

Sherman Ray Interview

Sherman Ray Interview

Sherman Ray Interview

0:00:01.2 Speaker 1: And sharing your life story with us. We went into a little bit of a prelude before the tape started, so I think... I think Chelsea, and all of us know a little bit about what to expect. But why don't you just begin by telling Chelsea when you were born, what your family consisted of, and what your life was like from the time you were born until the time the Second World War started.

0:00:32.2 Sherman: I was born in Poland, May 5th, 1921. It was a pretty good sized city, I would say, about 100,000 people.

0:00:45.9 Speaker 1: What was the name of it?

0:00:47.4 Sherman: Białystok.

0:00:49.4 S1: Białystok.

0:00:51.3 Sherman: And my father was a tailor, and I had two sisters and one little brother. I was the oldest. I was going to school... I was 12, 13 years after my bar mitzvah, which we always have. I, sometimes, was not so easy at home. And my father always said that, boy, training to become a tailor. So, a lot of boys was alright. A lot of boys didn't do the job the way it should be. One of these days, I decided, when I was watching, my father was showing one boy how to make a head buttonhole and he just couldn't do it. Then I said to myself, it was after school, I took two pieces of fabric and a piece of canvas and I went outside, cut a little button, I mean a hole, then fixed a buttonhole. And I showed it to my father and he said, "Who showed you how to do it?" I said, "I was watching, you were showing so-and-so, and he cannot do it." "Well", he said, "if you can make a button hole like this, you better come and help me."

[chuckle]

0:02:25.4 Sherman: So I asked for... [chuckle] Nobody can blame me why I got in this trade. That's what got me into the tailoring. Summertime was not so easy. We used to go on the small villages, for the farmers. They couldn't go in like here, making... With them buying in Kmart or Walmart, they'd go to a tailor. The women used to weave the fabric, we used to make the pants here. So, the farmer, they couldn't pay any money, so what do we got? Potatoes, butter, sometimes a chicken.

0:03:10.4 S1: Instead of money?

0:03:12.1 Sherman: Instead of money. And I will remember... I will never forget, I used to carry on my shoulders, 16-18 pounds, sometimes 20 pounds of potatoes and my dad used to carry. So we will have food.

0:03:28.8 S1: How old were you when you were doing this, Sherman?

0:03:31.7 Sherman: I was about 13, 14 years.

0:03:34.4 S1: So we're talking about the early, mid-'30s?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:03:37.2 Sherman: Yeah. It was until the war broke out. And usually, we used to... Not everybody could afford to go have a radio. One, especially, you had to be wealthy. We used to go to some guy and he used to have the window open, the radio was going. We heard Hitler was blasting his speeches.

0:04:00.0 S1: Could you understand German?

0:04:01.3 Sherman: Oh yeah. If you speak Jewish, I told you, it's easy to understand German, yeah. And he's going...

0:04:09.0 S1: So you actually heard Hitler's speeches and could understand them?

0:04:12.3 Sherman: Oh yeah. We understood. Special Jews.

0:04:15.2 S1: What did you, as a Jew, hear in Hitler's speeches? What did you expect?

0:04:22.4 Sherman: Well, the way he's going, what's his name, take over Europe. But a lot of the wealthy Jews were sitting, having their meal, and drinking tea, hot tea, that was... He say, he maybe attack, what's the name, Austria and Czechoslovakia, but Poland? He will never dare.

0:04:47.5 S1: But the Jews knew that he hated them?

0:04:49.6 Sherman: Sure they knew it.

0:04:51.0 S1: And he... You knew what was in store for you, if he took over Poland?

0:04:54.3 Sherman: We knew it. But Alan, who could have afford to go any place? Even a lot of wealthy Jews. Okay, it was a leather manufacturer. He had a lot of money. He hired a private plane, it took him to Chile; left his wife and two children in our town. I will never forget.

0:05:21.2 S1: He abandoned...

0:05:22.6 Sherman: He left... But after the war was over. And when the Russian came in, when the pact is signed, half of Poland, the Russian took over, the other half, Germany. The German armies marched in, took them two days. They marched in and then they signed the pact, Ribbentrop and Molotov, they signed the pact. And they, after three days, the German moved out. Then took three days or four days, the Russian army.

0:06:06.0 S1: You were living in the eastern half?

0:06:08.1 Sherman: Eastern half of Poland.

0:06:09.7 S1: And when the Second World War started, Hitler and Stalin had signed a secret agreement...

0:06:14.5 Sherman: Secret agreement.

0:06:15.4 S1: Whereby Hitler would take over the western part of Poland...

Sherman Ray Interview

0:06:18.1 Sherman: That's right.

0:06:18.5 S1: The Russians would take over the eastern part.

0:06:20.3 Sherman: Eastern part of Poland.

0:06:20.9 S1: And for the first two years, before Hitler attacked Russia, you were in Eastern Poland, under the Russians?

0:06:26.9 Sherman: That's right, that's right. You see, I was living, they used to call this "White Russia."

0:06:32.3 S1: White Russia, Belorussia?

0:06:35.1 Sherman: Belorussia. And 'til 1905, it belonged to Russia. But after 1905, Piłsudski was the president of... Became president of Poland. And he was fighting and Poland become a state. That's the way Poland was created. Times was not so easy. Especially, the inflation and people, so many poor... Everybody... People were starving to death. No jobs. You saw people, soup lines. People couldn't afford anything. Nobody had any money.

