United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Sam Bankhalter
February 26, 1992
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PREFACE

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SAM BANKHALTER
February 26, 1992

Beep.

Beep.

Okay, why don't we start and you tell me about the antisemitism in Poland that you remember as a boy. Sort of like we talked about in the other room.

Uh, uh, in my younger years, and like you mentioned 1938, 1939, maybe going back to 1937, there was great antisemitism in Poland. Uh, a lot in, in my, my personal view, a lot had to do with religion. Uh, there was a very religious Poland, very religious, mostly Catholics, and the church instigated a lot of the problems that I think still exist today. Uh, I'd been going to school, I'd been beaten, I'd been pushed to ground, spit on it, and the famous slogan, which everybody, everybody in Poland was aware of it, is "----------," which this is in Polish, which means is uh, uh, uh "Juda go to, go to Israel." Uh, in Russia, you had to say, "---------go to Israel." So, get out of Poland, and go to Israel, this is where your country is. You don't belong here. And this is a ver-- very famous slogan in Poland. They had an organization, as much as I remembered because I was very young, they call it the Indekes, and this was literally a Nazi party, Polish people belonging to it, and they also, Poland was a lot of, we call it "-------- Deutsche," half Polish and half German. And uh, they used to have meetings, and after the meetings, they used to make little pogroms, not very big, but pick up a street or two, and actually knife people to death. I remember one incident, a shoemaker that lived not far away from us, they went into him, barely made a living, and stepped into that. 95% they used to get drunk after the meetings, this was a party, and then they went out just beating up Jews. ---------that's what it, that's what it was. And, uh, they used to throw stones at windows, breaking windows, and this kind of thing. As I remember, people that were elderly than I am at that time, I was young, very little related any hatred or anything like that, I just knew that it's going on, I didn't have any political opinion one way or the other. I grew up this way, I thought it's a part of life. But, mainly the people were locked up, and they were in their houses, in their, in their apartments, and everybody didn't go out at the time when they knew that they're going to have a meeting. So this was the kind of life that you went through day after day.

How did you know the war had begun--------?

At that time, I was in a camp for children, a summer camp, which called the Shnova Guda, in

Polish, this was the area of it, which was uh, I really don't know exactly, maybe 50 60 miles from Lodz, which is the main city where I used to live. One day the, uh, I remember this was maybe around 2 o clock or something like this, if I remember it, they called us, and says, you all have to go home. There was not an organized effort to take us on a bus or take us on any kind of transportation whatsoever, and people came from way far away, like hundred miles, 2 hundred miles, and we just, they just tell us to get home, war broke out. That's all we knew at that time. And on the way as I was walking, uh, the sirens would go on, and we knew that this war, people were getting killed on the street, they used to throw bombs, and this is the way I knew that the war broke out.

After the Germans invaded, what kind of persecutions did you see in the kind of war you ended up being ----------?

Oh, when the, when the Germans invaded in the beginning, I thought everybody felt that, what can happen to us? The atmosphere was, as I remember conversations, uh what can happen? I've never done anything to anybody, I never s-stole anything, uh, I run my honest business, I've been a hard worker, most of the people in Poland worked hard for a living. I mean, people went on the market they said, uh...So nobody could imagine at that particular time uh that something bad can happen. Uh, what we thought at that time is this is a war between Poland and Germany, and that's about the end of it. Then we can live very peaceful. Well, it turned out when the Poles, when the Germans came into Poland, they began, the first thing they began to do very little things in general, but the people, religious people, which, Poland you had a very large, uh, uh, uh, Jewish population very religious. Uh, a lot of orthodox Jews in Poland, which of course, they wear a beard, and, and uh the, and they used to take them off the street, cut their beards, cut their curls, uh, do all kind of thing to disgrace them, to make them feel like an animal, and then let them go home. This was, this happened, this was a daily occurrence on different kind of streets in Poland, and, these people, you have to understand, a lot of people will say, "Well, why didn't they cut the beards?" Well, this was a no-no. They were religious, this was, this, this, in their minds, this is the way God wants it, this the way it's going to be, we're going to take our punishment. And so, some people took a some kind of deal and put on so that they hide the beard, because uh, you know, this was just a part of the religious costume of having a beard. So this started out in the beginning. What I remember of course, start relating war as war is the German caught a lot of Polish uh soldiers as prisoners, and they kept them outside, and this was in the wintertime, I cannot relay exactly what month it was, and the soldiers died and froze to death. Well, this was a mixture at that time between non-Jewish soldiers, and Jewish soldiers because in the, in the Polish military, in the army so to speak were Jews and non Jews alike. So, now, again, the religious part came into it, we're going to start

finding out who's Jewish, and bury them in the Jewish cemetery on a Jewish mass grave, and who is Polish and let the whatever, the church, whoever, take care of them. And this was going on between, between different religions, between the Christian religion, the Jewish religion, they used to go out and identify who is Jewish and who is not. Now, we ought to understand today circumcision is very common. It's nothing about, nothing unusual. In Poland, this was unusual, because in Poland, Poland at that particular time, strictly Jewish people were circumcised, that is a part of religion. You're not a Jew till you're circumcised. So, this was what was going on, and at that time, I got the feel how probable war can be, not suffering, but general war, seeing all the frozen dead people was just unbelievable. We're talking here hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and the thousands.

Explain to me what a ghetto is, and how the Germans set them up.

Ghetto, a ghetto, what it really was is that they came and took an area within a city, and surrounded it with barbed wire, all built walls, and concentrated as many Jews as they can in a very confined area. You cannot get out from this area, this where you live, and there was no such a thing like uh, a family gets a home or gets a, a place to live. There used to be ten, eight, six, seven families, living in one apt. And this what they put you into, this is, this start out the ghetto, and what we had, we had uh people, SS and non SS, uh watching you uh on the outside walls. They have towers, uh they had dogs, and they been watching, nobody could get in or out. If you escape, you want to go for example which this happened, people try to escape from ghetto to Vashow, or to go into Russia, so just for---------at that time, they been caught and shot, and this is, this is a daily occurrence, and mainly they start to escape at the Jewish cemetery, and I'm talking about Lodz, I'm strictly talking about Lodz, which in German, of course, was Lichmenstadt. In Polish, it's Lodz. And, so people tried to escape and, of course, you know, to be, we been surrounded by, by soldiers or SS or whatever, and you just couldn't get out of it. And, uh starvation, tremendous amount of starvation, and again, at that time, my father, because he was involved in, in community service a lot, he was chosen, and we moved, when we got into ghetto, we moved to the cemetery, to the Jewish cemetery, what this is quite big, there used to be a house there, where nine families used to live all year round, and they took care of burial of the dead. And they lived right on the cemetery. But it was very gorgeous, looked like a park, I mean, big trees, gardens, and really was a little bit out of the cemetery, was a big wall from brick, about, about oh maybe 50 feet away, the cemetery began, and uh, my father was at that time in charge of the cemetery. I forgot what I did want to get into it, the question.

We just ran out, and that was perfect----------

Beep.

Can you go back and tell me about how old you were and what you were doing at that time when your, when you were in the Lodz ghetto, what life was like and what you decided to do.

