

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Edgar Krasa
September 9, 2003
RG-50.030*0478

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Edgar Krasa, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on September 9, 2003 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

EDGAR KRASA

September 9, 2003

Q: Good morning, Mr. Krasa.

A: Good morning to you.

Q: May I call you Edgar?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Yes? What -- what name were you born with?

A: Edgar. And I always wondered where my German speaking mother came up with Edgar. And she said it was between Raoul and Edgar, so I said, "I'm glad you picked Edgar."

Q: And your last name?

A: Krasa, K-r-a-s-a.

Q: Right. And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in the German part of Czechoslovakia, in Karlsbad, call it Sudeten, too. And my upbringing while we were there was in German language. Grade school started in German, and there was never any animosity among -- that I felt -- between the Czech and the German population, and these were German Nationalists, but Czech citizens, Czechoslovakian citizens. And there was no friction between the Germans and the Jews until I think in 1930, when Hitler came to power, he started to demand of the leaders of that German Nationals -- of those German Nationals, to start to agitate, and complain about oppression by the Czechoslovakian government, and it -- and demand to be annexed by the Nazis. And by 1933, it -- three years later, it came to the point where my father as a Jew couldn't make a living among those Germans. And he moved to Prague.

Q: Can I -- can I go back, so we can go just a little bit more slowly?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was the date of your birth?

A: February ninth, 1924.

Q: 1924.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And do you remember growing up -- you -- you moved to Prague in 1933 --

A: Yeah.

Q: Is that right? So do you remember growing up between 1924 and 1933 in --

A: I do remember.

Q: -- in Karlsbad?

A: My father was born 1877, one of nine children, the oldest of nine children, six boys, three girls. And I am so sorry that I never -- I didn't know his parents. But I never initiated questions about them, and he -- neither did he. So I don't know what -- we found out in the archives that his father was a -- had a small store in a -- in a very small town in central Bohemia. And -- so at age 16, he went to Vienna, to be able to earn some money, and he worked himself up to a tremendous position in a textile factory, to the point where he supported his brothers to go to school, and accumulate a dowry for his three sisters. So in World War I, he must have been acknowledged by the military as a good administrator, so he became administrator of a hospital in Karlsbad. And there he then later settled. My mother, you didn't ask about her, but I'll tell you anyway.

Q: I was going to.

A: She was born in -- in the German part of Czechoslovakia, and she -- that family was religious. Not fanatically, but Saturday was no work, I couldn't go to the barber, have my hair cut on Saturday. I don't remember, I -- they must have been kosher, but the father's side, the Czech Jews, they were very assimilated. They were aware of being Jewish, and if they weren't aware of -- of, this would have made them aware. But the Czech -- Czechs were not antisemitic -- not aggressively anti-Semitic. I think they handled the Jews in a way that they didn't know what they are, and how different they are from them, and kept them a little at arm's length. And some would be very nice to you, and then when you turned your back they would say, there goes the dirty Jew. This kind of hidden anti-Semitism. But I never -- I never suffered by it.

Q: Your mother was considerably younger than your father, am I right?

A: 18 years younger, and how they met was that she was a born matchmaker, and she wanted him -- I don't know where she met him, she wanted him for a friend of hers. And we met that friend later, and we discovered why he didn't marry her, she was very dull. And somehow -- he may have been attracted by a younger woman. I am too, but it's too late for me. And so they got married, and settled in Karlsbad. But what happened with this excellent job that my father had in Vienna, he saved a lot of money, which he lost when Austria lost the war. The money became devalued, and somehow he could not recover from that. He --

Q: You mean psychologically he could not recover? [indecipherable]

A: I don't know what it was, but -- it's not nice to talk about your father this way, but this is a matter of fact. He continued to live in the way he lived while he had the money, to I think show in front of other people that he is -- is still up there. But he was very, very lower middle class I think I would say, to the point where Mother had to sublet rooms to earn some extra income. And then in 1933 we moved to Prague. He went first to look for a [indecipherable] for a job -- for an apartment, for a job, and then in October, we moved to Prague.

Q: Wh-What was your relationship like with your parents? Were you close with them?

A: Relationship was very good. I -- I started my memoirs by writing, I want this -- I'm writing this for my kids, not for -- for publishing, and thinking back of the relationship my parents, from what I heard, had with their parents, and what my parents had with me, and the relationship, and how I was bringing up my kids, and how they bringing up their kids, should they laugh, or should I cry? It was -- it was a respectful relationship. Mother was the boss. She was running the family and everybody else. And -- and she come and I wasn't there that minute, I had one coming like this.

Q: She hit you, really?

A: And the second time I was there when she called. I know my sons call their kids 10 times, come, come, come. Then they give up and the kids don't come. If my wife is listening, she's going to kill me for this statement. So -- and I discussed this with one of our daughters-in-law, and she says, "You cannot touch the kids, because they become abusive parents themselves." I didn't become abusive, and I didn't become abusive to anybody else, and I still loved my mother, and respected her. And I think it made me a -- a straight guy.

Q: Was she warm as we -- I mean, she could be strict, clearly, but was she also warm to you?

A: She was warm and witty, and -- and had many friends, and was liked by others.

Q: So you liked her, also?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: And was your father, being so much older, was -- was --

A: We had very little -- very little activities together. He went to work, and in the afternoon he -- some of the people sat somewhere playing cards, he never did this. Me, what I did with my kids, skiing, swimming, running, sports, o-or other activities. He was 45 when he got married, and 47 when I was born, and at that time, 47, you were a settled person.

Q: Did you eat dinners together?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did you eat dinner together --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- did you eat all your meals together?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you were an only child?

A: Only child. That's why I'm so spoiled.

Q: And did you have conversations at dinner, do you remember? As a little kid? Did they ask you questions, and -- about school, and your friends?

A: In -- opposite what's happening in England, we were not allowed to talk with a full mouth. So while you were eating, and you had the full mouth all the time, there was no conversation at the table.

Q: Interesting. So it was very quiet.

A: Yeah. But I -- I did not have many toys. I had one -- what do you call this horse? Rocking horse --

Q: Rocking hor --

A: -- which also could -- you could take off this rocking part and then it was on wheels. And we lived on a street that had a slope, we -- I took the horse up, and -- and rolled down. And I remember at one point one of the children wanted to have it, I don't know for what reason I wouldn't give it to him, my mother locked me up in the bathroom the whole afternoon as punishment because I was not generous enough. And when she had to go to the bathroom, she went to the neighbor's bathroom. Very strict, but still lovable.

Q: Right.

A: And loving.

Q: Did you -- did you understand when you were young, before you left for Prague, that your f -- your father -- you really didn't have a lot of money, but he was trying to behave as if he had money? I mean, did you understand that there was a f -- confusion?

A: No. I found it out later from Mother.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: N-yeah.

Q: So did you have a maid?

A: We had a maid in the beginning, I remember, and that also had to -- that belonged to the status. We had to have one, and I remember one summer, she went home, her father picked her up with a horse drawn carriage and I went with them to spend some time there, but I don't know how long. It was a short -- and vacations, while we lived in Karlsbad, I spend with Mother's family in -- nearby, it was 60 kilometers from Karlsbad. Her father had a liquor production, which her older brother took over, but her older brother was only a half brother from his -- from her father's first wife, who died. And then he remarried, and through the second wife he had four daughters.

Q: Hm.

A: And one was a divorced lady, so she can co -- she maintained the household for the older brother, whose wife died on diabetes. I remember her, she was a wonderful wife, but when I remember now what diet she kept, I don't wonder that she died early. I had only one grandmother, of Mother's -- from Mother's side, the father died already and she died when I was three years. And the only thing I remember, she always wore an apron. And the only sentence I remember that she said -- that I remember, was to my mother, "Don't beat the boy, he's such a wonderful child." So that means she started to punish me already before I was three years old. She d -- do it to make a good guy out of -- or a decent person out of me, I don't know, that was the method, maybe.

Q: Do you remem -- do you remember being hit a lot?

A: Not a lot, no, not a lot, but I had to obey on the second.

Q: And mainly she would slap you in the face?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And the only time Father was hitting me was when I was writing, he insisted on beautiful handwriting. He had two fingers on the right hand injured -- cut off, and in spite of it, his handwriting was like printing. And he didn't know that there will be typewriters, and dictating machines, and computers, so not only should I have a legible handwriting, but he said this is a show of character. So that was the thinking at that time.

Q: So how -- so how's your handwriting now, is it good?

A: Ah, ah, I can't -- I can't consider right now -- I -- I print well, I write legibly.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Even my wife will dispute it, but I write legibly, but I don't -- I don't need it much.

Q: Right, right. Was it a surprise to you that you were going to move to Prague?

A: No, no, I understood that among the Germans the -- the political situation is not good, and that -- whether I knew it, it's because of financial, or economic reasons, or whether it is for political, I couldn't say now exactly what I knew, that we're moving because the Germans were not very good to the Jews.

Q: And it was assumed that in Prague it would be better?

A: Yeah.

Q: And so you were 11 years old when you moved in 1933?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was it difficult to adjust?

A: '33 I was nine years old.

Q: Nine, you're right, you're right, it's nine --

A: That's -- just figured it out --

Q: -- 1924 --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- yeah, no you're right, I was moving in some other direction. Was it difficult for you, was the move difficult?

A: No. We moved in October and didn't -- from September one, I went in Karlsbad, to a Czech school. That was only -- is about six weeks, but I learned some Czech.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And when I came to Prague, I adjusted.

Q: Pretty good, huh?

A: Yeah, I -- it was one talent I had was picking up languages just by hearing.

Q: Really?

A: But German and Czech are the only two languages I learned formally --

Q: Uh-huh. Right.

A: -- in schools, grammar, and --

Q: Did you like school?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have favorite subjects in school?

A: That I don't remember. Favorite subjects, I was good at arithmetics, and -- and gym.

Q: And gym, yes.

A: But -- but I don't -- no, I couldn't tell you exactly that I liked any s -- any -- we had music, which meant singing the -- the how is it called? House -- house -- home -- home teacher. Home class, or whatever they call it now. The -- the main teacher, our -- for this particular class. We also --

Q: Oh, you mean a homeroom teacher.

A: Ho-Homeroom, thank you.

Q: Yeah.

A: Homeroom teacher. And he went with us, he progressed with us, he didn't stay in one -- at one grade. He was very nice, and he played the violin, and with him we had the song. I don't know how many hours a week, but there were hours of --

Q: So you were taught singing? Or was this -- all students were taught?

A: This -- it -- not from -- not -- we weren't reading music --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- we were just learning it from his -- following his violin.

Q: And what kind of music were you singing, folk songs, or Czech --

A: No, I think Czech -- Czech -- popular Czech songs.

Q: Uh-huh. So did you learn anything about classical music?

A: No, no.

Q: No. And did you go -- there must have been concerts, and theater, and opera in Prague.

A: That was later.

Q: That was later.

A: That -- that was later on, yeah. We went to the theater and operas for one Czech choral [indecipherable] or whatever it was called. We're standing in the National Theater, on the fourth balcony up, standing.

Q: Yes?

A: A-And it looked so huge. And I don't know, in '94 -- 1994 or '95, we went there again, and we were -- could afford the orchestra seat, and it looks like it could reach to the last row, it was so small, it was just very high.

Q: Small -- that's interesting.

A: So all these perspectives have changed since childhood.

Q: Right. Now you were Bar-Mitzvah'd.

A: Pardon?

Q: You were Bar-Mitzvah'd in Prague --

A: Yes.

Q: -- am I right? So that must have been 1935.

A: Mother was dragging us -- I don't know whether every Friday, but definitely Saturday, Father and me to the synagogue. And seemed like an awful long morning, you know? And interesting that during Yizkor, the prayers for the deceased, the kids were sent out, cause they didn't have anybody deceased there, I think. So we were playing outside, there was a -- a little wooded lawn area in front of the synagogue, and we were sent out, it was a break. But I never became very religious. I -- there is a feeling of God that she instilled in me, and when we get later to these various stages of the Holocaust, it varied in several degrees.

Q: But you said your mother dragged you and your father to the synagogue.

A: Not dragged, she didn't drag, she said, "We are going to the synagogue." And nobody opposed her, you know?

- Q: I see. But is it -- it isn't something that necessarily you would have done on your own, or do you think you might have?
- A: I -- I don't think I initiated the -- or had the desire to initiate --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- to go to -- to synagogue, or -- I like the -- I liked Purim because they were throwing candies to the kids, and like -- but I was not especially enthusiastic.
- Q: And who trained you for the Bar-Mitzvah, do you remember?
- A: Yes, I remember him, and I remember his daughter, the -- the Cantor in our shule, I went to his house, and he taught me, and later on we were very close with his daughter in Israel.
- Q: And did --
- A: Shapiro was his name.
- Q: Shapiro, Cantor Shapiro.
- A: And I -- and I don't have a good memory for names. I never forget a good looking face, especially on a woman, but the names I do forget.
- Q: And did you enjoy being trained by him? Was this something that was interesting to you?
- A: You're asking difficult questions. I don't know well -- whether I enjoyed it. I know I had to go, so I went.
- Q: So you went.
- A: But it was not, I think a favorite activity that I would had sought on my own.
- Q: Do you remember the service?
- A: Yes, it was -- was very good, but I don't remember --
- Q: You remember your haftorah?
- A: No.
- Q: No.
- A: But I don't remember whether and where and if there was a -- something like a party or so. I -- no, there were no parties, there were family members and friends were coming,

and I think it was in my mother's house, some cake she baked, and coffee she made, and that could have been it. And funny, much later in -- about five, six years ago, I found out -- you must have heard of Arnost Lustig?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Living in Washington. He went to the same school, I think two grades lower, and their economic situation was very similar to ours. And he told me, I never knew that, that my mother gave him my Bar-Mitzvah suit to wear for his Bar-Mitzvah.