0:07:28.7 S1: This was before the First World War?

0:07:31.0 Sherman: This was before, yeah. Anyway, after this, the Russian moved in, and it was not a honeymoon either. You had to stand in line for bread. They send in a lot of the big, big fish, we never saw this in Poland, frozen from Russia. You had to stand in line to get it.

0:08:00.2 S1: Is this in '39-'40?

0:08:01.4 Sherman: It's when the Russians moved in. They stayed about 18 month. Everything, we had to stand in line, even matches to make a fire, you couldn't buy it. Salt, you couldn't get it, from sugar, no question, nothing you could find. Everything, you had to stand in line, especially, like people like my father was a tailor or a shoemaker, or a carpenter or... You had to belong to the government. A cooperative... Everything, you belong to the government and you got to work for the government and if you don't want, they gave you the first time, 6000 rubles to pay taxes. Four weeks a year, you had to go do, wintertime, go in the forest to cut wood, 1 meter long and it was shipped to Russia on the train.

0:09:09.0 S1: Everyone had to do that?

0:09:11.1 Sherman: Like my father had to go and do it. Then I said, "Dad, you got to stay and make a living. Why don't you let me go and you stay home and you will provide food?" So wintertime, they used to send us for two, three weeks, the farmers and the villagers, put out straw, we laid on the floor, slept, and in daytime, we used to go... Everything by hand, there was no machines.

0:09:47.5 S1: You were about 18, 19?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:09:50.4 Sherman: 18, 19, yeah. And that's what I did. So after this was summer, before you turned around, summertime. Summertime, we had to go... They was building roads. So big, big mountains, you had to dig so many meters to make, and it was not easy. I used to come home and was bleeding, my hands. I was not used to do this kind of a job. And they didn't give you any gloves.

0:10:21.0 S1: You had nice, soft tailor hands.

[laughter]

0:10:23.1 Sherman: That's what I mean. So that's the way it was going on, but before you turned around, the 18 months was gone.

0:10:32.8 S1: June of 1941, Hitler...

0:10:34.9 Sherman: It was a Sunday morning... I will never forget, the voice of the planes. The German planes was a different sound and not too far from the town was the railroad. They dropped the bombs on the railroad.

0:10:55.2 S1: So the town you were living in was close to the railroad?

0:10:58.7 Sherman: Yeah, the railroad.

0:11:00.0 S1: A kind of depot of some sort?

0:11:01.6 Sherman: Yeah, they start dropping the bombs. And they were so smart, they send us, the Poles, they send us to the front to put up some little trees, with little shovels, to put up trees by the borders. They didn't bother with the borders. They dropped the parachutes, middle of Białystok.

0:11:27.9 S1: German parachutes?

0:11:29.9 Sherman: Surrounded the Russian army and the Russian army, you know how big it was? It was such a big tanks, they couldn't go to the streets. Why? It was the pipes underground. They are afraid it was the most biggest tanks you ever saw in your life. Three, four days, they was moving and moving and moving, day or night. And you could tell in a minute between the different talking by the Germans and talking by the Russian. The Germans, not a single German soldier was walking. Everybody on a bicycle, a motorcycle, two wheels or three wheels, that's the way the Germans was moving.

0:12:14.7 S1: Mechanized.

0:12:15.7 Sherman: Mechanized, but the Russian was a different story.

0:12:19.4 S1: On horses.

0:12:19.5 Sherman: Horses, walking. A lot of them on trucks, with a lot of them, with the everything, with their rifles and everything, they marched. You could tell right away the different. Everybody said it's a hopeless case. They will never make it. And sure enough, that's the way they

Sherman Ray Interview

got them surrounded. A lot of them killed themselves. A lot of them asked us for civilian clothes. Who in the hell had clothes?

0:12:56.8 S1: Tell us what happened when the Germans took over Białystok.

0:13:00.4 Sherman: Now, when the Germans come in, and before... You see, when they moved in, the Germans, they stayed three days. And then when they moved out, a lot of the youngsters was throwing rocks at the German army, they remembered it. In the middle of the big, big, Białystok, in the city, was a big synagogue. They took 7000 Jews alive, women and children, surrounded with the machine guns, pour kerosene, set on fire. 7000 lives I have seen with my own eyes. And if anybody was trying to run, they shot them like rats. After this, they got a hold of some Jews and said you gotta create this small part of the low class of town. They took six or seven streets, surround it with wires...

0:14:11.0 S1: Ghetto?

0:14:11.6 Sherman: Ghetto.

0:14:12.3 S1: Where all Jews had to live.

0:14:15.3 Sherman: Three, four families moved into a place. A lot of them slept... You didn't have any fancy furniture like here, so a lot of them slept on the floor.

0:14:27.7 S1: How many people would be living in a room this size?

0:14:30.9 Sherman: This size? About 10-12. And that is not all. Sleeping, you didn't worry, but food, they gave you some... The Germans didn't get enough food to eat, but especially Jews. They gave you one little slice of bread; no potatoes, no vegetables, nothing. A piece of margarine and a slice of bread. It was unbelievable. I really don't know 'til today, but the only thing, is like men, you see, like a boy, we went out of town to do some labor. Unload coal from the trains, the trains was very active going; coal, unload wood and other stuff. So a lot of times, we got a hold of some Poles and trying to buy a few potatoes, trying to buy a loaf of bread. So we ate, wearing a long coat and a belt here, and tried to hide something inside. Sometimes when you went in the ghetto, the Gestapo didn't check you, so you had to make a prayer, and hope you were able to go through.

