

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Icek Baum**

**July 5, 1994**

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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Icek Baum, conducted by Randy Goldman on July 5, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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# ICEK BAUM

## July 5, 1994

01:00:40

Q: I need to begin by having you state your name as it was then, the date of birth and where you were born.

A: My name is Icek Baum. I'm born in Warsaw the first of January, 1925. And this neighborhood where I was born in Warsaw, it called Powisle, this was just on the river but Poland the big river is Vistula, maybe you know, and that neighborhood was called like that. And my father was a tailor for the army, and so far my father was not alive. He was not bad but he died. I was very young. I don't remember. It could be 1934, '33, '34, something like that. And my mother she was with seven kids. It was very, very hard. So that's the beginning of a very, very hard life for all of us. I was very young at this time, maybe ten-years-old, maybe younger. Maybe a little bit younger.

Q: Were you the middle child, older brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. I have older brothers. I was the second youngster, so I have three sisters, it was three sisters and four brothers. So I was the more youngster, the second youngster.

Q: Now, your life was difficult because your mother had so many of you to take care of, but perhaps you have good memories before the war?

A: Good memories, yes, good memories, little bit, yes. And time when my mother couldn't support everything and I was -- it was time to go to school and first time I was in Polish school. In this neighborhood there was no Jewish school and Polish and I was there but I was maybe lucky, maybe my mother was lucky. She sent me to Dr. Korczak<sup>1</sup>. I was in orphanage by Korczak. Maybe you know about Korczak, something like that.

Q: Now, let me just hear a little bit more about your lifestyle first, and then I do want to talk more about Dr. Korczak. You went to a public school?

A: Yes.

Q: And many of your friends and neighbors were Christian?

A: Most of them was Christian, yes. Perhaps some Jewish too, but just in this neighborhood where we were living there was not many Jews, was most Christians. And we was living -- like I can remember -- it was good because even I don't know what different between Christian or not Christian so. I remember just once when it was holidays, Passover, so we

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<sup>1</sup> Janusz Korczak (1879-1942), physician, writer, and educator. In 1912 he was appointed director the Jewish orphanage at Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, Poland.

had change and we give them matzos, and they bake beautiful nice cake. And this was the difference between a Jew and non-Jew and that's it.

Q: So you had a good relations?

A: We had a very good relationship, yes. And I think my father, my mother, she have too good relationship with these peoples.

Q: Did you do anything that was very uniquely Jewish, other than the holidays?

A: Yes, because we went before to go to the public school my parents would send me, send - us, brothers too, in the Jewish cheder<sup>2</sup>. Maybe you know. This is most religion school. So that's the one that was really different between the Christians.

Q: So your parents were fairly religious?

A: Not very religious, but like maybe more than in this time. But my father keep always the Sabbath and my mother she prepare always for the Friday, like a Jewish home.

Q: Did you experience or were you aware of any antisemitism before Hitler came to power or before the war?

A: Yes, lot. Yes. This would be after my father die, so you know when we becoming older already say we understood more and even on the street "Jew, Jew." It was always the young people, they beating us and they make all kinds of stories, all kinds of things, because we was Jews. I didn't see any difference, but maybe they saw the difference between Jew and non-Jew.

Q: By these were the same people that you were friendly with?

A: Yes. But when they are coming older maybe they was more antisemitic – that's one of the reasons. Maybe the parents teach them like that. Maybe when in the churches, when they go to the churches the priest say, "Don't buy by Jew. Don't.... Kill the Jews. Because they killed our Jesus Christus." That's it.

Q: So this was at a time when Hitler had come to power in Germany but before the war?

A: That's when all before the war -- far before the war. This one, like I say, it was between 1930, '35, '34, '33, '34, '35.

Q: And these were the same people that you said a few minutes ago you went to school with?

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<sup>2</sup> Orthodox primary school (Yiddish).

A: Yeah, we went to school. But even in the school when we went the first time and I was in the public school, so it was always that the -- but in Poland the people were very religious and when it's coming the time to religion -- we don't have to -- but I went out, out from the classroom, and so after "Jew, Jew, Jew," and if they couldn't, they beat us because look, we was just couple youngsters. Not so many like them. We are scared from them and they take advantage of us, that's it. It was very, very hard this time. So even like youngster, and believe me I don't know, I couldn't understand why, why? Because I'm Jew? And I don't see no difference because I was the same thing. We don't have no horn. We don't have nothing. We took the same language. We eat the same thing. And they was so -- they kill. If they can't kill, they beat us. They make all kind of trouble. Sometimes, we saw, they break the windows. They break all these things. Why? Because they were -- they're Jewish family, and believe me at this time we were very, very poor. I remember mine house. When my father died we were very, very poor because we had my mother. She was with seven kids and support seven kids wasn't easy. She have a very, very, very hard life. Very hard life.

01:08:50

Q: What did you know about what was happening in Germany before you were invaded?

A: Lots of things. I don't know. The truth, just what we read sometimes in the paper, you know. The Nationalsozialistische Partei<sup>3</sup>, they win, you know. At this time it was Hindenburg<sup>4</sup> -- Hindenburg lose the power and the German took the power. So when the -- 1939 -- just when it was Rosh Hashanah is decreed the war was starting. So the Germans start to come into Poland. I remember when the Pole -- I never want to believe that the Poland going to lose the war. But at this time I was very young so maybe I don't understood very well, but I remember once my mother told me -- she told us, "You know what, you'll see, when the Germans come in here, I don't think they are going to handle with us very badly because they not the antisemites like the Polacks. Because," she say, "I remember in the war in 1914-18 they were very friendly, because we Jews are speaking Jewish<sup>5</sup>, and the Jewish is a lot like German so we could understood altogether." And it wasn't -- was like she was saying.

01:10:13

Q: So, you all knew what was happening in Germany but you thought that it wouldn't happen to you in Poland?

A: What happen German, I don't know exactly. Because maybe I know what we read in the

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<sup>3</sup> National Socialist Party (German); Nazi political party in Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Paul von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg (1847-1934); German army officer and statesman, president of Germany 1925-1934.

<sup>5</sup> Yiddish

papers, but, you know, we couldn't have no radios, no TV's and the media was not strong like today. So we don't know exactly everything. But one thing I remember is when Hitler is coming on power, they send out most the Jews from Germany. And the Jews, they come into Poland and lots coming to Warsaw and we was talking with them and they tell us what kind of pogrom was there, you know, with the Kristallnacht and the beating and the -- don't let live the Jews. The Jews have no right, the Jews was second, even not the second citizen. They couldn't work. They couldn't have absolute nothing. So we know already there is trouble.

Q: Do you remember the first day of the war or when Poland was occupied, do you remember what was happening?

A: When the -- first of all, the Polish people, the Polack, they keep the fight one month, 30 days. And this was a very, very badly because we was in Warsaw and I remember it was when shrapnel -- you know what the shrapnel -- it was maybe two, three windows away from our apartment. So in the house if you run down, all my mother she prepare for everybody, pullover, you know, something to put on clothes. So we run to the shelters. So after maybe one or two hours later we go out. We went back to the apartment and we eat what we have. We don't have much but we eat everything. And just the second day, I think, they started again and it was fire bombs that fell in the house where we was living and everything was burned. And we don't have time to take nothing, nothing, we run out just what we have on our back. And everybody -- all these houses, all of Warsaw was burning. So we have nowhere to go. That's what I remember and it was on the same street it was a bath -- public bath. So we went there. We have a little. We took a little broom and my mother she was living, sleeping in the bath tub. That's what I remember. And when the Germans come in, the first thing what they do they start to give food for the peoples, soup and bread. So it was not bad. But after they doesn't -- they start with the Jews. No Jew have right to have bread. No Jew have nothing. And sometimes my mother -- she was blond, she wasn't very dark and so it was not so easy to recognize her like a Jew, so she went and have bread. But sometimes, next day or two days later when she go again, some Polack recognize her and they say, "Ah there's a Jew, there is a Jew." And they throw her out so we didn't have nothing.

Q: So this was in the bath house?

A: That was in the bath house.

Q: And there was Polish people and Jewish people?

A: All together, yeah. But as soon as the German come in, you know, they saw what is all the difference. We were treated a little bit better because from the Jews, but we were always scared to go out because it was not very, very pleasant. Not easy.

Q: How long were you in this facility? Do you remember?

A: I can't tell you exactly how long because--

Q: Days, weeks?

01:14:50

A: It was couple, maybe one or two weeks until we find a shelter very, very far out from town and there we was maybe the whole time until -- this was 1939, and 1939, '40 the winter was very, very hard winter so we stay there until it makes 1940. I think 1940. So, I was, I was by Korczak.

Q: Let me just ask you a question and then I want to ask you about the orphanage. When you were in this bath house, wasn't there any feeling of -- I don't know -- camaraderie, between the Polish people and the Jewish people because, in fact, you were all being invaded by the Germans?

A: Not special, not special. No. Because first of all, I don't know, we was scared. If the Polish people was scared from the Germans, I don't know. But it was, there was a distance between the Jewish people and the Polish people because the German they start already -- the Jew. They take away everything from the Jews and they start to talk about the ghetto and they start, you know, every Jew have to have, you know, the Jew shtern<sup>6</sup>. So we -- there was a certain distance between the Polish and the Jews.

01:16:22

Q: Maybe the Polish thought they could protect themselves by separating?

A: You know, it's very hard to tell you, because the Polish people -- I going to tell you just once. The antisemitic by the Polish people -- by the Polish woman there was already inject in the breast of from the woman and they give it to the children. But the children took the breast from their mothers and start to give them the milk. They give them the hateness for the Jews. And it was all over, all over, every time you have always, you know. There was terrible. Even sometimes you know this day I remember I stay up about two, three o'clock in the night to make a line to have a piece of bread. And when one Polack or somebody see a man what is a Jew, they threw him out. They kicked him out. They beat him.

Q: And yet your early memories were good. Early memories everybody was friendly. It all changed.

A: That doesn't change. And I think nothing change today. I don't think something change

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<sup>6</sup> star (Yiddish).

today.

Q: But what I am saying is when you were young you lived around a lot of Polish people and everybody was friends?

A: Yes. Because, you know, everybody was friends because we was young, little one. I was very young. So we don't see the difference but in the moment when we come just to the reason, the moment when the brain start to work, they change. They change today because maybe, like I say, maybe the churches, maybe the priest, maybe they put the poison in this brains. Maybe the brainwash you, I don't know what. They always know that they pretend always, "The Jews they kill Christus -- Jesus Christus." What I have to do with 2000 years with all this thing?

Q: At what point were you sent to the orphanage and why were you sent there?

A: I was sent to the orphanage because like I say we was poor. It was very hard and this time, it was time when I have to go to school and it was maybe very hard to my mother, you know. So somebody give her the address from this orphanage and she put me there.

Q: Do you remember what year this was?

A: This should be about '35, 1934, '35, maybe '36, in this year.

Q: Can you tell me in a full sentence what that is 1934, 1935 you were sent to the orphanage and tell me what it was called?

A: What you mean it was called?

Q: What was the name of this orphanage?

A: This was -- I'm sorry Dom Sierot<sup>7</sup>. It was Polish this is orphan home for the orphanages and this was a private -- not private, but we have to pay. But I think they reach people from Warsaw who support themselves and this was the hope -- the director -- maybe for her was Dr. Janusz Korczak. His really name is Henry Goldsmith. He was a doctor and they have the Mrs. Wilczynska<sup>8</sup>, she was the director too because Dr. Korczak doesn't was always there. I think he was busy, you know, to collect the money, to collect all the things for us. And he have always an audition on the radio. He talk on the radio once a week, I think.

01:20:40

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<sup>7</sup> Orphan home (Polish)

<sup>8</sup> Stephania Wilczynska (1886-1942), head teacher and co-director of Korczak's orphanage.



Q: He was well known?

A: Yeah. And they call him the stary<sup>9</sup> doctor, the old doctor. And I remember he took me once with him to the radio and he was -- moment I was I think, in September, October it was cold outside. He talk about the flu, and there was a moment I have to cough and I forgot to cough and he say "Cough, cough, cough." And then I did it. He was a very, very nice man and we was there 107 children, 56 girls and 51 boys. My number was 46.

Q: How old were you?

A: Bitte<sup>10</sup>?

Q: About how old were you?

A: About six, seven years.

Q: No, no, how old were you when you went into the orphanage?

A: Seven years, maybe.

Q: Oh, you were young?

A: Yes, yes. They don't took old people because when you were 13, 14 years, you have to leave -- to live -- you have to go out because they took somebody else in your place.

Q: Now, did your brothers and sisters go with you to the orphanage?

A: I was alone but sometimes, every Saturday I go home to visit my parents and there, I was there a whole year. But in summertime we have a camp they call Kolonia Różyczka<sup>11</sup> and it was a vacation. I'm sorry. So when I come in they took me out from the school the Christian school and they send me to the Jewish school, not the Jewish, but it was a public school but it was most Jews was there. That was there. So when we have vacation so we went to the kolonia<sup>12</sup> for two months and I have my little brother. So it was hard for me. It was so nice. It was so good that I have food. I have nice bed I have everything. He have to stay home, so I ask, I make questions and they allow him. So I went home and he was in my place for one month.

Q: Was this after you went to the orphanage, or before?

A: In the orphanage.

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<sup>9</sup> old (Polish)

<sup>10</sup> please, pardon (Yiddish)

<sup>11</sup> Little Rose Camp (Polish); children's summer camp connected with Korczak's orphanage.

<sup>12</sup> summer camp (Polish)

Q: The school you were talking about, was that part of the orphanage?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: And the other thing I'm confused about, if you don't mind is -- now, you were born in 1925?