Q: Interesting. And you didn't know, or you don't remember?

A: I didn't know that she did, and I -- if she -- if I knew I may not have remembered it.

Q: Right.

A: In -- I remember behind our house in Prague was a sports -- like a stadium, but it was just a fence and some benches around for the workers -- workers -- sports -- workers sports association. And we played some soccer there, and in winter they poured some water on it, and it was a skating rink. And there was a big hill behind the house and it was -- kids were roaming there. So that was a --

Q: Now, how are things for you in Prague in 1935? This is two years after Hitler has taken over Germany, and things must be happening in Czechoslovakia, or didn't you feel that?

A: '35, nothing happened. I -- as I mentioned, I went to school, and I had no problems anybody, anything, except I said there were very few Jews, and there were no Sunday schools. The religion was taught once a week, and a rabbi, a priest, and a minister came, and in different classrooms, religious education was conducted. But I can only speak for the Jewish education. We learned about the holidays, we learned to read the Hebrew alphabet. And at the end of the school year, the upper class dropped out -- it was for all the grades, kids of all grades together. So the upper classes dropped out, a new one came in, and we started from the beginning. So I knew very well the holidays, and the alphabet, and it was very repetitive. But this was the -- and the religious [indecipherable] the Catholic, Protestant and the Jewish were state -- the rabbi was a state employee, the state financed, but they did not interfere with -- with religion. But it was th -- there were no congregations, or in congregations, dues and fees. You went to whatever synagogue you - - you wanted, but you went to the one nearest to your house.

Q: Right.

A: And as I said, was state supported, and so I don't think there was a great pressure for higher education, in the religious --

Q: Did you have Jewish and non-Jewish friends? Do you remember?

A: Yeah, I had Jewish friends, and I had non-Jewish friends. There were some favorites in the classroom, and the most favorite one I met 1998 in -- in Prague. He's older now, he's old as I am. But I remember his face so I could make -- I would recognize him. And looking back at the class picture, I recognized several, which means I must have been close, or close with them.

Q: Right.

A: The other faces mean nothing.

Q: We're going to stop the tape now.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

- Q: Edgar, are you -- this is 1935, a little after your Bar-Mitzvah. You were -- you were talking about Arnost Lustig, who had told you that your mother had given him your jac -- your suit for his Bar-Mitzvah. Are you conscious of what's going on in Germany? Do you hear discussions about the Nazis taking over, and what they're doing? No.
- A: I don't think so.
- Q: You don't think so?
- A: No.
- Q: Okay.
- A: That was -- that was I don't think it -- I have no read -- I have no read newspapers, and you don't talk in front of kids about --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- these difficult things, so I --
- Q: And in school --
- A: -- I was sheltered from that part of knowledge.
- Q: Right. And in school the kids were not talking?
- A: No, the only thing -- the only thing that was different in school, after gym, if you took a -- a shower, they all came to look at me, because in Europe, only Jews you get circumcised.
- Q: So they all looked at you?
- A: Pardon?
- Q: They all looked at you?
- A: They -- no, not all the time --
- Q: [indecipherable] right, right.
- A: -- at least until they got a good look. So --
- Q: Did they say things, or they just wanted to --
- A: No, no, there's a -- some did say how come you're different, or whatever. Said oh --

Q: Right. What were you like as a kid?

A: Pardon?

Q: What were you like at this point? How -- how do you remember yourself -- oh.

A: Oh, I have to go back to Karlsbad --

Q: Okay.

A: -- does it matter if I go back?

Q: No, it's fine.

A: I told you about the economic situation?

Q: Yes.

A: I did, in addition to running my rocking horse, there were a lot of Jewish stores where I went in the afternoon, helping out. There was a -- I don't know for what purpose, right next door in the basement they were washing bottles, recycled bottles, I think for wine, I don't know. I was working there, and getting some money. I was delivering with a two wheeler, like they have on the market, you know, the -- the za -- vegetable people, a two wheeler, deliveries from another store to different people. I was in a --

Q: You mean a two wheel bike with a basket?

A: Pardon?

Q: A two wheel bike with a basket, is that --

A: No, no, no, a -- a flatbed with two wheelers, with --

Q: Uh-huh, oh I see. Uh-huh.

A: And -- and in another s -- I was helping -- this was a leather -- leather store, raw hides, to shelve them and -- and stock -- like a stock boy. In another textile, it was the cleaning up. I always got some money, and I remember one store where they gave me some money just to get out of there.

Q: Why?

A: I don't know. I --

Q: But you were a kid.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you were -- wa-was this a typical thing for kids to be doing?

A: I don't know, I don't know about any others, but --

Q: And you were earning some money?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you do this a -- do you remember, did you do this on your own, did you decide you wanted to do this, or did s -- did your parents --

A: Yeah, it was -- it was fun for me to go be among other people and do some work.

Q: So did you continue this --

A: I was -- all my life I was said I'm good with my hand, I was told, use my hand, so --

Q: So you kept doing it.

A: So I couldn't -- I started -- I may have started there.

Q: Did you continue working when you were in Prague?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: And wa -- what's the difference, do you think?

A: I don't think there was a opportunity to that -- in -- in Karlsbad, these were friends of -- friends of my parents, maybe they did it just to let me earn some money, or whether they really needed me, I don't know. But I -- I did -- I did work, and I did some active participation in the stores.

Q: So you're going on, you're 13 years old, you're 14, you're 15, right? And life is pretty much the same, I gather. Now --

A: Yeah, the -- I -- there is not -- there were not main -- I can't remember anything that's worth mentioning, that happened in those years, until '38, in -- that would be worth noting down, not the --

Q: Well when -- when -- when do you become an apprentice cook?

A: In 1938, it came so far into th -- the pure remember or [indecipherable] with the help of Britain and France, the -- they supported the Germans, that the Czech government gives up that border area where the majority of German Nationals were. There was a -- a non-aggression agreement, France and England on this side of Germany, Czechoslovakia on this side, should any -- should one be attacked, the others would assist. And at that time, Chamberlain and Daladier decided -- I don't know whether decided, they thought if they give in this little bit to Hitler, they avoid World War II. So not only was, in September '38, this border area occupied by the Nazis, they also came beyond the Czech fortifications which they had on the border, against the Germans, so now they were standing there naked, without any fa -- without any safety, security or fortifications. So it was anticipated that Hitler's appetite will grow to the point where he will occupy also the Czech lands. And the parents of Jewish teenagers encouraged their kids to learn a trade, should immigration become necessary, they can support themselves with work of their hands in a country whose language they don't know. And then aunt of mine told my mother, "Why don't you have the boy become a cook, so he never has to go hungry?" There was no discussion of -- Mother agreed, so that that was it.

Q: No discussion with you [indecipherable]

A: No discussion about this.

Q: Had you been in the kitchen, did you cook at all, at your house?

A: I -- y-yes, I did, when Mother on her Yahrtzeit went to her 60 kilometer distance town, to the -- her parent's grave, I cooked for my father. He wasn't able even to make a cup of tea for himself.

Q: And you felt comfortable --

A: I was seven, eight years old, and I --

Q: Really?

A: -- was -- simple, preparing the me --

Q: But you felt comfortable in the kitchen?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: I feel comfortable in any room.

Q: I see.

A: Some more than others.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: So -- but that -- I don't think that had anything to do with it, it was -- she suggested it, and I -- her butcher told her about the little buffet, you know, you -- you come in, there's a counter with those hot meals, and he suggested I should start my apprenticeship in a small place, where I get exposed to everything. So I got exposed to bringing coal from the bay -- from the cellar, not only to the kitchen, but also to the third floor where his wife lived, where wi -- they lived, and taking down the ashes, and the -- whether they didn't have yet -- they must have had, but they didn't use them, vacuum cleaners, so I took the carpet down, and in the yard was a -- a beam, put the carpet over, and by hand you bang it, there was a -- I don't know whether you ever seen one, it's a big antique [indecipherable] now. I beat the dust out of the carpet, and bring it up. When she went to the market I went behind her with two bags. And I came back in time to go -- opposite was the police station, a theater, and the director or the whatever you call it, of the railroad. And in Europe, it's fanizer. I remir palladucks.. At 10 o'clock you have a gabelfrühstück, a breakfast with a fork, but you eat it with a spoon, because it consists mainly either of goulash soup, or tripe soup, which is a delicacy, I can't find tripe, they -- they don't -- I love it. Anyway, so you had two carriages, and there were little poles -- but they were not poles like this, but they were like -- like a cup, a large cup, and I went to all these three offices, deliver the soups, just in time to come back at noon to wash the dishes, there were three tables in that -- opposite the counter where some workers, or people came and consumed their meal there. So just came back to wash the dishes, and then clean up the -- the kitchen and the floor, and the -- so that was my exposure.

Q: But how old are you, 14?

A: Yeah.

Q: 1938 --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you're doing this, and you're not going to school?

A: No, no.

Q: Was that because you stopped school, or because you weren't allowed to go to school at this point?

A: No, the school system was such -- there were five grades in grade school, and then you had three compulsory and a fourth voluntary school, it was called -- I don't know how to translate it, and it was a -- a public school, it would be equivalent of middle school or high school here. And then there was a Gymnasium where you had to make an entrance

exam and pay. That was private and you had to pay. O-Of course I didn't qualify -- I may have qualified with the exam, but I didn't qualify with the payment. So I made -- I had the three -- three additional years through the five grades schools, and then came the decision about learning the trade. And so it reminded me of stories that I read. The aristocrats in central Europe, the Germans, or -- they had the mansions, or castles, and they had over there cooking staff, including pastry chefs and so. And every apprentice was stuffed. Eat, eat, eat. So he gets -- he gets fed up with it, and then he eats very little, so he won't be too expensive by consuming a lot of food later. And this guy tried me on plum dumplings. Eat, take, eat, eat. And I ate 79 of them.

Q: 79?

A: 79. But there were 79 pits that I had to spit out, so it was less in -- in actual weight and volume.

Q: In one sitting?

A: In one sitting, and he told me right after that, tomorrow you don't have to come any more. So -- so I wouldn't say anything at home, I left at six in the morning, like I will -- would go to work.

Q: So he fired you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- because you did what he said?

A: Yes.

Q: He said eat as much as you want.

A: Yeah. And then he saw it's too expensive, so --

Q: I see, okay.

A: I left every morning, hunting jobs. I sat -- till eight o'clock I sat in a park, and by eight I went to different restaurants to ask if they need an apprentice. And one day I come home, Father sees me in the door, and that's the other time, besides handwriting that he gave me a shot. He said, "You were fired, and you didn't tell us." [indecipherable] Luckily on that day I found a job. Well, how did he find out? In -- you had to -- I think it was in Germany, it was also before the war, in Czechoslovakia that everybody had to be registered at the police station. And when you moved, you had to unregister here, and register there. And we had again, borders, and he went to the police station to register a border, and the waiter's apprentice came with the soups, and he asked, "How is Edgar doing?" He says, "I don't know, he isn't working a week already, he was fired." So that

he didn't tolerate, he thought I did something bad. And he first hit and then he asked the questions, that was the system.

Q: He hit first --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and then he asked.

A: Then he asked.

Q: Did that -- did that hurt you -- I -- I mean, physically it may have hurt you a little bit, but did it hurt you --

A: No, it didn't.

Q: It didn't.

A: I -- I felt -- I felt I deceived him by not telling them.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But I didn't feel bad because I already had a job in a --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- new restaurant, that's why they needed somebody, it just opened. And it was a combination food establishment. From the street you walked in, and it was the second only in Prague like a semi-self service. You took the tray, and you paid, and you walked among -- but there are people behind the counter who gave you what you wanted, and you pay at the end of the counter. And then there was an excellent restaurant, first class restaurant in the -- you walk through a passage, and inside was the restaurant, and up on the -- what here is the second floor, were function rooms. And I learned everything from slaughterhouse to fine pastry. It was an excellent restaurant.

Q: Why did they take you, do you think?

A: Pardon?

Q: Why --

A: Because they just opened, and they were looking for help.

Q: And they were looking for people.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, was this a typical way for a -- someone to just decide they're going to be an apprentice, and you don't necessarily apprentice with one person, you apprentice within an institution of some kind, you know?