0:16:03.7 S1: What if they caught you?

0:16:05.4 Sherman: Sometimes if they caught you, they start feeling your potatoes, took everything away.

0:16:13.5 Speaker 3: So your meal was a piece of bread?

0:16:18.8 Sherman: They gave you so much... A slice, a little loaf for 10 guys.

0:16:26.7 Speaker 3: Per meal?

0:16:28.8 Sherman: For a day.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:16:29.5 S3: For a day.

0:16:30.2 Sherman: For a day. You couldn't buy nothing. You couldn't get nothing. People would start swelling up, from hunger, starvation. Young kids, they need milk, they need eggs, they need... You couldn't buy nothing. You see the two-wheeled buggies, carrying... The buggies, carry them out and bury them.

0:16:55.0 S1: Because they died of starvation?

0:16:56.9 Sherman: Starvation.

0:16:57.5 S1: How long were you in the ghetto, in Białystok?

0:17:00.0 Sherman: On the ghetto, I was over there, I would say about five or six months.

0:17:08.5 S1: So the Germans came through there in like July or August of...

0:17:13.1 Sherman: Then they decided, see it was Białystok, Łódź and Warsaw, the three big cities. All the small surrounding, the towns, they liquidate, put them in the ghettos. Elderly, they went to Treblinka.

0:17:29.7 S1: Tell us what Treblinka was.

0:17:33.1 Sherman: Treblinka was a camp. The first gas chamber was built in Treblinka. It was 90 miles from Warsaw.

0:17:44.4 S1: This was not a camp. There were no barracks.

0:17:47.9 Sherman: No barracks.

0:17:49.0 S1: Yeah, there were no barracks. Nobody stayed there more than a few minutes...

0:17:52.5 Sherman: You went over there...

0:17:53.5 S1: Because you got off the train and you went to the gas chambers.

0:17:54.9 Sherman: Yeah, that was the Jews. Now gypsies, they didn't give them the time of the day, not in Auschwitz, not in Treblinka. They went straight to the gas chamber.

[background conversation]

0:18:23.9 Sherman: After this was going on, they finally decided, to go and take... Clean all the ghettos. When, with the loudspeaker they announced, men and women, all of them, we don't want nobody to hide. If we catch anybody, you will be shot on the spot. Where could you hide?

0:19:00.0 S1: Did you see people shot on the spot?

0:19:00.9 Sherman: Sure. In the camps, in the outside, one guy took a little spool of thread. One

Sherman Ray Interview

guy... I'm talking about the camp, in the first camp where I went to Bliżyn, where I fixed the uniforms. They didn't give you any socks to wear. So what did we do? The blanket, what we call that, one guy cut off a piece and used it as socks. They was wearing the wooden shoes. And one of them says... Walked by and they saw, and they said to the other guy, "Write down his number." "Why?" "He cut off the blanket to cover his legs, to wrap up." They went... Took him to the forest, and shot him.

0:19:55.0 S1: Okay. They liquidate the ghetto and...

0:20:01.4 Sherman: The ghetto, they liquidate. So they took us from over there, put us on train. I told you, people was, wanna get a... The Polacks wanted to bring water but the SS, with the machine guns, they wouldn't let you do it. So they got us on the train, put 90 to 100, on the cattle boxes, the boxcars, send us to Lublin. Over there, we saw a lot of the Polish soldiers.

0:20:33.0 S1: Prisoners?

0:20:36.1 Sherman: Prisoners. And they put us over there and the... The Ukraine, with the black uniform, they had rubber sticks, and a lot of the Jews, they didn't know how to shuffle or that, or do... It was not their profession... [chuckle] Knocked them over the head, they was felling down. And I saw this, what's going on, now here, they start hauling for tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, carpenters. I said, "I will go any place but out." So tailors, shoemakers, so I went...

[background conversation]

0:21:25.8 Sherman: I went... I went... Registered. They write us up and they put us in a big boxcar, and send us to Bliżyn that's where we work as a tailor, fix the uniforms.

0:21:42.1 S1: That's what kept you alive? Knowing how to tailor.

0:21:43.5 Sherman: That's what kept me. That's what kept me. But a lot of them, who didn't have any profession, they didn't wanna waste any bread, so they decided, just go and eliminate.

0:22:00.4 S1: Sure. How long were you there, Sherman?

0:22:02.2 Sherman: In Bliżyn I would say, approximately... Approximately about a year.

0:22:08.6 S1: And you... And you stayed alive there by...

0:22:10.9 Sherman: Over there, let me tell you something, it broke out a typhus. You don't know how many was dying, and who was dying, a lot of the Jewish policemen who was overlooking us, they are the one. Why? They was dealing with the Poles, throwing over a shirt, throwing over salami or bacon and bread. And they was doing business in vodka. They was red on their faces, you thought, "My gosh, they died before we." You would never dream this. But their typhus was... It was a hospital... A lot of them was afraid. They find a little bit of a, something on your skin, oh you need just put a little... What's the name... Something, iodine or some... But nothing. You couldn't get nothing. You was afraid to go to the hospital, otherwise they write down your number and make you go.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:23:23.4 S1: Where did you next go?