A: Yes.

Q: And your father died in, around maybe 1935?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't remember exactly?

A: No.

Q: So you went to the orphanage after that. I was thinking you would be a couple years older?

A: Maybe.

Q: You don't remember exactly how old you were?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Okay. But your parents sent you?

A: My mother, yes.

01:24:00

Q: Can you talk about life in the orphanage?

A: Life in the orphanage, it was very nice. First of all, we, you know, everybody have his bed. You have to, like you say, sleeping places for the girls, for the boys, everybody have his own bed. And I think, like I remember this day, it was six, six-thirty in the morning. We have to be washed, clothed and we have a breakfast and everybody have to prepare to go to school. We went to school so we went to different schools. And the school -- I remember the first couple years when the first I start from the third degree because I was already-- so after school start one o'clock to six afternoon. So before we have breakfast and everybody have to make his bed and we have to clean the beds. And the -- we have to make the homeworks, and after we have lunch and then have to be dressed, shoes

shined and we went to school. And we have some people, some children who start the school at eight o'clock in the morning until one o'clock.

Q: Did you -- was there a certain organization in the orphanage? Did you each have responsibilities or --

A: Yes. Everybody have his responsibilities, they have to take care. First one, the oldest take care the youngsters. So when you arrive about 10 years, 11 years and when a youngster come in, so you take care of him. You teach him. You say the rules for the orphanage, you know. Until a certain time you was responsible for him. If he do something that not supposed to be, you be punished. Not him. But this guy, what was responsible for the child, he was punished. But children thinks it was very, very -- but still -- and you know, we have like supper all together. It was about seven o'clock supper and we could play. We have ping pong. We have a piano and we have lessons every day you could. They teach us to play mandolin if you want to or the piano. They teach us Hebrew always when you want to. Nobody force you to do something. And you know, they have all kind of -- wintertime, we went out and we play with winter things and we have, we can go ice skating too. So it was very, very nice, very pleasant. But Saturday after dinner everybody could go home to the parent or visit the parent or something like that, and sometimes we make a play in the orphanage and we would invite the parents and they come. We invite the parents and they come to ho... see how the play.

Q: Now, were the people -- the kids in the orphanage -- were they Christian or Jewish?

A: No, no. It was just Jewish.

Q: Just Jewish. What were the ages?

A: The ages were from six to 14; 13, 14 years.

Q: And how long did you stay in there?

A: I was until the war, 1939, even I was longer. When I finished the school they find -- summertime and place I was working in an office. The office, the factory they make all kind office supplies like pens, like all these things, and I was in the office there and this was summertime because my brother was in kolonia, so it was until 1939, until the Germans come in. When the German come in, so the owner from this company they give it over to peoples. I think they was swear in or something like that, and they go in. And when they swear and they go in, every Jew have to go out. We -- I was laid off from there. And at this time, like I say, I went back to the kolonia -- to the camp because in the wartime the peoples they steal the beds, and the mattress and the all the extras that we have there. So we call the police and they went with the police, to the houses, and take all the things back. So when the all the people, all the children going back to Warsaw because they think the school going to start. So we was three or five still there in the

camp to take care of that because we have -- it was a very, very big place. So this was until maybe -- 'til 1941. I remember it was, I remember it was a winter there to take care, and after the Germans come and they make a ghetto for this camp because there was lots of barracks there. They have like sleeping block. Block for the boys, sleeping block for the girls, with a very big dining room. Have a kitchen. We have a very big washroom, you know, to take showers and all this thing. And so Germans come in. They took this away and they make a ghetto. Because there was in town is called Wawer, and they took all the Jews to put them, and they make a ghetto. And they started again with the killing there and with the shooting. All the things. So I was there a little time.

01:29:00

Q: I'm sorry to stop you, but I want to talk a little bit more about the orphanage before we talk about the ghetto, if you don't mind. So in the orphanage it sounds like you had a good time?

A: Very good time.

Q: Sounds like you had a good time. And tell me a little bit more about Dr. Korczak. What was he like?

A: Dr. Korczak was a terrific man. He was good. This man was, I can't describe you. He didn't have no hair. He have a little beard. He was a beautiful, good man. He was a doctor. He was a very, very good man, and he kiss everybody. He was so warm -- is very hard. Something wonderful, something terrific about this man and I wonder because nobody talk about him. They make a movie but is far away from what he was really. He was a doctor -- really, really, really, really, good. He was like more than a father. He was a father to 107 and maybe -- what do I say -- yes, 107 children -- but you have some teachers there, about 120 peoples.

Q: It sounds like he was quite a character. He was going out and getting money. He was all over the place. He had Polish friends and Jewish friends?

A: Yes. First of all, I don't think so. I don't know exactly, but I don't think so. The Polish people, they wouldn't accept him like a Jew because his name is -- Korczak is really Polish name -- but his name is, was Henry Goldsmith. This was his really, really, really name. And I think he was from a very nice family and he travel very much before the war. He was in Berlin, he was in Austria and even the German, lots of German know him.

Q: How was he able to accomplish all of this?

A: I don't know. I can't tell because unique. He was very, very nice and every time when somebody was sick or what, he was always there. When we need him he was always

there.

01:33:45

Q: Do you have any other real distinct memories about him like the radio show?

A: He was -- I remember once, like I say, he went once with him out in Poland and he had on always his uniform -- because he was major in the army in the Polish Army. So you have the uniform and I tell him, "Doctor, please, why you put the uniform? It's so dangerous, it's so dangerous. Why you don't take them out?" He say, "Oh, no, this is my uniform. I'm a Polish soldier. I'm going to keep the uniform." And I remember when we was in the camp, some Polish people, women, come in and ask for the Doctor, "Doctor, please, my child is sick," or something like that. It doesn't make no question what kind, if it's Jew, if it's not Jew. What happened? He took -- I remember he had a little, little bag. He took his little bag. He went to the people and doesn't charge, doesn't take any money. Don't take nothing. I don't think so, for this man he was any difference. He was -- he don't think any difference if he's a Jew, if he's not a Jew -- a human being, a child. That's it.

Q: I understand he wouldn't wear the Jewish star?

A: Bitte?

Q: I understand he wouldn't wear a Jewish star?

A: I don't think so, no. I don't think so, I don't know if he speak Jewish. He never -- with other Jewish, if he speak Jewish, he never speak Jewish. Something like that, he was a human being. A 150 percent human being. I don't think so you can find men like that today. He was...

Q: Now, you were there for several years until the war?

A: Yes.

Q: And then you left, and at that point were any of your brothers and sisters also in the orphanage?

A: No, no, no. It was just my little brother. He wasn't in the orphanage. It was just in the vacation and camp there, but not special. He don't know his name, so they call him "Maly<sup>13</sup> Icek" -- the "Little Icek". Because that's -- he was always one month, because, you know, vacation time, like here, they're vacation took two months and one month I was home and he was there.

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<sup>13</sup> Small (Polish).

Q: Now, you didn't really have to leave during the war because the orphanage stayed together, but were you at an age where you were ready to leave the orphanage?

A: Yes. Just in the wartime in 1939 I was age, you know, to live there, but I couldn't come every day or once, twice a week to eat no supper, the meals with the friends all together until 1939, until the war. That's when the war, yes, 1940, until the war. So they need help because the camp was empty. Everything was stolen and the children, they was too young to go. So they ask me if I would, I would and I say, yes, I -- and there was nothing to do there, the school. We have no more school because the Jews, you couldn't go nowhere. So I went and I was there and then -- in the camp until the Germans make a ghetto. And after when they start with all this shooting and all this thing.

Q: So you helped out with the orphanage a little bit when you were older?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you make good friends in the orphanage?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I have very good friends I have even, yes, a little girlfriend -- very nice. She not survive. She go over, over with Korczak to the oven.

Q: Do you remember what your duties were in the orphanage?

A: My duty, yes. My duty was after breakfast I have to go and, you know, we have passages between the beds, and I have, I think, two passages to clean, with the broom and the floor was polished. That was my job and sometimes we change. So I have to wash the cups in the morning after breakfast, and there was a girl, Ewa Zylberberg, she is no more there.

Q: She was your girlfriend in the orphanage?

A: Yes, young love.

Q: Very young.

A: Yeah.

01:39:00

Q: Did the girls have different jobs than the boys or did everybody --

A: Yes. It depends. They have to, but most of the girls were working in the clothes shop. Not the shop but, you know, like to sew the numbers, and sometimes they have, the socks to repair and to see after our clothes. Something like that.

Q: Everybody had numbers on your clothes?

A: Oh, yes. Everybody.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because not to mix them, because I say I could have maybe 10, 11, 12 years and there was a little one who was six years who was maybe short, too high, so everybody have his clothes. So when they come from the washing, everybody knows this one was his. Everybody know there one was his and there was one was hers -- everybody have a number and my number was 46. So, you know, if you go to take showers you have to change underwear, so the underwear was there. So I don't want to take somebody else because I know my number is 46. So I have to take number 46, the socks were 46. Everything in the -- everything was marked.

Q: Were there other ways in which the girls and the boys were different in the orphanage?

A: There was girl and boys, yes. There was difference but, you know, we were -- they handled us exactly the same thing. They have tables, you know, the table -- I think we was six children, I think. So there was boys and girls together for the breakfast, for lunch or something like that. They was all together. There was no difference.

Q: You just had different jobs?

A: We had different jobs. Even we went to school together, everything. Even in the same class together. We was together but, you know, when it was time to go to bed, that's only difference. That's it.

Q: It sounds like it was a really nice experience.

A: I think it was one of the nice, this time in young. It was the nicest time, the best time in my life -- this time, you know, if you don't have no war. We have everything. We don't have no war. We have everything -- and you can't imagine -- something is coming like holidays. When I say "holidays" the Christian holidays. So we have -- we receive oranges. It was something. You -- this was something in Poland for the war, an orange was something. You can't dream about that. And this coming from Israel, you know, from Palestine. This time it was market; Jaffa oranges, bananas, all kind of fruit. Was something. It was amazing. Nobody can dream about this, in this time and it's as poor who we was.

Q: How was Korczak able to get the money to do all of this?

01:42:40

A: Like I say, this guy, he doesn't rest. He run the whole days and like I say -- there was very rich people in Poland, in Warsaw, and poor ones too. Was Jewish people, and they support and I think the Jewish organization from Israel to help him, lots of them. Because you know Mrs. Stefa Wilczynska, I think she went to Israel. This was maybe '36 or '37, I don't remember exactly, and the plan was to take all the orphanages, all the children to Israel. But no time. And after, when I was there, you know, when the German come into Warsaw, they make a ghetto. How we come in it, I don't know. There I was in kolonia but I know it was very, very big problem. My brothers, my sisters, my mother, she doesn't have food, she doesn't -- nothing to eat absolute nothing. So when they make the ghetto in the camp. So I know a man, he was a butcher. So he come to me and say, "You know what, if you want to make some money, you can earn some money. Like you have a face nobody can say you a Jew. You take meat. You go to the ghetto. You sell the meat. I give you the address, everything and you have some money. You help me, you help yourself. You can help your family." So at certain time every day in the morning, about five o'clock in the morning when the first streetcar pass -- because in the ghetto, Warsaw ghetto, it was a streetcar passing by the ghetto, but nobody can go down. It pass just the ghetto and it was from one Christian side to the other. Nobody can see go in, because there was police there and they take care. So I have every day, every day I have my shoulder -- I have in back, and I have meat. I don't remember exactly, maybe 25 kilo, 30 kilo, and I have, a band with the -- and this one I took it. I have it in my pocket. So, he told me, he teach me, he say, "You know you go there and when the streetcar, it pass, it turn to the second street he slowed down, and this time you go down and you go in the house. You put on your things and you go, and this and this address. You said it, you're going to have it." But I say, "but the police!" "So the police -- don't worry, the police going to turn his back with the hand behind and you push in some money and doesn't see, doesn't look at you." It was to every day, every day.

Q: This was the Jewish police or the German police?

A: No, no. Polish police.

Q: Polish police.

A: Every day I go down and it was very -- at home -- that was nothing to eat, nothing, and I had to help them. And this one the of the reasons. That's why I help them I go over this meat.

01:46:12

Q: So you got on the streetcar? You took off your armband and you went out to the Polish side to meet with --

A: No. I go out from the camp. I was on the Polish side, so I don't have no band. Off. I went



to the streetcar. Off. I pay my streetcar and I have to take in correspondence and second ticket. And when I come in the street and I take the streetcar, the same streetcar, it pass the ghetto from the other side of the ghetto to the Polish side. So I go in and the policeman was there with his hand behind his back, I give him some money. I jump down. I put my armband and I was a Jew and nobody see. And when I sold the meat. I give the meat, I have some money so I could buy something, potatoes or something like that. I took it home. I give them and I go out and I wait exactly the same place. When the streetcar is coming, take off my band, jump on the -- and I was a Polack again. One day in this ghetto there was a man, a butcher too, he was killing the cattles so he say, "you know, I going to give you" -- I remember very, very, well, "25 zlotys." It was very, very, much money -- "when you bring me my knife." You know, the man have a special knife to kill. So I say, "okay." You know, young, no brains, I don't see the danger what I going to do. So he give me the address and when I go down with my meat, I sold the meat. I go to my mother, give her the money. So I go in this place and I think he going give me a little knife. She give me a knife like that, so I say, "I promise, 'I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it.'" I put the knife -- it was in box -- I put it in here between my shirt and my body. I put it there and exactly the same thing. Jump on the streetcar. But I don't go in the streetcar. I was just in the front by the driver and when I was there, two Gestapo come out. They doesn't talk to me. I don't talk to them. I was quiet do nothing and I went 'til the end on the streetcar until the terminus of the streetcar. And I bring him the knife. And he was wondering, "How you do that?" He give me 25 dollars. You can imagine what this 25 dollars in this days, lots and lots of money. And when they start, you know, with the Jews and they start to make trouble, and they start to take the Jews to the concentration camps from Warsaw. And I say "Stop, I have to go."