Well, in ghetto, I was not very long because I had been taken from the street on the 28th of February uh 1940, on the 28th of February 1940, the Germans had a ----------, which we call, which means they came to the streets, and, and just surrounded all the people that they wanted and then shipped them out of ghetto into different camps, and this happened to me on the 28 th of February 1940, which they call it the----------, in German, the ----------, which means the Bloody Thursday, where a lot of people got killed and, and transported at that time. When I was in ghetto for the short time that I was, there was a lot of, uh, a lot of misery, a lot of, a lot of like I say, hunger was one thing. For an example, I remember people used to keep their dead at home, not bury them, bury them in their own basement so that they can keep the card, the, the ration of food, used to be on cards, you'd get so much of every little thing, and so they didn't want to bury the, the dead, because they took away the, the card, and in order to be able to feed themselves, they kept the dead, they kept them at home till they started smelling sometimes, and, and sometimes they would bury them in, in uh in their own basements, or wherever they could find a place, just so to hold on to, to the ration.

When you got picked up on the street, what were you out doing?

I went, I went for my father for an errand, and this was the end of that.

All right, now tell me how old you were then, and then go right on to what happened.

Well, I was at that time 14 years when, when the war broke out, and at that time we were transported next to Auschwitz, where we used to build, uh, literally, we can say, build Auschwitz at that time. We used to build roads, and uh, blacktop, for, for the Germans, and this was, uh, that time was small camps, uh, I don't remember exactly the name because I been quite a few of them later on when they get to it, after 1944, but we been in those working camps, and uh, and keep on, there were thousand people, 800 people, sometimes 2000 people, and just building. Now when I was there, again, I don't remember exact time on the timetables, I don't remember, but I know that I w-w-walked into a --------- trains, you know, where they're loading, and I escaped, and I wind up in ghetto, I didn't know where I'm running, but I went in there was a lot of straw, they used to

transport straw or hide it. I used to load cement, and I knew exactly when the train is going to take off, I watched the----------, and all the, the kind of things that I, I planned for quite a while, and then I, I with the last load that we put in, I never showed up, and they took off, and I wind up in Lichmenstadt again. And I went in back to ghetto. I was able to crawl back. So were my parents. A lot of suffering. I I uh I saw some people. I start working for a little while, and pretty soon I was taken again. I was uh, there used to be a place called Marachin, also was a part of the ghetto, where the German took it, and one morning eleven o clock, they just closed off all the streets, and they took me to Radegush, which was a train depot, a big one, and I wind up in Auschwitz, all within a very short time. (Sandy talking in background)

All within a very short time. So, now you went by train to Auschwitz, was that in a transport of cattle cars?

yeah.

Describe to me that please.

Well, the cattle cars was uh, you know, at that time when I went, from this particular transport, they were still a little livable, there was uh maybe 85 90 people, and about that particular time, and in fact, till today, I don't, I don't, I hate trains, the noise drives me nuts, this tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Because I've been, I've been going around trains a lot at that particular period. Uh, so we was with the train, and they picked up people, the trains connected with other boxcars, from other parts in Poland. I don't know exactly where, but we used to stop a certain place, and they used to hook up more boxcars, with more people, and we wind up, like I say, we wind up in Auschwitz.

What was that like? Tell, when was this, was this still 1940?

1940 something like this, yeah.

Tell me what arrival in Auschwitz in 1940 was like.

1940 the arrival in Auschwitz was no different than people came later. You came in, the Drs used to look you over at that time, remember this was the beginning of Auschwitz at that particular time. Dachau existed much longer, uh, the camp, but Auschwitz just began, as much as I understand when I came in. Uh, the uh, you have to undress, they shave your hair, they gave you the striped uh, uh pants, and at that particular time also, people used to have, they didn't cut them both sides,

they cut just in the middle, just the middle hair, used to be cut off, and you couldn't escape, because they always, they recognize you, and of course you got the number. And uh right away you, of course, you know you start working the way, whatever they want you to do, that's what you done. Mainly building stuff and all this kind of thing.

And the selections then were where the gas chambers are, were they operating at that time?

AT that time, there, there was, there was 4 gas chambers, uh, if I remember correctly, it's, I think it was 4, I don't remember exactly because we had Birkenau and Auschwitz uh together, but I think it was 4 or 5, yeah sure, they all went was already going, but at that time really mainly was sick people, kids, older people, at that particular period. They tried to get as much labor, and this is my opin-mine uh assessment, you know, I, I was not involved in German politics, but uh, at that time, whoever still looked pretty fair that they, he can go to work, they used to keep him, and of course, they separate the women right away. And the system was the same, any, any person no matter how old or young you are, you carried a young child, you went automatically to the gas chamber. Didn't matter, they didn't tell you, "Give the child to somebody else." You could have been 19 years old, or 20 or 60, whoever had a child carrying, or a little child on their hand automatically went to the gas chamber.

When you say the doctors did the selecting, who were the doctors.

There was at different times, different doctors, was an SS man, well, which he was a doctor, I think, most that we know, Mengele was very much involved in the selection at that particular time, but mostly uh, you know, I didn't go out this far, once you're in camp, you very seldom you see it once or twice. Later on when I was in Auschwitz, I was able to go out more, but we didn't really pay much attention, so I cannot tell you exactly who done it at that particular time, but when I was in, Mengele was the guy that mostly was selecting people for experiments, or who is going to be in camp, or who is going to go to the gas chamber, and I'm sure he had help because this thing was going on 24 hours a day, you know, people used to come continuously after 1940, and the trains load from all over Poland. It was just not where I lived.

How do you, since you were 14, shouldn't you have not made it?

Well, that's a big question. You know, I'm asking myself a lot of questions, uh, the older I get, the more it bothers me, I was, I was pretty, for my age, I was a pretty husky fellow so to speak, I was pretty nicely built, and uh, it's very hard to say why I'm alive because I've been dead many, many times, but I

think I've got something in me that I know how to survive. How to explain this is very hard. Other people can do better ------. I know in camp, they used to say, "Sam is like steel. The more you pound him, the harder he gets." and I got something in me for survival. I cannot explain it. According to the records, I've been, I am dead a long time ago.

We have a little bit left. What's a Kapo?

Kapo's are not very nice people (sarcastic laugh). They were people, they ran the camp, literally for the Germans, I don't know how better to explain, and uh, we can make another film how they treat their own people, now this probably going to be cut out, I shouldn't say that (laughs), but very, very, no heart whatsoever, I, I'll give you a little example of Kapo, and I make it very quick. I went, when I was in there, I went and asked for a little water for an elderly person. I was a young kid. The guy was fainting. I went over to our kapo and asked for water, and he hit me, that I flew over 6 times, and blood from my mouth, and his, and he didn't, and he says to me, "What do you think you are here? What do you mean you want water?" So, I didn't know what Auschwitz was all about. This was still when we change clothes. So...

We've got to reload.

I think we should just finish that story about the Kapo.

Well, literally, Kapo were people, they really helped the Germans running the camps.

How did you get to be a kapo.

Uh, Germans selected them. They were selected. Uh, there were good and bad like in anything else, but this, uh, this is mainly really what it is, they been running, they done the dirty work for the Germans.

Could they have major good impact if they wanted to, do you know any good kapos?

Could they have a good impact? Uh, yeah, but if he would be good, he wouldn't be a kapo, because they want the--they want the people that they want to please them, not to please us, so from this you can draw any conclusion you want to.

If you're nice, you wouldn't be a kapo in the first place.

Tell me what you remember of what Auschwitz was like, how massive it was, how organized it was, or--------how it changed.