0:23:24.4 Sherman: From over there, they send us... When the Russians start getting closer, they send us to Auschwitz.

0:23:32.6 S1: What was the date when you went to Auschwitz?

0:23:35.9 Sherman: Alan, the date, I cannot give it to you. I told you, I didn't know a day, I didn't know a date. The only time I knew it, when Christmas was. Why? They served pea soup. [laughter]

0:23:49.9 S1: Do you have any idea what year it would have been?

0:23:52.7 Sherman: I think it was in '43. It...

0:24:00.1 S3: When did you get your number?

0:24:04.1 S1: Yeah. That's what I asked...

0:24:04.9 Sherman: The number? In Auschwitz.

0:24:05.9 S1: Chelsea...

0:24:05.9 Sherman: That's when you had your number tattooed...

0:24:06.3 S1: Chelsea...

0:24:06.4 Sherman: On you?

0:24:06.4 S1: I used to have a number, right here.

0:24:09.5 Sherman: Chelsea, he used to have a number.

0:24:11.4 Sherman: Right here, B2526.

0:24:15.5 S?: She doesn't... She doesn't realize how that...

0:24:17.7 S1: They numbered these people like they were cattle.

0:24:21.1 Sherman: Yeah.

0:24:21.6 S1: Like you would tattoo a cattle number on somebody because they just considered them to be cattle.

0:24:26.7 S?: Like branding?

0:24:28.5 S1: Like branding. Like branding...

0:24:30.2 S?: So the cows have a brand on their bottom.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:24:32.6 Sherman: Yeah.

0:24:34.1 S?: Then you talked about...

0:24:34.3 Sherman: And in Dachau I had a different number. 119-465. It is how many thousands was coming in, especially the women. We helped to unload from France. They shaved off their hair. They took their clothes off. Put the potato sacks, cut a hole, wooden... They have on... Alan, the wooden shoes, usually for when you wash laundry, that's what they put them on. They looked like monkeys. You didn't know if it's women or men. It was... You cannot describe to nobody.

0:25:20.0 S1: How did you survive in Auschwitz?

0:25:21.8 Sherman: Auschwitz, all I did, we was carrying a rock from one side of the fence, about half a mile to the other side, put it down, pick it up. Back and forth. That's what we did in Auschwitz.

0:25:36.7 S1: You know why you did that? Because they considered Jews to be lazy and they wanted to get some work out of you...

0:25:42.5 Sherman: Work out of you.

0:25:42.8 S1: Before they killed you.

0:25:43.9 Sherman: Yeah. You see, like in Poland, there are the factories. So we could do... And they build buildings. Who do they use? The Jews. Unload the trains. What do they use? Jews. Now in Dachau, it was a different story, in Dachau, they build for the Luftwaffe a big one mile long. Big... And the American finished it up, [0:26:15.6] _____ is what I'm trying to collect for the labor. So far, nothing.

[background conversation]

0:26:30.4 Sherman: I will...

0:26:31.6 S1: This is, this is not easy for you, Sherman, I know...

0:26:38.0 S1: Sherman, you said when you were in Auschwitz, that you would spend your day sometimes going to the train and that people would come off the train. Tell Becky and Chelsea what these people were like, when they came off the train.

0:26:53.5 Sherman: The women used to ask me...

0:26:56.4 S1: They would come in... How would they be dressed?

0:26:57.2 Sherman: Oh they was... These days, they used to wear the foxes... In Europe, I don't know if they was wearing it here... And dressed up and a lot of them wealthy, wealthy people. You could tell by the jewelry, the necklaces... Where's the hotels, where are we going to stay?

Sherman Ray Interview

[background conversation]

0:27:31.6 Sherman: "Where's the hotels?" The women used to ask us...

0:27:33.7 S1: Wealthy Jewish women coming from the train to Auschwitz, they wanna know where the hotels were...

0:27:36.0 Sherman: With the luggages and things... I say, "Lady, you see the chimneys... "

[overlapping conversation]

0:27:42.4 S1: "That's where you're gonna go."

0:27:45.0 S3: Yeah, okay.

0:27:49.4 S1: Oh, they was... They picked up nothing. They gave them one little suitcase, you can pick up, whatever. Naturally, they picked up nothing but the jewelry and stuff, and dressed up everybody. But soon...

0:28:02.5 S3: It didn't matter.

0:28:04.3 Sherman: Soon they make them go... A lot of youngers ones, they let them... The old ones, you see, they had a little stick, and pick up and looked if it was wrinkled, 60, 70-year-old woman. Links, rechts, links, rechts. Right, left, and...

0:28:24.2 S1: Yeah, if you went right, you went to the gas chambers.

0:28:26.1 S3: That's right. A lot of women, with the children, they took the... Churned them out. The women run and guarded child, shot them right. Kept the pistols, and just killed them like a dog.

0:28:41.3 S3: No rhyme or reason.

0:28:44.0 Sherman: For no reason.

0:28:45.2 S3: Sherman, when do you think the people in Poland and the people in Germany knew that was happening?

0:28:54.5 Sherman: Well, a lot of them... A lot of them didn't know at all. Well, you see, everything was hidden. Nobody knew. And special, the newspaper, you see, like here the media right away, today I'm talking. But then, who read a paper? If they caught you listening to a radio, you went to concentration camp. I'm talking about the Aryan.