01:49:25

So I run away and I was marching from Warsaw to Plonsk -- that's about 50 kilometers. There, my older brother was there, my mother was there, and there it doesn't -- was, you know, Poland was split. The Generalgouvernement<sup>14</sup> and the annexed territory and there was territory -- so I want to go there, and I was walking two days and when I arrived there so. It was okay the first time. There was no ghetto there and they was living not so very well, but okay. We was in little room, like here would be ten peoples, but it was okay and I start to work by turps<sup>15</sup>. You know what turps? Turps, that's when they take a piece out from the air and when it was dry the people burn that, like coal. And I was working very, very, very hard when I was working there and I --

Q: Can I stop you a moment?

A: Yes.

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<sup>14</sup> German established administrative territory encompassing portions of Poland that were not incorporated into the Reich after the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

<sup>15</sup> turpentine

Q: First of all how are we on tape? I want to make sure we have enough tape. I want to just go back to the ghetto a minute. I'm sort of curious about what it was like in the ghetto and how your life changed and how your family lived and what a day was like?

A: Oh, God.

Q: I know it's not a happy memory.

A: First of all, they took all the Jews.

Q: Can you start out by just saying in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto, exactly what happened in the ghetto, I can't tell you. I was not very long in Warsaw in ghetto, but I know everytime -- when I come there, I see people lying outside starving. The German come in, they laughing, you know, they make all kind of pictures from the poor peoples and it was is very, very hard to explain you. It's not a life. The people you have -- the people are dead, all dead. You don't have nothing there, nothing there. No food, cold. Peoples was outside begging you for pieces of bread and some, they have children they go in the past the wall, you know, to the Polish side to take something, to have some potatoes and when they was chased from the Germans, they kill them, they shoot them, I -- you know, I can't explain to you. I can't explain.

01:52:40

Q: Did you ever see this happen?

A: I saw, yes. I remember once like I said, you know, one time I have my meat on my back and I have to go, and I couldn't go down because they have a German soldier, German gendarme was in the tram. I couldn't go down. I have to go 'til the other side. When I arrived there it was just in cemetery, in Jewish cemetery. To go to the ghetto, I have to pass the cemetery and I arrive in the middle from the cemetery. They start to shoot. I hear, you know with the machine gun, and I was there. So I said, "Now is finished." So, you know in this time there was so many dead people, because by the Jews you have no right to make the grave before you have the body at the cemetery and the preparer of the holes. One thing that I have to do is I have to jump there and I have lie the whole night between two deads -- and I hear what the shooting, what the machine guns around and they was walking over my head. So you can imagine. It was the whole night there in this hole.

Q: Should we stop and change tape?

01:54:12

Tape #2

02:00:39

Q: All right. So let's just talk a little bit more about the conditions and in the ghetto and the structure of it. What was going on with the Jewish council and the Jewish police?

A: It was the Jewish police to take care and sometimes they make -- they took the peoples go out from the ghetto, you know, with the Germans to work. All kind of work. Like wintertime to clean the snow, clean the highways and all kind of things like that. And sometimes they took them to work, you know, to make the uniforms for the Germans. But there was nobody have the chance to have something and it was very, very, very, hard in Warsaw. In the street and every place, you have dead peoples, and peoples begging. It was, you know, horrible to see. Really is very, very hard to explain. It's just -- I can't believe that I passed there. I saw all this. It's no human nature can see this. You know, I saw lots of things but it was, it's really terrible. I can't understand, you know, because the Germans they are cultivated people and they couldn't do things like that. I can't understand it. I can't, I can't understand it.

02:02:20

Q: Were there activities going on? Was there any semblance of real life in the ghetto? Was there music? Was there school?

A: Yes, school. Nobody school, you know, when sometimes you have the teachers, the Jewish teachers were teaching in the school before the war. They're teaching their own children. They can do that for nothing. Nobody want to pay. And every time when the Jewish community, the community when the German make and they're always -- they ask for money and they ask the peoples to work and they send the peoples, you know, to the different camps to break the stones to make highways, and all kind of things. Because the Germans, they was the was the worst. The work -- they need the uniforms. They need everything, so the Jews was very cheap labor. So they took the peoples and that's it. Sometimes, I remember, my brother tell me once he was -- they took him in school, in a big school, and they give him brush, teeth brush to wash the floors. And there was the ladies' room, they have to take off pants and to clean it. It was terrible.

02:03:47

Q: Now, weren't there also more secretive activities going on? Weren't there youth organization and schools and cultural activities?

A: Nothing. You have sometimes, but you need money for clubs. We have some clubs. We have some singers. We have some players. But you need money to get in. Where you going to take the money?

Q: So there wasn't so much?

A: There was nothing, most of nothing. It was very hard for the living, very hard. And after they start to evacuate the ghetto, to take to Majdanek, to Treblinka, and the peoples they start to know they kill these people. So it was the ghetto uprising. Maybe you remember. Maybe you hear about that. It was too something terrible and this people inside, they begging outside they ask to help. They ask the Russian, they a and the American, they ask the German. I think the English to help to send some weapons, send some ammunition. Nothing is coming, absolute nothing, nothing, nothing. So what they do? They kill out -- they killed everybody and they burn. The whole ghetto was destroyed. Everything was destroyed.

02:05:27

Q: But there were youth organizations that were involved in the resistance there?

A: The youth organizations doesn't help us with absolute nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.

Q: There was --

A: They couldn't help.

Q: It didn't work, but there was resistance?

A: There was Resistance, yes, and the underground too, but the underground was from the Polish people, and some people, some Jews, they was escaped from the ghetto, escape from the uprising. They went to the partisans, you know. And that's all, I think.

Q: Well, there was also resistance within the ghetto?

A: The what?

Q: There was also resistance effort inside the ghetto?

A: Inside the ghetto, but not in this time. It was when they start to evacuate this ghetto because nobody, nobody can imagine they going to send peoples -- they going to burn their whole family. They are going to kill their whole family, and the killing going on and going on and going on, until they come, until to Warsaw. There was the uprising, but what could they help? They had nothing, no rifles, no absolute nothing. They have little bit, but absolute nothing.

Q: Now, I think we were talking about this off camera, so I just want to make sure you say

this for the record, that where was your family and where were you at this point?

A: What?

Q: I just want you to say what you told me for the record, which was essentially, that your family was in the ghetto, you, one of the youngest, were out doing things. How did all of this happen?

A: You know, when we was in shelter after, when the Germans come in, and because the apartment we was living was burned up. We had absolute nothing. So we went to the bath house and we find a shelter, but when the Germans come in we have to move from there to the ghetto. I was with Korczak at this time. This was in 1940, '41, I think.

Q: You need to explain to us that you were no longer really in the orphanage at this point. You were at --

A: Yes.

Q: You were at the summer camp?

A: At this time I was -- this was in summer. I think in summertime they move from Warsaw to the camp. And they ask me, too, if I want to go to the camp. I say, "yeah," because I didn't have nothing to do there, and they start the ghetto in Warsaw. All the Jews have to go to the ghetto -- towards the ghetto, and this time even my mother say, "What you going to do here? Go to camp." I went to camp and how to come to the ghetto, I don't know. I know once, you know, they give me the address. I knew they was in the ghetto and there was very, very bad situation. Very bad situation. They was hungry. They have nothing to eat, and "this," I decide "this time." So I have possibility to help them and this was my opportunity to help them, risk my life to help them.

Q: And this was because you were outside of the ghetto?

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: But you moved pretty freely between the ghetto and outside the ghetto. You seemed to get back and forth pretty well.

A: Yes. I have to go and I was feeling very angry because I saw the Polish people, the Polish boys in my age they running free. They eating. They have everything, and I have to hiding myself all over. Take care. Doesn't talk, doesn't speak, doesn't go nowhere. You keep yourself. You just -- you know, because don't forget one thing, "You a Jew, you a Jew, you don't have no right to live."

Q: Did you pretend you weren't a Jew?

02:10:00

A: I pretend I wasn't a Jew, but one thing I know. I say to myself, "If this was finished, I don't want to be any more a Jew. I don't know why they hate me. I don't do nothing. I can't understand. I don't want to -- I want to be free. I want to eat. I want a piece of bread like everybody. I don't want to hate you." This was in my mind.

Q: This is while you were still a boy before the camps?

A: Before the concentration camp -- maybe not. When I escaped from Warsaw, I went, you know, to my family. There I know there was Jew. It was hard for me too, sometimes I think about not to be Jew, but I born a Jew, I couldn't help it.

Q: So when you were helping your family, they were in the ghetto. You were on the outside. When you were on the outside, did you talk to people, did you pretend you weren't a Jew?

A: I don't talk to nobody. I was scared, very scared, you know. Each time, if somebody recognize me or what, because first of all, with the meat. Second, if a Jew, they kill me -- they kill me one hundred per cent. Not scared -- yes, I was scared but it was, I say, look, like what they can do to me? Kill me, that's it. Not kill, but hang me? That's it, you know. Because they say if you're a Jew, a bullet too expensive. I couldn't help.

Q: Did you ever spend much time in the Warsaw ghetto?

A: Every time a couple hours, but really long time, no.

Q: Was there any sort of confinement or ghetto up at Rose Camp<sup>16</sup>?

A: No. I don't think so. One thing, I was very happy when I went out. I feel a little bit, I'm free a little bit, but outside. But inside, you know, my heart was beating very, very -- every time when I was in gendarme -- in the German gendarme I said, "Oh! You finished, you finished." Like the same thing when I have the knife in my back and why I go on this streetcar. Just the two Gestapo come in, and I don't want to say they followed me, but in the way -- they went in the same way that I was. Believe me, you know, if I'm today alive, I don't have a heart attack this time, oh, I was very, very strong. So when I come in I give him this knife. I say to myself, "If I can do that, I can do something else."

Q: I thought you said there was a ghetto up at the camp also.

A: Yes, yes, yes. So I was there and so, you know, they have some peoples in the ghetto, but

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<sup>16</sup> Kolonia Rózyzka

they have family in Warsaw and they was young peoples, and they ask me if I want to bring them to the ghetto. And I say, "Look, I can't go." So I go with this peoples. They pay me but it doesn't pay very much. They pay me just, you know, they pay me just a dinner or something like just for survival, but nothing special. I make it because I can help. But nothing special. But to understand this, that the shooting and the killing there and my family was already dead. As I say, "Stop, is enough, you have to run away from here." So I go away and, you know, it was about 70 kilometers. I went there and I was wandering two days without food, because when I come on the border, was -- on one side was the Polish police, and on the other side was the German police and, "Halt, where are you going?" "I go working to the farm to keep the potatoes," because it was not me alone, but some Polish people did traveling, too. So I listen to him. I say, "I go for the potato." So, "I go for the potato" and I was a young boy, so they let me pass. And I have some couple money. They took away the money but I don't care. I went, and we have to pass a bridge and I say, just two Germans gendarmes. And they go just to me, and I say "Ay, ay, two gendarmes, it's finished with you." But behind me was an old woman with a little boy and they stopped the woman, and I pass.

02:15:40

And I come on the road and it was two gendarmes and they threw out a family from this house -- maybe they want to take the house -- and they threw out and they say "Hey, come here." And they say, "help," and I help these people to put on the wagon. And I remember it, was a bread, a big, big bread and the bread fell down and the hard side fell down. So I take the hard side, I put it in my jacket and -- because eight days I don't eat no piece of bread -- and I help them, but this piece I hide for me. And I sit on the wagon and they bring me to a little point because they turn and I have to go straight and I go straight. And I go to the farm and I ask, "Maybe you have place to sleep?" So it's an old farm. They say, "Look, I have one place but here you can sleep -- there is a lady laying in bed -- if you want." So the lady in one side and I was on the other side. The whole night I eat this bread. The next day, in the morning, I say, "off." I go to the town and I was in the family. But in certain time the peoples from this town, they need papers. I don't have no papers and the paper was, you know, the fingerprint and this one is the Bloody Sunday. The Gestapo come in, in this town and they throw out -- everybody have to go out, and they start to control the papers. I don't have no papers. My brother doesn't have papers. If he don't have no papers, so they have to start to hit the stakes over the head, over the back, all over. Because if you don't have paper, you have to go on this side. If you are going to see my brother -- he has here, on his lip, was open from hitting him.