A: Yeah. I don't know how others decided. They may have inclination for cooking, or necessity, or I d -- I don't know why others started their apprenticeship. So -- and I moved -- as I said, I worked in the slaughterhouse, I learned to skin cattle, and I --

Q: And who killed them?

A: Pardon?

Q: Who killed the cattle?

A: Oh, somebody went around --

Q: Somebody --

A: -- with a -- was a -- not a gun, but was something he had in the hand, he pushed the button and shot the cattle in the head. And it was not kosher, so I learned everything and I don't know -- now when I pick up a 30 - 35 pound luggage going to the airport, it seems very heavy. I was carrying whole quarters of beef to -- in the -- in town was a marketplace where in the basement, the whole basement was refrigerated. And because meat and beef was not as tender as we have here -- now here, beef is fed with corn, and in six months it's big enough to be slaughtered. So it means you have tender -- young, tender meat. There, it took much longer with grass and hay to feed the cattle, and -- so it had to age. It was hanging three weeks in that uniform temperature. And when you were able to scrape off the moss from the meat, it was the right age. And I was on a spiral staircase, I was carrying down whole quarters of beef, I don't know how I did that.

Q: And you were a kid, too --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- you were not an older guy. Huh.

A: And -- okay, and then the next station was soup, with a soup chef, and then with a vegetable chef. And I remember for the soup, he was a young guy, but he was -- he was a nasty guy. But not because I was Jew, he was nasty to everybody. I had to cut for soup, so there were kettles where they were boiling all the bones, and all the meat that you cut off the ends, and what you didn't want on the portion to be served, and vegetable, and all the -- the peels of the onion, which gives good color to the soup. And as a filler for some soups, was a small dice of vegetable, carrots, celery, theirs was the root celery, and parsley and had to cut those in uniform dice by hand, and when I had about this much in a pot, he came and looked through it and if wasn't uniform, he threw it in the kettle, and I

had to start again. And it -- it is a -- it is a good method, you don't want to work [indecipherable] while you do it. You learn to do it perfect. It's like this, you know, you remember it.

Q: Right. So how long would you be at each station learning? When you learned soup --

A: This I don't remember. Then the grill, and the roast, and then the -- well, braising, you know, because the meat was not as tender as this meat, and in spite of aging, for steaks, only the tenderloin and the sirloin was used. The other pieces were not suitable. So these were -- there's a goulash and butt roast, you know, braised with -- with gravy. So that was the station where I worked. And of course, not just the beef, there were pork and lamb and fish. Yeah, after the slaughterhouse, I was in the basement working with two butchers. They were from those quarters preparing a portion size, whether it was a roast, or whether it was steaks to be cut. I worked there before I got to the soups. And then the salad department, and then the pastry. And the pastry was a pastry chef, and a female helper, and she loved me. I was lucky with women. No, she was very nice, she covered up for my mistakes, and you know, we were making like a -- a sponge cake, but a little different, from 80 eggs. So if you spoil 80 eggs, it was -- labor was cheap that time, and food was expensive. Here it's different. So she was nice to me, and -- and on the salad I worked in, they were th -- the salad was not just salad, it was decorative items like fish in -- in aspic, and gelled, and -- a first class place. And -- yeah?

Q: About how long did the ho -- the whole apprenticeship last? Six months, a year?

A: No, the whole apprenticeship went on till spring of 1941.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. One day a week -- I worked six days, and one day a week I went to vocational school where -- that was compulsory, to learn hygiene, and -- and about the foods, about the [indecipherable] and a description of handling, why this way, why that way. And when I came from school at four o'clock, five o'clock, I had to change into uniform and help serving dinner. So --

Q: So you worked six days a week?

A: Long days.

Q: Long days.

A: Long days.

Q: One day a week to school.

A: No, work was five days, plus that evening after school, and I had one day off.

Q: And you had one day off. So --

A: Yeah.

Q: So from 1938 until 1941 --

A: From fall of '38 until spring of '41 --

Q: '41.

A: -- there were two and a half years.

Q: And you're still being an apprentice?

A: Oh yeah, it was a four year apprenticeship.

Q: Huh. And as a -- at a certain point do you get a particular specialty that you work on more than others, or you keep working at each of these stations?

A: First to learn, you move around, and then if the apprenticeship from the soup post was sick, so they took one [indecipherable] and you moved around, and you were able to substitute in every department. And there was no anti-Semitism. All the time -- in '41, the owner -- there were two owners, one was more looking at the kitchen, the other one was looking at the other areas. And he was very nice, and he came and said he's under great pressure to let me go, and he didn't expl -- didn't have to explain to me why, I knew. And at that time I couldn't get a job any more in another restaurant. Now, we were at ni -- it's '41, you pushed me too far ahead.

Q: Yeah, I did -- yes, I was going to go back now.

A: Six months after the occupation of --

Q: [indecipherable] 1939 March

A: -- the Sudeten, they occupied -- came and occupied the Czech lands.

Q: Yes.

A: And [indecipherable] ends, it's the area of today's Czech Republic. The Slovaks had a -- at that time already, a Fascist government, which cooperated with Germany, and were not occupied. So --

Q: When does occupation happen in --

A: Pardon?

Q: When does occupation happen?

A: March 15th, 1935 -- '39. And immediately thereafter they started to apply the -- what they call the Jewish laws, which were actually anti-Jewish laws. I think you have knowledge about them -- about those --

Q: Tell me -- tell me what you remember.

A: The first thing was to identify the Jews, although they ar -- physically identify, and physically and visibly identify, because they had at the police records they had all the Jews, because at the time you had to give your religion -- I don't know for whatever purpose, but to -- at the police station your registration was your religion known. So the first thing came this yellow star to wear. And you had to wear it on every piece of outwear, so if you took your jacket off, you had to have one on your shirt. And then, turning in all the valuables, including wedding rings, which I guess the Germans used to finance their war efforts. Then a radio, so you can't listen to BBC. Everything was dual intent, for the Germans to enrich themselves with those items, and the second purpose was to deprive the Jews of whatever gave them pleasure or resistance. So the radios, so you couldn't listen to BBC, and then musical instruments had to be turned in. And then came restrictions to travel, you couldn't go out, get out of your town. [indecipherable] You could not enter public areas like movies, theaters or parks, playgrounds. And Jews could travel in the streetcar only in the last car, on the last platform standing. And there were many more -- oh, ration tickets were issued. There were three kinds of -- for the Germans, they were -- we were already somewhat restricted because was a war economy. The Czechs got less, and the Jews got almost a blank paper. And if you were caught with something that you could not have -- that was not on those tickets, it was -- this was punishable. So my parents had my food ration ticket, because I ate at the restaurant. And they get -- had 50 percent more of almost nothing, that's -- how much that is, I don't know. Mathematician has to figure that out. But they were better off than some other people.

Q: We -- we're going to need to --

A: Pardon?

Q: We're going to need to take a break and stop the tape.

A: Again? I didn't see him touch you.

Q: Again. Ah, he didn't.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: We were talking about the fact that your parents had your r-ration, and you were saying --

A: Food ration tick -- yeah.

Q: -- food ra -- yes, which was 50 percent of nothing, right? But let me -- let me -- let me go back before we go forward a little bit. Do you remember the day that the Germans marched in to Prague?

A: Yes, I was standing in the sidewalk in my cook's uniform, horrified to see them. They -- that restaurant was on the main --

Q: Really?

A: -- through road in Prague, and that -- approaching through there. Everybody was -- people were crying, and --

Q: So the Czech -- the Czechs were not like the Austrians?

A: No, definitely not, but there were some who very soon adapted themselves to raising the arm, and -- yeah, you know, I think the Czechs had the -- I don't want to sound im -- missing the right word, but it doesn't matter. They were not deeply involved in anything spiritual, I mean, they were 400 years under the Austrians, under the Hapsburgs before World War I, then for 20 years -- and they tolerated it and cooperated, and they had to live -- make a living. Then for 20 years they were free, from eight -- 1918 till '38, and there were great Czech patriots. And when the Germans occupied, many became sympathizers, and collaborators -- collaborators. Then there were again great Czechs after '45. There were fighters for Czech freedom 10 minutes before the war ended, and -- not 10 minutes, two days. And then the Communists took over, they became the great Communists. And in 1989, the biggest Communists, who were Etta Truff, and -- made all the money and stole all the money, they were the ones, the first ones who privatized state enterprises. And with their Communist connections, they got it for almost nothing, and today they're millionaires. So they can adjust in the [indecipherable] so, any condition.

Q: And were you frightened when you saw the Germans come in, the Wehrmacht come in?

A: I didn't know the full future impact of -- you know, the Germans now occupied the Czech lands, that -- that I knew is -- isn't good. But the full range of impact on the Jews, I did not know, I didn't -- I knew that Jews in Germany are persecuted and all that, but it somehow didn't sink in immediately, I am in danger.

Q: And in fact you're -- from '38 until '41, you're still in the same place.

A: I what?

Q: You're still in the same place --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- between '38 and '41.

A: Yeah.

Q: So in a certain way, a lot doesn't change. [indecipherable]

A: For me, no. For me, not much has changed, no.

Q: Do you think that things changed for your parents more than they changed for you during that period?

A: I -- I am sure now -- shopping hours were I think twice a week, or three times a week from five PM till six, or from four PM till six, when everything was already sold out. So there were the --

Q: You mean shopping hours for Jews?

A: For Jews, yeah.

Q: So what did you think, as this young boy, being an apprentice, watching the different restrictions being made, and have to wear -- did you -- you have come to work with a Jewish star --

A: Yeah, yeah. But nothing else affected me, because I didn't have time to go to movies, and -- and I didn't have time to listen to the radio, and I did not have a musical instrument that I had to give up. So I was not -- I didn't feel affected negatively.

Q: Did Germans come into the cafeteria? Soldiers?

A: Th-They must have, they -- I wasn't out there --

Q: You weren't out in front --

A: -- I -- I was in --

Q: -- you were in the back.

A: -- the kitchen. And if they were, I didn't wear the star on the uniform. Only on the streetcoat.

Q: Only on the street.

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh. And did you begin to feel something in -- when you were in the back, working with the other pe -- were there other Jews?

A: No, no, the --

Q: You were the -- were the o --

A: No, I was the only Jew.

Q: You were the only Jewish person?

A: And they didn't look at me, and -- because we didn't go to the gym.

Q: But they knew you were Jewish?

A: But they knew I am Jewish, and they didn't treat me worse than the others. There was a tough -- tough apprenticeship. I could show you but is showing only up to here, these two prong forks that the cooks use? I have several marks on my behind, when I wasn't moving t -- fast enough.

Q: They would --

A: Yes. So, but not just me --

Q: Was everyone?

A: -- all -- all the apprentices.

Q: And how many apprentices were there by the way, do you know?

A: Oh, there were quite a fe -- they -- on every post was one, at least one, and then there were some who replaced you when you went to school, and there were some additional ones that were needed at time of serving and y -- lunch and dinner. And there were functions also. So there were at least eight, nine apprentices.

Q: But I thought you said you did serve sometimes, when you -- when you went back after school in the evening.

A: Yeah, at the -- me -- me -- at the counter where the waiter brought his -- his order, we assembled the -- the plates, or that --

Q: Oh, I see, not at -- you didn't serve the -- the plates at --

A: No, not sit -- no, no, no --

Q: -- uh-huh, I see what you mean.

A: -- no, that was -- that was the service --

Q: Right.

A: -- the cooks provided --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- for the waiters. Yeah.

Q: Did your father --

A: I am glad you qualified that.

Q: Yes, cause I wasn't quite sure what you meant. What was your father working at when he was in Prague, what was his job?

A: In Karlsbad he was a salesman for textile because that's what he knew from Vienna, from before. And I guess he couldn't find anything in that line in Prague. So once a salesman, always a salesman, he started to sell coal. And I don't know whether to individual home owners because the truck came and every house had a -- a cellar, with through the window they put the coal down. I do not know if there were several tenants in the house, whether each one had his own storage for the coal. Wa -- he was -- he was selling coal, and it's cold only half a year, so it's only about half the income, the yearly income. So --

Q: So things were not easy.

A: I think -- I think he also delivered to fact -- sold to factories and so, which were running on coal. Oil was not at that time in use for production. I don't know what electricity was made from, but I'm sure it was from coal, because it was cheap and abundant in Czechoslovakia.

Q: And did he keep his job till '41, do you know?

A: No, I don't -- don't remember. I -- I --

Q: You don't remember. You didn't own the apartment where you were living?

A: No, no.

Q: You rented the apartment.

A: Rented it.

Q: So, were you getting paid as an apprentice, so that you could --

A: Yes, I did get -- I did get 60 crowns a month, which is two crowns a day, which allowed me to go twice to the opera. It was a contribution, was little, small. I think at later years I got little more, but that 60 initial, stayed in my mind.

Q: And did you give most of this money to your parents?

A: All of it.

Q: All of it.