0:29:29.2 S1: A German.

0:29:29.4 Sherman: Jews, they, right away, you couldn't have a radio, you couldn't have nothing. It was no television then.

0:29:36.9 S1: How long did you survive at Auschwitz?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:29:41.6 Sherman: Auschwitz, I would say, about a year and a half.

0:29:48.8 S1: And how did you survive there? What did you do?

0:29:51.6 Sherman: I used to help them carry extra food for the barracks, carry food to get an extra meal. A lot of times, we used to get up the middle of the night, go to the kitchen, the windows was open, grab a few potatoes, came to the barrack. Was a little fireplace, threw the potatoes and tried to eat them, so fill up... That is the way you had to fight for survival.

0:30:23.3 S1: How much food did you eat a day?

0:30:25.1 Sherman: Alan, whatever you could get a hold.

0:30:29.7 S1: A couple of potatoes?

0:30:30.7 S3: Sometimes it would be very little, sometimes it would be more?

0:30:33.9 Sherman: They gave you a soup, you had to hunt for a piece of potato. It was nothing but water. And the wild grass what is growing, that's what they used to cook.

0:30:44.0 S1: They put grass in the soup?

0:30:48.1 Sherman: Grass in the soup, yeah, in the water. Potato, very limited. They brought in a bunch of Russian Jews... The peels from the potatoes, they went alone and cooked in little rusted buckets. Made a little fire and cooked it. And believe it or not, I was watching. After a while, their legs start swelling up and swelled up their bodies before died. Then with the typhus broke out. And I will never forget Alan, I was wearing a long coat, not a belt, but a piece of wire, but we had a metal, like a dish. The dish, I would have to carry all the time, that's what we had to eat the meal. And they gave you some coffee, they call this black mud, from the dish. You didn't have any cups. And a spoon, I was very wearing boots, putting the spoon in the boot. And that's the way it was going, day after day.

0:32:05.8 S1: How much did you weigh in those camps?

0:32:08.2 Sherman: I would say maybe about 75 pounds. Skeleton. Laying at this doggone board, the skin was... Nothing but skin and bone.

0:32:23.4 S1: The bone was rubbing your skin...

0:32:25.4 Sherman: No meat, no flesh. I mean no flesh. That I will never forget.

0:32:32.5 S3: That's amazing.

0:32:33.6 S1: You went from Auschwitz to where?

0:32:36.5 Sherman: From Auschwitz, the last one was Dachau.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:32:39.7 S1: That was in Germany.

0:32:40.7 Sherman: It was in Germany.

0:32:41.9 S1: Right outside of Munich.

0:32:43.5 Sherman: Three days, it took them. You see, a lot of the railroad lanes was bombarded so they went back to Austria, different places. But I will never forget, a bottle of black coffee, they called it, water and a slice of bread. We was laying in the boxcars for three days. You're talking what a human can go through, here we are complaining... A little cold or a little virus... How can a human survive for so long, be in a boxcar for three days... You didn't know anything better.

0:33:31.2 S1: Where is that piece, that newspaper article...

0:33:36.1 S3: I have a question, how big was Auschwitz?

0:33:39.5 Sherman: Auschwitz was 40 kilometers square. It used to belong to the Polish cavalry. The place was build a barracks for horses. So they went along and build three, the beds... They call it beds, three. Now I will never forget, every one of them, we was laying and we was engraving the name, first name and last name, the town, in case you ever die, people will look so they will know who was here, what town, what's his name... With a little, it was like a knife, we sharpened on a rock, so we could engrave in the wood. And everybody did it.

0:34:37.7 S1: It shows you the people that were in the camp, that died, Chelsea.

0:34:46.1 S3: Are these people that died from starvation or were they killed?

0:34:51.2 Sherman: Starvation.

0:34:52.6 S1: When were you liberated?

0:34:55.0 S3: May the 2nd, 1945.

0:35:00.8 S1: Three days before your 24th birthday. How much did you weigh?

0:35:04.0 Sherman: I had to hold on. I couldn't walk alone.

0:35:07.7 S1: You were 24 years old and you couldn't walk alone.

0:35:09.7 Sherman: I couldn't walk alone. Alan, we were so weak. I was covered up with a little blanket. In Bavaria, the 2nd of May, was felling light snow. When I got up, we start looking for the SS, and [0:35:36.1] _____ was a village. We saw white flags, and a lot of them start, Alan, "Oh, we are free, we are free. We don't see the SS, we don't see the Gestapo. All of them run away." And I will never forget, a dead horse was laying in the road, you should see the way they were... All that was left is the bones.

0:36:00.6 S1: Eaten the horse?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:36:03.1 Sherman: Eaten the horse.

0:36:07.9 S1: Did you go to a displaced persons camp after that?

0:36:11.4 Sherman: Then, they took us... The American trucks and boats...

0:36:15.3 S1: Were you liberated by Americans?

0:36:18.3 Sherman: By Americans. They took us to Munich...

0:36:20.4 S1: The American army liberated Sherman, Chelsea. The American army liberated Sherman from Auschwitz... From Dachau.

0:36:30.6 Sherman: Dachau.

0:36:33.0 S3: They marched in and...

0:36:33.3 S1: And where did you go?