Q: This is the town of Plonsk,

A: Plonsk, yes. And they put us and they going to ask you for the bloody Sunday. I'm going to tell you about this. They put everyone on a field. I don't know, maybe a thousand peoples, on one field and we stay there two nights, one night or two nights, I don't remember. And they put us in a camp. They will call Pomiechówek and this was a really

death camp. And there we was, I think, six week. I can't explain the trouble what they have there. It was those barracks, stone barracks and was so many peoples. We have to lay down on the floors like the herring, you know, in the tins. If one want to turn, everybody have to turn. Soon it was dark until morning. You have to stay there. It was very, very hard, but one thing it was not German, I think, it was Germans but it was the SA. Maybe you hear about SA -- Sturmabteilung<sup>17</sup> -- that's when the Germans with war, the brown shirts and with the Hakenkreuz<sup>18</sup>. It was very, very bad peoples. There was, there was Volksdeutsche<sup>19</sup>, it was most of the Polacks, but there was maybe Germans, I don't know what kind. It was very, very bad and they was very bad peoples. They hit us. We don't have no food. And I can't explain what kind of trouble what -- I don't know how we survived there. There was hundred and hundred of people and, you know, we couldn't have no washroom, nothing. So they make a grave in hole with a stake and everybody, women, men all together, we have to go there, if we need to go. And sometimes a passing German push in. I can't explain. And was always one, he pass in the barrack and tell, "You stay up!" When you stay up is okay. When you kind of stay up so fast, so he have, "You sick. Take out to kill." And they shoot every day, every day, you hear the guns. They shoot these people something terrible. And my little brother, Erwin he was there, but he escaped. And how I come out from there, I don't know. I don't know, I don't remember. I know once my brother told me I was sick. I had typhus and all these people that have typhus they have to be killed. And I remember one time I was laying on the outside to wait until they going to shoot me. So I know once my brother, the oldest one, come and take me on his shoulder and put me in a wagon. They run away and they pass, and we have to go, they send us back to Warsaw to the ghetto. Before coming to Warsaw to the pass the, the front, they make a big fire, and all these people have to pass this fire. The other side there was the ghetto, the free, but we have to pass this fire. We have so many -- you feel it. You pass on the people that first down. They couldn't survive.

Q: You went through the fire?

A: Through the fire.

Q: It was a big fire?

A: Was a big fire and my brother, I don't remember, but my brother told me because we pass. I know I have smell the burn, smell the burn.

Q: So you had to walk through this fire to get to the ghetto?

A: Walk the fire, pass the fire to go in the ghetto, back to the Warsaw ghetto. And when we arrived in the Warsaw ghetto, I don't remember exactly what happened, but once I was

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<sup>17</sup> storm troopers (German)

<sup>18</sup> Swastika (German)

<sup>19</sup> ethnic German (German)



laying on the floor, and I was in a hospital and they wash myself and they put me in a bed in the hospital. And there was maybe one or two days and I start to cry, because they put somebody in the bed with me. And so there was a nurse come in and she ask me, "Why you crying?" So I say, "I don't know, they put somebody in maybe he have typhus. I'm going to have too." So she say, "What you think what are?" and they let me there a couple days. A couple days, maybe one week, and when I was already health more, so I went out and I remember it was just a wagon come in with stones. The men, they ask me, "Hey, you want to help me to put down the stones?" I say, "yes." They give me 50 cent and I buy pickle, a sour pickle. And I found my brother. We don't have no place to go. We don't have no place to sleep. We don't have no money. Absolute nothing. So my brother told me, "What you going to do?" So, you know, in Poland in the houses there was the stoves and they have in the ovens, they have the doors. There was like a cup and the houses that was destroyed. So we took that and we sold it. We have some money. We pay a guy – and we go out from the ghetto and we have just enough to pay to buy a bread, because we want to go back to the same town where my mother and my sister.

Q: And this is Plonsk?

A: Yeah. And we have just enough money to buy a bread, but from there we have to pass a bridge to the station and from the station we have to take a little train to, I don't remember. And this town a little bit closer to Plonsk. So we go to the, into the train. We have already tickets -- no. There was -- we was waiting outside because the train -- somebody come I don't know, it was a Polack, I don't remember, a woman or a man – and she say, "Don't go in because they can recognize you, you a Jew and they going to send you back or they going to arrest you." So I say, "But we want to go." So he or she, I don't remember, "Give me your money. I will go buy tickets." So we give him the money and he buy tickets for us and we have the tickets. We go in the train. We sit on the train and this train start to go. So he's coming, the control man for the ticket, so he looks, "Are you Jews? I going to call the Gestapo." So I start to cry, "Why you going to call the Gestapo? We don't do nothing. We want to go." "No, no, you Jews. You don't have the right to go. You don't have the right to be here." So I say, "What can I do?" So he say, "Pay me." So I say, "What can I pay you? We don't have no money. We don't have nothing." One thing my brother say, "Maybe you going to give him a gown." I remember I had a gown for my sister, a nightgown. So I tell him, "Look, I have a nightgown. If you want to, I give you the nightgown." He said, "yes." I have to go to the end train, take out the nightgown and give him the nightgown. So, he let us go. So we went a couple miles and we go down. We don't have no money. We don't have nothing to eat. We have to live. We have to do something. So actually, you know what, we go here we go begging. So I took to the house and somebody give us some beets. So we have beets. We eat the beets and we sleep outside. And we stay and we go again, and they stay and we go again. This time we walking again. We want to go to this town and it's very hard. It's not so easy, so --

Q: You're walking to this town?

A: Yes.

Q: How far is it?

A: About 70 kilometers and we was running with the train, maybe 10 or 15 kilometers. But there was somebody. He make travel past the peoples. So we ask him, maybe he want to travel, to help us to travel. So he say, "Yes, but you have to pay me." But we have nothing. So I remember when I was in camp I receive a pair of boots from UNRRA<sup>20</sup> or the Jewish Committee<sup>21</sup> -- I don't remember. So I say, "You know, that I have boots. I can give you -- you take my boots." And we past there. And we was together certain time and after they took us to the concentration camp, so they start there with the concentration camp. Exactly the same thing, you know.

02:28:07

Q: Now this Bloody Sunday in Plonsk, going back a little bit. Did this take place in a lot of towns at the same time?

A: I don't know. I know it take place -- one second, I think it take in two or three places in Plonsk and it was a couple kilometers was in town, the same thing, the same thing. That's the Bloody Sunday.

Q: Is it unusual that you went from ghetto to a camp then back to the ghetto? Is that unusual?

A: Yes.

Q: Because generally when the people leave the ghetto they leave for good, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: You were very resourceful.

A: What?

Q: You were very resourceful.

A: What can I do? I have to. I can't help. And then after when we was the last ghetto the last time. So, you know, the propaganda was from the German and they say, "Don't worry. The oldest people, your old people, you're going to work." This was the propaganda.

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

<sup>21</sup> American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

“Took what you can, warm clothes most important. Took it to a Jew and you're going to work, okay? The youngest people, they are going to work. The older people they're going to keep the children and the household.” So this was the reason. Most the Jewish people, they go, but nobody can imagine -- but when, you know, they going die it was already too late. They're already there. They couldn't help. So first I know when they start to send tickets. “This family, this family, this family.”

Q: I'm sorry. Were you at this point?

A: In Plonsk. Now, I told you Warsaw was already liquidated. It wasn't completely liquidated but is started.

Q: What year do you think this was?

A: This was 1941, 1942.

Q: But was Warsaw ghetto wasn't liquidated that early, I don't think.

A: They start, I think, but the uprising was in, I think --

Q: '43?

A: '43. So they start -- first of all, in Warsaw, there was a big ghetto. There was lots of people and there lots of Jews was working for the Germans and the factories, like the tailors for the uniform. And so this when they start already to evacuate.

02:31:12

Q: To evacuate?

A: And to evacuate it. And first one -- the policy from the Germans they say, “Why do we have to kill them? They are going to kill themselves.” And that's true. The people starving on the streets, no food. In the wintertime the people was freezing completely, dead freezing, dead. They have nothing. So they don't care. So they just to help so they evacuated to Treblinka. And Treblinka, soon they come in and the older people, the woman, the older men and children, they put them on the trucks. The trucks come into the crematorium to say, “You go to bath. You going to take a shower.” But the shower is gas. That's it. And there in Plonsk they start to send people to get this family and this family and that family. They have to be at this time and that time, and that time they have to be at the station. On the grand Platz<sup>22</sup> was the place they have to be there. At this time my mother and the younger brother and the two sisters -- my sisters receive the paper. My brother and I were supposed to stay there, but -- and they took them back. So after,

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<sup>22</sup> plaza (German)

you know, he's coming, an officer and he say, "Who want to go to have place? Who want to go?" So, I say to my brother, "What they going to do here?" The ghetto was -- this town was three-quarter empty. "What we going to do? Come, we're going to work. Come we're going, too." So we going and this was when the family was together. My mother, sister, my little brother was together until they send us to Auschwitz and this took, I think, three or four days just traveling.

Q: What was it like on that train ride?

A: We was packed. Peoples was crying, you know, packed. No food, no water. Absolute nothing. But the one chance it was in, I think, in fall, so it doesn't was very hot. So you don't feel this so thirsty like in summertime and that helped, a lot. So we arrived, I remember we arrived in Auschwitz. It was at night or very early in the morning, and when we go out from the trains they start to beating and to shoot. So I say to my brother, I say, "Come, we have to go fast so we don't be beat." So we was all together and he is coming, the German, and they start, "Men, and women on the other side."

02:34:25

Q: I'm sorry, may I stop you? I want to hear a little bit more about the trip on the train. It took several days. Did you know where you were going?

A: No, no. We know we want to go to work. And when we went in the train, so, I think, I was young, but I think peoples in mind couldn't imagine this finish. We go to death.

Q: Had you had any information on the camps?

A: No, we didn't have -- like I say nothing. They say always, "Don't worry. Everything be fine. You go to work." But when we was on the train, the train was blocked, nobody can open. But now it was too late. But for me, I don't know, I couldn't believe, could happen things like that. So I say to myself, "They told us, we going to work, okay? We're going to work." But who couldn't believe from, we know. Every day the German was a very polite people. The German was very [unintelligible] people. Who couldn't imagine. They imagine and kill machine like that. It's impossible. But then we go to -- when we arrive in Auschwitz and they separate men and women, children with women. So I say, "Oh, this smell not good." And coming Mengele<sup>23</sup> and he come in and he start, "Men" -- all like the young men, like I and my brother, healthy, from the regular to the bigger -- so "right." "Left" and my little brother have to go the women. And like I say, I was feel like something wrong. So we was there and we was the first of the first, because I say, always you have to be careful not to be beaten. If not, they kill you with stakes, with pipes, with rubber, with all this thing? So I he come and, you know, the German was like that. He was tall. He jumped between his legs and come in my side, and I was there with a friend -

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<sup>23</sup> Josef Mengele (1911-1978?), German doctor and SS officer.

- my, my friend live today, is in Toronto-- they lift him little bit and he started to look, start to -- it's too late. They don't see him and we was together.

02:37:00

Q: So you were able to have your little brother come with you?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, how did you know this was Dr. Mengele?

A: I recognize him after because he came to our camp. I saw him many time because when I was already in camp, they make selection, you know, about selection. Yeah, the one have to die. The one have to go to the gas chamber. So we have to unclouted, take out the clothes and we have to pass like in barrack and the barrack was -- it doors. There was two doors. One there was no the block, the chief block and they have to get the prisoners first in the second, so it was to the -- so we have to go out from one door and down, and Mengele was there and we pass by him and he look at you, and the chief on the block, you have -- a card -- you don't have no names. We have just a number and he have the card, you know, and we pass. So I know. I see him many times and peoples out there, they know him before, "this one is Dr. Mengele," and so...

Q: So you got off the train and there was a lot of shouting?

A: A lot of shouting and separation and crying and all kind of things. And after you pull together and after we went on march to Auschwitz and went into concentration camp. From the station in Auschwitz we went to concentration. The first thing that we saw, you know, they bring us just on the wires, electrified wire, doubled wires, and we saw some people hanging on, so he say, "You see that? In case somebody want to escape, he going to have exactly the same thing." So they put us, you know -- first, there was outside many couple hours. After we have to take off our clothes. We went to the barber to cut the hair completely, and showers. After the showers we have to go to the room. And they make the numbers, and they made the numbers, you know, the numbers with little point and they, I don't know what with, a pen or something like that. And they make the numbers.

02:40:00

Q: Did it hurt?

A: Oh, yes. But a couple days later it was okay.

Q: Did you still think you were going to work?

A: To work?

Q: Did you still think the reason you were going there was just to work?

A: At this time, no. At this time I thought I was finished. This time I was finished and the peoples, you know, because it was -- already people was prisoners in Auschwitz and this I always say, "Don't think you go some place to work. Once you can go, you see the chimney there?" We saw the chimney -- the smell, the smell. "This what I told you. See the chimney? That's where the crematorium." The first time, I didn't know what he mean and he, "burn the people." And so I ask, "Burn alive?" And he said, "No, no, no. First, all the people go in the gas chamber and from the gas chamber they go in there."

Q: Now what year was that?

A: The what?

Q: What year do you think this was?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you think this was about 19--

A: What year? I'm sorry. It was beginning '42, I think, beginning '42. Yes.

Q: Okay. So after you're showered then you're tattooed and you're with your brothers?

A: The two brothers, yes. And we still together. No food, nothing. And we have to go to the tailor room with the numbers and they give us numbers to put on. They give us the uniform. Some uniform is too long, too short, and they took away the shoes. They give you some wood shoes, and here was some stuff, tissue, and wood shoes, they are very, very hard to walk. And one moment we lose my brother, the older one. The little one is still with me. And we was there in Auschwitz about three days, I don't remember exactly how long. It always was the same. We have to go to tailor. You have to put your number on your pant and on your jacket, and they took us to Buna I.G. Farben district. And this was about three kilometers from Auschwitz. So we go there. It was, I think, at night. I don't remember exactly because we have to pass the town in Auschwitz. Maybe he doesn't want the people to see the prisoners. I don't know exactly. And there we go to Buna there. We arrive there and we went to quarantine.

Q: What was that?

A: Quarantine.

02:43:18

Q: Why is that?

