

Interview with David Bloch
RG-50.834*0005

Red = Ina Friedman, Interviewer

Black = David Bloch, Interviewee through an interpreter

[Interpreter comments]

Green = Unknown fourth person

Hello, this is Ina Friedman. I'm interviewing David Ludwig Bloch . It is October 16th 1987.
Mister Bloch is a survivor and artist and a person who happens to be deaf.

In your letter you were talking about the Catholic, protestant and the deaf who were in concentration camps and he hadn't heard about any of that.

No, were you but in the concentration camp as a Jew or as a deaf person?

Because I was Jewish.

Because you were Jewish.

Yeah, because of being Jewish.

But her question has to do with sometimes some deaf people were put in concentration camps, too. Not because they were Jewish but because they were deaf. He had never heard about that.

Oh, but this is true?

I write for young people, for children who do not know very much about the Holocaust.

Not sure what he is...

He is saying that crippled children were all gassed and killed and...

But she [indecipherable] have been differently. She is writing books for children.

The children can't understand that kind of things. To write books for children they wouldn't be able to understand the idea of Hitler and the Nazis and they wouldn't be able to follow that kind of thing. I don't think it's...

I work with some teachers who are teaching about the Holocaust to children. Eleven years and up and they are understanding it is a way of teaching them about prejudices. How we can't let this things happen again. And it is important to tell truth.

So come and see my pictures. They'll see anything they need. My art you know, you have the children see my art.

But not everybody can bring children from Pennsylvania or Boston to see your pictures.

My neighbors have brought their children and all that. *He thinks that his art speaks for itself; is much more powerful than he could ever tell from his experiences.*

The brochure?

Is this ... you know is this the brochure...

Yes I see but I would also like please to have a little background about the deaf in Germany before World War II. Your life as a Jewish person who was deaf. How you were received by the community? The Jewish community, the general community? I would like to get a feeling about these things.

Jewish is Jewish regardless whether they are deaf or not.

But she is a writer. She wants to see how things happen.

I think what he saying is that the Nazis had everything so well organized that the doctors would help them out saying this one is merely retarded. The nurses would help; they single out people and the teacher of the deaf would also do the same. They helped the Nazis, too. The teachers of the deaf helped the Nazis, too.

But you know but that's so little that there isn't that much to write.

Both German and Sem-German sign in addition to American sign kind of a little mixture there. And this is very difficult.

Horst Bisolt is a teacher and he is at the University of Bremen also. He has written a dissertation about deaf people in the Holocaust. No no no, from the year 33 through - also including Hitler and the...Doctors, Nurses, teachers, the priests, too. The priest were pretty bad, boy, they were awful.

Do you remember people - specific people? Like a good friend who was turned over to the Nazis by a priest or a nurse?

Not the names of the teachers or the nuns but the name of a friend that the nun or priest or whatever gave over to the Nazis.

Do you of any deaf friends of yours or good friend of yours that a teacher or a doctor told the Nazis about any of your friends. Do you have any friends thank you can think of?

Cheap People, like they are insignificant people.

I don't understand what he is saying because it isn't in ASL. He is asking me during my time what I know from 1945 and how the German people discussed during the Nazi times. Asking if anyone discussed any of that with me if I would have asked other people. Nobody ever dared to talk about it. They just kept their mouths shut. Nobody ever discussed it. So when did you start talking? During the 1950s. So were you surprised or how did you feel?

He asked how I felt when I found out, those things had happened? What do you remember? In my school - this was a catholic school - in my school itself I had a very hard time with Hitler,

Hitler and the mayor. OK but when you found out how did you think, how did you feel? I mean you were there during that time.

He said that I could tell you the things, too, about what I know, what I have heard from others.

But she wants your personal experience. Your personal story. Also he is catholic. You are Jewish. Let's add it: Jewish and deaf. That is very different from him: He is catholic and deaf.

Deaf is deaf. That's bad enough.

They were sterilized.

And they were just you know put in a hospital and just left there.

Whether they were deaf or not. They were either put in jail or just shot.

I think she is probably gonna ask you: Do you know any people who were sterilized?

Many, Many.

Maybe you can find some deaf people in Chicago.

And can he give me any names?

Isn't there one in Chicago from Hanover, a good swimmer? He is a deaf person who was sterilized.

He thinks that I may know that person, a deaf couple from Hanover who one was a champ swimmer in the deaf Olympics. They were sterilized and they live in Chicago. Do you know the name? I don't remember where in Chicago they live. Do you know the name?

It was a long time ago. A long time ago.

I met them once.

