany. AND the southern part belonged to Austria, Hungary. So he spoke Russian because he had it in school, you see, so he went to a Russian school. In Poland, the Russian language was compulsory. He use to tell us, the Russians built this big papce for the czar in our city. They came for hunting there. And my father was called to the czar because he got sick. And he gave him some medication, so he gave him a medal. This he showed around, of course, I wasn't, I didn't exist at that time. That's what I heard.

(Was your family religious?) assimilated.

(Were both of your parents Jewish?) Yes, but they didn't speak Yiddish, we spoke Polish only at home. We were just the opposite to her family you see. Not assimilated, we were Zionists. As a matter of fact my father would always try to show the first shekel he bought through the Zionist Congress. So we were Zionists but we were not religious. We didn't belong to any particular orthodox group.

(When did Hitler's regime first affect your life? You went to the University in Warsaw, what years were those?) From '34 to '39, I graduated in June '39. (So when you were there, Hitler had already come into power in Germany. So how did that affect you in Warsaw during those years, 35-39?)

It was very bad because first of all we were sitting on the left side. Jews had to, you know, were sitting on the left side. And the Poles were very anti-semitic, and you had plenty of little pogroms, you know. Before Hitler came. They displayed those big posters, ala streiser, you know those anti-semitic posters to warn the Poles stay away from Jews because they bring typhoid, Jews have lice and this and this and that. So this was the mentality of the Poles. That is why when Hitler came they were not to unhappy that he take care of the Jews that were always a pain in the neck for the Poles as such. But we went to school, and we knew this is our lot..so nothing you can do. You cannot fight the government. And the government, they knew about it but they didn't do anything.

(What were your plans during those university years, you were studying to be an architect, were you going to stay in Warsaw, had you planned to go back to Scherdinitza before the war?) lNO I would be in Warsaw, where I knew lots of people and I spent my \_\_\_\_\_ years there. But one thing, the problem what did you think about them? I would never dream about coming to America. Never, even after the War.

The reason for it is because our whole family didn't have anybody in AMerica. (Was your father planning on going to Israel?) After the war, hadn't I come here, I would be in Israel. (Were you a Zionist at the university?) I belonged to the Socialist-Zionists. (Were you planning on emmigrating to Israel before the War or would you still have stayed in Warsaw?) I supported Israel, I belonged to the organization but I never made the decision to leave. Because I personally had it good. Because even after I graduated, July-August I was working already, two months. And then the war broke out the first of September. So I was working already 2 months. June I graduated about the 13th or 15th of June, I don't remember, and July/August I was working. And the first of September the war broke out. (So in September you went back to Skerdinitza. Was most of your family there in Skerdinitza at that time?) Most of them were married and were in different cities, you see. (So when you went back, who was there?) In my thing was my brother, my sister, my mother. This was the immediate family together in one place. The others were in different cities, married with kids. As a matter of fact the kids were older than me, you see. Because my father lost his first wife and with her he had four kids. Three daughters and a son. They were little so then he married his wife's sister which is my mother. So we are two groups of kids. But being that she was an aunt to this first group, there was none of this division, my kids, your kids. There was always one family. Now of course, I, being the youngest didn't know all these things. There was another woman before...all the sisters and brothers belonged to this group, this family. (IN Skerdinitza, the four of you were together. AND what was life like during that period before the ghetto?) I went back to Skerdinitz and the life was very bad because the GERmans, when they arrived, about the 10th of September or the 12th, right away they grabbed the people to work. To do all the dirty work. To drag wood for them, the coal, to clean their cabins, to clean their barracks, to do so some work for them, so it was bad. (Did you have to wear bands at that time?) Ya. (Immediately you had to wear the Jewish bands?) Ya. The band was a white thing with a blue Mogen David on it. So the things were very very bad. (Anna mentioned that you were working in an ambulatorium) In the ghetto. (Oh, but before the ghetto, what did you do?) Listen, listen, there is one thing. When the war broke out I was in Skernivitza because after I graduated I came back from Warsaw. And they told us that all men should go to Warsaw to defend Warsaw. AND stupid me, I was walking towards Warsaw, it was about 40 miles or so, and the Gemrans caught us on the way. AND they took us to a camp in Germany. Becuase they were afraid that this is the underground, or th resistance or God knows what they were thinking. And I was in this camp til the first of November about 2 months more or less. (What was that camp like) Nothin. WE didn't work. Nothing, they just kept us.