0:36:34.5 Sherman: It was... The city was Munich. By Munich were the [0:36:39.0] _____ where the Wehrmacht used to stay. So they took every boy, three boys to a room, where the Wehrmacht used to stay, they gave us the rooms. And they had the French doctors. They didn't trust the German doctors. The French doctors come in and they checked us, and they gave an order to start cooking fine soup not...

0:37:08.5 S1: That would have killed you.

0:37:11.1 Sherman: Killed me right away.

0:37:12.2 S1: That meal would have killed you.

0:37:13.4 Sherman: Killed me.

0:37:14.7 S3: Too much?

0:37:15.6 S1: Way too much.

0:37:17.4 Sherman: Fine soup was... They gave us so much bread. We accumulate so much bread, we had to go and trade it, trade it for razor blades. But nobody... They gave us a little bit of wine, the doctor said, to make the stomach stretch. The way you see the skeleton, the bones... That's the way we looked.

0:37:38.8 S1: Yeah, and your stomach, it just shrunk.

0:37:40.0 Sherman: Stomach shrunk, you couldn't eat.

0:37:45.0 S3: How long did it take you to...

Sherman Ray Interview

0:37:46.5 S1: Recuperate?

0:37:46.5 S3: Yeah.

0:37:47.9 Sherman: It took me about six, seven months.

0:37:50.1 S3: Really?

0:37:52.2 S1: And did you stay in Europe after?

0:37:54.0 Sherman: I stayed in Germany.

0:37:56.1 S1: You stayed in Germany.

0:37:56.9 Sherman: Stayed in Germany, in Munich. I said to myself... They wanted to send us to a camp, where a lot of displaced persons. I said, "Look, I had enough." And this guy who was in charge, he was from Latvia.

0:38:09.1 S1: Latvia were not friends to the Jews either.

0:38:14.0 Sherman: Well, but I'm talking a Jewish guy, he was living in Latvia. Yeah. Kaplan was his name. I said, "Kaplan, fix me up with a nice room. I had enough of the camps." "I don't blame you", he said, "I will see to it you will get a nice room." So he fixed me and another three guys, living alone, and we lived in Munich. I said, "I don't want to reach in the camp." They offered free food and all, I said, "I don't want it." And then we start, go to the market, trading bread for razor blades, for... And then I got acquainted with Germans, was making purses and a lot of the Jewish girls, they wanted a purse, and they wanted... Start dressing up, get the stuff. And you couldn't find... You couldn't get nothing.

0:39:04.2 S1: But you knew how to sew clothes, didn't you?

0:39:06.8 Sherman: But I didn't wanna bother with sewing. I said, "It's a lot easier way to make a living than do sewing." But in Germany, whatever you bought, you sold, you doubled or tripled, especially the GIs, my gosh, and the fräuleins, they got with the GIs, and the stamps and the cigarettes... It was...

0:39:31.5 S1: American money.

0:39:32.3 Sherman: American money. It's like Korea, you saw the same thing over there.

0:39:39.3 S1: So you stayed in Germany how long?

0:39:41.5 Sherman: 'Til President Truman signed... So many refugees can come to the United States, so many can go to Australia, Canada, New Zealand...

0:39:55.7 S1: And that would have been early '46?

0:39:58.5 Sherman: '47.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:39:58.5 S1: '47.

0:40:00.0 S3: And you were lucky enough to come here?

0:40:02.3 S1: Early '47 and you felt that the American...

0:40:04.9 Sherman: I've been alone, I signed up, go to the United States and to Australia. About three months, they called me, saying, "Look, you got to make up your mind, where you want to go. You can't go both places."

0:40:23.2 S1: Did you speak any English?

0:40:24.7 Sherman: Are you kidding?

[laughter]

0:40:26.8 S3: What did you know about America?

0:40:29.3 Sherman: My grandfather, and I was a little boy, during the Depression, he came to the United States.

0:40:38.0 S1: Your grandfather?

0:40:39.0 Sherman: He was a ladies' tailor.

0:40:43.5 S1: A ladies' tailor. You were a men's tailor?

0:40:46.8 Sherman: He left five children and Grandma start writing him, "Come back, we need you." If he would stay and bring everybody over, we wouldn't have to go through this, but you know how women are. They think they're always right. So he went, the fool, he went back, and that's where we wind up.

[background conversation]

0:41:13.3 S1: Chelsea, Chelsea... Sherman, we haven't asked you this, but your entire family who survived the Second World War... Your mother died, your father died...

0:41:27.9 Sherman: All of them vanished. When they went to Treblinka, it was no way for surviving.

0:41:36.4 S3: Chelsea asked me that today, she said, did you have cousins, did you have brothers and sisters...

0:41:40.3 Sherman: Oh yeah, I had two sisters and one brother.

0:41:45.0 S1: They were all murdered?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:41:46.4 Sherman: All murdered. You see, in Germany, I mean in Poland, the way the families was all together, it was really to die; if they have to die, they will better die than be separated. The only one who survived, with a lot of gold pieces, money, special... Now the Scandinavian countries, I got to say good about them, they helped a lot.

0:42:21.6 S1: Denmark and Sweden.

0:42:24.9 Sherman: Denmark, Sweden, Holland. They've done a lot, they saved a lot of Jews. I had a uncle in Poland, he used to deal in the commodities...

0:42:37.8 S1: You told me about him.