Well, there were big barracks uh starting out when it was very big barracks for people when I came in who were sleeping on the floor, and uh, we were literally sleeping one against the other, and there may be 80, 90, 100 people in one link, and this was, we're laid out like that. When one guy turned over, everybody had to turn over. That's the way it was. We literally pressed in one against the other. Uh, we used to get up in the morning, uh, we used to stand on line. Winter or summer, didn't make any difference, with the same little clothes that we had. In the winter time people were standing in line for about an hour and a half, two hours, they used to wake us up when it was still dark, people were frozen to death. You couldn't move, you had to stay just straight with your hands down. five in a line, they used to count us every morning. And we used to go out to work, different, in Auschwitz had different uh, different contractors, German contractors, uh, had uh shouldn't…think that the uh prisoners uh in concentration were working for them. Uh, I was involved, for example, building uh, a place for Hitler, a ----------, which was under, this was again was, they called it the ---------- from, from Auschwitz, which meant really that it was a extension of Auschwitz, but a smaller camp, and Auschwitz had a lot of them. But the people didn't really come back to Auschwitz to sleep, but they went out to work with another small camp, was also run through the Auschwitz uh management if you want to call this right. Uh, used to have music in the morning, when ---------I go out to work, and there were not a day that people didn't come back uh dead. The SS was watching you. On the jobs, you were beaten up, you were shot sometimes, and all kind of things just to demoralize the people, and take away any little pride that you had in you. We were literally treated, you know, animals are treated today much, we were treated like animals at that time. We would uh, probably felt pretty bad. Uh,

This thing you built for Hitler, what was this thing?

Beg your pardon? This thing that you--

We, this was a howdy, a hideout, for Hitler, in mountains. We never finished it, but we were working on it. A special hideout for Hitler. From a camp which called Provinger, we built. This what they used to tell, what we building at that time, and it was strictly built by, by uh prisoners.

Were there any attempts to sabotage?

No, I don't think so. There was nothing worth to sabotage there, was cement and steel. And they watch you and you have to work so what could you do.

What other kinds of jobs did you have in your years there?

What jobs I had? Well, I worked uh, carrying cement bags, week after week, uh, and the Germans were standing and uh screaming, "Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, shno, shno, sho!" And we used to, you can't walk with a cement sack, you had to run with it, and load it and back and doing the same thing, all day long. At that time was no food, all day, till you came into the camp, they gave you something, you know, to eat, you had a little piece of bread, and a coffee in the morning, and then something evening when you came back, which was very little. If you didn't know how to steal or had a kapo that gave you something on the side, uh it was impossible to survive what they gave you. Uh, you came back, again, you went to sleep, and then they had uh, for example the facilities of uh lavatories, where, where a big barrack and the holes one next to the other, but talking about Auschwitz, that I didn't talk very much about it, the thing that I remember which shows you how you can emulate??? people. In Auschwitz used to be septic tanks from the big lavatories that I just explained, and uh, the first thing they done when we, when I was there, they put in, a fellow that I knew that I knew very well, uh, he was a cantor, and they put him in the septic tank sitting up till here. Catholic priests, ministers, they all put them down, we had to walk by every day to see them, and they literally died in there, after 6 days, 7 days, something like that, they kept them in there. And this was just the method because you know, you have to, we, we have to understand at that particular ----------the respect for a rabbi or a priest or a minister or a cantor. Was a different perception than today really, when it's quite different. At that time, you were like God. I mean, the respect was tremendous for these people, and here you see them sitting in the septic tanks, forgive me for the expression, with all this crap up to their neck, and we had to walk by everyday to see them, they made a point to do this. The Kapos used to round us up, and we had to walk by. And this was to break, break your spirit, whatever methods they had in order just...to get you in the kind of mood that they want you to be.

They were all in there together, priests and Rabbis?

Priests and rabbis, yeah and cantors and all religious, any, anybody from religious sect, they, they started out, just right in the beginning when we came in. In fact, these people came in the same transports that we came in.

In your interview, you said you worked also in a crematorium.

Yeah, I…

Tell me about that.

Well, uh, what happened is they, we had the barracks, and at that time, the infected, which I don't really, don't s----------, the infected gypsies, they brought in gypsies from all over, and they infected them with typhus, and they sent them to the crematorium. Literally just eliminate all the gypsies. There was not a question of going to work or anything, they just eliminate them. So they brought them in from Romania, from Poland, from, from uh, uh Hungary, wherever, and, in this barrack, where people uh, uh infected with typhus, and they grabbed me, and I help loading them on, on a, on a truck, and we moved them from this particular barrack into the crematorium. They still were alive, but barely, you know high fever, and if you're familiar with typhus, what this can do if they don't treat you, you get very high fever, and uh, I was working in there, almost, almost 11 months, help from the gas chamber to the crematorium. Now, normally, I wouldn't be alive. Here's another thing you asked me before, wonder How I survived. A truck went back, and we loaded some stuff to bring it back to the camp, and I jumped off and I never got back, and this the way I survived. And uh, I was hidden out with some people within the camp.

They didn’t' miss you on the appel?

Well, there's, there's a story about that, and I, I don't think I really would like to get into it. I was exchanged for another person as a number, which he went, he was very sick guy, he went to crematorium, they exchanged me and, and I, I was able to survive. And this was a fellow that is still alive today. They helped him in there.

Uh, how did you make choices in this time, or do you feel that you didn't make choices?

Choices in which way? What to do, not to do? or...I, I, I don't know. I can tell you one thing that I have an instinct in me, whatever it is. I could smell trouble when it came beforehand. I uh, I just have it in me, I just have it in me. I know how to manipulate to survive. I just have it in me. I don't know what it is, instinct or whatever it is, I, I was able to do that. I got a little bit of it till today.

I think we're going to run out----------.

Change film, camera roll 4 is up; sync take 5 is up.

Beep.

Tell me about your family coming to Auschwitz.

My family come to Auschwitz, they came in 1944 from ghetto and uh, that's the last time I saw them. Uh, I talked to my father. In fact, as I mentioned before, I grew up in a very religious home, not fanatic home, but a religious home, and I said to my father, I said, "Where's God?" I said, "All, all the religious, you know, rabbis and priests and ministers and children and everybody getting killed here." I said, "Where's God?" And his answer to me was, "This the way God wants it, and this is the way it's going to be." And he knew he's going to the crematorium, and that's the last time I saw him.

Tell me that story again, and tell me how you were able to go up to him.

Well, at at that time, I remember, I

(Laughing).

At that time, I knew everybody in Auschwitz. I could move around pretty freely. I knew everybody, I knew the SS, the people there, that were there, I knew. I knew everybody. And, so there was not for me, a big thing, and at that time, by the way, I used to go to, there was, you were outside of the camp, of course, when they came in, within the camp, but with the railroad, and then they went down, and then they went to the crematorium, whoever went in and out. At that time I was looking for people coming from Lodz Ghetto, because I, they start liquidating the ghetto in 194--, but there were transports coming in before my father came or my, my mother, so I used to, you know, what's, who is coming, what is happening, and I was interested at that time, and I knew sooner or later my father's going to show up if he's still alive, and this is the way I used to go up looking for them.

So tell me that story again. Did you see your mother at the same time?

I saw my mother--

----------, but tell it to me as though you didn't tell me before.

Well, uh, my, my father, like I say, my father came, he was standing in line, my mother was on the other side, on the other side of the trucks, where at that time, and this was a very painful uh situation for me as a youngster uh because the woman had to undress completely right there where you were standing, on the other side, and the man was on this side. Now why at that time, the woman undressed there, I have no idea, but this what we done, all the women had to undress, and the men standing on this side of course, which was the rails, the railroad ran through the middle, and there were one side and then this and men, as I remember, facing towards the camp, the woman was on the left side and the man was on the right side if you faced, or you were marching down towards the selection. And I waved to my mother, I couldn't go over there talking to her, but it was very painful for me to see my mother naked, but, coming at that particular time, I'm sure everybody felt the same way, and I spoke to my father, like I said, I s-because the way I was brought up, you know, we were a home with God, and uh, we're children of God, and my God, and you know and, and I was pretty religious brought up, and what I saw at that time changed my mind a little bit, and I raised just that question with my father, "Where's God? Look at what happened here." And the answer was, "This is the way God wants it, this is the way it's going to be." So religion has its proper place because he went to death so to speak without fear. At least he didn't show it to me. But how he felt I cannot tell. I just know that, the religion at that poi--at that particular time, the only time that I remember that really played a big role and I'm happy for it today, if this is really the way he felt. So, whatever God wanted was going to be, so, which means everything is not?? in his hands. I, I don't accept it very easily, but if this made him feel good at that time...