A: I didn't have time to spend it. So after he told me that he can't keep me, I know I took off my star and I found a job in a resort hotel on the Czech-Bohemian Highlands. I don't remember how I got it, I don't remember how I got there, I don't remember the name or location. I do remember having work there, and what impressed me in my memory is that one day a man came from -- came in and asked me, "Are you a Jew?" I said, "Why would you want to know?" And he said, "I just was at the police station and I heard them say that at this hotel works a Jew, and they come to pick him up." So I dropped everything, changed my clothes, went to the railroad station and went home. I didn't even pick up the money for -- for -- for that period that I didn't get paid. So that was my -- but I -- I don't remember many details. And I have many such empty windows in my memory. Some -- some unbelievable ones. So then the only job I could get was at the -- at a --

Q: Tell me something, what is it you think you're -- you're not remembering?

A: I don't remember the town, I don't remember the hotel, the name. I don't recall like how the kitchen looked. But I know that where I was standing when this man came in and told me that they coming to get the Jew.

Q: Maybe the shock of what he said was so great that it blocked out --

A: Yeah. Like people remember when Kennedy was shot, or when 9-11 happened, where they were.

Q: Right. So you went back --

A: I di --

Q: -- right di -- did -- you obviously are not wearing the Jewish star.

A: Not wearing the -- the star on the train.

Q: Do you look Jewish, in terms of what people --

A: Do I?

Q: Well, I have no -- I have no idea what that means. I never knew that that meant.

A: No, I think -- I think the Europeans categorize the people, they -- they recognize the Jews by the nose, or other features, I don't know.

Q: Mm-hm. So were you suspicious looking then? Did you --

A: I didn't act suspiciously, and -- I acted as if I belonged there, and --

Q: Now there's obviously -- well, this is 1941, have -- have the Germans attacked the Soviet Union by then?

A: Oh yes, in -- in '39, in the end of '39 they attacked Poland.

Q: Poland, right, but the Soviet Union wasn't coming --

A: And as soon as they had Poland, they broke their pact with the Soviets, and they went on.

Q: Right.

A: The -- the only job is that -- I could get was at a dining hall that the Jewish community -- commu -- not the community at large, the community center you would call it, the keela -

Q: Keela, uh-huh.

A: -- is -- is maintained for immigrants from Poland, because they couldn't get the working permit, or not to endanger the Czech's jobs. So the community at large, plus the keela, had to take care of them. Clothes is -- was collected, bedding and then other things, and they got a substantial meal at noon at this dining hall. I didn't mention, when this aunt told my mother I should become a cook, that many times it will be very beneficial to me, and maybe some those -- some of those related to me. So the first time was that my parents had my ration ticket and I got a good -- good meal. Not 79 dumplings, but I ate a good meal. So I worked there, and thi -- another advantage of it was that I was one of only two Jewish cooks in that whole occupied area.

Q: Really?

A: Which brought me almost to the social level, or importance level of lawyers.

Q: Really?

A: What?

Q: Really?

A: No, wa -- one of two Jewish cooks, and they were needed.

Q: Maybe more needed than lawyers.

A: So one was already in that dining hall and I was the second.

Q: But was he much older than you, or was he --

A: He was older, he was born in 1919.

Q: But he's only five years older.

A: More -- yeah, but more experienced --

Q: Yeah. Yes.

A: -- more -- I worked until the fall, when the man who managed this dining hall told me that he was designated to become a member of a council of elders in charge of supply and feeding and economy, in a ghetto to be created to hold all the Jews from the Czech lands. And he would appreciate if I, as a rarity, one of the two cooks, would volunteer and go there with the very first transport to prepare kitchens, train people so they could be fed when they arrived by the thousands.

Q: And who was this person?

A: His name was Karl Schliesser, very nice, very nice man.

Q: And about how old did you think he was at the time?

A: Oh, he was a [indecipherable] person I didn't judge what he -- he already had kids and I know he had a daughter who was older than I was. Anyway, he immediately contradicted himself. He said to ghetto to hold all the Jews. And then he said if I volunteer and come with him, he would protect my parents from being deported further to the east from that ghetto. As a member of the Council of Elders, he would protect my parents from -- that means before this ghetto, Terezín, Theresienstadt was created, the officials at the -- at the Jewish community knew that it's not going to be a permanent ghetto, it's going to be a transition station for further deportations.

Q: Did you understa -- did you understand that there was a conflict in what he said, that there was a contradiction? Or did you --

A: No -- I -- I -- I knew that -- immediately that all the Czech Jews would come there, but not all would stay there. And my father was vehemently opposed to my volunteering, you

don't volunteer for something like this, unknown. But I thought -- i-in the first instance he said to hold all the Jews of -- so if my turn would come eventually, and if he will be able to keep his word, I believed if he c -- will be able, that he would. I'm ahead of the game, and my parents have a chance to stay there -- there was no thought about the concentration camps, and annihilation and then gassing and the -- that was not known until the very end. Nobody outside the concentration camp knew what's expecting the deportees upon their arrival in Auschwitz, or wha -- that was not known of Auschwitz -- and people would not have even believed it and have not believed it later on. There was [indecipherable] always optimistic. Now -- and there were some people who were arrested for political -- by the Germans, opponents. And they later got -- the family received a card that he died, that family member arrested six months ago, died in Auschwitz for -- on a heart attack. So those who came afterwards, and came to Auschwitz, wrote back. They couldn't say, I'm in Auschwitz, but they wrote, in these 30 allowed words, I am at Uncle Joe's, or with Uncle Joe, to let them know he's in Auschwitz. But these people have interpreted it, Joe is alive, he is not -- you know, always --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- took the optimistic --

Q: Optimistic, yeah.

A: -- part of the situation. So --

Q: T-Tell me something. Your father was absolutely against it.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did your mother say, since she was a very strong person in the family [indecipherable]

A: She was less against it.

Q: She was less against it?

A: Less against it, because I said that, what he promised, and she thought there may be a chance. And nobody expected it to be, you will -- okay, you will be displaced, and replaced somewhere else. Nobody had an idea, a military barracks that the families won't be -- there were ghettos before in Poland, but these were voluntary ghettos where Jews have, on their own will, congregated to be away from the anti-Semites, and felt better and safer, and on their own. So these were voluntary ghettos, and there the Germans just drew a barbed wire around the district, and they had the ghetto. But people were living together, maybe crammed, maybe, but fam -- so they made up -- the -- the idea was, we were living elsewhere with only Jews, and just the situation of -- of living arrangement will change.

Q: So was this an easy decision for you in spite of your father's --

A: Yeah, I --

Q: -- or was it a difficult decision?

A: -- I -- no, no, I -- I decided, this time I prevailed. And I went to the -- on November 24th, 1941, with 342 hand-picked men, and we assembled -- we came from home, directly to the railroad station, assembled there, and it was the last time we traveled in a passenger train.

Q: Oh, you were in a passenger train for that trip?

A: In a passenger train to --

Q: Were you the only cook, o-or that other guy was there --

A: The other one was too.

Q: -- was there.

A: But he did not volunteer. He did not volunteer, and he was put in anyway.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So --

Q: 342 y -- mostly young men?

A: No, these were th -- I -- depends what is young. Today everybody under --

Q: -- is young, right.

A: -- 75 is young for me. But these were accomplished engineers, technicians, plumbers, carpenters. To transform the town, which was a fortress town, built in 1780, with 12 meter thick walls, built in octagon, you have seen the plan. And each corner was in a -- shaped in a triangle so you could see the enemy approach, if he did. And the 12 meter thick walls, and the moat around it, and the moat was filled on the river that was running just by the walls. And there were only three gates into this town, which is a ideal place to hold someone whom you don't want to let escape. Those gates, wh-when we cleaned there --

Q: Let me as -- let me go back just for a second. Are -- is -- is everybody feeling, when you - when you go to the railroad station and you're waiting for the train, if you're waiting, I don't know if you're waiting --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but th -- are people nervous, or they're fairly relaxed --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- what is this --

A: -- no, no, they were nervous, they --

Q: -- tha -- what's the sense --

A: -- all those, the others, the 341, they were all called up to go.

Q: I see. They -- it wasn't volunteer.

A: I was the only volunteer

Q: Uh-huh.

A: There's another word for it, it called meshuganah. But --

Q: Yeah, it certainly is.

A: But --

Q: But you really were the only volunteer amongst all of them?

A: Yeah. And later on people volunteered when the husband was taken with one transport and the wife volunteered to go with the next hoping to be with him, this -- this were only kind -- other kind of volunteerism. So --

Q: So it's not a calm situation for people, there's --

A: No, they know -- they -- I don't know what they thought when they thought they're going to build something and then they come back home.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You know?

Q: Yeah. You don't know.

A: I don't know that. But I was the -- I think the only one who was told it's going to be a ghetto to hold all the Jews, and -- and so on. I think, I'm not sure. It was not a frightful

situation, concerned, worried. I think that the prevailed -- the -- the th-thought prevailed, we are going to do a job somewhere and we come back. Because there were before groups sent to certain areas where the German a -- the -- the head, or [indecipherable] or wife was residing in a castle and the group was sent there to do the landscaping, and then they came back when it was finished. And there was another group working in the forest, I'm not sure what they did there, and they came back. So I think that did example must have been in their mind, because it was not nervous, it -- it was upsetting, taken away from your wife and kids, but so we were allowed to take with us 110 pounds of luggage. And it consisted mainly, going into the winter, of warm clothing, and everyone had the 110 pounds, and two pair of pants, and two jackets, and another coat, and you know, to -- the -- to --

Q: You mean that you were wearing? Yeah.

A: -- to -- to -- that was not among the weighable luggage, to augment your possessions.

Q: So you assumed you were not coming back. You knew that.

A: I -- I -- I was sure, yeah.

Q: Did -- did Schlaisser -- is -- is it Schlisser or --

A: Schliesser.

Q: Schliesser.

A: Schliesser.

Q: Was he with you on the train, or had he gone before?

A: No, he came one -- he came about six, seven days later.

Q: I see.

A: Or four days later, we -- the whole Council of Elders. And the Council of Elders were the officials at the Jewish community in Prague.

Q: The same Jewish community where you were in the kitchen?

A: Yeah, I didn't know that when I was in the kitchen, they were in another town -- another par -- ch -- part of Prague, in the --

Q: So who accompanied the -- you -- the 342 people on the train? Did you just go by yourselves?

A: I don't know. That I don't know. I was young, I didn't know the -- what arrangements, how -- whether somebody was in charge or not.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But on the railroad station -- the town does not have a railroad station, it's two and a half kilometers in another town -- nearby town. There we were, expected by Czech gendarmes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And it's like state police. And they were -- they accompanied us, and here they were also the ones who guarded the three gates, not the SS.

Q: The three gates of Terezín.

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So we were brought in to what was called the Sudeten barracks, and when we entered, the gates closed behind us. And when we came there, it was open. We came in, and the gates closed. So that was the first time suspicion of some prison type accommodation is beginning. We were assembled on the courtyard, and the commandant was a doctor, I don't know what kind of a doctor, he was not a cardiologist I know, because he didn't have a good heart. But they assembled us and told us everything we are not allowed to do.

Q: Was this Sydel?

A: Sydel.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there was not much left that we could do, other than our daily work. And the carpenters went immediately to work -- there was a supply of lumber, making table by table bunks to push as many people into those military wards as possible. And I didn't have anybody -- the -- since -- during the Czech re -- Czechoslovakia, in 1938, they kept about 5,000 soldiers of different -- how would you say? Infantry and Cavalry and artillery --

Q: Different units.

A: Each one had its own barracks, 5,000 of them, and 3,000 civilian population was living there. And they were living [indiscipherable] and from the military. And there was some farmers with fields around it. And we only later found out that the gates closed so those

Jews don't mingle with that other population. But we didn't know that that was the reason.

Q: So the gates closed --

A: And we --

Q: -- in barracks.

A: Yeah. And those --

Q: I -- I'm going to have to stop you.

A: Yeah?

Q: So hold your thought. Remember where you are --

A: Yeah --

Q: -- because I'm going to change the tape.

A: -- we closed the gates.

Q: Yes.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

- Q: Edgar, I just want to get this picture again. The 342 of you were brought into the Sudeten barracks, into the courtyard of the Sudeten barracks. And then the -- the gate that closes is the gate from the barracks?
- A: The gate from the barracks, yeah.
- Q: So that you're going to be kept from the Czechs who -- and the --
- A: The German -- it was mainly Germans. There is --
- Q: Mainly Germans.
- A: -- [indecipherable] on the -- on the border already, the s -- the Sudeten, part of the Sudeten.
- Q: Right. So they wanted to separate the Jews from these other people until they --
- A: Which we didn't know, we thought prison bec -- now, those who had to -- who had work outside, like some of the engineers, who had to -- their job was to increase the capacity of the utilities, serving currently 8,000 people, to accommodate 60,000. So the electricity and the -- and the water and the sewer, all these -- these people were specialists picked for that job, and some of it was outside --
- Q: Outside.
- A: -- the barracks, and outside the ghetto. So they went with -- accompanied by a gendarme.
- Q: A Czech gendarme.
- A: Czech gendarme. And some of them were very good, they felt, you know, that one Czech to another, and the re-relation didn't make a difference. Some were bad, and some were afraid to be good.
- Q: Yeah.
- A: So there three categories. You had to know with whom you are dealing. So you could go out only accompanied by a work detail.
- Q: So you're really in a -- in a rather small area?
- A: I was inside the barrack, never got out. I mean, never, for a certain period --
- Q: Right.