A: Quarantine. They think maybe we are sick or we have some typhus or something like that. So if somebody going to be sick, they have to kill all the peoples. So we was there six week. It was very, very bad. Every day we have to make some exercise. Every day it was the same thing. The hanging and killing and beating and every day. Sometimes, you know, they hang us with the hands in the back and they hang us just like that. And, you know, who was the chief, it was the murder -- German murder. No one else but the murderers. But the Germans, they was maybe condemned to death. The place to kill them, they put them in concentration camp and it was the chief of the Jew, from the Jewish Häftlinger<sup>24</sup>. And this was six weeks there, and after six week, we have to go to work. They send us off and we went to the camp where all the peoples. And maybe this time the whole camp was maybe six, 800 people. And we when there just to build this concentration camp, and we start to work there and we make the wire and the barracks, because every time when the camp was ready, they was coming always new prisoners from all the countries. From Poland, from Belgium, from Czechoslovakia, from all over, all over. And then in the end, I think there was about 15 or 18,000 prisoners there in this camp. And there was a, maybe you read about the I.G. Farben industry, and they have a factory. They make all for the war. They make ammunition. They make even gasoline for the planes.

Q: Wasn't this a synthetic rubber plant?

A: It was a plant.

Q: For rubber?

A: What?

Q: For rubber?

A: No you take -- some peoples was working you know in the coal mine. So from the coals, they take out and make the gasoline and they make all the things, and we build it all together. And it was exactly the same thing. And after, they bring over there maybe, you know -- in the end it was in this I.G. Farben maybe one million people was working there. All kind of nationality you can imagine. Even the war prisoners from Americans, English peoples, French peoples, all of the soldiers that was taking --

Q: How long did it take you to do this construction, do you remember?

02:46:35

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<sup>24</sup> Prisoner (German)

A: We work always. The construction take about two, three years to build up everything, that the kind of work. And it was very, very hard. Every day we lose lots and lots of peoples dying there, by working very hard job. Very hard labor -- very hard job. You have to stay up about five o'clock in the morning and it was Appellplatz<sup>25</sup>, cold winter.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the Appell<sup>26</sup>?

A: It was a very, very big place and there was the barracks, and in each barracks was the -- depends, 100, 150 men and we have to go up, you know, in the morning. Sometimes they give you a little bit of coffee, water, and you have to go to the Appell.

02:48:00

Q: What time was this?

A: They count so many, so many. They have to. They know exactly how many peoples. And it was a block -- block one to 53. I don't remember. And each block you have so many, so many peoples, and so we have to stay to five and they count every block in the morning, so much and so many, and they look on the list. If exactly number people what there are, even dead. Even somebody die, we have to take him out, you know, to -- he count like prisoner. It was very hard in the beginning. I was -- you know first, I don't understand German at this time and they talk always German. And like soldiers, so in the morning when the German pass, so you know, they give orders the "Mützen ab!"<sup>27</sup> -- that mean take off your. And first of all, you have to be straight out, it was two words, it was very hard to understand for me, "richtet euch!"<sup>28</sup> You have to be, stay nicely, and you -- after you say, you can stay. Just like that and this -- I was mixing up. I make always upside down. So you can imagine. They beat me so much until in the end I understand already what they mean.

Q: Why was the Appell so awful?

A: The what?

Q: Why was role call so --

A: Well, you know to take respect for the SS.

Q: But why did people think this was such a terrible thing?

A: They was the rules. Like you say, because Jews don't have right to live. The all day, you

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<sup>25</sup> roll call grounds (German)

<sup>26</sup> roll call (German).

<sup>27</sup> Hats off! (German)

<sup>28</sup> Straighten up! (German)



listen, you hear, just what; "Ihr verfluchte Jude,"<sup>29</sup> dirty Jew, you Christus, you murder," and all kind of things. I can't remember all the things, but in the end they say always, you don't hear about, we was used to that. Okay. You talk because maybe in an hour they going to shoot us. Maybe in an hour we going to be dead. So we don't care about that.

02:50:20

We never, never, never one minute never think about survive. And my, my policy, and I say always, "I have to do all mine better. I have to try to survive." And we was this struggling there was until January 18, January 1945 and 18 and 17, January, so we start already, we listen already, you know, the bombardment. So we say you, "Oh, oh, something's wrong." and before you -- yes -- before you know, it was already alarm, fleet alarm the bomb, the American flyers coming and the Russian coming at night, American day. And was all day, you know, they destroy completely, the I.G. Farben. But the crematorium and the gas chamber, they never destroy because Churchill<sup>30</sup> say this one is not a military object.

Q: Let me see, how we are doing on tape?

A: The what.

Q: I have to check on the tape.

A: So maybe I don't have to say that.

Q: No, no that's okay. Let's get back to the building part. Do you remember how you felt about the work you were doing?

A: Yes. We have all kind of work. First one was the old building was in concrete, okay. And I remember it was, trains come in with stones and sand because is not like today with the big trucks with the mixer. We have to make ourselves, so my job was to put on the wagon stones. So much, so much stones, and so much, so much sand and there was two of them. We have to push the wagon to the machine. We have to turn the machine and to put the stones with the sand in a mixer. Not a mixer, but it was in back in big box and the guy what was working the machine was a German guy. He put the cement and he lift this in the machine and they mix it. On the side was again two peoples like we was and the cement, the concrete fall in and we have to go with them to the building to the builders that build and -- to put like today, you know, the concrete fall down and they make it. It was a very, very hard job. This was my job, my job, and we have to go fast and sometimes the cement, they use very much cement and sometimes cement is coming, you

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<sup>29</sup> you damn Jew (German)

<sup>30</sup> Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965); British statesman and author who served as Prime Minister during the Second World War.

know, with trains. The same thing, except they coming at night at this time.

02:53:50

So, what do we hear, “Juden raus<sup>31</sup>,” where we have to out from the block and five they count so much, so much, and we have to go to take out the cement from the trains, from the wagons. And I was, this time I was maybe, I don't remember, maybe 16 years, 15, 16 years and you have to, you know, put on your shoulder in back of cement sack, and it was over 100 pounds. And you have to run with that and sometimes when the Germans when the SS, they outside they start, “schnell, schnell, schnell<sup>32</sup>.” They want to go home so they put two and you can't run, so they hit us with the rifles. And one German, he hit many, many times and he smashed my kidney, and they have to take out the kidney. So I have just one kidney. But what can you do? I couldn't say nothing because if somebody doesn't listen, if somebody fall down with – so they call “Hey, take him.” If not, if he doesn't want to, so he shoot him on the spot. You have them carried to the camp dead. So what -- I couldn't do nothing.

Q: This is probably a strange question, but when they took out your kidney, was there any relief that you were in a hospital for a few days?

A: But, no the kidney was removed after the war.

Q: Oh.

A: But, you know, I was suffering from the kidney in camp, but I was scared to go to the doctor at the camp because they send me to the gas chamber. But this one was in the beginning. But after -- so when you are already an old prisoner, you know a little bit the rules. So I couldn't manage to not go to this work first of all. Second one, you know, the camp was already built and the buildings was already built so, you know, we don't make any cement. But in this time they start to make like professionals work. Electricians, carpenters, painting, because all everything have to be paint and you -- they make some peoples -- they have to work for the -- to put on the Skelett<sup>33</sup>, you know, for the building that's from the ironwork, you know, the big things. So, you know, it was very, very hard, but we don't have to. We don't have to carry the cement, all this thing and first of all, and second, I was already an old prisoner so I know this rule. So we can manage, you know, to not to work so hard. So I manage to be an electrician.

Q: Okay. I have got to stop you because I think we're out of tape. We'll pick up when you become an electrician.

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<sup>31</sup> Jews, out! (German)

<sup>32</sup> quickly! hurry! (German)

<sup>33</sup> framework (German)

02:57:00

Tape #3

03:00:42

Q: When we stopped we were talking about your work --

A: Yeah, by the cement. When I went it was already a longer, little bit longer then camp. So we start to know the rules first of all. Second one, when I was 79,000 but at this time, after -- first of all, when the building was already finished. We was--

Q: Now which building was this?

03:01:16

A: Any kind of building. There was many buildings and they start to bring in from the east like civil peoples. [Technical conversation] So -- and this time, this was maybe two years after, maybe, they start to bring in all kind of peoples Ostarbeiter<sup>34</sup>. That mean the people from east, like the French workers from Belgium, civilian workers. They was going in freiwillig<sup>35</sup>. That mean they go for themselves because they make big propaganda "Come to work for Germany. You going to be fine. You going to be good." And the same thing was from Poland, from France, from Belgium, from the Russian, from Ukraine, from all over, all over Europe and this Buna works and this Buna I.G. Farben industry they make was at least one million of workers. We was in the concentration camp already, I don't know exactly, maybe 12 or 15,000, but you have and -- after this coming all the prisoners from war, from the English people, the American soldiers, the French sol-- you know they -- what was the prisoner from the war. There was -- they have on the back marked "PY<sup>36</sup>," prisoner of war. There was two there so, you know, this work, it was already -- I don't want to easy, but it was a little bit easy. And at this time I was already an old prisoner so I know the rules. So I don't want to work. It's too hard and I think sometimes in my mind I say myself, "The world have to finish once. Maybe, we going to be free or maybe we going to be dead." So I say, "I have to try to survive long as I can so I try not to work too much." And I become in a Kommando<sup>37</sup>. A Kommando, that mean every prisoner was to the Kommando, and Kommando does what kind of work? Some people was electricians, painters, was builders, was carpenters and I was younger this time, so I don't have no trade. So I have a Kapo<sup>38</sup>, you know, the Kapo. That mean it was he organize, not organize but he take care on a certain group of people for the work, like a manager for work. So I ask him, "Maybe you want to take me to your job," because it was not so hard.

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<sup>34</sup> eastern worker (German); forced laborer from Eastern Europe.

<sup>35</sup> Voluntarily (German)

<sup>36</sup> In a later conversation the interviewee clarified that he had meant to say "PW."

<sup>37</sup> commando (German)

<sup>38</sup> Forman (colloquial German); term used for inmates appointed by the SS to head a labor Kommando of prisoners.

03:04:26

So I was a Kommando 120 – 800 – 28. I was electric Kommando specialist, you know, the work was already little bit easy. First off all, I don't have to carry nothing but, you know, sometimes we have a pliers. Sometimes, you have a case and box with tools or little wire or little cable, and even when we have to pull cables there was a special Kommando, Kommando nine and they pull the cables, and there was that Kommando. There the peoples not survive no longer than four, five weeks.

Q: Why was that?

A: Because it was very hard. First, they were big cable and it was hard and they were very big. And the Kapo was very bad man. He was from Austria. But I never want to go. I take care always not to fall in, in this Kommando because that finished. So I in was Kommando 128. It was very -- not easy, but it was easy. And one day the chief of -- the German chief come in and I was working with two Polish guys. They was in concentration camp too. But they was okay. So I was the helper. I have to help them. I was carry tools. I was carry the box and they was my chiefs, my managers. So the chief come in and say "Look, you have to go in this, this place, you have to connect the cable to 4000 volt." I remember very good.

03:06:12

So it was in, Tadek and we have to go there. And it was a big cable and there was a box, you know, for the fuses and it was the long fuse. And on the top there was power and on the end there was no power, because you have to put the fuse and you have to connect this cable. So we put the cable in this box and he say, "You know, what? I'm going to push him. You push in and you make the screws and we'll be okay." And so, he was stronger for me, and after the cable I screw a little bit. Not so much because I was not so strong like him. So he say, "You know what? Now, you come lift little bit the cable. I'm going to screw." So I have -- the box was big -- I have my face always in the box and I keep this cable. And he took a key, a metal key and turned the nuts, you know, to close it very fast. And in the middle it turned and placed from down to up and from up to down, and it make a short and there was a flame and I have it all, everything in my face. The whole face was burned and he have, you know, split his hand and I think I was burning, so I wipe up and I take out all this meat, all the skin to the bones. It was, first of all, it was hell. So I look at him. So I say, "Tell me, what you do?" When he saw me he say, "We have to go some place." So we run to the commanders place where the SS was there and we arrive there. So, I remember the SS, they say, "Was hast du -- Icek, was hast du gemacht?"<sup>39</sup> What you are doing? So I say I was in -- meantime there was no power in the center there. So, they call to the -- we have in Krankenbau<sup>40</sup> and like a little hospital,

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<sup>39</sup> "What have you – Icek, what have you done?" (German)

<sup>40</sup> Infirmary (German)

and they say for me, "He was wounded -- he was burned. You have to come and take him." Because I can't see any more, nothing. So -- but the SS still, they give me cigarette, maybe they have pity for me, I don't know. And it is coming with the table. Put me on a table I went to the hospital and I was there. So I say -- it was a doctor, it was Polack -- I say "Look, I hope I can go out tomorrow, day after tomorrow." So he say, "You crazy? Even in 15 days, you can't go out." And, you know, every day the doctor come and take out the dry skin. But I was so bad burned so they have to put me some place because Mengele come in every time to looking after, and when he find me, he send me to the gas chamber because I was very sick. So they hide me at certain time. I was covered with all kind of things -- he doesn't see me. And I was in the hospital for maybe six weeks. After six weeks I come out and we start to work again. So no more electrician.

Q: So they let you stay in the hospital six weeks and not many people they let stay six --

A: Oh, no, oh, no. Because every day, every day you have peoples coming in truck and take them out and they send them to the gas chamber.

Q: And these doctors were nice and they hid you?

A: He didn't see me. I don't know how they manage it. But they -- because of, I don't know. Maybe they like me. Maybe I was lucky. And it was a very nice man. The doctor was very nice. He clean it every day. He take out the dry skin. It hurt very much.

03:10:38

Q: Now where was your brother at this point?

A: My brother, he was in Birkenau. They take him away to Birkenau.

Q: Did he start at Buna with you?