How do you feel?

About?

About what happened there?

Well, it's very ----------you know, it's very disturbing of course, it's very painful, you know, uh, I live today with uh with night's that I don't sleep wondering what went through their minds before their dead. What they felt, what they were thinking of, (weird sound in background), but it didn't take very long to know, you know, you're going to the gas chamber. Took a minute and a half, two minutes, you start choking, you're still a little bit conscious, till you're dead, and this is a, is pretty fast process, but a very slow one, when you suffer 30 seconds is a, is is a year. And the screaming and the hollering, it's still ringing in my ears. It doesn't go away. It'll never go away. So, (clears throat) you know, how can you feel? You just, as you get older, I thought, as older you get, you

forget what happens. And it worked quite different. The older you get, the more it works on you, the more guilty you feel that you're alive, or how did you really survive or your family becomes more important to you, you miss them much more, because now you finish raising a family, you establish yourself, so when you're busy in the early years, when you're young, you're probably busy enough, so you don't worry much about it, but then later on, ----------, worked on you much, much more and much more often than uh, than it should. You know, I, I know that uh, you know, people that came back from Vietnam, you see, they have psychologists and psychiatrists and any kind of bad experience, they go through all the kind of things to get their life back together. In our case, we got liberated, we didn't have this kind of luxury. We had to struggle day in and day out to overcome all the kind of obstacles except your self motivation and, and all this kind of thing, so, there, there is there is there is a backlash. I know psychiatrists who claim that children of survivors uh have some problems. What they are I don't know.

Tell me about your brother, Chaim.

Both my brothers uh were very uh, uh people that went again in Poland, this is very unusual, they went to Gymnasium, which you call uh here college. And uh, Chaim was married, he had a beautiful little boy and a wife, and when he find out when he came into Auschwitz that his wife and child are dead, which he did find out, he then decided in and he spoke to me about it, it was not something that he got mad, he committed suicide. He explained to me very calmly that life for him, if if we get liberated, this was a big if, that I am a young man and I don't have children and all that kind of thing, that life for me can be pretty good, but as far as he is concerned, even if he gets liberated he doesn't want to live. And he suffered a lot, he uh, he worked on construction, he was freezing to death, he didn't, he didn't fight it, you know, and uh, he really, you, you could see every day that he was losing his health and his strength and an he made it very clear to me that this is what he's going to do. One thing he made, and it's very interesting what he said to me, "You know, you got an aunty by the name Sosky." This is my mother's name, maiden name, and it took me 2 years, I didn't, couldn't remember the name. One night, in a dream, I remembered the name Sosky. I woke up and wrote it down, and told my wife, I was all happy. For two years I couldn't remember it. Just completely blanked out. And this the way I found my aunty in uh in Paris.

What did Chaim ultimately do?

What he ultimately do? He jumped down a big construction, a very tall construction, he jumped down and killed himself.

Were you and he together for a long time?

We were together for, for not for a long time, we were together, and then he, they took him, they took him away to a different barrack, and I was in a different barrack and we saw each other on a Sunday or something like this.

Did you have long-term friends while you were there?

In Auschwitz? Uh, yeah.

Tell me about the support system.

Well, the support system in my particular case was a little unusual because you have to remember I been very young. I was the youngest when I got into Auschwitz. The fathers they had children, they had a family, they knew what a family is. I was like a little adopted, so to speak. So, everybody you know uh, like I was their child. They, they, they touch me and they and sometimes I got a hug from them and sometimes a little piece of bread or whatever, and I was pretty outgoing, uh, you know, so, this was comrade-----. I didn't have any children that I really knew till I got into Buchenwald. In Auschwitz, I was with only grown up people.

We have to reload.

Beep.

One of the things you said is once you start fighting for survival all the ethics are gone. Talk to me about that.

Well, this is my personal opinion, okay, this is my, my personal opinion, uh, I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, but I think that after 5 years being with hundreds thousands of people every day, you become a pretty good psychiatrist and psychologist even so you don't have a degree. What I found is that uh, we, that human beings in general, we live by circumstances, everybody is able to steal, to kill, to do everything what he ought to do at the proper time. If you have to survive. We all have the instincts. The question is, when does it come into play? And what I saw is, for example, people, they came in with, they're called intelligentsia, people that are very intelligent, doctors, lawyers, uh, philosophers, scientists, you name it. They didn't have a rough life before they came in in camp. They didn't survive for very long. They just didn't survive. And the ones

that did want to survive, they became the biggest animals that you can ever saw, in order to survive. Now these are people, which of course, had, uh, some background of behavior, intelligence, and you name it, but it didn't work like that, uh, these were the ones that would push you, these are the ones they will steal from you, these are ones that will lie in order to survive, so I feel very strongly that circumstances plays a tremendous role, not the way we're brought up, not the way you learn to school, uh, survival, you will do a lot of things which you never thought you will do in order to survive.

Go back and talk about choices and the difference where you at fourteen versus if you had been a father with children.

Well, uh I, I again I have to say something and it's probably true today that it was then. The family unit at that particular era that goes back when I was growing up was quite different, much closer, uh, it was uh, uh the whole, the whole lifestyle was different, as far as family life is concerned, who, we never heard of divorces, I mean this was, this was uh, you know, this was a shame, uh, you know uh my uncle will know I got divorced, well, I'd rather commit suicide before they know I got divorced. I'm trying to just give you the atmosphere I get from Poland, that the family unit was very close, so when you had a wife and children that came in, and you knew that they're suffering, even if they're alive, that the do not, they had have nothing to eat, they stand outside in freezing, no clothes. As a father, this is a very painful uh experience, of knowing you have a family that's starving the hunger, even so that you yourself are starving, but this does not enter your mind, you're always worried about the kids and your wife. And so the people that had this kind of experience, their chances of survival was a little bit less than the ones that, that I had a dream for example, and I dream about my grandchildren, I will sit at the table and I will eat the same food I ate in concentration camp or in ghetto, which is uh potato peels, that they used to give you in ghetto if you had swollen feet, this supposed, this was your medicine, there was not a medicine, you know. And so I had dreams which were quite different, you know, I have a story to tell, and I, I'm a fighter uh, I remember when I I used to walk to work and the SS was going next to me walking side by side, and I used to in German say, "----------," which means "I have you underground, I will survive." They used to turn around and say, "----------?" I'd say, "Nothing." So I motivate myself, uhhhhhh, you know to survive. You know, I used to say very terrible things to them, and they used to turn around "----------?" And this was my getting even a little bit with them. So, again, I, I cannot explain them, but this what it was.

Did you have any close calls because of that, did you ever do something----------?

Uh, no, I spoke German because we spoke uh, uh German at home, I , I spoke German, and so I always, you know, was able to get--I didn't have any close calls, no, not this way, you know, I had, the, you know, I was, I was beaten up for other reasons, you know, just, just because uh, you know, there's a thousand reasons that I, I'd been beaten up pretty severely, you know.

So, you're resistance was expressed that way, you didn't have any occasion to do other forms of resistance?