- A: -- until it was filled. Anyway, I started to say that until 1938, those barracks were used -- occupied and used by the military and since the German occupation, there was no military in those barracks, they were closed. And of course, they started to deteriorate, a lack of maintenance, and weather, and rusty and dusty, and -- and repairs, the floor, the pipes. So -- but I couldn't get anybody to help me to prepare the kitchens, because they had their assigned job. Until later they got the idea that it's good to have some relations with the kitchen under the conditions we were living at, and they came and helped, that they did some manual work, and the engineers did some repair. And they finally got the one kitchen going. There were two kitchens in the Sudeten.
- Q: Two kitchens in the Sudeten. So what ha -- how did people eat when you first came?
- A: We were told to take a three day something -- for the first day some sandwiches, and then some non-perishable food like a canned food or so, there was no frozen, or whatever --
- Q: Right, right.
- A: -- prepared meals. So for three days we took --
- Q: Your own food.
- A: -- our own food, and we were able on the third day already to prepare a soup, and -- and bread was delivered for the 342.
- Q: So, did you make the soup because you didn't have any help? Who made the soup?
- A: That wasn't difficult to make, the soup, that if you did nothing else. That -- that -- the other cook was there, we worked together. He was not very enthusiastic about it.
- Q: And what did you have, huge -- huge pots?
- A: Kettle, like you saw in that picture.
- Q: In picture, huge --
- A: Huge, yeah, 400 liter, hundred gallon kettles. Some were steam heated from a central steam line, which then had to be augmented, the capacity I mean, of which. And some burn coal. So there -- you found -- I'm jumping ahead again. Okay, we're in that kitchen and preparing it and we got ready, and six days later, a transport of thousand people came from Brno, that's the capital of Moravia.
- Q: Right.
- A: And what -- it was the job of the Council of Elders, and now while -- if the Council of Elder was in Terezín, so there were other officials in Prague, and those big communities, that had to put the thousand people to fill a transport, on German orders. This is a terrible

responsibility to decide whom you dislocate from their regular life, which was lousy already anyway, but it was something known, and send them away. But what they did, they kept families together. In my case it was negative, because they wanted me to be together with my parents, so they came three weeks after me, while they otherwise might have, by chance, stayed longer in their accommodations at home.

Q: Right.

A: And this principle prevailed also when transports were put together from Terezín to the east.

Q: They would bra -- keep families together.

A: Families together, unless one of the family members were -- was in a job -- it could work both ways -- a job that was necessary either for war industry or -- or for maintenance of the town -- functioning of the town, they either kept the one and send the rest, or they kept the whole family back. And I don't know who and why and how these decisions were made, but these were three ways of people staying in Terezín till the end, or being shipped out.

Q: Right. Now, Edgar, you're 17 years old in 1941 when you're deported.

A: Yeah, 17 and a half

Q: Seven -- 17 and a half, that's right, because in February you're going to be 18.

A: 17 and a half.

Q: That's right, in 1942.

A: Almost three quarter.

Q: Right. Do you feel as an adult man at this point? I mean, how -- what is it -- who -- who are you?

A: It's hard for me to say, it y -- sounds like bragging, but my wife wa -- brings that up, whereas that it was unbelievable that age 17 and three quarters, I could organize the setting up of the kitchen, and not only that. When that first transport came of -- I don't remember what the other one did.

Q: The other cook?

A: He was the -- yeah, he -- he worked alone, but he did not initiate anything. I think he was mad that he was taken out of his regular life. With that first transport, I mention whole families came, so I had somebody staff the kitchen with women who knew about food, who knew about preparation of food, understood food, although they never worked for

thousand people, I -- I -- neither did I. But at least somebody who knows how to handle food -- food. Now, there was flour in -- in the warehouses. There was some sugar, there was some margarine, and interestingly, there was plenty of spices. Pepper, paprika, caraway. I guess that was not a -- an item the Germans were short of. But there was no vegetable, there was no fruit. There was occasionally some marmalade, and not to jump too fast, we started up one kitchen, and then, or after that first transport, every second day, third day, another thousand people came. And I don't remember how many thousands that Sudeten held, but when it was full, the Germans decided to separate women from the men.

Q: So at first when they came to the Sudeten, they were together?

A: Often families together, yeah. And I never went up to look how they a-accommodated with a -- a family occupies one of the three sections of the bunk, or above each other, or -

Q: And how -- how were the -- do you know how the bunks were set up? Is this like a dormitory?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or were there actually separate room? There were not separate rooms, it was all --

A: No, no, there was the -- this military barrack --

Q: I see.

A: -- was one long --

Q: I see.

A: -- one long room, and then they put up the bunks this way.

Q: So where are you staying?

A: I was staying in one -- one of -- one --

Q: One of these bunks?

A: One of these bunks, yeah. I wasn't privileged yet, later I had some privileges.

Q: Uh-huh. And did you have bunkmates?

A: Yeah. So when they se -- decided to separate the women from the men, they designated the Dresner for the women. That other cook went there, and with the women went girls of all ages, and boys under age 15.

Q: Oh.

A: Those 15 and older stayed there, and they were assigned jobs.

Q: Stayed in Sudeten.

A: Everyone -- everyone had some job designated.

Q: So Sudeten is first, then Dresden is second?

A: Then Dresner, yeah.

Q: Is it Dresden or Dres --

A: Dresner.

Q: Dresner.

A: Dresden is the town, and the designation is Dresner --

Q: I see.

A: -- it's [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: -- barracks, it's instead of an [indecipherable]

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And --

Q: Did you also have to set up the kitchens in -- in Dresner?

A: In Dresner he did.

Q: He did.

A: He did. But he stayed there, and when Dresner was full and another barracks was -- the kitchen to be set up, I went.

Q: So then who took over in Sudeten? You -- you don't know.

A: I hope by that time people were already capable of running -- what was interesting, most of the so-called head chefs in those kitchens, were former butchers.

Q: Really?

A: Although the -- no meat was handled. Oh yes, when the horse died somewhere in the neighborhood, we got it in -- we got it -- we got --

Q: You got in the meat.

A: We got the meat. And if there was a butcher store originally, for the germ -- yeah -- I'm handling it too fast.

Q: That's okay.

A: We were isolated and walking from barracks to barracks or to the workplace, accompanied by gendarmes. By June 1942, the last of these town inhabitants was evacuated by the Germans. I don't know how they were accommodated, whether they found them, but that wasn't my problem.

Q: Whe -- when -- when in 1942 did this happen? Early?

A: June.

Q: June of 1942?

A: June '42.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And from then on, the gates of the barracks were open, and when you finished your job, your work, your assigned work, you could go with that family and move around without being accompanied or guarded. So I went from barrack to barracks, and part of just preparing the kitchen, was also training people to -- to -- I did get information of what is in the -- in the warehouse. And I got information how many people are already living there. So based on that, I made use of supplies for individual barracks, and later on even a sophisticated menu, how many grams of what to --

Q: Really? So how did you figure this out? I mean, these are much larger populations than you were ever trained to feed.

A: Yeah. I told you, there's one -- there were some women who were able to administer the kitchen, not just the butchers, and that [indecipherable] it's -- it's funny that there was no meat, but the butchers seemed to be the best administrators of a kitchen.

Q: Did -- w-were you the person who was in control of the amount of -- of whatever ingredients could be sent, whether it was flour, it was sugar, it would be sent to this barrack, or that barrack, or this kitchen?

A: That -- that started out this way. Later there were people who were in business, food business, so I had stores at -- and groceries and -- and other related business. They became -- they became the warehouse -- operating the warehouse, and this -- they didn't get the information, and without my interference or -- or participation, based on the initial set-up, delivered directly to --

Q: And were there equal rations given to each barrack, or were there different -- differences in the barracks?

A: Not in the barracks, the difference was -- and that was -- you know, the Council of Elders had very -- they were, so to say, the town administration. They were actually a cabinet, there was a man designated for transportation and for labor and for health and for supply, and -- and other departments. But they had very little room for initiative. That was all based on strict rules set by the Germans. However they, where possible, they applied their own decision making. Like for instance for the children, and that was a little bit later, the -- a children's kitchen was -- was created, that had more of the food a growing child needs, because children were our future. And they decided those who had hard labor assignments to get more food. Of course, that was taken away from the general population, but the general population was so large, that the few privileged groups -- and it wasn't privileged, was rewarded appropriately, larger portions -- rations. But it did not impact tremendously.

Q: You don't think it impacted the general population very much?

A: Not much was taken away from all the thousands of the regular population to feed the few -- to improve the ration of the children and the -- those who have hard -- performed hard labor. So at -- this way I was hopping from one barrack to another, trying to get the most capable person to stay behind and run it, all while I was 18 - 18 and a half.

Q: Did you feel --

A: Important?

Q: -- important, yeah.

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. I -- I don't think -- I liked to do that. I felt good having a responsibility.

Q: Yes.

A: Being trusted and so, yeah, but --

- Q: Did -- did you have contact with the Council of the el -- Elders, with Schliesser, after you got there? Was there meet -- for instance, a meeting?
- A: It -- it -- not -- really not, really not. He had his jobs to do, and I did mine, and there was no -- he did -- except those, as I said, the instructions as to portion size for the kids, and then the decision to create a kit -- a children's kitchen and a diet kitchen.
- Q: What does that mean?
- A: What does that mean? That was maybe in the small -- I think it was a p-previous restaurant in -- for the civilians of the -- the kitchen was then, for people who had diabetes or gall bladder or stuff, to give more of one item that they can have, and less of something that would be harmful to them. You know, a -- a diet within the framework of availability.
- Q: So give me an idea of the kind of food people will have for breakfast, and then for lunch or dinner. And I'm assuming now, given your explanation, that most people in the general population, 90 percent or 95 percent of the population, is eating out of these big kitchens. Very few people have apartments and cook for themselves, am I correct?
- A: That was only very later, and -- and these were only some of the privileged people --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- who had connections to get a room in one of those -- where the -- where the town population was living, they got one room per family, and they had a little kerosene cooker, or so, and --
- Q: So would you say it was 10 percent of the population --
- A: No, much less.
- Q: -- or less -- much less than that?
- A: Much less.
- Q: Okay. So everybody's lining up for whatever they're going to eat, in their -- in their barracks?
- A: In the -- except in the -- I -- even -- even in the days when it was snowing, from those kettles the food was transferred into barrels, taken out and in the yard, served. And lines were forming, and the -- very soon they made not ration tickets, but meal tickets, which they were printed there somewhere, and all the days of the month on it, and there was one person, called ordnungs Dienst, somebody who kept order with the band, armband, and it's not a s -- what do you call it, it's -- made holes into these --

Q: Right.

A: -- tickets, showing that the person was already there, and to reject him if he came a second time. And --

Q: So if you lost this ticket, you were in big trouble.

A: Yes. I don't know what -- what they did if -- they wouldn't let them starve, but I don't know what the -- could be only for that month that he was starving, but I -- I don't know.

Q: Right.

A: This -- this organizational part, I -- I don't know. I didn't --

Q: And everyone who had a ticket would get something?

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Now if the person with the ladle at the barrel was your friend, you had a chance to get like -- you came with a bigger container, and he may give you two ladles full, or may reach lower down to get you some of the sm -- more of the solids. This is something that has developed -- you know, a barter system has developed. There was no money, so everyone -- it may not sound nice, but that's what happened, everyone who had access to something, like the carpenter had access to wood, the cook had access to food, there were workshops where they worked for the Germans, so s -- that was a mitzvah to steal from the Germans. The other was a little less colorful. The cooks were expected to give their family little more, but it was not ethical to steal more and get from a carpenter a shelf, where you put up your shaving stuff, you know? Or --

Q: But -- but it happened?

A: Yes, yes. And it happened in -- in every single department. And what is even less ethical was that only those families who had someone involved in -- in one of those trades where you could schleusse something, that was called also, to -- th-they didn't say steal, they said to schleusse it.

Q: That means what? To channel it? To -- to go from one person to another?

A: To -- yeah, in Auschwitz, it was called organizing.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And here was called, to swipe, or whatever. So there was -- there were -- were different categories and levels of -- of f-feeding, and -- and access to the -- you know, you got

someone working in the -- in the clothes warehouse, where the clothes was that was either confiscated upon arrival, or if someone died who didn't have a family, who wanted to retain the goods, went to the warehouse. The Germans sent this to Germany for their own people, they needed it, or -- while they were at war so long. So if somebody stole their something [indecipherable] so where, everywhere somebody had something that somebody else wanted, he bartered for or something he wanted or needed, or didn't need, but got it anyway. Cigarettes were the most valuable barter item. The Germans didn't know how well they mean to the Jews when they forbid them to smoke. Otherwise they would have brought in a lot of cigarettes.