A: He start at Buna with me and this I want to see before my accident. The burn accident. The transport from the same town when I was in Plonsk is coming, the next transport. It was my oldest brother come in and he took the place, the transport took the place from us in the quarantine. And in quarantine they find out one or two, they have typhus, and they take the whole transport and they send them to Birkenau. And they went -- most of them, 80 or 90 percent from this -- they went to the gas chamber. And my brother was between them.

03:11:49

So we have to -- you know, in column -- we was always -- all this was about four or five o'clock afternoon. When the war was finished, the day war was finished, we have to walk to the camp. We never walked when it was dark, not in the morning, not at night. We

have to come into the camp when it was lights. So when I come -- when my Kommando come to the camp, so I saw the whole column from my brother and he saw me. He say me, he say me "Goodbye. We doesn't see you -- We don't see us anymore." And this was the end.

Q: Your brother waved goodbye?

03:12:40

A: And my little brother was already in Birkenau. He find, maybe next day he find his clothes.

Q: Now, when you were building over at Buna, what were you building?

A: Blocks, buildings, all kind of buildings. Because like I say --

Q: Can you just begin that thought with, when we got to Buna we were building?

A: First of all, we building the camp because it was not camp. It was just empty, not empty places, just a couple barracks. It was not the wires, the electrified wires. We have to build that. We put it --

Q: The barracks?

A: Yes.

Q: Your own housing?

A: We have to make that. And we made it because -- first of all, we make the holes to put the Beton<sup>41</sup>, you know, around and after we have to pull the wires the, you know -- how do you call -- what they make on the prisons, the wires. You can't pass there, the wires. And after they have the wires electrify with -- I think, 220 volts around, and something we have to put on this one. We have to put barracks because every time, every time there was newcomers, newcomers like from all kinds of Jews. Most, they coming from all over from Greece, from Yugoslavia, from Belgium, from France, from all over, all over, all over, and we have to build a place for them. So this was the building. After, when the camp was built, so we went in certain group. Went out to the Buna -- work -- we start exactly the same thing to build it. Carpenters to prepare to make the things for, to make the Beton, the concrete, and some people like electricians to build all this building. And we have the masters, the masters -- the chiefs, they was Germans. Germans engineers, Germans architect, all the Germans was -- and we was just, we made just the dirty work, the hard work.

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<sup>41</sup> concrete (German)

03:15:27

Q: So you build your part of the camp?

A: Yes.

Q: And then after all this was built, did you stay at Buna?

A: I stay always at Buna, yes. Until the end. Until the 18th of January, 1945.

Q: Because you were there at the beginning, did you have a good sense of the layout of the camp and how everything was organized?

A: Layout of the camp, no. But one thing we know, we don't going to survive there. They have to -- first of all, you know, when you fall sick, was finished. And they have to every day, every time, they have to kill in certain number from this prisoners. There was this policy, the German policy.

Q: Did you work in the German industry as well?

A: The whole camp was German industry.

Q: But in the -- did you work in the coal mines? Did you work in the munitions? Did you work in the rubber making?

A: We make, yes. I was working there and in the industry because it was our job. Like I say, I was working like electrician and we always have to be ready, because we make sometimes, you know, they have some trouble with the electricity. There was the, you know, how can I explain you? It was in building 700, and this 700 they make the gasoline for the planes and there was a roll, and under this it was like a carpet, long carpet. It was rolling and over there they put some, not coal, but cox.

03:17:53

You know what cox? Cox is coal. You take out the coal – you take out the gas from them and from them they took out, they make gasoline and this have to run the whole day. You put it in the machine to take out the stuff, and we have to always take care of that, to repair. Sometimes it was missing. Sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes it was a fuse was burned up or something like that, and we have to be always there. They run 24 hours a day. So this one is the job I was working there.

Q: How long were you in that job?



A: This was maybe about two years.

Q: How many workers were over there?

A: In this whole company, they all I.G. Farben industry, was about, I can't lie to you, about a million something, a million people.

Q: In the part where you were working?

A: The part I was working was about, maybe 35 peoples. Just my Kommando for me. This was just the prisoners.

Q: Were there women working at Buna?

A: No, no, no. There was women, yes. But there was no prisoners with us. There was the civil workers, the Ost<sup>42</sup> workers from east, from east, from Poland, from Ukraine, from Russian, and sometimes there was even the prisoners from the war, from American prisoners, English prisoners, Australian prisoners. They all take part in the war. They was there in this I.G. Farben industry.

Q: And you're calling all these prisoners of war? These civilian workers, even though they were prisoners of war?

A: Yes.

Q: And how was this organized? You did certain job and they did certain jobs?

A: Yes. We have -- first of all, we don't have no right to speak with any kind of civil workman. When is a German we have like chief German, German chiefs, like architects, like engineers.

03:20:25

When these spoke there was a Kapo, they take care of us. So he was talking with him and he give us orders, but personal. I don't have no right to talk with any kind of civil worker, any kind of civil business. Nothing. If they catch me, they hang us, you know. We have every day, every day there was before supper, supper what we have. We come in, and we saw already the thing was made and today they going to hang one or three or five or something. I remember, there was one bombardment and there was a young man -- I don't remember how old he was -- He eat his piece of bread that he receive for breakfast, and the German SS take them and they put him in jail. They make a jail, a hole. They put him in jail and the next day they hang him, and because they say he was stealing bread. And

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<sup>42</sup> East (German)

time from the bombardment was not good, and I remember young man was maybe 17, 18-years-old, he begging them officers – Obersturmbannführer -- and they begging him, they kiss his boot, “Please, it’s not true, I don’t do nothing.” He doesn’t help, absolute nothing. They put him on -- they put his cut on his neck and he poor guy, he couldn’t die. There was a guy -- a Rackers<sup>43</sup>, terrible bitch an German, took his feet and pull him so down to die fast. And this one was the order for the day was, maybe every day, every second day. One day we coming up, we coming to the camp after the work and they saw already, in each place from the Appellplatz was the German with the rifle, with the machine gun, and we say, “Oh, oh, something happen.” And three young boys was hanging because he say they want to escape from the camp. That wasn’t true and they hang him. So I remember one scream, “Kopf hoch, Kamerad!”<sup>44</sup> -- I’m sorry...”

03:23:11

Q: Take your time.

A: I’m sorry. He say, “Kopf hoch. Kamerad! Wir die letzten”<sup>45</sup> -- he say, “up his head” -- “we are the last one.” And the last one he say, “Leben die Freiheit!”<sup>46</sup> “long life and liberty.” They hang three young peoples for what? Did exactly the same thing, pull them by the legs because they couldn’t die. And sometimes even to die, even to hang, you have to know how to hang. And sometimes, you know, you have to -- they think, you know, they have to put it here just to break the neck. But he just put on the thing and put here. This guy don’t know how the neck, so he pull on the legs to die. How did they do that?

Q: What were you thinking as all of this is happening?

A: Every day, every day, every day was the same thing. Every day we saw it and sometimes, some days, we talking about it and I have it before my eyes. I saw the young boys, and after we have to march, you know. You know was about 12 or 15,000 peoples, I don’t remember. We have to pass by them and have to look on them, how they hang dead. Something terrible.

03:25:28

Q: Did you feel terribly isolated?

A: You see in a moment there -- sometimes I wake up at night, you see, 50 years after and I say, it was impossible. Is dream. I dream about that, but it’s impossible that things happen in the 20th century and peoples, like Germany, they are cultivated people. So organized people doing things like that. It is something impossible. When the-- you know,

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<sup>43</sup> SS Technical Sergeant Bernhard Rackers

<sup>44</sup> Head high, comrade! (German)

<sup>45</sup> Head high, comrade! We are the last. (German)

<sup>46</sup> Long live liberty! (German)

liquidated the ghetto there was the German to go to take out the peoples, took the little children, little babies by their feet and they smash their heads on the wall and -- and the government doesn't know, the United States government don't know, the government from England doesn't know -- they know everything but nobody lift their little finger, because maybe, because they are Jews, but maybe -- they don't kill not just Jews. They have Christian too. And nobody, nobody lift. Nobody say one word because, you know, and God, where was God? God. And the Germans have this belt was marked God, God is with us. The Germans not with us. They kill people. They kill rabbis. They kill priests. They kill everybody. Where was God?

Q: Where did you think God was at the time? Did you think there was a God?

A: No. Even not today, no. Look at what happened. That still, but still is not maybe a Holocaust, but they kill. They still kill all those people. Why? Why did they kill? Okay. I going to say they kill the oldest people, maybe they going to do something, but the young babies, the old men -- I had an uncle he was over 100 years. They kill him. Why?

03:27:54

Q: Do you remember if you prayed at all when you were in the camp? Did you pray?

A: Did I pray?

Q: Did you pray?

A: Pray to who? No, no. Even not today, no! Because to who I going to pray? To kill me a little bit faster? I like to believe -- I like to believe, I'm a Jew 100 percent. There is no question. But pray for who? For who? Where is he? What to do? God, I see with my eyes. We was wondering there was a priest, an older priest and he fall on his knees by the Saint Maria in Poland. You know, there was the Christ and all these things, and a German come in, a young German kill him on the spot. And there is nothing there. Even this guy should -- his hand should be paralyzed and, you going to tell me there is a God? There is a priest. There is a Pope, all these things, but, nothing is not true. Is nothing there. Even today in the 21st century we believe, make such a thing as murders, killing little babies, little children. Why? What difference? Jew, not Jew? We all the same. They have the same blood. Why? Who you going to ask? Who you going to ask? Who we going to ask? Stop it. What are you going to say? I have the same thing.

Q: Let me ask you, was there -- did you ever feel like you would get out of there?

A: No, no. I know once in 1945 in 18 of January. So we don't go out no day before. Two days before, we don't go out to work. The Kommandos were a little, you know, some no problem, but the Germans was very hard, so I say, "Uh-oh, something happen." And this time they start to make the bombardment on the camp. You know, the I.G. Farben was

bombarded. The repair was bombed. It was something. So on the 18 of January there was an order, we have to go together and we was out. The camp was liquidated and the Buna. We have to go out. So we was walking the whole night until a certain camp, Gleiwitz.

03:31:03

So we was in camp. We went to the camp. We stay over night and the next day they come in. We have to go to the train station. And in this gruppe<sup>47</sup>, I was most of the last one. And we have to take out the peoples what was first in the Krankenhaus<sup>48</sup>, in hospital there. So we have peoples. There was a little, not all young. They was a little sick, you know, and we have to take them out, and they sit outside the place. It was -- I saw was one or two SS, they shoot them, they shoot all those people. There was a river from blood. I couldn't -- we go to the station and they put us in trains, you know that. They put in the beast, you know, the cows. They put us in the trains, and it was maybe eight days long. It was a ride maybe eight kilometers up and down, up and down, and everything was closed. We don't have no water. It was wintertime, no water, no food, nothing, but in the trains, in the wagons there was a -- you know, between the wood was little bit open. So we have the air. So we coming back to Gleiwitz and I was hearing an order is coming from the Germans, and they say, "SS abrücken, Häftlinge stehenlassen."<sup>49</sup>

03:33:03

So the SS have to go away but they have to leave the prisoners in the wagons. So one officer say, "No, we have to take the prisoners with us. They was a -- they going to protect us." And they open the wagon with the machine rifle they start to shoot them. I have just one. I received here. I don't know if you can see. (Indicating.)

Q: Yes.

A: So I fell down and have to roll. I don't know how long. I don't remember because it was just shooting and lots of dead, and we was walking in the bushes, and from both sides the SS with machine rifles they shoot. It was lots of people run away, run to the bushes. I don't know if they catch them or kill them. And we are were wandering the whole night. We were walking until the next day. We come in the morning. We come in the prison, and we fell on the floors, and we sleep on the floor until next day. Next day we have to walk. And we walk 2000 kilometers from 18 of January until ninth of May, 1945. And we was by streets, all kind of towns, and sometimes we have a place to stay, in place one day. One day -- it was in March -- we come in a place. I don't remember anymore the place, and there it was, a camp just for the Polish people. I don't know if it was

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<sup>47</sup> Group (German); military term for basic unit of 10 men.

<sup>48</sup> Hospital (German)

<sup>49</sup> SS go away, prisoners stay (German)

concentration, if it was a work camp. And so the SS, I hear what they say, "We going put the prisoners there and we going to have a rest for one or two days." Because, I think, they was tired, too. But the chief in the camp, he doesn't want to let us in. And in this town it was a mountain, a little mountain and they make a tunnel -- you know what a tunnel is -- in case the fliers come in to bomb. And so the people from this town can go in and to be safe, but it doesn't make it right through. And the chief say, "Okay, we going to put the prisoners over there." They put us there and it was not so very high and so it was cold. Everybody go on the end but it was closed. You couldn't go nowhere because it was not finished, it was not finished.

03:36:27

The compress us. All the things was outside, so I went there too, and it was a little warm but after I say, "Is little bit but no air. I want to go in the front." And they wanting the chief, the commandant in this camp. They make soup, you know, liquid soup. So I have it was a part with me, and I say I going to go in the front every time and I going to take a little bit. I have to eat, so I take one and I say I going to take one, and I have a nice time. In meantime we start to missing air in the end, no air, no air, and everybody want to go in the front. So like here, you have the door. When you open the door, it was a place -- "This one for me -- a good place, I gonna go there, I go to hide there. Nobody going to see me and I have the fresh air." And the front was two SS and every time when the peoples want to go to the front, they shoot them. They kill them and they kill lots of peoples. And they put in -- there was a wagon outside and they put a wagon in front so nobody can go in. What I going to tell you? I can't describe it. There was screaming and crying and the peoples, they running to the walls. They licked the walls because it was wet from the no air, and you see the oxide coming out. It was there in March. It was about six o'clock. It was dark and the front was the SS. They let nobody out. We have to stay inside until the next day in the morning, and the morning was lights come in, maybe eight o'clock and they called all the SS to come in, and they let out the people that was still alive, and the firework was coming. They couldn't go in. They had to take the gas mask, they couldn't go in the end and from the end they took out peoples there. Dead. Maybe 100, 150 people was dead. And some peoples could survive on the end, coming out after five, six minutes they outside, they fell down and die because the lungs, they couldn't support.