There were thousands of Poles also. In one tent, they put up tents this was for Catholic, Poland was a Catholic country, Catholic clergy. So they kept the clergy in a separate tent. So they didn't catch only Jews perse. They caught everybody, because they were afraid that they shouldn't do some fighting behind their back when they arrived in Poland. Then they released us. (Did they mistreat you in the camp?) Nothing. There you see at the beginning, even though these laws were promulgated in 1933, and they took root in Germany those laws, and the Nuremberg laws, but coming to a strange country, not knowing the language of course, for them they didn't know what to do so they just did what they again were told to do..to take the people out and camp them in Germany. They gave us some liquid food and then released us. (So then you went back to Skerdinitza and then what happened?) Nothing, I didn't do anything. (And your daily life was not jeopardized at that point?) No. Nothing. People were walking out and you could go and buy, and mix with the gentile population and the ghetto, as I recall was built in 1940. The ghetto again, speaking of this ghetto because she goes to the Martyrs Memorial talks about them. So I always emphasize when I have a group what a ghetto it. Because for a person who never lived in one cannot even comprehend the conditions lived in. Let's assume we live on this street. So they will take 2-3 streets in this direction, three or four streets in this direction. Let's just say for discussions sake there are a 10000 people living here. Then, what they did, brought in people, Jews from other towns they occupied. They wanted to get rid of them. They put them in this ghetto. So then let's say in a house like this..ok we had three kids but they are gone, so now we are two, it's too much space anyhow. But let's assume it's a family here of four or five or six. They would put in 20-25 people. Four or five people can sleep in this room, 8-10 people can sleep in these two rooms, the other people in the other..and this was the tragedy of the ghetto, including the one in Warsaw, you see. Because what they did, they had cleverly planned. They wanted to concentrate Jews in one spot. So they know when I come to this city, I can grab 50,000 Jews. So I don't have to go and pick up any in all the other little communities. Because people live everywhere, you see. Like you have here Van Nuys, and the Valley, and Pacific Palisades and God knows what. So they put them in this cramped condition and had this package ready. As a matter of fact, in '4, the end of '41, they chased everybody out from this Skernivitz. Go. They wanted to make this city Judenreiden. Judenreiden means clean of Jews, you know they cleaned up the city. And this they did in all the other areas, you see.

So where do you go. We, our family, we went to WARsaw. She went to another city. (When you will still in Skerdinitza in the ghetto, you worked in an ambulatroim.) My brother, he was a doctor <sup>My older brother.</sup> too. He was a doctor for this Judenreiden. January or February 1942 (we went to WARsaw. (Why did they decide to go to Warsaw?) Our family? First of all my mother and some sisters there. AND we knew Warsaw. (You thought that possible life wouldn't be as bad in Warsaw?) It's a bigger city, we said more people..But when we were there, ya, the ghetto was already there. So you moved into the ghetto right aways. Ya, the ghetto was there.( AND what was that like.) Terrible. But our personal life perse. because we ran away from there to another city. Because the conditions were..Of course we didn't have too much money to live on, because a bread was in our money, fifteen or 20 dollars, you see. (How did you get out?) How did we get out? We paid money and a guy in Poland took us out. (The four of you are still together?) I, my brother, my sister, my mother. So he kept us in a basement for a full day, and then we rode us in a horse and carriage and he took us to the..we took off our bands, and he took us to the train station, bought the tickets, and we went to another city. Sandomich was it called. (Was there a ghetto there?) No, there was no ghetto there. There were some Jews there. Why did we go there? It's another crazy thing. A boy with whom I graduated, he's from this city. AND I knew his father who use to come to Warsaw to visit him. So I said, let's go there, they told us there is no ghetto, let's go there. So we went there. AND from there we went to a village, and we stayed with a woman there who had fields in a garden. So we helped her a little bit and she kept us in her house. There were a few Jews in this village living there, maybe 5 or 10 families. So we stayed there. And finally one day the Germans reached us even there. And said all the Jews must leave this village. So we went to another little town. THIS is all in Poland. AND this town didn't have a ghetto as yet. It was in 42, ya. And we were living there. AND finally one day, they chased everybody out, in 42, into the market place, and they took all the younger people including me and tehy took us to the camp. And this is how the camp started. (What about your mother and sister?) They stayed in this city. (They took you to the camp but they were left behind. AND your brother?) No. My brother couldn't go, couldn't walk because he had polio. AND at that time, polio didn't exist, the name perse. But now, reading about it, knowing what's what, now I call it by the right name. So he walked with a stick. He couldn't move normally. (When you were taken away to the camp, did you ever hear from your family again?) Ya, ya. Because it was again. It was under the German supervision, but the Poles were our supervisors. The POles, some plain common laborers