Q: So how did you get cigarettes?

A: Si -- through some of these good gendarmes.

Q: The Czech gendarmes.

A: You pay them, and some did it even without paying. They contacted your family in Prague, and the aunt or whoever, came to the gendarmes home, who lived nearby, delivered the stuff, and he brought it in, and you pick it up at the gate, or so --

Q: And why would they do that? Were they getting paid also [indecipherable] bribe?

A: Some did it for payment, and some did it just out of good heart.

Q: And did cigarettes then become sort of currency inside the ghetto, if you had it, you could then --

A: The -- the most valuable currency.

Q: Really?

A: And there were people who gave up their food in Auschwitz, people died because they -- the meager ration they gave for a cigarette. Couldn't stop smoki --

Q: And this was both men and women, as far as you know? Or more men than women?

A: I -- not many women were smoking, I -- I -- I don't know. I couldn't -- I don't know about women, but I know men.

Q: Men. So what -- do you know what might have been the -- the -- the biggest currency for women in terms of this bartering system, or y -- or you don't know?

A: I don't think it was lipstick, but I -- I -- I -- I don't know. Maybe my wife will be able to tell you.

- Q: Uh-huh. Well, we'll ask her tomorrow. So would you consider this a kind of black market system as well, or not?
- A: Just barter -- barter --
- Q: Just bartering.
- A: -- barter economy. Bartered with -- with whatever you had, you brought with you, and didn't use it, and somebody else wanted it. All things that you --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- disappropriated somewhere where you had access to.
- Q: Did you smoke?
- A: No.
- Q: Really?
- A: I don't remember in which grade, kids dragged me into the bathroom in school, I was a young kid still, and gave me a puff of a cigarette, and I coughed so much that I never touched it again. So --
- Q: So did that mean that you didn't have access, or did you sometimes get cigarettes and use it to get other things?
- A: No, I never got cigarettes, and I never -- I -- I had the -- I had some of the food that I could use, and I tell you how I used it. We are already far ahead, and I wanted also to bring out my -- the initi -- the beginning and impact of Schacter on the whole camp, and on me personally.
- Q: Well, we will do that. I -- I still wanted to stay with the kitchens for a little bit, if that was okay.
- A: Yeah, no, but that started -- he came in December of '41, so --
- Q: So just a few weeks after you?
- A: -- we did -- we didn't have to go back.
- Q: Uh-huh. Am I correct to say that your first roommate was a lawyer of some kind?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Introduced you to various people. Was there a lawyer?

A: How do -- yeah, yeah, how do you --

Q: There was an interview that you did.

A: You -- you have your own --

Q: Spies.

A: -- Intelligence network?

Q: Yes. I think we have to stop the tape, but we're going to start --

A: I couldn't find anybody of his family.

Q: Mm.

A: His wife was a little bit taking advantage. She -- she bartered with -- with giving favors to men.

Q: Uh-huh. All right, we'll stop the tape now.

End of Tape #4

Tape #5

- Q: Edgar, before we get on to your roommates, and -- and your relationship with Schacter, I wanted to ask you about what kind of food was -- was served. I mean, it's a little overwhelming for anybody to think of thousands of people being cooked for, under these conditions especially.
- A: That's why I tried to introduce Schacter, because we have something in common.
- Q: Mm.
- A: [coughs] Sorry. He -- I consider him a psychologist without a certificate, or without a diploma. He recognized the -- and I'll come to your question --
- Q: Yes.
- A: -- he recognized immediately upon his arrival, the -- that the prison mentality can sink into the people's mind. That when he came, when the gates were still closed, and he got everybody together and encouraged them to sing. And most of the songs were Czech popular songs, which most of people knew. And it had a tremendous impact on everybody, not just during the time you were singing, and gathers others who were not singing, were sitting there and listening, to the point that not just that hour, hour and a half, you forgot every -- that the reality of your actual circumstances, but you took with you a little bit of -- like a care package, a -- a spiritual care package to help you carry on i-in -- for the -- until the next time when we sing.
- Q: So this was -- he did this in the Sudeten barrack when you first came --
- A: The Sudeten in the basement, and not only that, I mentioned to you that the gates were closed, and the women were in another barracks. I don't know how he managed, he appeared in the women's barracks, and did the same with the women, with the same beneficial impact. So I -- why I represented him before answering your question, I knew that the Czechs lived through their stomach. Even now, this family, when they come to visit, the sister-in-law and the nephews and nieces, food is so meaningful, they come into the house, and they go right, pick up the covers of the pots and -- and then pinch here, and pinch there. I tried with those ingredients we had, to make food that's mainly a Czech -- Czech food. Dumplings -- we had flour. I don't know how, on my request, yeast came into the camp, and we made dumplings, and from this so-called coffee, that was a dark grain, nothing to do with coffee, but it was dark and looked like it, and we cooked it, and let it cool, and at the right temperature, if you put in some margarine and whipped it, it didn't dissolve completely, and it -- you know it didn't melt. It stayed like little dots of mar -- people thought that's the best sauce on a dumpling they ever ate. And some people asked after the war, said, could you make it for me?
- Q: Really?

A: So this -- in this way I tried to accommodate or improve their mental state with providing food that is close to the Czech stomach. And I say Czech because these people were first Czechs, and then they were Jews, then they were -- if not they, then somebody else made them aware that they are Jews.

Q: Okay.

A: So in this way I mention Schacter first, because in his way he did work on the Czech mind, and I worked on the Czech stomachs.

Q: But I -- I'm still not completely clear on once the kitchens were going in all the different barracks, and I assume that all the barracks had their own kitchen, am I correct?

A: Yeah, yeah. And then there was -- and from the nearby neighborhood of those houses where the origin population lived, nearest to each barrack, those people were designated to this particular barrack.

Q: Right, uh-huh.

A: And then the further -- located further away, for those -- sorry, for those a kitchen was built in -- on the main road, and that was only to be delivered to another location, central location where those able of walking could come to. And from that kitchen also, the ones who couldn't come were supplied like meals on wheels, Terezín style. So --

Q: You mean, the elderly who couldn't go --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- or the people who were disabled, who couldn't go. So d-do you think people starved in Terezín?

A: Those who had no connection to, or anything to barter with, or had something but were in the attic and couldn't get down and mingle, those really -- it was -- it's not starving on the street falling down, but they, of malnutrition, lack of vitamins and -- and s -- lack of appropriate amounts of food, even if it wasn't the right food, caused them to -- made them susceptible to diseases and we had the best doctors, all the doctors were there. There was a operating room that was brought in from a Jewish hospital in Prague. And if you only need a doctor's attention, you had the best attention, but if you needed medication, you were [indecipherable]. I had my hernia operated there.

Q: Really?

A: And ne -- didn't need anything else except a surgeon's intervention. And I healed, and that was okay. But if you had something, I don't know, asthma, that they gave you -- inhale some vapors, hot water or so, hot water vapors, but there was really no medication that --

Q: Did they put you -- they must have put you to sleep with something, did they have ether?

A: I think -- yeah, it was, it was ether.

Q: But no painkillers for after?

A: No. I didn't any.

Q: You didn't need it.

A: No.

Q: So there were not people who were lying dead on the street, the way they were in other -- in other ghettos, as far as you knew?

A: No, no. That -- they were dying in the -- in that -- in the infirmary, or -- or where they lived, but it was maybe not direct starving, but starvation induced susceptibility to diseases which put them in pneumonia. Dysentery -- dysentery killed the most people.

Q: But you have very few toilets. You had th -- at the -- as far as I know, at one time the most was about 50,000 people.

A: Yeah.

Q: But there's something like 900 or a thousand toilets available. So most people --

A: I don't -- I don't think there were that many. Th -- in the barracks --

Q: You think there were fewer?

A: -- in the barracks -- in the military barracks were not latrines, but the soldiers had there a wall of urinals, and then what do you call it, those booth or separations with a toilet. And there were people standing in line. In some areas, where it was necessary, some latrines were built. And I don't know how they were emptied, and the stuff carried away, or sanitized I think, with some -- some carc -- it's calcium, but it's not calcium like you take for your bones, it's -- I don't know how it is particular --

Q: Lime, of some --

A: L-Lime. Oh, isn't she wonderful, lime. What would I do without you?

Q: I don't know.

A: So -- but still, it was dysenter -- Hana's grandparents, both of them -- no, was grandmother and -- and this brother of her grandfather came, he -- he was 80 years old

and he worked as a lumberjack, he was splitting wood for the -- starting the fires in those kettles. And there was a [indecipherable] six weeks later he was gone, with diarrhea -- the dysentery.

Q: Because they had nothing.

A: Dehydration, you know.

Q: Now, access to water also, was -- was very difficult, yes? People couldn't wash easily, or -- and drink water, or am I [indecipherable]

A: I don't know how -- you know, in those houses and apartments of the town population, these were not apartments with two or three bathrooms that -- nobody had two bathrooms except some super rich people in their villas. But here, they -- they must have had -- possibly, problems. But in the military barracks, there were these -- was these rows of one huge trough or two in the middle of pipe, water pipe, with --

Q: With faucets?

A: -- with faucets along. And I have a picture at home of one of those ladies' washrooms.

Q: So Hannover had it? Sudeten?

A: All the bar -- all the barracks --

Q: [indecipherable] they all had it.

A: -- all the military barracks had washrooms. But cold water only.

Q: Right.

A: Which in winter was not very pleasant, but --

Q: When you said that you had -- your first roommate was a lawyer, I don't know what his name was, what does that mean when you say roommate? Were you actually living in a -- in a separate room?

A: I told you I was a big shot. In eight -- with 18 or 19 years, and I had -- and I don't know how and where I got it. Could be -- it could have been a part of barter result that some carpenter put a -- a few boards up, separated a bigger -- a smaller room from the rest of the big room, and his wife -- in the Hamburger was a jail for women. I didn't mention yet that there was a -- the gendarmes was -- were watching outside, and inside was a ghetto police, established by the Council of Elders and they looked like -- under the cap and the -- and the yellow armband identifying them as a police.

Q: Were they in uniform?

A: They had some -- they wore black -- I don't know, but everyone had exactly the same. But you could recognize that he's of the police formation. The -- how did we get to the police?

Q: Well, I'm asking you about the lawyer.

A: The lawyer, yeah, yeah.

Q: So internally there's -- there's ghetto police, and his wife --

A: -- okay.

Q: -- you said something --

A: That's from the wife we came to the police.

Q: But also you said something about the wife in the last tape. Which was that she seemed to have slept around.

A: Did I say that?

Q: Well, you didn't use those words, but that's what you were implying.

A: Yeah, okay. This is how she -- I think this is how she got the -- either head of the -- the jail mistress, or chai -- jail warden in the Dresner. And the jail was the -- when -- it was used by the military, the barracks, there was a guard room, and there was another room where they rested if they -- between shifts, or between the guard duties. And there was a - - they put up a [indecipherable] and there was a temporary holding jail.

Q: For women?

A: For women. And I don't know why women were being --

Q: You don't know?

A: -- jailed. No.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: My mother was jailed, but that was by the Germans. And that was in the Kommandatur, which was in a bank building and down where the vaults were, they had the jails.

Q: But in male barracks they would also have jails for Jewish men, if they --

A: I think so, I -- I was --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- held in one at the moment of weakness. I -- just for the short time we know each other you must know I'm a very easy going person. And I -- I have tremendous amount of patience. But when it comes to the point where I can no longer be patient, I can be a murderer. I can kill. So, I -- I totally lose presence of mind, and just instinct. There were two very young SS men, they would de -- everybody called them kindergarten. And they were driving the tractors that were pulling the -- the heavy loads, so they were -- because the Jews, they didn't want to entrust a Jew, that distracts the Jews. And one day they come in front of the Hamburger. There's an old man going, and one of them -- I -- he didn't see them, he didn't take his hat off, or whatever, and they went in and started to unload on him, with hitting. I went with a friend, I tore loose, and I knocked them both down to the ground. A normal person wouldn't do that, but that's the condition I get in when it snaps. And they started to shoot, but they were drunk, and it didn't help. So they get the police, grab me in, pull me into their guard room, and the other guy went to the head of the Council of Elders to tell him about it. And he cleaned it up, because those two were drunk and shouldn't have been there. So somehow I got away. I don't know how, because nobody attacks SS men unpunished. So you asked the jail, and I went to sideways in saying I was in there. So he was -- he knew about it and he suffered by it, and we consoled each other. And --

Q: Let me -- I -- I said something s -- a little bit coarsely, and I didn't mean to say it that way, when I said that this lawyer's wife was -- was sleeping around. And what I really mean to ask --

A: But that's another way of saying it.

Q: It is another way, but I -- but I think it's a more s -- s -- it's more serious than that. You know, when you were saying that men were smoking, so they could easily use cigarettes as a way to barter, is it possible that women had a currency that became very significant in Theresienstadt, namely sex.