Is there anybody in New York?

No they were all killed, they were shot. But sterilized - I don't know who was sterilized hmm can't think.

In New York there may be 4 or 5. Come to New York. I don't have the right atmosphere, I don't have the right mood. The best way: Come to New York. See my pictures and they'll give revelation.

All right. Let's talk about your grandchildren. Do you have grandchildren?

No, not yet.

I have grandchildren. It's important for me to ...

Yeah, lucky.

It's important for me to talk to my grandchildren about the holocaust and I would like to help you but...

Could you just tell me about your experience as an artist? I'm interested in the fact that you...

That is a long story.

Well, I would like to hear some of it. How did you first show talents in artist?

It was step by step. Interest came first. Then as a small boy I wanted to be a businessman but I found out that I was deaf and dumb. So the best way anything to do with the hands. So I became a part-time artist. A porcelain, a China painter.....[indecipherable]

As a young boy, as a young boy what was your dream in terms of art? What would you have liked to become if the Nazis weren't there?

I loved art. I always loved art. Always. It's been a long way. *Would might help if you can go back. I think he really hadn't finished understanding exactly what your role is, what you want. I think. She wants to know about me. Well maybe I can help get things going. OK, so give me some [indecipherable]. She is a writer. She writes children's books.*

I understand that.

OK. She feels very strongly that children must know a lot about the Jewish Experience during the Hitler time. I know what you said. What did he say?

He said there is thousands of books all over the place.

But the new book I am doing is about the 45 percent who were not Jewish, who were victims of the Nazis. 6 million Jews, 5 million Christians. That's 45 percent.

I had a hard time because I had no father and no mother. It was a hard time, I had no parents. And I just did everything by myself.

I'm not catching what he is saying.

He says that in Germany people have always understood his speech and people have always complimented him on his speech and today he is not understanding why you can't understand his speech.

And he is wondering why you are so interested in the Christian people who ... I mean the Nazis hated all people who were crippled, blind, mentally retarded, including deaf people.

They wanted to save food. *Oh, no excuse me*, the fed on themselves. They were crazy. They put people in the sanatoriums or the just killed...

Yes, that is what I want to show that when you start with Jews and you begin to persecute Jews and people let you do it then you say OK, I can go after the deaf, I can go after the gypsies, I can go after anybody else. So the people have to learn that it's not only the Jew who is at risk. It's

everyone when you let crazies like the Nazis let take over. When I first went to research material...

Nazis prepared the whole thing.

But what she is saying she wants to write more about the non-Jews who also suffered. She wants to write stories about people who also suffered under Hitler. She wants to write that.

But people always kept their mouths shut. But people never said anything, people never talked. People just walked around like lambs they didn't defend themselves. The children just went like lambs and didn't know what happen.

The point she is trying to make is that trying to prevent people to say OK, we pick on the Jews and then other people let them pick on the Jews and then they say OK, we are allowed to pick on the Jews, why not on other, too; other weaker people. That's the point. She is trying to understand

The German just kept their mouths shut they just did it and said, you know that's it. They didn't care whether it was wrong you know. There is lots of books about that.

Yes, but what people don't realize is that they were victims other than the Nazis.

Excuse me, did they were...

Victims other than Jews. I'm sorry.

When I went to research material for my first book it said under Holocaust, comma, Jewish, and 45 percent of the people killed in the camps were not Jewish. So the Christians have to be made aware of this fact that they too were victims. They were the victimizers and the victims at the same time.

How do you know the 45 percent? How can you tell that 45 percent?

Because the figures Hilberg, Reitlinger give approximately 6 million Jews killed, 5 million Christians. These are German born historians who have looked over the records very carefully and these are the figures they come up with. So if the figures is such approximately 45 percent of the victims were not Jews. And this is the fact...

45 percent non-Jewish. *So who were in the ... Oh, what. The 45 percent what did they die of?*

Gas, shooting, murder by the Nazis. Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Homosexuals, physically handicapped people, Polish people.

I saw all of that in the camps. It's very easy to see on their tags. If they were homosexual they had pink tags. *Wait. No, excuse me. Homosexuals had pink, right?* Jehovah's Witnesses had purple tags. Jews had the yellow and white. No, red and yellow. The Star of David. Criminals they had black marks. And the asocials - or antisocials - had brown. I have that information at home. I have written that down at home.

Can he tell us please what happened how the day they came to take him to the camp? What was he doing?