or what have you. So through them, I could send a letter from time to time. (This was the first camp you went to, and what kind of a camp was this?) This was a camp we were cutting down a forrest because the Germans wanted to have a shooting range. So we were cutting down the trees, cleaning out the woods, making it nice and clean.. (So it was strictly a work camp? How did they treat you in this camp. Were they mostly Jews?) Mostly Jews, ya. Because they took the Jews from the last city. I don't want to bother you with names of the cities because... They took only the Jews to the market place. So these people in this camp, number A, let's call it, were only Jews. (How did they treat the Jews?) They didn't kill people there in this particular camp. It was such a transitory camp. From there they took us to another camp which was better organized already, with the Jewish police, a big camp in another city. Melitz, we were building the planes..in Poland still. AND from there they took us to this Flossenbergl, (How long about were you in Melitz?) Six months I think. (And were you still able to keep in touch with your family?) Ya, because it was still in Poland. (And were they still in this small town, they hadn't been taken away?) No, and they disappeared in this small town. This is what I heard. That they took all the Jews to the cemetary, who were left, and shot them.

(So then you went to Flossenbergl?) Ya, and this Flossenbergl, now the Melitz camp to be a comparison, was a camp which was run by Jews more or less...Jewish overseers, Jewish foremen, ..and every day we went to this factory to work. In Germany in Flossenbergl, it was a German organization. It is true that our formen were German, as I mentioned I think here, so both of my two foreman they were socialists from Austria. But Austria was annexed by Hitler so of course. Some other guy was a pickposcket before the war. But Hitler needed people and even a criminal can take care of Jews, you know supervise Jews. Of course, those foremen, they got a little bit better food, and they were Germans. The other was what yo call a safecracker. How do I know this? During lunchtime we were sitting, they didn't mistreat you. They thought they are prisoners too. Because they are happy to be out of jail, but there they are prisoners too, they cannot run away anyway. And this was surrounded by barbed-wire, this whole factory. Because from the camp itself we walked about two or three miles to this factory. And every night we came back to the barracks. (You were in Flossenbergl how many years?) Two. (When you first came there, it probably changed later on, but when you first came there had you any idea what concentration camp life was like?) No, but this was a working camp again. It wasn't a death camp. Of course plenty of people died. Plenty of people died, there's no question about that. But one curious thing, you should make a note of it, nobody committed suicide. (Not even the non-Jews?)

And then speaking because she went yesterday they had some lectures, so a question came up, because many of the teachers are from Israel, the teachers who are teaching here in America, why didn't the Jews resist, why didn't they fight? If the Israeli's are fighting the ARabas, so of course we should have fought the Germans. So she explained to him that the Jews were driven already to such a point that physical fight was impossible. What can you fight with, you have nothing. They took away all your pictures, all your things, they gave you this striped suit, you didn't even have a knife. For this food they gave you, you didn't need a knife, you didn't need a fork. So you couldn't stab anybody with a knife or fork. So fighting back was a very very problemtaci affair. But in this camp were all these nationalities from all over Europe which the Nazi's had occupied, Bulgaria, Italy, Poland, Yuogoslavia..These people were in this camp with me...and they behaved just as we behaved. You know they say Jews are cowards, they don't fight, they don't defend themselves nothing. But it's amazing that none of the other nationalities acted in adifferent way. Even among themselves, if one Russian got a little more soup the other guy wanted to grab it from him or steal some bread from him. Even among the Russians, nationality, belonging, comradship, didn't exist. And this was true for the French poeple, the Yuogslavians, the Belgiums, everybody acted the same way. So what I'm driving at, that you couldn't make a case that I am a Jew I behave differently. Those people were not more people, they were not human beings anymore. They had only one goal, to get a little soup and a piece of bread, period. Why? Because I want to live. Why in the hell did we want to live in this conditions? Maybe tomorrow I will be free, maybe, no one believed in it but we were always talking. In a proper discussions its crazy too. Maybe this is a normal thing. We were taling about food. Food that we ever ate, or that we didn't eat or we heard about, but the most fantastic recipes you will think people were inventing. Dreaming if they would be free, they would like to eat this and this and that..the most elaborate dishes every invented, ever cooked. This is constant hunger. Why it is like this I cannot tell you. Being in this condition, with this miserable improper nourishment, I don't know if I mentioned here, we lived on 5-600 calories a day. You know you and me today in normal times we have about 2500 calories. So we lived on 5-600.