0:42:38.8 Sherman: Yeah. He used to always let them have money and they saved him. Calmish Kolnig. They saved him.

0:42:45.9 S1: He ended up in Israel, didn't he?

0:42:46.9 Sherman: He ended up in Israel and he died of cancer, he was 70 years old. But there, they saved him. Why? He had some gold pieces but they had him build a bunker... Poland had a lot of forests you could hide. At the beginning, I thought, we thought, the war will last 5-6 months and it's over. But it was dragging and the Poles say, "Look... " Which... They was good to me. I used to come... In daytime, we used to lay on the ground, but at night, I know a lot of farmers, my dad used to make clothes, "Are you alive? I thought all of you are dead."

0:43:26.4 Sherman: I said, "Yeah I'm the only one." They used to give me a big loaf of bread, bacon, smoked... Give me a shirt to change, [0:43:38.8] ____ you couldn't take a bath. So, one boy was laying, we start feeling, it was getting close to Easter. Start feeling, you have gangrene. And they brought him in the ghetto, the doctor said, "I gotta take your legs off." Anybody, was crippled, handicapped, that's it.

0:44:08.4 S1: Okay, so you got on a quota to come to the United States in '47.

0:44:13.3 Sherman: In '48.

0:44:15.4 S1: In '48. When did you arrive in the United States?

0:44:18.3 Sherman: In United States, I arrived, it didn't go so fast. They have to check you, if you're not a... Asked me if I'm a communist...

0:44:28.2 S1: This is McCarthy folks, we gotta remember.

[overlapping conversation]

0:44:34.0 S3: Where did you arrive in America?

0:44:34.1 Sherman: In America, I came to New York City.

0:44:37.1 S3: To Ellis Island?

Sherman Ray Interview

0:44:38.1 Sherman: Ellis Island.

0:44:38.6 S1: Wow.

0:44:42.5 Sherman: And I said to a little Jewish lady, I say, "Why don't you let me stay here?" "Oh no, man, you got to go west."

0:44:45.4 S1: Chicago?

0:44:46.0 Sherman: Oklahoma City... [laughter] And I said... I was talking to a guy over there in Munich, he was a captain, a Jewish captain, and I asked him, Oklahoma City, oh, he say, "Don't go, nothing but Indians and n[redacted]." I said, "What?" I said, "They are human, no?" He said, "Yeah. But you don't wanna go over there." I said, "Look, it's not up to me. I can't ask to go." But anyway, I came over there with the... A jewelry lady in Oklahoma City, yeah, on Fort and Robinson. And they was helping me...

0:45:33.7 S1: When was this, Sherman?

0:45:37.7 Sherman: It was in 1950.

0:45:39.1 S1: 1950.

0:45:39.8 Sherman: October 28, 1949. Yeah it was almost '50. A ruskin. It wasn't a jeweler business. And she spoke Russian.

0:45:52.9 S1: And you could talk with her.

0:45:54.4 Sherman: I could talk to her. And another lady spoke German. I spoke with her.

0:45:57.1 S1: Did you speak any English at all?

0:45:58.2 Sherman: Nothing. Alan, you could buy me and sell me for whatever you wanted. Nothing. And I said, "Oh boy, it's tough." I went to a custom tailor, and I... [chuckle]

0:46:12.9 S1: You pantomimed... You knew how to make clothes and...

0:46:15.2 Sherman: I know... It was a Swedish tailor... Was a good tailor. I said, "All I wanna do is catch on the system." Europe, we used to make full-lined coats and here, the F-line and the double-breasted. And his name was Smith. So, I stayed with a Swedish tailor, I saw he was trying to use me, but I said, "Look, I can speak the language." But except this, I said, "I got to get a radio, start listening, I got to go to night school," and I said, "I got to start all over." And that's what I did.

0:46:53.6 S1: And you were almost 30 years old.

0:46:57.2 Sherman: Yeah. And I was watching the girls with the divorces, what's going on, I said, "Oh, my gosh. I don't wanna get married to one of them..."

Sherman Ray Interview

0:47:04.3 S1: But you did, unfortunately.

0:47:05.8 Sherman: Unfortunately, [0:47:10.5] _____. Alan, sometime I say to myself, "Did it pay for me to go through all the hell and look what I arrived at."

0:47:23.4 S1: You got two choices, you either go through it or you die. And you survived, and we're all the better for it.

0:47:33.5 Sherman: And the way I survived... And the way I survived...

0:47:36.1 S3: When did you get your tattoo to cover your number?

0:47:39.1 Sherman: In Oklahoma City. There was over there, off Main Street, a lady... Everybody, "Hey, what is the number? Explain."

0:47:47.4 S1: Sherman, you had it on... When I bought my first suit from you, you had your number.

0:47:53.2 Sherman: And believe it or not, I said to myself, explain everybody what I went through and all, and everybody I looked and it always remind me. I said, "I got to cover it up, try to forget."

0:48:06.9 S3: Try to forget?

0:48:10.3 Sherman: You never can forget, but at least, it's not in front of my...

0:48:14.4 S1: You don't have a constant reminder.

0:48:15.0 S3: Right. You don't get the questions.

0:48:19.2 Sherman: Everybody. Well, the American people are the greatest, the most charitable people in the world. If not for the United States, believe me, I wouldn't sit here and talk to you. They are the ones saved my life. Russia was a different story. Now, where they come in, in Germany, they took revenge. They come in, they took the furniture, paintings, everything...