I was at home. It was Kristallnacht. It wasn't a surprise. It was all planned. The uniforms were very neat, everything was well prepared. *OK, so you were taken. Then what happened? Did they know you were deaf?*

They didn't care. I could speak, they could understand me. I couldn't understand them. Sometimes I tried to fool them but not that time. *OK, then what happened?*

It's hard to explain. I was lucky. I was in camp only one month. I really don't wanna tell everything. I would prefer to keep it on to myself.

Can you tell me how your cousin got you out?

No, that is wrong. I was freed and then my brother was living in America, in Brooklyn. So they talked and my father's first cousin was a big man. He was a big guy of a big paper company. So my brother wrote him and they sent money so that I could come away to China. And they sent me money. I arrived in China and I had to show some kind of paper, show that I have some money, so that they would let me in. I had to show that I had enough money to live, to go to America to go there, to live there. If I didn't have enough money they wouldn't have let me come. Okay, so your cousin fixed ... Did your cousin free you from the camp? No no no. I was freed. It wasn't so bad at that time. 1940 I was let go. I was lucky. I was the last one to be let go. One of the last people who left the camp. In 1940.

The war was already started. Did you have troubles getting about to China?

No. I had American money you know. American gold.

There were 250 people let go. 350 people. Jews let go. Not from the camp. 350 Jewish people went with him to China. When you landed in China on the dark.

Did they Jewish organization come for you or did you take a riksha home. Where did you go?

I was in Shanghai.

Yes, but...

I ate. I wasn't in jail. I was free, I breathed. But was there an organization. Was there an organization that came and arranged everything?

There were lot of rich Jews from Russia and Arabian Jews in Shanghai. And they gave me some money. They have a very nice organization and they had some groups which would help people. They had a kitchen for people, they had their own hospital. Shanghai, they had an excellent organization. I have a book at home about it if you would like to read it.

I have some books. What is the name of your book?

Shanghai.

I would like to read it. Yes, thank you.

Is that the name of the book? Shanghai?

I'll make a copy and send it to you. Give me your address again and I will ... The best is to go to New York to my house. Open your eyes, take a look. Here, what is it. I have many books. It takes time. I can't tell you in five minutes. Soup you can make in five minutes.

My husband is a good soup-maker.

My wife is always making soup for me because I never cook. Do you cook? Ask him. Does she cook?Ten weeks ago. My wife died ten weeks ago.

Oh, I am sorry.

Cancer. She was sick for a long time. Last 5 or 6 months she didn't eat. She couldn't swallow. So. She was deaf, too. Chinese.

How did you meet your wife?

We talked you know. Deaf people talk very easily. It's so easy. You know you talk great. It's a great world. She needs to know that. Deaf people are deaf you know it's very interesting. That's interesting, it's the mentality. East and West are very different worlds. Can you cook Chinese food?

Mostly I cook Russian.

It's very simple. You like tofu? That's my favorite food. Oh, Russian is good food. I used to have many Russian friends. Hearing friends. Before you eat you have to drink first. Do you drink vodka? Good.

Here it's only 80 percent. In Russia it is 100 percent. Oh, boy.

[indecipherable]

It is hard to translate. Ahm, jack of all traits. No, no. [indecipherable].

He tried to get by to live. Are you a teacher? No, I am an evaluator. Do you evaluate children, no, adults? We can explain later, ok ok.

OK, did you live in [indecipherable] the section where they put the Jews after Pearl Harbor? What part of Shanghai did you live?

Some Germans pronounce it differently: Hongkuu. It's like Boston, Brooklyn. It's close. It's part of the city.

But I understand it was very crowded.

Yeah, it was crowded, but it was very poor. All the houses were very old. During the war they were bombed. In 37 before the war Chinese and Japanese had a war. So they really destroyed the area. The Jews rebuilt it. And they had the money. I have a book you can read about it. But if I gave you the book don't you dare [indecipherable].

Tell him books are sacred.

It's a very interesting book. It's hard to believe.

Did the deaf ... Was there a deaf community in Shanghai?

[indecipherable]

What was your Question? Deaf Jews or Jews?

Deaf community.

Jewish or Chinese deaf?

Both.

I had some good Chinese friends. Deaf friends, yes. But it was hard they didn't have enough money. Money was very hard, boy, the deaf people in China were really second class citizens. They were very oppressed. Chinese people really oppressed them. You are only lucky if your family has money.

Did they have...?

The day before yesterday I got a letter from Hong Kong. A Chinese friend of mine was killed in Canada. He was very smart. Didn't speak but he made a lot of money. He sold a lot of small pictures all over the world. He was an artist. He went to Calgary, Canada. A good place to sell pictures and he was killed.

And then his son had to come to Calgary to pick up his father's body?