(From the time you came to this camp, tell me your breakfast, lunch and dinner.) In the breakfast they gave us some so-called coffee which was some black concoction made from some weeds and God knows what from, and this was cold coffee. At 12:00 o'clock, we got a little bowl of some cold soup. What was the soup? It was water with some floating vegetables, and if you were lucky maybe you caught a piece of potatoe. This was the soup. ANd then the evening when we came back in the barracks, they gave

us about one inch of bread. Sometimes a piece of margarine, sometimes a little drop of jam. This was our day. (Were people constantly dying from starvation?) Many died of starvation. (So the German thought at that time was that they didn't care whether they starved you to death?) At what to care. WE are sitting in this goddamn camp. I couldn't understand it. Here the Germans had those people they trained, who build those damn planes. Why the hell don't they treat them better and treat them better, clothe them better, keep them clean? Then I came to the conclusion, they don't give a damn. Because people die, let's say 10% die, 15%, they go to another country and grab the young people and bring them in to work. AND they are people who are well fed because they are better than us because they were free so-called. So they go to Holland or France or Poland, and grab a bunch of people and bring them to the factory. (Why, then, did they even bother having a hospital in the camp?) Who the hell knows? Maybe they want to show the RED Cross that they take care. But what was the hospital? They didn't have any medications. Did I write in the story about my typhoid and he gave me an aspirin. It was a French doctor, he was an inmate too. (So why did they send you there?) Every barrack had this secretary. You told him you cannot go to work today you are sick. So he said go to the hospital. So I went to the hospital. And then he had to give it to the guy who took us to the factory. He told him that five people are in the hospital so instead of 200, in this group, we were 20,000 there but we were going in groups of 200, so from 200 you will get only 195 because 5 are sick. So in the hospital, so-called hospital in English, it wasn't a hospital. Plenty of people died there. Because what could they do? They couldn't give you shots, pills, no medication nothing. The only damn thing, you didn't have to work. (Describe a typical day, what time you woke up, what you did, your rollcall. From the time you got up until you went to bed.) We got up about 5 o'clock or so. And then 6 o'clock we had to go and bring this so-called coffee. So I always was hiding here and there because it was so goddamn heavy, those big, like a garbage can, a big drum with the coffee. And our barrack was maybe 50 steps to walk up because it was a hilly country. So I didn't want to bring this damn coffee. After the coffee they had appelle in the morning. They counted. Outside. (Were you always in the stripe uniform. You had only one article of clothing and that was it?) This was it. This is what we were wearing in winter and summer. Now the area we were in is a bad climate. It is like in Poland, you had four seasons. Spring, summer fall and winter. AND in



winter it was cold of course. ANd this was our outfit and those wooden shoes. No socks, so you'd scrounge for some rags and put around your feet. ANd this was our outfit for summer or winter. Only this one outfit. ANd once a month, they took us a proper washing to a shower. In the morning when we got up, there were a few faucets you could wash your face. We never used, speaking here we have all kinds of shapes of brushes with teeth, we didn't brush our teeth. We were full of lice. You know this typhoid is spread by lice. Somebody has it they crawl on you and bite you and you get it. This is how I got it probably. So anyhow our living conditions were, I wouldn't call it below standards because there were no standards at all. Not that the minimum wasn't even a minimum. They were zero....Oh ya, talking about the schedule. 6:30 we start walking. Why the rollcall they have to see if somebody didn't run away. So sometimes the rollcall could take 1/2 an hour, an hour or two hours. Because they had to check so many thousands of people. And in front of every barrack there is this rollcall. They didn't get all together in one group. Every barrack had to have this exact number and they knew because in the evening they knew how many people are there. So from there we marched to the factory, after this so-called breakfast of coffee. And there they brouth us this so-called soup. And at 6 o'clock we went to the barracks again. Then we got this dinner so-called a piece of bread. ANd this was day in and day out.