0:48:52.0 S1: Raped everyone.

0:48:54.0 Sherman: Raped the women, makes no difference what age, by the Russian... Special... And I was watching, I went to Berlin a few times, with some cigarettes. You bought in Germany, you could triple the price in Berlin. And one guy said to me, "You speak Russian?" I said, "Yeah." "What do you think we should do?" I said, "Get a couple of cartons of American cigarettes, and get a bottle or two of vodka." Alan, we had about 100 cartons of cigarettes and we smuggled it to Berlin. And then...

0:49:31.4 S1: Quadrupled your money?

0:49:33.5 Sherman: Yeah. Then this guy say, "Let's go back." I said, "Wait a minute, you don't go and carry the paper back." "What do you think we should do?" I said, "Let's find out if we can get some nylon hose, it's a big market." [chuckle] In Berlin, we find a guy, we had to pay a price, but

Sherman Ray Interview

you could make money without... It was no problem. He bought a Mercedes Benz, it was stolen. [laughter] But everything was moving. People had the money. You couldn't buy nothing. Anyway, that's the way it went.

0:50:22.0 S1: Well, Sherman, we greatly appreciate...

0:50:25.4 Sherman: I sure appreciate and I'm thankful to you for inviting me and having such a lovely meal.

0:50:31.7 S1: You've enlightened our lives, and our seven-year-old will one day appreciate this.

0:50:37.9 Sherman: Anytime you want, any questions, she can come and ask me whatever... I can help you. It will be a pleasure.

0:50:46.1 S3: Okay.

0:50:46.1 S1: Maybe one day, she will.

[overlapping conversation]

0:50:53.4 S3: And she was in junior college, so she would have been about 19 or 20, and they corresponded for a number of years.

0:51:03.2 S1: They began to correspond before the war started, and then the Germans invaded in the spring of 1940.

0:51:13.7 S3: Yeah, he was part of the underground that was helping to smuggle the Jews...

0:51:19.8 Sherman: Oh, it was a lot of them...

0:51:24.5 S3: Fascinating letters. We have his letters...

0:51:25.2 S1: And he ended up marrying a Danish Jew. One of the Jews that had been hidden in Holland for four years.

0:51:32.8 S3: We met him seven years ago, we went to... We took our Baltic cruise.

0:51:38.4 Sherman: Special... And Italian, a lot of them smuggled Jews even to Palestine.

0:51:41.6 S1: I don't think the Italians were particularly honorable that much but...

0:51:48.7 Sherman: And Alan, you will not believe it, I lived about four years in Germany, and they always came, from the [0:51:58.1] _____, always, "You're young, you should go to Israel and fight. We need young boys like you." I said, "Wait a minute, if I will go," I said, "I will give you a \$100 let me stay." And that's the way I kept staying, until President Truman signed. I said, "No, I'm going." If I would be over there, I would be dead. A long time.

0:52:28.2 S1: Sure.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:52:29.0 S3: How many languages can you speak?

0:52:31.4 Sherman: About six.

0:52:31.8 S3: Six languages?

0:52:31.9 Sherman: Six? What are they? Polish, Russian, German...

0:52:36.5 Sherman: Polish, Russian, German, Jewish...

0:52:40.6 S1: Which is Hebrew.

0:52:42.8 Sherman: Hebrew...

0:52:43.8 S1: English?

0:52:45.7 Sherman: A little bit of English.

[laughter]

0:52:49.9 S3: Just a small bit.

0:52:55.1 Sherman: Well, I think that is my meal... More than I can eat.

0:53:03.2 S1: Anybody have any questions? Chels?

0:53:07.6 Sherman: Chelsea? You wanna ask me any more questions?

0:53:14.5 S3: You've asked too many already, Chelsea.

0:53:17.2 S1: Would you just come over here and stand by Sherman, so we can get a good picture of you?

0:53:20.9 S3: For the video-cam?

0:53:21.8 S1: For the video-camera. Just come and stand by him. Please.

[overlapping conversation]

0:53:23.3 S1: Come on.

0:53:26.8 S3: I'll walk over there with you...

[background conversation]

0:53:30.3 Speaker 4: I wanna look at the view.

Sherman Ray Interview

0:53:30.4 S3: I know, you can come back and look at the view in a minute.

[overlapping conversation]

0:53:34.8 S3: This is all on video. This is a video.

0:53:36.1 S3: Don't be afraid. Come on.

0:53:37.7 Sherman: It's gonna go on video, the view.

[overlapping conversation]

0:53:38.1 S3: Yeah. [laughter]

0:53:39.5 S1: Thank you, Sherman.

0:53:41.8 S3: Thank you.

0:53:43.4 Sherman: You're welcome.

0:53:43.5 S3: Appreciate it.

0:53:46.5 Sherman: Anytime you need me, not just anytime she wanna ask me questions, later on...

0:53:55.4 S3: When she gets older, she'll have questions.

0:53:56.3 Sherman: I had quite a few kids, they go to the [0:54:01.3] ____, I gave them some... They couldn't believe it. I said, "Nobody, nobody will believe but that's the way it was. You cannot deny, you cannot lie about it."

0:54:11.2 S1: Well, the reason we did...

Sherman Ray Interview