[indecipherable] information about the Chinese: Politics, everything. He was such a smart boy. Very smart boy and a good father to his children. Too bad. I feel sorry. He planned to come and visit me from Canada here to New York.

How long did it take your to drive from New York to Boston?

It was an easy job. Last week I drove to Montreal. Boston is terrible. You can't [indecipherable] the street signs are hard to read. It's bad. Makes me sick. I'd would like to write a letter to the mayor Boston. It stinks. It's terrible. There is some place nearby which had a beautiful sign right there. You can see it right there. Commonwealth Avenue or something. I love ... Where is Commonwealth? The sign was all bend over.

You speak well. Do you have partial hearing?

No. I can just hear a little bit. But if you speak there is no way I can anything you say. Some [indecipherable] music I can hear.

But how did you...

Would you talk about your school in Germany where you learned to make sounds? Tell me how you did it.

No, we were all deaf and dumb in school. What he is saying is that they usually call ... I mean the schools are called for dumb. The deaf are called "taubstumm". Deaf and dumb. Regardless of whether they speak or not.

He went to the Munich school for the deaf. It is not a school for Jewish deaf people like Berlin. Did you go to Berlin tough? Never knew about a Jewish school for the deaf in Berlin. You know in Vienna they had a Jewish deaf school. I didn't know anything about it. Never heard anything about it at all.

Were you discriminated against in this school for the deaf?

No problem.

Yes, but I'm interested in how you learned to make sounds. To make words.

I had no father and no mother. I was all alone. I fought all myself. Went to China all by myself. I was the born loner and still. My wife is dead. I have a lot of friends all over. I have no problem getting around. If you're not jealous sit in in six weeks I'm going to Hawaii.

Oh, I am jealous.

A deaf friend of mine. Going to New Zealand. In six weeks ... for six weeks. I have friends all over. Friends in Japan, friends in Spain, in Italy. I have friends all over. San Francisco, mostly hearing friends. In San Francisco there are two doctors. But they are just like brother and sister to me. In Montreal it's the same. Very close friends.

Before the Nazis came into power...

They are all hearing.

... were you happy in Germany? Did you want to make your life there?

Yeah, I love the mountains. I was a very good skier. Very good skier. Do you ski? No. Too bad. You are missing something. You should race. I was used to race. I really enjoyed it. During my time it was a poor time. My family was so poor they could never give me anything. Well I saved everything. I saved bikes. It took me two years to buy a bicycle. Here in two days I can buy a bike.

Did you [indecipherable] his grandmother who raised him?

I was 40 days old when my mother died. My father died when I was 1.5 years old. He died of heart attack. My grandfather raised me till I was five. Then I went to school. A school for the deaf. School for the deaf.

Did you live there?

But I was lucky. I had a little bit of money. After 8 years in Munich then I went to a private school for two years. The train passes there. It's a private school. What did you do in the private school? It was great, boy. History, it was wonderful teachers. We had wonderful teachers and I'm very thankful to the teachers there.

I'd never heard of that. What kind of private school was that? School for the deaf to improve. They had lip-reading. You know I can't lip-read you. You have got a mustache and beard. I went to Jena. There is a famous camera. Yeah, it's in East Germany.

You smart guy, I like talking to you. Much better talking to you then talking to them.

Ask him what Jewish there were in his grandmother's house.

I was five years old. I was very small when I left her. I was only five years old. I never understood any of that and it didn't make that much difference to me back then.

I remember the [indecipherable].

My aunt would do the [indecipherable]. But I wasn't so serious as far as religion was concerned back then. But I'm not an atheist. I believe in god. But only on the top of mountains. Have you ever been up to the mountains? It's beautiful.

Zugspitze.

I've skied up there. Garmisch? No. Two years ago I went by there with my son. We drove from Luxemburg.

I lived in Garmisch one year.

I know where that is.

Can you tell me: In China did you continue to get money from America to help you?

Yes, very little. But the American dollar was very powerful back then. Very strong. The money he got had a lot of purchasing power. It was a strong dollar. With one dollar ... In 1940 in Shanghai it was 1 : 20. Pigeon English. That's a meal. You can get a very good lunch.

For one Dollar or less?

Yeah, for one dollar.

Shanghai dollar not American dollar.

You could get twenty lunches for one dollar.