(How many supervisors were in your barracks of 200 men?) In my barracks there were 200 people. In this particular factory, it was a barrack too, a big hall, there were six supervisors, six Germans. These were the Germans that I, not SS people, but civilians who they let out of jail. These were my supervisors. (And they lived there with you?) No, they lived in the same compound as we, but separate barracks. These barracks were we slept in those tiers with this straw underneath were only the inmates. You could walk to the other barracks. (So what time did you have to be back?) About 10 o'clock. I NObody walked after ten. (Could you talk freely in your barracks?) Even during the work we could talk to each other. Now most of the people learned German. I told you all th nationalities, you see I don't know these languages of them, but all of them could communicate in GERman. Better or worse, but you could understand them. (Was there anti-semitism among the prisoners?) No. (They didn't distinguish between the Serbs and the ..) Nothing. Nobody gave a damn where you are from. Becuase everybody knew that you are in this goddamn place and you will suffer just like I do. This group which we were for instance, we never had any fights.

You are a Jew, you are this, you are a communist or whatever they want to call you, it never came to it. This is unusual that this is a camp like this. Because when you talk to people from Treblinka, Auschwitz or Belsen, these were camps with Jews only period. From all over the world, but they were Jews. I was in an international. (Did you personally try to seek out other Jewish prisoners?) You know you saw them, they wear these emblems. So you know who the Jews were. ....Among them you made some friends. What were friendships? He treated you nicely, you treated him nicely so you were friends. You worked in the same hall. But in this hall where I was, there were about 200 people, there were maybe 10 or 15 Jews or something. But I think nobody cared. (Did the German superivosrs mistreat you or hit you or?) Never. (Only if you wre sent to the quarry?) Ya. There the Ss tookover. And there was death. THis was death. Because why did you go to the quarry? If you did something terrible in the factory..something..listen excuses there are plent of excuses for them to mistreat you. (Were you constantly living under fear of death?) My fear was only the hunger. Now again. Will we get some piece of bread today? Because there are days, no bread tonight..I don't know, the baker didn't bring the bread or they don't want to give us bread, God knows what. So we went to bed without this piece of bread. And many people would exchange the bread for the soup. (Why?) Because they thought that the soup is more filling than bread. But this was a very very bad policy because they were getting so much soup in it their legs swelled up. (With this emeciated conditin and having no warm clothes and taking these walks in the bitter cold and in hunger, were people constantly falling and dying?) Again, many people were dying slowly. We calked them muselman, it comes from the Muslim you know. WE called them muselman. Skinny, bones and skin. So you know right away the next day he's gone. So from this stage, they changed into the stage of this so-called muselman. And there is another thing. They gave up. They didn't hope. They gave up. And this probably contributed to this state. Because later on you could throw him into a pile of garbage he wouldn't even react, he wouln't even scream. He says, I am gone anyhow. He knew it. So this is the group this next stage of this inproper diet. (How could anyone survive for any period of time, you were on it for two years.) This I asked plenty of doctors. How is it possible to live on this diet. You see the body, their funny organs. I don't know. Here you say, I must have a glas of milk, a glass of juice, a piece of bread, or something hot. There you were left to these portions which I described to you, and I don't know, you lived somehow.