A: Could have been there, not many, but under those conditions, and not knowing transports have -- were lea -- were leaving, and you don't know where they go, or -- or what's happening. So the level of morality sank a little, and people wanted to enjoy as much as they could, and as long as they could. And you did not have to be in love just to perform and enjoy. So I don't know whether, or how many, if so, would have used this as a currency.

Q: But in any way it's very complicated, because for some -- for some people, their life force is such that before they die, they want to have affection, and sex. For others it may be using it as a currency, it would be hard to know [indecipherable]

A: I think most of it was just sex.

Q: For itself.

A: As long as -- as long as you're here, you know you -- there are some certain rooms, or you had the roommate, you tell him get out of here, and so -- but I think it was very little. Well, there were young people who -- who -- Hana's sister got -- Hana's brother made a very serious acquaintance, and before -- on the day he was deported, in the morning, he married this girl. So there's a chance that they -- they can go together and she wouldn't -- her supervisor wouldn't let her go, because she worked in the agriculture, which was bringing in harvest for the Germans. The agriculture was not for the ghetto, that was for the Germans. So the -- these are the -- sure, there were instances where people fell in love with each other, or shared the -- the sorrow, which then became bearable through nice companionship. But there was also just this free -- free life before. It may not be again.

Q: Was this shocking to you at the time?

A: No, it was enlightening to me.

Q: It was enlightening to you. True, yeah?

A: Pardon?

Q: Yeah, yeah -- you -- you mean that, this is not just a --

A: No, no, no.

Q: Yeah. So this was a learning experience in some way?

A: You're asking too many questions, I already my --

Q: That's my job

A: -- I had already my apprenticeship before I went to -- to Terezín. But there, yes, and it was not the barter, it was mutual drive to enjoy as much as possible --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- under the given circumstances, which were not very enjoyable.

Q: Right. Did -- do you think that people in Terezín after '40 -- after '42, when -- there must be rumors of what's going on, at least, that people have a sense that if they're sent, they're not going to return? Y -- I mean, and are people afraid, or they s --

A: They may not return to Terezín --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- but they may go to another camp and build, and -- and create a new ghetto, or a new labor -- labor camp, and -- and the Germans kept this ver -- that was the best kept secret. For instance, they ordered, for one time, a thousand men, age 18 to 55, but only men t-transport, that they go somewhere to build a new labor camp. And the next transport, the wives of those men were encouraged to volunteer so they can be with their men, and they're never -- they were never together, because in Auschwitz, the men went one side, the women the other, and there were men who went to the right and to the left, and women who went to the right and the left. So they never were together again. But it gave an impression in the ghetto that they go somewhere, and they going to be together, and it's not so bad.

Q: So i -- in -- at the end of '41 - '42 - '43, you have no suspicion.

A: Nobody had, even afterwards.

Q: No -- afterw --

A: And when -- when the train opened in Auschwitz, and I saw what Arbeit macht frei in Auschwitz, I still did not believe what it is.

Q: Right.

A: I think we'll get there in -- in more detail --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- when --

Q: Right.

A: -- when we get to Auschwitz.

Q: Yes. So this lawyer, you remember his name?

A: Yeah.

Q: What is his name?

A: His name was Otto Freund.

Q: Freund?

A: Freund was a friend.

Q: Mm-hm.

- A: And he -- already, before he came to Terezín, he Czechisized it because he thought he will function better as a lawyer under a Czech name, and spelled it f-a -- F-r-a-j-t, Frajt.
- Q: Really?
- A: Frajt. That's a -- that's not a Jewish name, so --
- Q: And what kind of a guy was he, was he --
- A: Pardon?
- Q: What kind of a person was he?
- A: A very nice, mild mannered, wonderful guy. And I think he suffered knowing what's happening with his wife, and I think he had no influence, or didn't want to interfere. He just [indecipherable] tolerated it, and he didn't come back, and I inquired after the war if there are any relatives of his, and couldn't find anybody.
- Q: And is it the case that he knew artists and musicians and that he introduced you to these people, or is that not a connection?
- A: This was parallel. He knew some, and also I have recognized that the -- through him, that those -- first the artists, the painters, and then about the musicians, that they had a job assigned during the day, the artists were in -- there was a technical office, technical bureau where the artists drew the blueprints for the engineers and the -- the technicians, and made poster f -- propaganda posters for the Germans. And in -- at night, they were drawing the -- making the drawings of the real life in Terezín, which you may have seen - - mainly there's a book, and more books than one. And they smuggled some of that through these gendarmes. And there was also, in the agriculture department, they had horses that were drawing -- pulling the -- the carts, and the horses produced manure, and they took that manure out, and underneath, they smuggled out letters, and -- and these posters, and so -- so some of those, I don't know which way they went out, and some were found in Switzerland.
- Q: And these were taken out by the sh -- the Czech gendarmes, knowingly?
- A: No, I -- no, the -- the Germans found those in Switzerland.
- Q: I see.
- A: And of course, all the painters were immediately arrested. Some wound on -- wound up on the small fortress, and some went directly to Auschwitz. And only one of them survived, it was Haas.
- Q: Leo Haas.

A: Leo Haas --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and I don't know that Fritta had this three year old child with him, on the small fortress. He was then deported from the fortress, and his wife died inside, from illness, at the fortress, and Haas and his wife took care of this three year old boy, and I don't know how, in the small fortress, a boy could survive. Anyway -- and he calls himself Tomas Haas Fritta. Not even frit -- not even Dalzig, Fritta.

Q: Uh-huh, takes the first name, the first nickname.

A: Fritta --

Q: No, Fritta's the last name.

A: Fritta was Fritz Dalzig, and he signed his drawings as Fritta.

Q: Yeah, Fritta.

A: And --

Q: And that was called the painter's affair, when they were arrested, is that not [indecipherable]

A: Yup. And Haas survived, because they recognized his capabilities, that can be utilized in a workshop, where counterfeit American and British money was printed, with which the Germans paid their spies in those countries.

Q: Mm-hm. We're going to have to stop the tape.

A: Yeah, I know, I saw --

Q: You saw.

End of Tape #5

Tape #6

- Q: When you were rooming with Frajt, the lawyer, right -- what's his first name?
- A: Otto.
- Q: Otto Frajt. [indecipherable]
- A: Truly Czech it's Ota.
- Q: Ota?
- A: O-t-a.
- Q: O-t-a.
- A: Otto in Czech is O-t-a.
- Q: Okay. So he, as an older person, cause he's an established lawyer, can introduce you to some of the people who were artists and painters, who were working -- and they were working in Magdeburg, am I correct? Is that where they're --
- A: No.
- Q: No.
- A: There was -- some was in Magdeburg, but there was -- also was a technical office -- I've never seen it, that was not in a barrack, that was --
- Q: I -- I see.
- A: -- or it was a -- a specially constructed building, I'm not sure that --
- Q: But is it -- is it through him that you met these --
- A: Through him de -- I found out that these people actually doing double duty, and the second duty was even a more important one than the first one. So I stealed some extra food to them. And this is how we established a relationship, and I still don't want to create an idea that they were crazy about me, because I was nobody compared to them, these were established people. That it could have been because of giving them some extra food.
- Q: And why did you decide to give them extra food?
- A: Because a --

Q: Because of what they were doing?

A: -- the hard laborers got extra, the kids got extra, and there were people coming home from --from their eight or nine or 10 hours job, and sit down and started to draw till late into the night, what I thought was important material for the future. And I didn't know even that it's being exported. So I had some -- as I said, sa -- additional emergency rations.

Q: And did you --

A: And through Schacter I met the composers. So I did the same for them, because they were sitting at night, and composing, writing.

Q: Did you bring the food to the painters and to the composers, yourself?

A: Yeah.

Q: And -- and this was dangerous for you, if you were caught. Am I right, or not?

A: I -- I don't think it -- it would have messed up -- would have messed me up, but it wasn't dangerous, because the Germans were not inside the ghetto. There were no guards inside, except for those dru -- two drunk kids. But -- and there were no gendarmes inside, just the ghetto police. And they didn't suspect, or -- you carry something.

Q: So they wouldn't necessarily have checked anything?

A: No, no. It wasn't dangerous what I did, it was, I said, maybe inappropriate from the general point of view, favoring some individuals, but there were [indecipherable] six, seven painters.

Q: So would you -- you go to where they were working at night, and give them the food at night, do you remember?

A: Some of them were living at very close quarters, cause -- not far from one another, and yes, you we -- the answer is yes.

Q: So you e --

A: The short answer.

Q: It is. But you'd go at night, would you cook the food special, or would you simply take what was already there?

A: No, no, no, that was -- that was stuff that -- that was -- I didn't cook special.

Q: And would you stay --

- A: There was nothing to cook special, there were only the big kettles, you know?
- Q: Right. Would you stay with them, or would you --
- A: Yeah, I -- there were evenings when I stayed with them, but most evenings I spent singing with Schacter.
- Q: In the choir?
- A: Yeah, we had almost every night the rehearsal.
- Q: And was this almost from the beginning?
- A: The -- from the beginning was the --
- Q: When he came in December?
- A: -- the singing in those basements after. And then, after June '42, when people could move freely, he assembled the men and the women together in the basement of the military headquarters near -- on the right of the church.
- Q: Uh-huh, right.
- A: And that was during the day, a carpenter shop, and at night we put up some boards like this, and the choir stood there and was singing and rehearsing. As soon as we could get together, he came up, he had one score of "The Bartered Bride," as a very popular Czech opera, and started to study with us. The singers had nothing to look at. There was no written music, there were no way of copying, and no time to copy, and not enough qualified people to copy music. So we learned by rote.
- Q: So would he sing?
- A: No.
- Q: How -- how would you do it? P -- there was a piano?
- A: First there was a harmonium in -- there was a -- there were certain defi -- different de -- work details, one of them was movers who have moved heavy loads, really where they were needed, when on the town square, the tents and the barracks weren't up, where more industry roo -- projects were [indecipherable] production was kept. So these people were carrying, then loading the trucks with the stuff that was assembled. And they were also moving the German -- for the Germans when they -- when some was called off, and the new officer came, the SS or so. He was mo -- they were moving their furniture and the luggage, and so. And they discovered somewhere in the room, a old harmonium. So one night they, when it was dark, no moon, they brought the harmonium to that basement.

And first we were playing -- Schacter was playing the harmonium, and then they found a piano without legs, and also brought it in, and the carpenters made some legs. Until they made the legs and fastened them, the piano was standing on three crates.

Q: And this was a grand piano?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. What's a harmonium? What does it look like?

A: Like a -- like a -- we call it in church, the --

Q: Organ?

A: Organ.

Q: A small --

A: A small organ, not with pipes, but you had to pump --

Q: With your feet.

A: -- the air --

Q: Right.

A: -- into th -- the pipes were inside the harmonium.

Q: We -- we -- let me go back a little bit. Ho -- how was it that you met Schacter? Did you meet him when he came into the Sudeten barrack?

A: No, I -- I was in the crowd of -- of all the others who went to sing with him, whom he encouraged to sing.

Q: And why did you do that? You hadn't had much singing as a kid. What -- what --

A: I -- at the last three or four months in Prague, before I went to -- you know, this was a lunch job, this -- the Jewish communities had free evenings, first time. I -- I joined a barbershop quartet.

Q: Really?

A: As a bass. And we were singing. I don't think we were singing for money, we were singing I think only for pleasure. And so I liked singing, and so I definitely volunteered to participate.

- Q: Right, right. But you had been singing more popular music, and now with Schacter, after the popular Czech songs, seeing "The Bartered Bride" --
- A: Well "The Bartered Bride" is -- is a Czech popular opera --
- Q: Uh-huh.
- A: -- and almost everybody knows certain parts of it, and it wasn't difficult to learn the Czech. I -- I had a good ear, and a good voice, so it wasn't difficult to learn, once it was played in -- on the piano, to follow through on the --
- Q: The -- the lead singers, were these -- there are a lot of professional artists, singers in Terezín, were the lead singers more professional people, people who [indecipherable]
- A: When you say lead singers, I don't know what you mean. There were -- there were --
- Q: Soloists.
- A: -- soloists, yeah.
- Q: Soloists.
- A: They were from the Czech National Opera, and from the Vienna Opera, and later even from the Berlin opera.
- Q: Right. So you --
- A: They brought in German Jews as well, to Terezín.
- Q: Uh-huh. So you were in the -- in the choir?
- A: Yeah, only in the choir.
- Q: Right.
- A: [inaudible]
- Q: And what was he like in rehearsal?
- A: Schacter?
- Q: Yeah.
- A: Schacter is a -- was a lovable, pleasant person, until he sat behind the piano, then he became a tyrant. You were not allowed to look at the guy next to you, or even at the girl next to you. You were not allowed to whisper. You had to focus on his eyes, because he

was conducting with his eyes, the hands on the -- on the keys, and his eyes were directing the music. And if he noticed you did -- you're not attentive, if -- once he yelled at you, the second time he threw you out.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: So he --

A: And -- and --

Q: -- treated this very professionally?

A: -- and nee -- nobody minded it, everybody wanted to be part of it. He did nev -- he never had to advertise, people were flocking to him, he had the luxury of auditioning peoples.