I met a lot of people. I made a lot of friends. I was very lucky. Met somebody who was born in Germany. I said I am a skier. You know you can ski in Japan. How much does it cost? Well, it's cheap. So he brought me to a friend, to a new friend, a Japanese, a half-Japanese. Half German-Jewish. There is [indecipherable] knew all about the history of art. I said I can't speak English, I can't speak Japanese. So he wrote everything down. You know, that I'm deaf and wrote a sign for me in the language that I needed. So on the boat met a lot of people. Germans didn't wanna talk to me because they knew I was Jewish. So I went to the Japanese Alps to ski. Three weeks. In two different places. Then I went back to Tokyo. Went to the [indecipherable] museums and all that. Then I went to different places in Japan: Nikko, Kyoto. Then on the way home I always went by train. And I passed Hiroshima. And stopped in Nagasaki. Do you know how much I spend in all that time? 35 dollars. With both hotel, train, everything.

How did the Japanese look upon you then?

No problem. They were very friendly. I saw a very sad situation in Japan. If you get a letter which says you have to go to the military you have to go. On the train there were a lot of people saying good bye to their sons, their husbands. No hugging, no kissing. The all just stood there and [indecipherable]. All around there I saw that [indecipherable]. Now crying, just smiling. So a lot of things. So much I can't really say. But Japan is really a beautiful country. A lovely country. Mount Fuji. I have a friend in Shanghai who said never saw Fuji. He was there for one year and it was always cloudy. I saw it for three days clear. All around it, very clear. I've seen a lot of mountains. Number one is Fuji. It is so flat then you have got Fuji on it. Just right there. That color. My heart just goes [indecipherable] when I think of it. It's beautiful. Have you been to...

Where were you?

In Kyoto. I mean Osaka. I live in Osaka. Kyoto, Tokyo. I saw Fuji.

I have a friend in Osaka. Every year once a year they send me a letter. He is a director of a big chemistry factory. I have a friend in Kyoto. This friend is from a 500 year old family. Got a lot of property. And he tells me if I go there he gives me an apartment.

What was the attitude on the part of the Japanese once Pearl Harbor came? How did they act towards the Jewish community?

I wasn't there anymore. I was in Japan only for only four weeks.

No no, in China. Coming back to China.

Once Pearl Harbor happened what was the attitude?

No problem. Chinese people were wonderful people. Very objective.

No, but the Japanese who were in control...

What?

Saupreusen.

The Japanese were acting just like the Prussian. Military [indecipherable]. They were influenced by the Prussians. He is using the Bavarian insult for Prussian. Saupreuse. It's a Bavarian insult for Prussians.

[indecipherable]

No, no. They didn't put them in prison camps. But I was wondering if [indecipherable].

There was a man who called himself king of the Jews. You had to have to permit to go in and out. Did you know that man?

In the book that I have you can read about it. He invited me to dinner. Unbelievable. For me Shanghai was a high school, was like high school. And education, education, is that? There were wonderful people there, smart people. Linguists. One friend spoke ten languages. Most important with the classics. Do you know what the classics are? Four:

Latin, Greek, Hebrew, [indecipherable]

And the fourth?

Sanskrit. My friend [indecipherable].

Can you describe what happened when you found out that the war is over? Your feeling.

Hurrah, hurrah.

How long?

She is asking: What did you think?

When I was in Shanghai they were under the Japanese occupation. The Japanese were mean, mean people. Real mean. Very difficult to believe. They smiled and [indecipherable].

Acting like soldiers all the time. Standing like soldiers. Always saluting. They were terrible. They were brutal. I have a wooden engraving at home from that kind of [indecipherable] experience.

Okay, when did you come to the United States?

1949.

Did you have difficulty getting here?

It wasn't too simple. For deaf people it wasn't so easy. But they had one question. One question, I wasn't prepared for it. They gave me a book. I didn't know what it meant. It was colored to check if you were color-blind. You know the numbers like you know a page with the colors. They thought I was color-blind. They tried to get you with a lot of tricks. But I was lucky. I said my name very well. And I was very well known in Shanghai.

So you had no problem coming here. Did other people who were deaf had problems getting in?

They said only a hundred a year. My wife was the first to get a number to come. If the Chinese go to foreign countries it's very difficult to get a passport. But she was lucky, she got one. Then she needed an exit-visa. And they said: "You deaf girl, get out of here!"

So they send here.

There were four deaf people at the same time. After the next person after they said no to and the person collapsed and cried but she already had a permit. Three girls behind her tried to run to the office because they saw my wife had gotten a permit. So then they ran and then they said all four of you can go. So they finally did let all four go through with an exit-visa. I advise you the best way for you is to come to New York and see me. He has time to drive you. You drive a car, don't you? OK, no problem. Four hours, it's an easy drive. My place is before New York. I can give you directions.