03:39:26

And I was there maybe couple days, and they took the dead peoples put between the barracks outside, they all frozen. Food, no question about food for us there. And about eight days later we have to go away. And we start again to walk, and the order was to shoot the people, to kill us. But they couldn't kill us in town because it civil people there and they couldn't -- they doesn't want to give us to deliver to the Russian, because the Russians coming from the other side. And they don't want to give us to the American soldier, but the American was too far. So we was between and we was walking every

day. Every day we was walking. It was a couple SS and they pull out peoples and they shoot. So I say, "God, something happen. I won't survive." So I have -- on my side it was a little SS. He was -- I don't know if he was from Yugoslavia, an older man, maybe 60, maybe more, and he have on backsack. So I say to him, "Look, you not a young man. You know what? Give me your back. I going to carry them." So he say, "Why you want to do that?" "I want to help you. You tired. I want to help you. I think that's good." So he take out -- he give me the thing he was walking just on the side from me. So every time they eat, they have food, they have bread, so he give me just a piece of bread for me. It was good and I can walk, first of all. Second, I was sure no SS going to come and grab me to kill me because I have his things, and he going to take care of it because he want already -- I have -- SS they want to come in and grab me he say, "Uh-oh, don't touch it's mine." So I was already okay, and when I was doing that so many peoples, not many have prisoners like me to do that. There was about five, six that we carried the SS sack. And in summertime, so we find a wagon. We put all these goods from the Germans, from the SS, on the wagon, and we was pushing the wagon. And we was okay. We didn't have food, but at least I was sure -- I was not sure -- but I was sure I was going to live until night. I don't know what going to be next day. So they put us in all kind of place to sleep, and in the morning we see one dead on one side, one dead on other side -- the people dying like nothing. And it coming May 9, 1945 about seven, eight o'clock in the morning, and it was not far from Friedland in Sudetenland. There was still a little SS come into me and took me by the arm.

03:42:45

He say to me in German, "Go hin<sup>50</sup>, where you wollt<sup>51</sup>, aber lasst euch ja nicht erwischen bei unsere Brüder."<sup>52</sup> "Go where you want, but take care the Germans doesn't catch you." And this was my liberation. The Russian come in there and this was May 1945, and I was with my friend from Holland. My friend and we was running, running, and we saw already, you know, the Germans was sitting the rifles and all these things, all on the side. No more. And one moment everybody who running -- the Germans was running, all the soldiers was running. So I was on the highway and I stay and I wasn't German, and I say, "Hey, why you running so fast?" So he say, "Fast, fast, Ivan come!" And the Russian coming, this was the liberation. He was lucky he was the first officer that I saw. It was a Jew, Russian, Jew, Russian, and this when was the liberation. So you can imagine.

Q: Could you believe this was really true?

A: No, and the first thing that he say, "You go back about five or 10 kilometers because here we have to find, it still the Hitlerjugend<sup>53</sup>" -- was still in the bushes was hiding and -- "we have to clean it up." But this was impossible -- I couldn't believe it. I was at this time, I

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<sup>50</sup> there (German)

<sup>51</sup> want (German)

<sup>52</sup> but don't let yourself be caught by our brothers (German)

<sup>53</sup> Hitler youth (German); Nazi youth organization.

was maybe 30 kilos, about 60 pounds and eating -- I don't have eat maybe, one or two weeks and it was very hard not to eat, but in this time, you know, the snow, there, it was melted, it was blackened, and this is what we ate. This was our nourishment.

Q: You ate the snow?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, did the Russians then come back and take care of you?

03:45:28

A: Yeah. The Russian was there and we going back, and I was -- we went to Ringelshain in this one -- in Sudetenland, you know, and Czechoslovakia and I was there. I was there a little time and I don't know nothing about my brothers. Because all this time I think maybe they are all dead. So one thing that happened, you know, there was lots of people, watch us passing in this town, and so there was boy. He was passing and I was talking with him. So I told, I ask him, "Where you going?" So he say "Oh, I don't want to stay here. I go to Germany. From Germany I go to Belgium." And I say, "Maybe, maybe, you saw my brother." I don't know. But this guy he went like say, he say, he went to Germany and from Germany he went to Belgium and he go exactly the same place where my brother was. So the same thing I ask him and so he say, "I saw your brother. Yes, your brother is dead." So, I receive a letter from him. I receive a letter, I say, "I don't have nothing to do here." So from Czechoslovakia I went to Germany and I go to Munich, to Germany, and when I arrive there so, you know, we have all over friend. I have all over people I know from camp. So I saw one, he say "Aye, look, your brother is looking after you." "My brother is looking after me?" He say, "yes." "How is looking, my brother?" He describe me completely like my older brother is -- he went to gas chambers -- so I say, "Look, I think you made a mistake." And he say, "No, I don't make a mistake, I think he's younger from you." He told me, "and is that and that and that." "You have the address?" And he say "No, I don't have the address." So we took a taxi. We run the whole day over all Munich and that night I find him, and he doesn't know from me, and he doesn't know from me from my brother -- that was in Belgium. And I said "Look, Aaron is alive and is there and there." And we send him a telegram. He went from Belgium. He come to Munich, to Germany and from Germany went to Belgium. We were all three together, and after my two brothers, they went to Israel. From Israel they went to Belgium and from Belgium to Canada and here I am.

03:48:24

Q: So the three of you were together?

A: Yes.

Q: And they went to Israel?

A: What?

Q: They went to Israel?

A: No, they, went my brother went to Israel in 1947, or '48. After '48, you know by Israel was country received the independence. They went to Israel.

Q: And how come you didn't go with them?

A: Because I was married in Belgium.

Q: Did you have a difficult time getting to Canada?

A: I don't have no difficult in Canada, but I have very much difficult in Belgium, yes. Because they ask me always papers – and we don't have no papers -- you couldn't stay in Belgium. And we want to stay in Belgium. We don't have no right to work, no have to right to make business, and every three months we have to go to the police. And, you know, to present, to say, "I'm here," and always was the same question. "What you doing here? And why you stay here?" So the one thing I say is, "for the moment I want to here, but we want to go to Israel, to Palestine." And he gave me, you know, for three months and again for three months and -- but before, when we arrived in Belgium, we was in a home for old peoples, like an orphan house, but it is not for young but was already old, 17, 18 years. But before that we have was maybe, you know, Namur.

03:50:23

Namur was a priest, a very, very good man, a very fine man, and have trouble with the police because they doesn't want to let us be there. So the gendarmes, the Belgium gendarmes they want to take out to pass the border. So they took one, they put on the truck, and time they want to take someone else. They escaped. It was the priest. He say, "Stop. I going to take all." So he took all the peoples in the church. Jewish people went all there until a Jewish chaplain from the American Army, he know about that, and he took the – all this people, Brux-- Linkebeek.

03:51:25

And it was a home there. It was in Linkebeek in this home, and we was support by the Jewish committee until a certain time. After they liquidate this home and everybody have to go to work, but we have some trouble with the work and we need an *carte d'identité*<sup>54</sup>, a card. Some people have a white card, some people have an Model "C" this one with

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<sup>54</sup> identity card (French)



just use fingerprints. And we have trouble to stay there. We never could be a Belgium citizen. So the best way is to go out. And we start, you know, to make the registration to Australia, to New Zealand, and to Canada. So the first thing my brother, the younger brother, went to Canada here and after we come.

Q: But I thought he was already in Israel.

A: No. From Israel he come, you know, he make his service, military service.

Q: He came back?

A: Came back from Belgium. He come here to Canada.

Q: So you applied to various countries and Canada accepted you first?

A: Yes. Now Canada is my home.

Q: Were you in the DP camp in Czechoslovakia long?

A: There was no camp.

Q: There wasn't a camp?

A: No, I was not in camp. I was in private home. I was in Czechoslovakia, about a year, a year and a half because I have to find somebody. I couldn't imagine the whole family, nobody dead. So I travel. I want to go to Poland but when I come to Polish, on the border, Polish-Czechoslovakia they start to take us to the army. So I say, "Hold it, stop. First of all, I can't kill nobody. Second, I am no good for the army. I was already five year in the concentration camp." Not for me, the army. So, I remember very well. It was the German prisoners, the sick, wounded prisoners that was from the war. They was in train this pass from Poland and Poland Czechoslovakia and most of prisoners from the Russian front from the German. They pass Czechoslovakia, Poland, Czechoslovakia. So the first thing at night there was a train. I jump on the train and I went in Czechoslovakia because Czechoslovakia was the maybe, is today I don't know, it was the one civilized country from the old eastern country. First of all, no antisemite is there. There are very, very fine people. There are today very fine people, very good, and they help lot, they help. Red Cross, they help me and after I went to UNRRA and I was very good there. But soon I receive a letter from my brothers. I say and the same thing and this time, you know, I don't know if you know, Masaryk<sup>55</sup> was the president from Czechoslovakia, he kill himself and this started the trouble with the Communists.

03:54:54

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<sup>55</sup> Jan Masaryk (1886-1948); Czech statesman.

And I say, "I'm not a Communist. I was in diktature<sup>56</sup> already long enough. I want to be free. I want to freedom so nobody can tell me what I do, what I -- nobody can do what I have to say. What I have to do, what I have to say. I want out." So, the first thing that I do, I take my friend and we went to Prague and in Prague was just -- you know, I listen by the radio. It was the Nuremberg process. So they make the process and the next day we smuggle the border, and we arrive to Germany and then München, you know -- not München, but it was in West Germany. And from the West Germany I say, "Now I am in a democratic country." The American was there. I don't care but I don't stay not long, because we went to Belgium. Belgium we have trouble but the government doesn't let us there.

Q: You're with your brother at this point?

A: I was always with my brothers, yes. And that's the way was. Look, we go to United States -- not to United States -- we went to Canada then.

Q: Did the Russians treat you well when they liberated you?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. At first you know we cry. We cry.

Q: You know what --

A: They was very, fine. Very good.

03:56:50

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<sup>56</sup> dictatorship (Yiddish)

Tape #4

04:00:55

Q: I'd just like to finish up what we were talking about earlier, which was I was asking you how the Russians who liberated you, how they treated you.

A: Very, very good. First of all, they know already because before they coming to us, they pass already Auschwitz and Buna there, and the whole way that they make from the Russian country 'til us. They liberated 100 different prisons and they saw all of that, and they saw the crematoriums, they saw all these things. So when they arrived on us, they saw this. They know about us. They know, and I remember when the Russian arrived, the officer, the first thing what he gave me a piece of bread. And he have a motorcycle and he told me, "You know what? You sit on the side car. You going show me all the Germans that kill, that was bad." And, you know, it was the first soldier that coming and it was always with motorcycle and on this motorcycle was a machine gun. And, you know, they was in the middle and all the soldiers, the German soldiers have to be on the side because, you know, they was the Russian soldiers come in, and they took them all to the camp. And I, so far I remember, I was -- gun -- I saw a gun and I start to play with it and the gun start to shoot, and maybe I kill some Germans. I don't know.

Q: Did you want to?

A: No. I can't watch them. I know it was and I say, "Hey, hey, stop it. I don't know how to stop it." But it doesn't take time, it was so fast. And I remember we coming back, I don't know if he was talking Russian. Meantime, they take away all the Germans, all the SS with the Germans, they took to the camp.

Q: What camp did they take them to?

04:03:45

A: The prisoner camp, and after they separate them, SS one camp the Wehrmacht<sup>57</sup> in second camp, and the women was to the SS women was... and I remember it was an officer with a motorcycle come in. He want to pass, and on his motorcycle have a machine gun. So the Russians, the Russian officer, he say, "hey stop, go down and come in." And the officer was saying -- and he talk to his soldiers, "Take him, bring him there." He doesn't want to. He stay up. He want to take the gun, so they kill him. They shoot him and the first thing that I do -- I have no shoes -- so I take his boots. They were beautiful, nice boots, and I take his boots and I look in his pocket. Maybe he have bread or something like that. So I take -- and I find a piece of bread and a piece of soap. The first

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<sup>57</sup> General title of German armed forces from 1935 to 1945.

time. So the Germans, they give us, you know, machorka<sup>58</sup>, it was the tabek<sup>59</sup> -- to things -- and bread, and we have some meat. Not meat, but salami, the Russian salami. And they say, "go back" and we went back. So we went back maybe about 10 kilometers, back. We have meantime, I have a car. I have a horse. I have a bicycle. I have a car. I don't know how to drive, but I drive a car a little bit. But so far, so long we have gasoline. We don't have no gasoline, and after I have a horse, but the horse was more tired than me so I leave it there, until I have a bicycle. And we went to a town, a town called Ringelshain and I saw a little house on the mountain.