(You probably weren't any heavier than some of these muselmen.) I was weighing about 80 pounds. 40 kilos. So the whole thing, how I survived, people ask me a million times this silly question. Chance, because theoretically I shouldn't be here. According to the German plan. And then you must have read some books about those marches were they took them out from other camps too, Dachau, Terezzen, in this horrible winter in '44. You know because they lost the war in '45. But this was the end of '44. And they marched them and plenty died on the way. Some survived. How did they survive? They didn't have a better diet than me. How did all these people survive? Do you think that in Auschwitz they had a better diet. (During the winters in camp when you had to stand for rollcall and then walk back and forth to the factory every day, your toes didn't get frozen or frostbitten? Or what about the normal diseases one would get from the cold?) I don't know. I personally didn't get sick. ANd if you got sick so you went to this so-called hospital. So they didn't work, they were lying in those darn beds there. They didn't give you a special diet there. (What were your thoughts in this camp, about freedom? Did you think about avenging the Germans? Did you think about what you would do in freedom?) Again, as you know, they are talking now about some people, about people who came back from Viet Nam. They are so mentally disturbed that they kill and slice some other people, shoot them...and this is such a mental disorder after Viet Nam. From this what I know, and I think it is historically correct, none of the Jews who were liberated, ever took, never had the desire to kill a German. (During the time you were in camp, not once you were free, did you ever avow revenge, did you think of it?) Never. As fara as I know, and you can read many books, where after the war a Jew with a machine gun started shooting left and right, nobody did it. (What were your thoughts about the GERmans during that time?) Listen, I knew the situation and I knew the whole condition and I knew about Treblinka and Auschwitz...so we thought...no Jew ever killed a German. I didn't hear it. (So your thoughts about the GERmans while you were in camp?) I wanted to get rid of them that they should disappear, drop dead. And another thing, these Germans, those who supervised us they read the German papers quietly, they too were afraid fo the SS, told us what's going on. About the landing at Dunkirk .. so we knew what's going on. (What were your thoughts about how the Germans could do this, are they human beings or?) What I was thinking that he played the role of God with the Germans. ANd as you know, he eliminated religion perse. He put the priests and ministers in camps and jails and God-knows what, and he made himself to be a God. That's why many German people believed in him. And whatever he said they applauded. As you see those big speeches he made in those big halls and the ovations he gets, and this was a religion he developed. ANd this is National Socialism

And we will conquer the world and the Germans have it quite good you know. And this was their new God their new religion and they believed in it. And why they did it with their culture, with their past and things, they had very little to say, you know everybody was scared to death, to say something against the government and this is how it came about. That he had this power over the masses of people and organized this group of people around him who followed his orders, who did more than he asked for because here Hitler promised to eliminate the Jews first of all. This was his thing. As you know the propaganda went that the Jews are the richest, the communists, the capitalists whatever names he called them, they bring this sickness into our nation we want the pure Aryans..(Did you become more religious in camp or more irreligious, did it affect you that way?) No, because I was never religious. (What kind of an infraction would send you to the quarries?) Let's say you make a hole in a plane, in a part of a plane. You drilled a hole in it, sabotage. (What if you just forgot to put a rivet ..?) ~~They were killed~~ If they caught it, oh I got 25 lashes once because I didn't rivet it correctly. From our hall where I was working, nobody went to the quarry, from our group. (So the supervisors on a whim..) The supervisors were very very nice. So they had this criminal record but somehow as I describe here.. when they are taking them to go fight the Russians...so he says 'shalom' as he leaves. And I was wondering a German how in the hell does he know this. So maybe he was in jail with a Jew or something so he learned a few expressions. (What was the comradeship like in the camp? What was life like between the prisoners..their interactions, friendships?) The people generally were nice to each other, in general I am talking. They didn't fight, they didn't hit each other. (When it was time to get the kettles, the coffee, they didn't shove someone weak out there in front?) No Because you have to understand the conditions. All of them were in the same condition, as far as work is concerned getting up at the same hour, getting the same piece of bread, There wasn't that some got a big piece of bread, others a little piece of bread..everybody was in the same boat. So the French people were nice, and the Italians and Russians. If you wouldn't know that they are Russians, or Hungarians or, in general you wouldn't know. (Would you have discussions on things that you normally would talk about if you weren't in camp?) Ya, we talked about books and we talked about..I was working with a few Czech people. So with them I could use my language, they used their language, the same way with the Russians. I could understand them, they could understand me. I didn't understand everything but I knew what they wanted to say.

So we talked about movies and theatres and restaurants and books, and we'd talk about the war...(Was there ever any talk of escaping?) Never.1 Because it was impossible to escape. We were surrounded by electric wires. (No one talked about digging tunnels..) Not in my camp. In my campe nobody ran away. The father of your friend from school, Anna said you were together in camp.) I was with him in one camp. in Melitz. One day I see him in my camp. He is from a city which is about 100 miles away. He was at that time maybe 50 years old. He was an old man at that time. In this Melitz camp, I had a very very good relationship with this foreman who was a Pole, he was an engineer. He knew I am an architect so he treated me a little bit differently. So I was a favorite of his. So when this man came, his son graduated with me, I asked the foreman, I would like he should work at night. Because at night you didn't have to work. No work was going on at night. You had to watch only the ovens with those gauges..set them tend them a little bit, but you didn't do physical work. So I gave him, gave him, this job. In Israle they use the same word its called protectsia.. But even with this job he started swelling. He got wounds on his body, and he died in my arms. After the war in '45, 46, I was at the railway station going to some other city and whom do I see, but this boy with whom I graduated. Curious thing, who are you are yo alive are you dead, and so forth and so on..So I ask him, where are you going. He said to Stuttgart. And what is in Stuttgart? My mother is there. Your mother's alive? She survived the camp. Sothe next day I took the train and went to Stuttgart and told her all about her husband.