No.

I committed suicide, uh, trying to, you know, cut my wrists, but this a long story, I used to, I used to bring in uh food back from the people. There used to be a Russian guy from Russia, and this was one of the uh, I forget it was a ----------, I think, or Kravinkle??? because I used to be in different before the liberation, and I used to smuggle pieces of ammunition into the, to the camp, putting in the soup, leftover soup, in the can, and I got caught, and they want to know who is, who is doing it, and I didn't do it, so I was tortured pretty severely. I'd rather don't get into that. So, I decided I'm going to, before I tell them who is involved in it, I will commit suicide, and I cut with a piece of glass, but I didn't, I didn't succeed. I still have a scar, where it was.

You weren't doing the smuggling or you were doing it?

I were doing it.

But with other people?

Other people. Yeah, we tried to, we tried to establish a a underground resistance so to speak. And the people were working at ammunition plants, and we smuggled parts in to assemble them, to try to surprise, to do something.

Tell me more about that.

Well, uh... there's really not much to say except a lot of torture. And again, how I survived I cannot explain it, because a lot of people in my position were shot, hanged, I survived, I have no answer for that. But I went through hell for a long period of time. Was probably a 2 month ordeal.

Tell me about the pattern in Auschwitz, what their goals were.

Their goal was elimination. There was no, there was not a goal, there, there were no goals. If you had five crematoriums burning 24 hours a day, what is the goal? The goal was elimination. Oh well, you know, I'm sure that you're familiar with the final solution, the book, the Germans' final solution of the Jews, and the goal was, as long as they can, you're a little productive, whatever you can do when they need you, with very little investment as far food is concerned or anything else, till you, till you literally couldn't do it anymore, when you couldn't, you couldn't uh your strength is going, you automatically, they took you and you know you were disposed of. It was simple like that. So this was Auschwitz uh was strictly uh elimination camp, uh, just to eliminate the, the Jewish race, uh, there was , there was nothing other in their mind. If it was Eichmann or, or, or, or all the other ones, that it was just, this was the, this was their goal, and this was feasible. The only thing we, we always thought, there's going to be a miracle, and this, and I must tell you if the war would go on another year, none of us, we wouldn't sit here and talk. They would achieve their goal, which it was, to eliminate the Jewish race, and other races with it. You know, people talk a lot about uh t-six million Jews, and I must say 12 million altogether, the Turks and Greeks and, and Poles and, and Russians, when they got into Russia when they brought them into Germany for labor and also concentration camp, and the other six million, that was non-Jewish people. You know, homosexuals, you were, you know, we had in Auschwitz tremendous amount of homosexuals, and each one had a different uh triangle, political people had a triangle, homosexual had a triangle, the Jews all with different colors, and the goal was to eliminate them. There was no other things in their mind, except they didn't succeeded.

Did you witness spiritual resistance?

No. Be a little more specific, uh, about spiritual resistance.

Saying prayers.

Oh, I, I didn't, but I'm sure, I'm sure people done that. You know, you had pretty religious people in there. They relied on, on God to do the, the job for us, you know. But I I didn't , I didn't witness, people were too tired. They used to come home, remember we used to be on our feet 18 hours a day, 16, 17, 18, I don't know exactly, but you know, 4 o clock in the morning, you were out, and you went to bed, working, you worked hard, and so, uh, if they done it, they done it maybe in such a quiet way, but it was not officially getting together 10, 9 people and praying or anything like that. This was out of the question. There was no such a thing. But, I'm sure individuals, you know...

We just ran out.

Beep.

You said once that death was actually a luxury. Talk to me about why.

Well, in fact, I, I just lost it, I used to carry this in my pocket, uh, it never left my pocket, I just, something happened, I have a, a thing which says on it, "I remember times when death was a luxury." And if I got a little upset over something, I used to just feel my pocket, and feel as happy as can be because there are no problems for me. And what it was is basically that you saw dead people, literally same dead???, you walked by and say, "Boy, you don't have to suffer anymore." So dying was not easy. Even in concentration camp. I'm talking natural dying. Hunger was a terrible death, terrible death. Sickness was a terrible death. When you went into the, to the uh, uh crematorium, well, you had no choice, you went in there, and of course, couple seconds later you were dead. But people that slowly died...So, basically, uh, and I use this a lot of times, uh, that , you know, I remember times when death was a luxury, which literally you envied the people that were dead. You envied them. I done it many times. Many times. Because you no longer have to go through this ordeal. You don't have to suffer. It's finished. So dying was a luxury.

Was there a lot of friendship in the camp?

Uh, I, you know what, I really c--uh, I don't know, there was certain people, family you can say, sometimes maybe a cousin or a brother or this, but I really, I cannot really relate and answer that, I really didn't put in much thought, really to give an honest answer if it was friendship. I don't remember that kind, I know that very isolated cases that I done certain things for people, people done for me, but I I think you lived under conditions where survival, you just, you just have to look out, you look out for yourself. Not because you want it. Not because of your character. Again I come back because of circumstances. So comrade-------, uh, very seldom, uh I'm sure that existed, but I remember more people looking out for themselves to survive.
In, doing that, did they hurt others?

Uh, certain people done, sure, certain people done that. Yeah.

I want you to tell me the story once more of your, of when your father came into the camp, but I want you to give me a context, I don't want you to say, "As I Said before," I want you to say, "I had been in camps for about 4 years when the transport for 4 years when the transport from Lodz came

in, in 1944, my family was on it, and then I want you to tell me that story. Can you do that?

You want me to start it now?

Yeah…

Well, I was in Auschwitz in 1944, my father and mother they were in Ghetto in, in Lichmenstadt or Lodz, which is in Poland, and at that particular time, that particular period, the liquidation of the ghetto started out, the liquidating, literal liquidating the ghetto was no longer a situation where they used to bring in transports. They're liquidating. That had about a certain time in 1944, the ghetto has to be liquidated. So, transports used to come in every day, and one day my father came in and I walked up to him, and my mother was on the other side, on the, on the tracks, and I told, asked my father, because I grew up religious, and people cannot do nothing wrong, basically, and here I live in a conditions which quite different than I was brought up. And uh, I raised this question with my father, I said, "Where's God? Where is God?" Children, rabbis, priests, ministers, women, everybody's getting the gas chamber, killed. All hunger and all of that. And his answer to me was, literally his answer was, "Don't raise any questions. This is the way God wants it, and this is the way it's going to be." And this was the end of it, and he start, he was standing on line going to the gas chamber.

Are there other things that you remember about life in the camp ----------? What about the experiments, did you see that?

Well, uh, uh sure I saw, you know, there was, there was the barracks right there. We saw the, the children and the camps where Mengele used to experiment with them. There was a period of time when I used to clean in, in the barracks. Not very long, maybe 4 weeks or 6 weeks I forgot, uh, where I used to clean the barracks so this was visible within the camp. But again, I don't think a lot of people took notice of it because everybody tried to survive, so you didn't worry about somebody else's problems. And besides, you couldn't do nothing about it anyway, you know, you lived under dictatorship. You were just a number, not a, not, not, not a person. So,

Tell me about the death march and the trip out.

The death march in from, from Auschwitz?

Yeah.