04:05:48

And I say to my friend Jackie, I say, "You know what, Jackie, we are going up there. We are going to try to pass the night over there, but here on the road is going to be very noisy because the army pass." And so he say, "okay." So we go up the little hill and it was a little house, and we knocked. There was two old, one man and one woman and I was maybe crazy, not crazy but I very polite, and they were German too. And I say, "I'm sorry, we coming from concentration camp. We're very tired -- so, maybe we can pass the night here? I don't want to stay here, but maybe you have a shed or something like that?" So he told us, "Look, we are not farmers. We don't have nothing. But there" -- he show me over there -- "is a big farm, over there you can go and you can pass." In meantime there was a young lady stick out her head and she say, "Hey, hey, come here. How you talk? You speak Russian?" So, I say, "Yes." But you believe me, at this time believe me or not, but at this time I was talking about -- speaking about seven language. But I was with all kind of people. We have French -- not English -- French and Russian and Yugoslav. All kind of the slavish tongue, and we have Hungarian. We have Greek. And this all you have to understood all together, so for each language you take a couple words and you learn. So I say, "yes." So she say, "You want to come in because some Russian come in and they make us some trouble, and we can't speak with them. Maybe you can speak with them." So we go in and first of all, we was so dirty. So we have to go and wash up and they give us, I remember she start to cut bread, but little slices. So I say, "Oh, no. That's not for us." I took a big slice of bread. And the first time after so many years, I sleep in a good bed. And the next day we go out and we were looking for brother, maybe a sister. Maybe was and we went to the Russian commandant too, and they give us all kind of things too and it was very, very nice. Very good.

04:08:45

Q: Let me just go back a minute to the camp and ask you a few questions. One is, when you were in Buna, did you have much connection with or much knowledge about was happening in the rest of the complex?

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<sup>58</sup> Tobacco (Polish)

<sup>59</sup> Snuff (Yiddish)

A: What?

Q: In Birkenau?

A: Yes. We have all the news. We have all the news because it was every day, every day was the same thing. Because first, you know, Mengele was, most of time, he was in he was camp in the morning, when we was marching out from camp to work he was there. He was there with a little stick, you know, and when he showing somebody, "this guy have to be take out," and he went, you know, in a special block and they put them, they put all of them. There was the bed, three beds, but they took out the wood between and they close them like a box. Inside they put in these people and the next day they come, you know, with the truck and to put all these people in that. They want to send to the gas chamber. So we know that because we knew every day, every day. It is not just sick people. Even the healthy peoples.

Q: But did you know sort of what the structure of the other camps were or did people come from those camps to you and tell you what it was like at the different camps?

04:10:44

A: Yes. My brother, when he was taken away from Auschwitz they send him to Jawischowitz, and Jawischowitz was a coal mine. Now, in Buna, if somebody have a bad record, like in Kapo, you know, a Kapo he went to the jail, to the SS, and say "look, this guy is not a good worker," or something like that. So he doesn't kill him, but they send him to a very hard job and in the coal mines. They have, you know, it was punishment. So they send him for eight days -- not eight days, maybe three weeks, four weeks in coal mine. In coal mine like my brother told me, he was there, he was working on his belly, so deep, they have to shovel the coals it was so deep. So it was very, very hard. And how I know? Because this guy, he was strong, so he survive. And after surviving he come back to us and he give me news. He say, "Look, I saw your brother. Your brother is in Jawischowitz. He work there." So I make all my possible. He was a guy, he was Erwin, called him -- he was an Altreich<sup>60</sup> Jew.

04:12:07

He was an Rapport-Schreiber<sup>61</sup>. He was working in the office with the German for the worker. If somebody change the commander or somebody go from one block -- the first thing, I was in block four. After they send me to block 14. After from block 14 they send me to block 51. And this was the, like I say, an accountant. And they make all the paperwork. So I was talking with him, and I tell him -- I beg him, "Look, I have my brother. He was working there and there and maybe you can do something. Maybe try."

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<sup>60</sup> Old empire (German); term used for regions within Germany's pre-1938 borders.

<sup>61</sup> Report writer (German)

So he promised me. I say, "My brother's a barber. He, you know, he going to shave you." I promise all kind of thing, so he say "I going to try to do that." So he so that, So he make him like an electrician, special electrician, special. So, I think it was end of 1943. My brother come to my camp in Buna camp. I was in Buna and he was the same electrician. I was electrician. He was electrician, so you can imagine what kind of electrician we was there. So these people they told us everything that happened there, like some people coming from Birkenau, they took every time to put is called a Sonderkommando<sup>62</sup>. That mean, I don't remember exactly how many, but these people, they took out when the people was gassed dead in the gas chamber. They took out these people, put them on the wagon and push them to the oven. But these people don't do long time because -- I'm sorry -- they put out the dead peoples and they put on the wagon. And most of them, they put two men and one women because the women, they burn faster and better for men. And they put them off a little wagon and they push them in the oven to be burned. And these people doesn't work long. Maybe after two weeks, they are gassed, killed, because they don't want nobody to have to live. Can't tell nobody what happened, so they kill them. And we know that. Then they have special peoples. They was very good traitor. They received very good food, but eight days later, two weeks later, they have to go, and they took somebody else. And we know that. Exactly the same thing. They took the Russian prisoners, the women prisoners. They took out the marrow from the bones to put to inject the German soldiers. We know that. The experiments, because something the doctors tell us the same thing.

04:15:52

Q: The doctors told you?

A: They talk together and they have peoples, like I say, they go into this camp to take the clothes from the dead, because they don't have so many. But in the end, like 1945, beginning -- not '45 but middle '44, so before the end '44, we don't have any uniforms, like with the stripes. They don't have anymore. So we have civilian clothes, but we have to put a patch on the back so you know yellow or other kind of patch. So they know they are prisoners.

Q: You were in the hospital for a long time. Were you aware of any medical experimentation?

A: No. In Buna there was no medical experiments because the hospital was not very big. But once I remember, I was passing there, and I saw it was a very special place where they put the dead peoples there, and I saw two doctors. I can say it was Mengele and somebody else and they was playing with human brains. The door was open, there was human brains.

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<sup>62</sup> Special commando (German); A commando of Jewish prisoners in the six extermination camp selected to work in the gas chambers and crematoria.

Q: You saw this?

A: I saw it with my eyes, yes.

Q: Could you hear what they were talking about?

A: I have to run away because I was scared for them. They was looking for pistol or for gun or something like that.

04:17:47

And once when my brother come in camp, you know, from Jawischowitz into my camp -- he was a muselman<sup>63</sup>. He was very skinny, and so I try to help him. So he was working for the Kommando, for the Luftgaukommando<sup>64</sup> -- that mean they make the graves and the holes in the special machine guns against the planes, and they receive very good food, the Germans -- but he was in the commander and they have a couple men with him. And the Germans received this food. But always in the cans they leave a little bit of soup and before these cans have to go back to the camp they have to be washed. So they give him, they say, "Hey, you, you come here. Take the soup but wash the cans." But the cans was washed with iron brushes, and he was always hungry, he doesn't see -- so ate the soup and he swallowed a piece of wire. One Sunday he come to me and he say he was -- it was after, so you have to be a barber and so he shave this guy and somebody else and he say, "I have such a pains in my stomach. I don't know what happened. I have lots of pains." So I say, "You know what, come, I go with you to the hospital." But I know this chief of the doctors for the hospital. So, I say "Stefan" -- he was a Polack -- "Stefan, look, my brother have pains. You come see something." So he put him on a bench like that there. Was many doctors coming in and he was saying appendix. He had such big pains, so they put him at night -- not at night -- to operate him and I was on the other side. I was hiding but I saw everything that happened. So it was Dr. Mengele's, because even between the prisoners, there was some good doctors and they worked in this hospital. And they want to operate him, so they open the belly. In meantime everything was open. There was an alarm, you know, the planes. I don't know if English or Russian planes come in. No lights. He was laying down with open stomach. It just take I don't know, very long but the lights coming back. And the doctors coming back. I was behind. I saw that. I saw Dr. Mengele come into him and say on his shoulder, "Jude, when you live now, you going to live long time." And they operate on him. But they pull out all the intestine together very badly and he have very big trouble today, and they can do absolute nothing. Even when eat a little bit too much, they have to put him to the hospital, they have to take out everything. He was very, very sick.

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<sup>63</sup> Muslim (German); camp term used to refer to prisoners who had lost the will to live and were near death.

<sup>64</sup> Air defense administration (German)

04:21:19

Q: But were you aware of any other weird medical experimentation in the camp?

A: By us, I can't say, no. And I was scared. I never want to go there because I have enough, and I was burned because everything was gone. So I don't want to know. I don't want to go there.

Q: So you really didn't know that there was much medical --

A: I know that they make some but I don't think so that they make by us, no. But I know they make with the Gypsies. I know because -- and I know they make with the Russians ladies, the prisoners. I know from the Jewish people, Jewish woman, they was sterilized.

Q: How did you know this?

A: They told me after the war.

Q: How did they know?

A: The Jewish women, they alive today. They have in Canada and Montreal. I have one. They can't have no children and -- .

Q: So this was information you got later on?

A: In camp. I have from people that coming from Auschwitz, and Birkenau and the other camp because --

Q: Did anyone say, "I have had some injections?"

A: No, no, no. Like I say, I have an injection in my breast. It was so thick. What that mean this time, I don't know. What kind of injection and I have experience with my tooth. What this means, I don't know.

Q: You don't know what it means?

A: It was take a little time and it was gone. Maybe some people have a reaction, but I don't know. I don't know because there was so many peoples.

Q: So they gave you an injection. You don't know what it was? And a few days later you were okay.

A: I couldn't -- and because if I ask, I have a slap in the face.



Q: They didn't say, "We're giving you a shot for the flu?"

A: No, no, no. They never, never say for what. But we know, we have an injection and maybe one or two days we going to die. If not, lucky for me.

Q: So they just said, "Come, we're going to give you a shot?"

A: They say, "Juden have to go there and there and wait." Or sometimes they say, "Kommando this number and this number Kommando, have to go there." Because, like I say, there was maybe 12 or 13,000 people. So they couldn't give in one day the injection for everybody, so they take a certain number of people. Like a block. Like I was in block 51, it was maybe a 100 people, 120 peoples and other block was exactly 220. So they take about 200 peoples and, or 150 peoples, and this where you go there, and this was if an experiments, it's possible.

04:24:34

Q: Were you aware of any significant attempts in the camp to resist or sabotage the Germans?

A: I remember once, it was short before the end. They threw out everybody from the barracks and it was a block resistor. There was a guy, he was responsible for the block. He was a Holland man, Bernard I think -- and they took him away. And they look in every bed, under the bed, every barrack, supposed to have some weapon in camp. This I know, positive. If they find something, maybe. I can't say because we don't see this guy anymore. Not just him. Some people, couple peoples, but he was in Holland. I think he was somebody. He was from the army and big man, but was in concentration camp. But why, I don't know. And he was, you know, already in block he was something special. And they took him away. I'm sure they took him away to Auschwitz and the Gestapo, and over there they make some questions and pop -- that's it! Because I know in Auschwitz it was in block 14, block 14 was, and in that block everybody would have to -- be shot. They took him to the block 14, and from block 14 was finished. Nobody can go out. Because by us in Buna, they doesn't shot -- they shot, sure -- but no somebody wasn't tried to the Gestapo. Maybe tried to hang. This was most of time, almost every day -- it was not news. So we know when we come into the camp, we saw in Appellplatz, Appellplatz, we saw soldiers come in, in every corner, soldiers with machine gun and, "Oh, somebody is free today. He going to have his freedom." That's it.

04:27:20

Q: You weren't aware really of a lot of efforts for people to try to sabotage the Germans in the factory or --

A: In the factory, special work we didn't have. They don't trust us. We make -- like I say, we

make all the dirty jobs, the hard jobs, but special jobs they don't trust. They have their own peoples. Like they have the Hitlerjugend, they have the old people, the chiefs, the engineers, the architects were all the foreign German peoples, even the women --

Q: How do you think you lasted so long? How did you last so long?

A: I was young. And, you know, this one was maybe my luck because we don't see the danger and we try to keep -- the first thing what I know, I remember when we arrived to camp after the quarantine and we went outside, we were waiting because there was a table. There was all the Gestapo and they marking down what kind of trade you have. What you can do?

04:28:58

So there was a guy -- he's already dead a long time -- he said -- Chaim Komslowski -- and he come to me, he say, "Look, I can't understand why you are here." I say, "Why I here? The same thing why you are here -- I'm a Jew." But he say, "But nobody can say you are a Jew." But the first thing he say, "Look, if you are -- I give you a little advice -- if you want to live, try to avoid any beating. Try to avoid not to drink water, and if they going to ask you what you can do, what kind of trade you have, you say you are a carpenter." I never was a carpenter in my life. I was 14 years. How could I be carpenter? So it coming my time, you know, to go before Gestapo, and, "Your number, name?" "No name," I say, "79630." "What is your trade?" So I say, "I'm a carpenter" so the Gestapo, the Gestapo say, "What? What? You are a carpenter? You so young. You're a carpenter?" I say, "I'm sorry. I was learning carpenter." So they put me with the carpenters. It was good, but I have a couple Polack, the son of a bitch -- I'm sorry -- some murderer. So I go to the, you know, to the barrack to work things like a carpenter, and they give me a stick and they say, you make a broom. I don't know how to do that. I never saw a carpenter, like, you know, how to make it round. I don't know how. So, nobody want to show me because they were scared and this bitch come in and he say, "You not a carpenter. You" -- and they start to hit me, to kick me, to hit me. There was -- an SS was sitting there. So he come in and ask him, "Hey, why do you hit him?" So he say, "Because he was lying. He is not a carpenter." So he tell him, "You let him go." So he called me and he say, "Here, you have the cans, you are going to wash the cans. You can clean the toilet." And this was my luck. So times like I say you have some Germans that was....

04:31:37

Conclusion of interview.