(Now the march.1 Who led you?) Ss men, 6 on each side of a hundred people. Every 100 is a group. Suppose somebody was thirsty, he went to the ditch to grab a little water from this, he got shot. Somebody tripped, he got shot. (On that march did you think that you were going to die at any time?) Yes, my thoughts were that this is it. Because when you see, again, we had to dig the graves for the poeple who died, who were shot. So I thought from all these people, and then you see from this column of 100 youa are 50 now.1 So they combined two columns in one. People were dying left and right, so how in the hell will I survive. And at one point, in this one city, I wanted to run away. You are talking about escape. But again, a friend of mine from the camp, he was holding me like this. He says, you won't go, they will kill you. ANd I didn't go. In this one second.. (How were you able to walk even though you had no food...) This is another question, I think it is a medical question.

Tape # 3 (Incompletely typed)

{ # 4 " "

Being undernourished all these years, how can you still walk? And I mentioned how many kilometers we went.. 48 kilometers about 30 miles in eight hours. Listen if you have a gun behind your head..theoretically you cannot walk, you are tired. So you say, what the hell, so I walk or I get killed. So you see people are walking so you walk too.

(In the box car...)

.....  
You saw pieces of flesh glued to the wall. And then what did you think? Thank God it didn't kill me. And then I described the boys who ran away from this car to dig some potatoes up, what happened to them.

(When did you find out about your family?) I didn't know anything until after the liberation.

At one point when the Germans left, they said don't move from this point because there are Ss men around and they will kill you.

(When you approached the tank on the day of liberation, how did the Americans receive you?) Here we were like skeletons and the Americans well-fed, shaved, clean. I couldn't communicate with them. I spoke German, Polish, Italian ..nothing. But they saw us and they said come to this city, or whatever the hell they said. AND there we went. They gave us food, plenty of food. Many of the boys died, you know, because they ate too much. On an empty stomach, they filled themselves up with this food.

(That day, ..what happened from there?)

We lived first with a farmer, a vegetable farmer. We just came in because we thought we are the survivors, we have the right to stay in this house, you know, he's a German. They treated us very very nicely. And from there we went to another little town, and we were staying in a beautiful house of a very rich German merchant who had a big store with delicatessen and wines and whiskies and things. AND we went in there and said we want a room here. AND the reason we did it was because they took him to jail, a temporary jail probably as I see it now, because he belonged to this party, the Nazi party. So they took him and we lived in this house there. There were maids, they fed us, I had a terrific time there. That's why when I came to Stuttgart one day and I saw that they live on this dp rations, which was horrible food, I said, how in the hell can you live in this darn thing.

(You lived in this house about how long, a year?)

Ya, 45 to 46 ya. I didn't do anything.

(Did you just want to do nothing and just live..) Do nothing travel around go here go to this city or another city.

I didn't do anything. I didn't smuggle, I didn't do marketering, black market or white market. I didn't do a damn thing. AND I didn't know what to do with myself frankly speaking. I didn't think about it. So this that I went to Stuttgart is a pure coincidence too. Because hadn't I met him, I would never have gone to Stuttgart. Stuttgart is from my city about 300 miles away. So I would never go there.

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(Did you think during that year of coming to America?)

I probably would have gone to Israel. Because I didn't want to go back to Poland number one. I didn't want to go to Germany, so the only place I would be is Israel.

(Do you regret not having gone to Israel?) I will tell you. It wouldn't be maybe monetary better, but culturally I think it would be fuller. I have the impression. I have been to Israel maybe five or six times. And I see their attitude. They are so proud of everything. This is our bridge, we built a new roadway..We, you know everybody is part of everything. This what I think life would be different, on the value side different. AND the people in Israel are different. Because here in America, what car do you drive and what suit do you wear, or what sweater is this? And I think the kids would have a better direction. Because here again, they are not religious. They don't belong to anything. There is no direction here. Tessa is settled. She is married and has children and is sending the little one to a Jewish day school. Karen is floating around with those crazy people in New York. David is in Paris, and when I ask him in letters, what will be the future. He cannot give me an answer, he doesn't know.