Uh, this was in 1944, we g, we got from Auschwitz, they start, they took transports away from Auschwitz, and as I understood later, there were also other camps, that was united on this death march, so to speak. Except each one wind up in different, in different areas, different camps, so to speak, for liberation. Uh, they took us into trains, and at that particular time, they put in 120, 125 people, in the in the boxcars. And they dragged us around through Germany, back and forth, back and forth, and then we wind up in camps, I will not go through with the sequence, but I give you their names, because I think people will relate to it. One camp was Kravinkle, Nespartal, Flossenburg, uhhh, Finspeisch??, these old camps within a very short period of time, Gross-Rosen, when we went there and stayed there 2-3 weeks, out we go, and they dragged us to some other place. I finally wind up in a camp Flossenburg, and from there I get into Buchenwald, and I said, "No more. I'm not going. I will hide out. I will do something." And I got liberated in Buchenwald. Uh, the death march was very terrible, it was in January and in February, it was winter. People were dying like flies, fro-freezing, nothing to eat. I remember in one particular place, if it was Gleivich or Girlich in Germany, I cannot remember exactly, I tried to remember, but I know it was in Gleivich or Girlich. We stopped, and we were sleeping outside, and, in the morning we got up, they gave us one boiled potato, and this was after marching for a long period of time. For water, we used to take ice, uh, snow, and try to eat snow. And uh, and I wind up, like I say, I wind up in Flossenburg, then in Buchenwald. When I got into Buchenwald, they start on the speakers, loudspeakers, every day. First of all, they cut off the water in Buchenwald. No food. The only ra-ration of food you get is when you go out on march, which they took you out from Buchenwald , which I understand, they took you out from Buchenwald, they went into Weimar in, in the woods, and forests, and machine-gunned everybody, and this was very short before the war came to an end. The way I survived is I was next to a, a, a, a barrack, where sick people went there, and I hided in a septic tank with 2 brothers, their name were Greenfeld. One of them is still alive, that lives in Israel. The other brother unfortunately survived concentration camp, and got killed in Tel Aviv by the bus station from, from Arabs, they throw hand grenades. And, we were laying there, and uh, very interesting is that, when I got liberated, and I lived in a, a place called Gersfreund, there's a guy still living there by the name Main Grajinsky. He was watching, he went on march, but he was watching when we hided going into the manhole, and he gave me a bottle of water. I never knew this guy. But he knew we're going to hide there, so he was watching for the SS, when he turned around, we crawled in there, one by one, closed the manhole plate, and when I met him, he wind up in Gersfreund, which is thousands of miles away, and we told the story, and he says, "You know, I'm the guy that gave you the bottle of water." He knew who I was. I didn't tell him that you gave me a bottle of water. He says, "I'm the guy that gave you a bottle of water. So we been lay there for 3 days, 4 days, we knew the war is coming to an end because we heard the

cannons shooting and a lot of activity at night and during the day, and it came closer and closer. But how it will come out we didn't know, and uh, I literally couldn't get out of it. I was dragged out of the hole after the war was over. And we all survived this way, in this manhole.

We're going to run out.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

9 Second ----------

I want you to tell me what happened to your mother and sister, but I want you to go back to, but I want to again repeat as though I haven't heard it before, the story of how you went to meet the transports from Lodz, the liquidation transports.

Well, the story uh, about my mother and my sister, and they liquidated the ghetto, and I spoke about it before, the liquidating, my sister came, and she had a, a small child, which my mother was carrying this child. And everybody that carried a young child, or walked with it went automatically to the gas chamber. My sister's uh suffering from that uh to a point that she was very sick because she has a guilt feeling that she lived, that if she would not give my mother the child, my mother would probably still be alive. And so she feels guilty, and disturbed that she thinks she killed my mother. This what goes in her mind, that's the way she feels, and it's uh, it's very painful for her.

Do you think you mother knew what was going to happen. Do you think your mother and sister...

No, no. No. My mo, my mother or my sister did not know what is going to happen. Uh, my father knew more about it. Uh, which I follow up a little later, the reason my father knew what is happening in Auschwitz is that he was getting in ghetto by short wave radio, information from England, London, which was hidden in ghetto. This was death if the German catch us, but it was some people in ghetto that hided in a basement, a short wave radio, and they would listen to London, and, at that particular time apparently, it was already known what Auschwitz is all about, and what the Germans are doing in Auschwitz. So my father knew a little more about it. Uh, my mother had a, I don't think she had any, any idea what's going to happen, or my sister. Uh, one of

the things, if I may just say something, the way they liquidated, the Germans, the way they liquidated the ghetto is by telling people, "Take your belongings, take your tools if you're a, if you're a, a, a professional, whatever you are, a carpenter, or whatever, and we, what we doing, we're relocating you, this was the German strategy away from ghetto, at least in Lodz, and I know this from a fact from a lot of people that been in ghetto, and this is what they tell them, that they relocate them, due to the war, the Russians coming in or whatever. Whatever lies they can take. And this what people, in their minds, this what they thought this what is happening. They're going from ghetto to be relo-relocated. So, I'm pretty sure that most of the people, that went to the gas chamber had absolutely no idea.. that this is going to happen.

Tell me in a very basic way how by the point of view of age, what would happen when the selections happened. Tell me who would have chance immediately at all.

Immediately at all is children, little children, of course, no question about it uh, 12, 10 years, no question about it, if they're noticeable 10, 12. Uh, like I say, I did not see in Auschwitz a lot of small children at all. Uh, Uh, with the, with the women, I cannot, I, I don't know that. But basically, the chances where uh people in pretty good physical health, and this is really what they were looking for. When they made the selection, and I think, the only thing that the doctor was standing who made the selection, right, left, right, left, right, is strictly for your physically ap-appearance, from who they can, who has a little strength that can work, and who not. So, they change this from middle age, uh, uh from 16 probably up uh if you look pretty, you know, pretty uh athletic or good health or whatever, but small children and elderly people absolutely no chance whatsoever, in Auschwitz.

Why do you think they took everybody on these death marches?

Well, uh, uh, uh, I uh, the war is coming, came to a, why they took everybody on the death marches, the war is coming to an end. They war got near the territory that they been fighting, got smaller and smaller. They got kicked out from Stalingrad, when they fought with Russia, they had to con-go back. They were kicked out in Africa when they fought with Rommel, they had to go back. So their territory was pretty small, and the war start coming to an end very quickly. And so what they tried to do, probably hoping that they will still win the war, so they tried to take it out from certain places, not to leave evidence. Because they, they made, didn't made any use of us. We didn't go to work or stay in one place for any period of time. We were just moving around and people were dying. And even eliminating them. So, basically, uh, basically, because of the rapid conclusion of the of the war...

But why do you think they didn't just shoot everybody?

Well, they did! They took out from Buchenwald 20,000 people and, and, and killed them. I mean, you know, they did, they done as much as they could do it, as the time permitted. They done it all the time, except I think, in my view again maybe some other people have a different philosophy, but when I look back, this is what really happened, this is was not enough time. The same thing Hitler was working on the V-2. We won on V-2, the atomic bomb, we were the only one that has it. The war would, another, another six, eight months, I don't know if America would be still America if he would succeed. So he didn't succeed with this either, so, it's a few things that didn't help him very much.

In light of your experiences, how do you feel about human nature?

Human nature? Personally, I can speak for myself, I learned how to love, not to hate. I don't know what hate is. Even when I go-I'm like to get even with the people that I personally know what they done, they wouldn't have much of a chance. I would probably cut pieces every minute. But I do not generalize. I am not a person that generalizes. People basically are good people. And, so I have no hatred anyway. I will never say all the Germans are the same, but if it be or not, we used to walk through a place called Vista Gistorf, on the death march, and the women were sitting in the, in the windows and crying. So, they got the---------- common, but, uh, I basically learned how to love. I do, because if I hate, I, it doesn't make me better what the Germans are, and I want to say something here that probably a lot of people will not appreciate it, you will cut it out probably, this what bothers me about religion. You see, we go to church, we say, we're children of God, we, you know, we all children of God, love the next, next one, uh, love your neighbor and all the kind of goodies. And not long ago when a Catholic did want to marry a Protestant, he had a hell of a time, not very long ago, fifteen years ago, ten years ago, he was an outcast in his family. So, uh, I'm not a hypocrite, and I don't want to, I don't want to, do not want to follow the steps of hatred. I judge people by individuals. What they are, I like them if I want to, if I don't like them, I stay away, but uh, I do not hate. I don't know even what it is. Now, this does not mean if I would find a couple people from Auschwitz that I, that I would like to get even with them. A lot of people that I wouldn't be such a nice guy. I would not. But I'm not generalizing.

Tell me about different types of camps.

Well the different types of camps were mainly, mainly working camps uh, you been, you been, you

know, beaten or you didn't have to eat, or you froze to death, or you work, no medication, all that. Was a process of elimination without a crematorium. Not as severe. Not gas chambers. Like Kravinkle or Nespertow. Uh, in Flossenburg, for example, they used to shot people, and we used to, they brought in Russians and also people in the camp, and they used to have wooden logs, and make a fire and burn them right outside. This again, this was very shortly before, before the war came to an end. So, this was, were, were for different camps, the, there was uh, like I say, there was mostly, you get up in the morning, you get your little cold coffee, you go to work, whatever it is. Some people survived on the job, some not. There was not a day that you didn't bring back some dead people that actually dropped dead, just simple like that. And the other ones was beaten up by the SS for not doing this, or doing this, or for no reason. So, uh, you were not treated with respect, but then from one camp to the other, except the different methods in which to, which to eliminate you.

We just ran out.

Beep.

What about a systematic effort to deny the truth, the ----------reality that you saw. When you did the other interview, you talked about a lot of atrocities that you yourself witnessed that you never read about. The fact that people say the Holocaust never happened.

Well...----------I witness. I witnessed hanging, I witness uh shooting, I witness terrible beatings, I witnessed in Buchenwald where they had a hose with a regulator and had women out there by the wall pregnant, tried to see how much pressure it takes to make a hole in it. This was Ilsa Koch, when she was, she was the, the camp uh, the main person in that particular camp in Buchenwald. As you know, after the war, what they found, they found lampshades from human skin. You know she had a whole barrage of stuff made out of human skin. So, this is the kind of things I witnessed, uh, you know I, I saw the pit in Auschwitz where they made soap from people. they throw in people, and took the fat, and make soap for the German military. Boiling water. Big pool. I mean, there's a lot of things, sure, you, you know, you don't want to talk about it because it's you know, I choke or I start crying or something like that, and besides I tell you this is, except people that been in there and saw it and witnessed this, it's very hard for people even to imagine it. That, that this was there, that this happened, you know. Taking people and throw them in in boiling water, and making soap for the German army. ----------, you know. So, you know, I, like I say, when you spend as much time as I did, you walk around all over, you been all over, you see a lot of things, and sometimes, you know, as you, some of it became a part of of living. There's no longer,

you know, you adopted a kind of, of life at that period of time. It doesn't, doesn't look like the ordinary. Later on it begins to work on you, but when you live there, it becomes a part of, a part of, of a society, you know, when you got thousands of people. So, I saw a lot of atrocities. A lot of, a lot of suffering.

Do you feel that being a survivor is being someone heroic?

Heroic? Well, I never, I never, I never talked this way. I, I am not heroic, if this the right word. I think it goes both ways. For some people, you feel if you, if you see the picture, then you see you're lucky that you, that you're alive, that you're able to see a few good years in front of you, or good years behind you after concentration camp. Some people live with a guilt feeling, that not heroic at all. They feel why did I survive, and these are, are, are dead, a lot of people. And there's a lot of people that have this problem today. Which living with a guilt feeling being alive.

Is...

I never considered myself heroic, I, but sometimes I think the kind of things I done to survive, you know, which is becomes very funny to me now, you know, how I was able to manipulate in order to survive. But heroic? There's no...We're very lucky that the war came to an end. We're very lucky that uh I was liberated by the American, by the American army, which I will be grateful always. Uh, but I don't know how you can be a hero under this condition. If anybody's a hero, it's the American army that liberated us.

What about as an achievement? Survival as an achievement? You had a certain will to survive...

Absolutely. I, I had that as I mentioned before, I, I motivated myself with a lot of, a lot of different kind of things. Uh, one of them was, what I, you know, I was young, I uh, I was going to school, I had a girl I fell in love with. Well, I always dreamed that I will see her once more. Well, this was, this was a very strong moti-motivation when you think you're in love with somebody, you know, so, but I was young! I was young. I was a young boy. Uh, and so, you know, I, I remember laying at night and dreaming about the kind of things. So,

What about----

But basically I think if you, if, if I want to talk about myself, I'm a very strong person in character. What I want I get, when I make up my mind I'm after it, and I never fail. Now, I shouldn't say this

because it becomes very flattering, but my kids know that, and the people that I work with over 30 years, which I just retired, know me for that. There's no no for an answer. And there's no problem with me. When I go after, I get it. So this is in me. This must be with me, uh, not because I'm smart or dumb or cute or whatever it is. I'm just lucky to be this kind of a person.

What about relief in the camp. Did you joke with anyone? Was there ever any laughter?

Well, I, I was, I was fairly, I don't know if I, I joked, I, I always had a sense of humor. I don't know, I'm sure I didn't get this uh after I go liberated. I always had it in me, you know to take a very terrible thing and turn it around as a laughter or something like that. Uh, I don't know, I uh, I'm a fighter, let me put it this way. If, if, if I would broke down, I couldn't achieve to be alive today, so I apparently I must have, uh you have to have a little sense of humor, you know. I used to steal the German paper and bring, bring it into the camp, when I used to clean the barracks, you know, this kind of things. So, even so it was all lies, but you read a paper, you know what this meant in, in camp to see a piece of paper. A paper written something in it! I mean, this was a luxury, you know, you never saw this. It was not there. I mean, culture was out the window. There were no books, there's no paper, there's nothing to read, you know, so but again I uh, I don't know what it is, I, I cannot say, other people that know me probably have a better opinion about me than I would give it. Why? I, I don't know, but I'm a strong person. Looking at other people, I compare myself, I'm pretty strong.

What about other kinds of mischief?

Other kinds?

Of mischief that you got into in the camp.

Oh, other, other kinds of mischief. You know, it's uh I don't know, I uh, I reckon I got into a lot of things. In order to get a piece of bread, I risked my life. I stole a, I stole a, a blanket, and sold it to a German worker. He didn't have it so good either because this was in a camp. And this was death. Literally death. And I risk it, so, but hunger was much stronger, and I didn't, I never worried to die by the way, this was one thing. When the time comes, the time comes. Because, again, you see you adapt not because you're a hero, but because you see so many people dying, you're not alone. This motivates a little bit, to a certain extent. But, uh, you know, I I stole a blanket in order to get some bread, and sold it to a worker, to a German young worker, he must have been 18, 19 years old. And he brought me up a loaf of bread, and I gave him the blanket.

What did you do with the bread?

Hmmm?

What did you do with the bread?

I, the bread, I brought it in camp, and uh, we had a good time, a couple guys with us.

What other kinds of things like that?

Huh?

What other kinds of things like that?

Oh well, no, the rest I don't know, really. You know, I really didn't, doesn't come to me right now. I really don't know. I stole potatoes, you want to know that, to survive. Well, yeah I used to stole pot, steal potatoes, you know, break off a lock where the kitchen was, and this was death, this was literally death. And the SS was watching going back and forth. So, you know, I done a lot of things that, that if they caught me, I wouldn't be here, in order to survive.