(Did you look for survivors of your family immediately after the war?) Ya. In the books which were published.

(And they all perished?) Yes, except I have a sister-in-law in Paris with 2 daughters who survived. AND I had a nephew who survived because he was in Russia, but he died of cancer in Paris. THIS was my family left. AND she survived with the two girls because there were as Aryans. In Poland.

(When you went to Stuttgart...and then you found out that Anna was there, before you saw her what were your thoughts?) I didn't know it. I was someplace with some girls, some survivors of course, and in talk I said where are the Jews here? Jews are here in this area, and there is also

another suburb, there is another group of Jews who live there. AND they lived in those villas of the rich Germans who were taken to camp or disappeared or God knows. So I left those girls who were in Stuttgart during the war, and left a note where I am, my address and I signed it. I left this piece of paper. But I still didn't see her. So then one day I wanted to go by streetcar somewhere, she is standing there with a group of boys and girls. So I was thinking at that time, is she married, I see all the boys and girls standing here. And finally I said, what the hell do I care. BACK and forth, back and forth and finally I approached her. So the first question, are you alive, are you alive..this was the first question. You see a person in front of you. But his was such a reaction you know, going through all this hell, in asking because you don't believe in the question perse. You see a person standing but you don't believe that this is true. Maybe you are dreaming. Is he alive, is she alive. And frankly speaking, I thought it isn't her, that it is her sister. Because her sister looked even more gentile than she. So I thought if somebody will survive, it must be her sister, whom I knew too. She was about two years younger. But I thought if somebody would survive, she would survive. But she didn't survive, she must have told you the story because the Jewish policeman denounced her.

Now this is another story about the Jewish police in the ghettos. A tragic story. They had to have somebody to keep order. But if you read all these books, you know how they behaved. Again, why did they behave this way? They wanted to survive. And they thought when they served the Germans, they will survive. And what happened, the Germans killed them all off. The whole group of policemen, killed them off. Because they knew too much, and they bribed them too much and God knows what they did. Of course, the element of the policemen wasn't the best element of the society. If you want to insult someone you would say who the hell are you a policeman, which is a very black mark. Because why the hell should you be a policeman and work for the Germans. But you know one darn thing. If you want to be a good policeman respected by the Germans, you must work with them, for them, catch the Jews, bring the Jews to the train..and all those stories which you read about them.

(Is there some tremendous frustration that you feel should be told, aside from the death...) I have in general. Why did the population, the German people as such fall into his hands? Even so, not every GERman was a watchman in a camp. Not every German belonged to the SS. But in general, why did they fall for all his lies and they knew about the camps...because the husbands who use to come who were in charge of those gas chambers of the camps,



came home for Christmas, for Easter, for God knows when. They must have told them what's going on, and they knew about it. 1 Now you asked somebody, they didn't hear, that he didn't know about it...And another thing, they knew darn well..all these materials that they brought to Germany were from the dead people. Because you know that Hitler organized this thing in such a diabolic fashion. Everything which was taken away, wasn't thrown wasn't burned, it was shipped to Germany. Not only of paintings and furniture and crystals, but shoes and clothing, not speaking of gold and diamonds whatever they stole from them <sup>not</sup> including their gold in their teeth, which was melted and given to the so-called German government and used as money, but these everyday things which came from the millions of people. So they say they didn't hear about it, they didn't know about it. So this is one question which bothers me, and not that's its answered yet because you talk to a German, he never heard about it. But they knew darn well what is going on.

(What about being with Germans today, do you resent being in their presence or feel uncomfortable with them?) No, But frankly speaking I have no contact with the real Germans. But to speak German or to meet Germans, I wouldn't have any compulsion.

(Could it happen here, in the United States?) Ya. This question was asked when I arrived. It could happen all over the world.

(Do you think it could happen in Israel with Jews. Could the Jews do it to the ARabs?) No.

(Why do you think they couldn't do it to their minority groups when everybody else in the world could?) I don't know, it's there background, religion...The Israelis know Hebrew so they can read the Bible, they have it in their schools as a subject and they know their background. It's a different mentality.

(Is this why initially the Jews didn't go for their knives to kill so quickly as the others) It isn't in their character. It is tradition, you know.