Tell me about the senses that you remember, the smells or sounds that you remember.

Well, the senses, the screaming from the crematorium, the smell of course, everybody smelled it, I mean, the smell from the, from the oven, you know, the smoke was going, you smelled it, I smelled it much closer where our barrack, and when I worked there. And, uh, you know and you saw the trucks coming in and picking up people all the time, and you know where you're going, you know, and this, so you live with it on a day to day basis. You literally didn't know if you'll be there tomorrow or not. You fought it, but uh, this the way it was, this, this, this the life that everybody knows that the day comes when you're going to be eliminated. And, so, you know, you fought it, nobody wanted to die, but this was common in Auschwitz. Nobody think they're going to really live it through. You know, you, you, you, you fought it, you motivate yourself. Certain people had certain things to hold them. Certain people did not.

Define, are we still rolling? Sonder commando. What is that? Sonder commando.

Sonder commando? Well, Sonder Commando were people chosen by the Germans as uh, you had to have a cer, a certain height. Otherwise, they couldn't be in the Sonder Commando. You--

We have to reload.

You're talking about the Sonders? The German Sonder Commando?

Yeah.

Beep.

Tell me what a Sonder Commando is.

I remember, I remember...

Start again.

As far as Sonder Commando, to, what I know about them is I saw them working in ghetto in the beginning, a little later. Uh, they are guys who uh, I think they were SS or not, I can't, I I don't know, uh, if they have the emblem SS or not, but these were people over 6 feet tall, and was a special elite as far the Germans were concerned within the SS, and their job was to come in in ghetto, and actually clean up uh, getting people…

You're thinking of, what is it, --------, it's another thing. ----------.

Eisertropun??

Yeah, but there's some of them ----------also in the camps.

Eisertroopen, these are regular Verrmacht?? Then they had the SS, then they had the Gestapo, then they had Kripo. Each one had a different function. But the Sonder Commando, we're talking about it, is literally they came in and clean up people in the hospital. They came with trucks, load them all on trucks, and out they go to death. So Sonder Commando in Ghetto, if we call them, this what they done. Now, in camp, there were certain outfit that they used to call them Sonder Commando, but uh, they were mainly to do all the dirty work. The SS normally, their job was, and by the way we had SS Germans SS, we had uh, Ukraine, they were not so nice either. A lot of Ukraine SS when the war start coming to an end, they used to replace, they used to take the SS, send them to the front, to Russia or wherever they needed them, and then putting in Ukraine, and they had black uniforms. And if I may say so, they were bastards. And, uh, and then they try to take Vermacht people. I was in a camp which called ----------. They tried to take Vermach people, and wanted to put on the SS emblem, and they didn't want to do it. Now, uh, a lot of people may not know this, but there was a lot of friction in the German military between the Vermacht and the SS. In fact, they hanged quite a few Vermacht people in this particular camp, which called ----------, what they didn't want to put on the emblem. They said, "We're, we're going to be a guard, but we will not put on the SS emblem."

Tell me again about your time working in the crematorium, and how you escaped. But I don't know about it. You're telling me fresh, I've never heard about it before.

The way I wind in crematorium is that I was helping uh, I think it was a Kapo, I says, I cannot reme--I cannot remember exactly, they cleaned up people that were in a barrack which was for sick

people like a hospital, but it was in a barrack. This where people supposed to be treated when they're sick. And they had typhus, and I helped them loading on the trucks to the gas chamber. And I was taken automatically, they put me on the truck, and this the way I wind up unloading these people by the gas chamber, and from there to the crematorium. So, I worked there, and later on, I didn't go out from this parti, particular area. We kept there. There was about 30 of us, they kept us in there isolated, and every time they brought people in, we worked on them, we, you know, after they're dead from the, from the uh, uh gas chamber, we put them on conveyors and went into the uh, to the uh, uh from the gas chamber to the ovens, to the crematoriums. And the way I escaped, a truck went back, I loaded, we loaded some equipment, and I went with the truck back into the camp, I jumped off and never got back. So, this the way I survived this because mainly everybody, I think there's a few people that done the same thing before me. Mainly when you work in the crematorium or the gas chambers in this particular, you never came out of it. After a period of time, you got into the gas chamber and they replace you with other people, automatically. So, there was no one, anybody that worked in the gas chamber or crematorium will never come out alive. But, uh, some people were very fortunate to survive through it. I've got a friend in Israel by name Kominsky. He worked, and he survived. Almost the same ordeal with that, with that truck, he got back in.

How old were you when you did this, and how did you deal with it?

Well, they fed us pretty good there at that time for this job. Uh, I don't know how I felt. Honestly I cannot tell you how I felt, I know how I feel today. At that particular time, I really don't know how I felt. I really don't know. I, I cannot relate very much to it. I know what is happening, you know, of course, and, and you hear the screaming in the air, but I I, in my particular case, the effect comes much later. The whole episode of mine going through, uh, the small part in ghetto or concentration camp, all that, it really hit me in the later years. In the beginning I didn't want to even talk about it. My kids never knew anything about it. People that I'm associate with, I just begin in the later years to open up. I've kept everything in me. Uh, maybe for one reason is I'm a little sensitive, I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. This may have a lot to do with it, I don't know, because I am, you know, I don't want anybody to feel sorry for me. But later on I was persuaded uh, to uh,

We have to stop for the...

Take 11 is up.

Beep.

I want you to talk to me about what it was like to come from being a child to, in your religious background, into that environment.

Well, it's uh, you know, when you, when you grow up with certain ethics, and you believe in your family, you believe in your holy kind of things. They try to teach you to grow up a nice human being. Uh, and then you come in and see uh, a jungle with people literally eating people, is a very big shock. Uh, to me it was a very, very big shock. Because I did not know that this exists. I couldn't relate to anything what was going on. Uh, so , you know, I came as a child. I, uh, my mother used to cook and used to wash, and we had dinner together as a family, and we have people over, and all the good things in life. Uh, I did not, I could not relate in the beginning when I got in there. I could not understand people, what people can do to people. And, so, it was a very, very dramatic experience for me. Very depressing in the beginning till I got out of it. Because you once of a sudden, find yourself, that you trust the people you're with, from a home, from a brother, sister, father, friends. Once of a sudden, you find yourself in an atmosphere where you cannot trust anybody. There's none to trust. And, people that go out for themselves, and uh, everybody fights for life, and all the kind of dirty tricks that people do in order to survive, so, it was a very, very, because of my background, from my family, you may want to call it brainwashing, but I was brainwashed pretty good. Uh, for the good, not for the bad. So, this was like, to answer your question, this is a very, very uh dramatic experience for me in the beginning.

Just now say one more word about you mother and your sister and her child.

Well, my mother, my mother and my sister came into Auschwitz at the same particular time, the same period, and as they get off of the, off the uh, railroad uh boxes if you want to call it, my mother was carrying my sister's child, and, as I mentioned before, they automatically went to the crematorium. My sister lived with it, till today, and she lives in Tel Aviv, but this does not get away, this haunts her till today. Uh, very depressing moments for her, and she cannot shake it off, uh, she just, the guilt feeling is that again, that she would not, if she, if if she would take the child because it was her child, and not my mother who carried her, my sister's mother, my mother, then she would be still alive. Which I don't think so, but this the way she believes.

Thank you. We're going to do one other thing which is we have to record the sound of this room.

30 seconds room tone.

So we all have to just be quiet for 30 seconds.

Can I leave you alone for 30 seconds?

Yeah, if you don't make any noise.

End room tone.

End sound roll.