Q: And w-was he auditioning people for the choir?

A: Yeah, for the choir, yes.

Q: So were there people with good voices in the choir, tha -- from what you remember?

A: Yeah, he -- he -- he makes sure you -- he had the unlimited amount of people were coming to him, who wanted to participate.

Q: And how many people ended up in the choir? I know that there were --

A: I don't know how many were doing these individual opera performances, but I know for the Requiem there were 150. He started another Czech opera, and then when German Jews came, and these were -- the German Jews they were not -- there were very few young people, very few. Very few young middle class, these were older, upper middle class, and then the -- the prominent ones, the old ones who fought in World War I, with whom the German played a cruel game. They promised them -- or told them, leave everything here, your furniture, your money, your belongings, the -- the glass in the showcase. We are bringing you to a spa where you will have no worry. You will have maid service, and room service, and food service, and laundry service. And these guys, after observing three or four or five years, how the Germans treat -- how the Nazis treated the German Jews in Germany, still believed the officer's word. The -- the reason that they came, at a time when the barracks, and the houses of the town population were already filled, and the only place for them was in the attics of the barracks. They will put straw mattresses on the floor, and you can imagine the old people going down to the floor to lay down to sleep, and even worse to get up to sleep. And if you have heard about it, older people have to go to the bathroom more often. So first to get up, and then climb over -- I guess these mattresses were one next to the other, to accommodate as many as possible, climb over the people with a dim light, because the light was dim so the rest can sleep.

And go down a flight of stairs, and then still the bathroom was not next to the stairs, still go on. And if they couldn't hold it, I don't have to describe you the hygienic and sanitary conditions that have developed, which contributed to the acce -- accelerated death rate. And also, many of them lost will to live. They were de -- they were deceived, heartbroken by the German officers and -- to whom they had so much trust. And so many suicides among them, among the old people. And then, as I said, quick deterioration through lack of sanitation and -- and cleanliness, and that was a very poor sight. But Schacter immediately took his Czech Jews, and started to study "Marriage of Figaro," for the same purpose, to pep up that -- those German prisoners. And "Magic Flute," and the Czech singers were s -- most of the Czechs spoke German, because not only at the -- at the border area, but most Czechs had frequent use for the German language. So German was pretty used among the Czech Jews.

Q: And these were concert versions of the operas?

A: Concert versions, yeah -- no, no costumes, no.

Q: [indecipherable]. And what did you use when you performed? Was that piano that had been given legs --

A: Just the piano.

Q: Just the piano.

A: Just the piano.

Q: Now, I'm going to go off this topic for just a second, because you mentioned that the old German Jews often committed su -- many committed suicide. How did they commit suicide? Did they jump out of windows?

A: A window, yeah. And some may have had the -- the -- taken a excessive dose of sleeping pills, or whatever they still brought with them. They deteriorated a very rapid fa -- rate.

Q: Di -- wi -- I want to continue o-on your relationship and the work with Schacter, but I also wanted to ask you, there were -- there were orchestras in Terezín, there are composers, there are other conductors, yes?

A: Okay.

Q: So that there is a lot going on. Am I correct?

A: How did it come about? Now there is a -- a saying going around, and you must have heard it, that the Germans picked Theresienstadt as a town to show off with. It wasn't that way. I mentioned it among other things in their hometown, they had to turn in their musical instruments, and some didn't. And some even had the chutzpah, people who will read this may know what that means, had the guts to bring those ins -- smuggle those

instruments with i -- within those 110 pounds, instead of food and clothing, into Terezín, because they were so -- such ardent musicians, amateurs and professionals, who loved to play, and because everybody thought it's going to be over in six months. I spoke about the optimism. When the six months were over, they gave themselves another six months. So they played in attics, and in cellars, to stay in shape for when they come out, they should be in the same performance level as they came in. And although there are no -- were no Germans in the ghetto, nothing escaped them, they found out. And now a terrific fright and concern gripped everyone in the ghetto, because the Germans -- a few Germans kept all these thousands of Jews in check by imposing corrective punishment. So what that means, were two kinds, either right away into the transport, with -- and these people were marked, when they were in the transport, in Auschwitz they know who they are, and they select them -- direct them to the appropriate side, punishing side, or the small fortress. So nobody wanted to involve their wife, parents, children, siblings in such a punishment, so there was a big concern. The head of the Council of Elders, Edelstein told the camp commander why -- I mean, not in this exact wording, I'm paraphrasing, why would you punish these few people? Look at the amount of talent you have accumulated here, why don't you think of a program where you can utilize them to show the world how well you treat the Jews? That's when this idea came into being. It was not a preconceived idea with the Germans before the ghetto was created. So not only were these Jews not punished, and could retain their instruments, more instruments were brought in from Prague, and before they determined how they are going to do -- show the world how well they treat the Jews, they already divide -- devised a beautification program in anticipation of that, and a free time activities department was created. And in the frame of this orchestras -- jazz has just come to -- to Europe from United States, so we had a five member -- what is it called? Ghetto swingers. Ghetto swingers jazz team. Then there were the two musicians who played in the café. One of them was my cousin, the accordionist, he was a piano and accor -- but there he played the accordion, and one was a violinist. And -- and other of the quartets, and unbelievable, not the Germans, and not the Council of Elders could have imagined what's getting news there. And not only music, there were theaters -- there were all the actors from -- from all these towns. The theater, cabaret, those are very popular because they were throwing these verbal darts at the Germans, in Czech language. Maybe some even in German, I don't know about those. And this was very uplifting, and very helping in -- in really reducing the anxieties of the life that was destined for us. There were lectures. There were 1240 lectures on different subjects. This is based on the notes from that -- that they found from that free activity -- free time activity list, by professors, chemists, biologists, rabbis. Nobody went to the temple, but they went there to listen to the rabbi. And people who had no interest in chemistry and so, went to j -- just to get diversification, and -- and getting away from -- from this dread life of ghetto. By the way, they called -- you know, Terezín in German is Theresienstadt, and the Nazis told these prominent people they go to Theresienbath, which is a Theresien spa. I didn't say it when we were on the subject. So it is an unbe -- there was more -- more of these cultural activities per capita than in New York or -- or anywhere else, in a day. And people after work went, and they -- they shortened their sleeping time, because they were not really strong with the -- with the food they were getting, and I don't take blame for it. I just did what was -- we had. But it was -- it was unbelievable, it -- it was -- it grew like mushrooms after the rain.

Q: And was this -- when Schacter came in December and started those little choirs in the men's barrack, and then the women's barrack, was -- was that secret at that point, or that's -- that was okay at that point? Do you remember?

A: Again, there were no Germans in the barracks, and the gendarmes were out at -- outside at the gate, and this was happening in the cellar after work. I don't think it was clandestine or illegal, it was just unofficial and --

Q: So that the permission that was gotten because Epstein said something to the Germans was to bring in the instruments?

A: That was only after it was decided that that's a good idea, we'll take advantage of it, and we divide -- deci -- devise a program that will help them to project them to the world.

Q: Right.

A: But I don't understand, they had occupied all of Europe, America was across the Atlantic, why would they have to care to show a good report card with good behavior or good treatment of the Jews? I -- that's what I was thinking about, who -- for whom did they need this? They were the masters of the world.

Q: And all of this cultural activity, and intellectual activity started in 1942 as far as you remember?

A: End of '42.

Q: End of '42.

A: End of '42.

Q: Now did you -- besides -- if -- if you were rehearsing as much as --

A: When you say that the -- that -- that [indecipherable] was happening before this okay by the Germans. That was still not secret, but was not official.

Q: Right. And that was performed publicly before it was part of this other plan?

A: That was performed in that cellar, and then it was performed in that auditorium of that boy's home that we circled there, next to the town's square.

Q: Right. Did you also go to performances of other groups, as well as being in rehearsals, or did you [indecipherable] too much?

A: I -- I did, but not too many, because I was -- I -- I f -- I went to cabarets because that was really important to -- you know, when you are -- when you are under the -- somebody's

thumb, if you can play a trick on him, makes you happy. So be -- being part of this -- this verbal dart throwing gave you even more an uplift than -- than -- than the singing.

Q: Mm-hm. Really? Did you -- did you go to lectures?

A: No.

Q: And did you go to chamber music, or the orchestra performances at all?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember anything about those performances? What you --

A: No, I went most to piano recitals or sonatas. The --

Q: The violin?

A: Pardon? The violin and piano.

Q: And piano.

A: And there -- there were [indecipherable] Alice Sommer-Herz. She still lives, she is 85 -- 95.

Q: Really?

A: L-Lives in London. And unfortunately lost a son who was a excellent cellist. I seen him.

Q: And she was a violinist, or she was a pianist?

A: She piano.

Q: Pianist.

A: That -- that was -- that was also very uplifting. And I think by that time they must have, with these all instruments, have -- one or two additional pianos came in.

Q: Mm-hm. This is going to be an odd question. Who tuned the pianos? It's one thing to tune a violin, you can tune it, but were the pianos tuned?

A: Oh, there were tuner --

Q: There were tuners there?

A: Yeah, the musicians themselves, Gideon Klein tuned our piano.

Q: Uh-huh. So they sounded -- they sounded good? These were good pianos?

A: Yeah, there wasn't -- not a -- a -- you know, it's terrible when you get old, don't get old. What -- what happens to me is I had a perfect command of the English language without ever learning, just by hearing and reading. And suddenly in the middle of the sentence, a word -- a simple, regular conversation word doesn't come to mind. And it comes up in Czech and in German, the only two languages I learned formally.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: It's a -- it's embarrassing, you know?

Q: At least it comes up in some language.

A: Yeah, but you can't explain it in Czech to an American. So --

Q: We have to stop and change the tape.

End of Tape #6

Tape #7

- Q: Edgar, when you were at rehearsals with -- with Schacter, did he rehearse the soloists separately, and then brought you together with the choir? Do you have any recollection?
- A: Yeah, yeah, no. When -- when the choir was little progressed, then he tried the total ensemble, yeah.
- Q: So you would rehearse separately from the soloists?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Did he --
- A: They didn't need as much rehearsing because they were professionals, they have sung these operas several times in their life.
- Q: So you guys in the choir needed more rehearsal?
- A: Yeah, yeah.
- Q: But you weren't singing as much as the -- n-not in these operas. In the Requiem you sang more, as a choir than you did the operas. Am I correct, or not?
- A: Wherever the part of the --
- Q: Chorus.
- A: -- choir comes up, we were singing.
- Q: Right.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Did he ever kick anyone out because they were terrible? Not because they were looking sideways --
- A: Terrible at singing?
- Q: Yeah.
- A: First of all he wouldn't have -- if he had recognized it in the beginning, he would not have accepted person. And which a -- which was cruel, because everyone deserved a little uplift. But he let people be in during the rehearsals, and then for the performance he said, "You better go in the audience and watch."

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. That -- that's -- that's as much as he did, but --

Q: Did people get angry at that?

A: I'm sure they did --

Q: I bet they did --

A: I'm sure, yeah --

Q: -- they got angry, yeah. But you -- you stayed for the performances?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have to get dressed in a particular way?

A: No.

Q: You just came in when -- the way -- any way you were.

A: Then for the performances, you put on your best, and that was the best of the 110 pounds you had brought in.

Q: And you kept the 110 pounds of clothing, they weren't taken away from you?

A: No, it wasn't 110 pounds of clothing, there was food --

Q: Uh-huh, right.

A: -- and there was bedding, and there was --

Q: I see.

A: -- other things, shaving, and it -- whatever I brought, I -- I had with me, whatever wasn't worn out, so I still had with me.

Q: I just realized something. So you could bring in shaving cream --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you could bring in soap, which --

A: But what did you do when it ran out? Yeah.

- Q: -- but at some point it ran out, yeah, what happened?
- A: So you were shaving just -- soap -- somehow we had soap, I don't -- I think there was a issue, or issuing of soap. As I told you, I don't remember many details.
- Q: Mm.
- A: So you f -- you use regular soap just so the razor slides better, and I was shaving at that time with a straight razor. I didn't have a -- there were -- there were these Gillette double bladed razors, but I remember I was shaving with a straight razor.
- Q: And toothpaste?
- A: Pardon?
- Q: Toothpaste?
- A: Toothpaste wasn't important, a toothbrush was important.
- Q: Did you brush your teeth every day?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Yeah?
- A: Was kissing, so I had to.
- Q: And how did you keep clean with cold water? Did you wash with cold water?
- A: It was disagreeable.
- Q: It was di --
- A: No, I -- I wash --
- Q: And -- and you -- and you washed your clothes, or was there laundry?
- A: There was a military laundry, and my mother, I mentioned, came three weeks after me, and first -- her first job was in a cleaning detail with buckets, and brushes and they were cleaning rooms in the children's home, and in the offices, and I don't know where -- where else, where cleaning was necessary, and where the regular inhabitants did not clean. So -- and then she was in the laundry detail that was outside of town, that was on the way to the small fortress, was a military laundry from -- used by the military before. And once a month you could put all your dirty stuff in a bag, marked, and give to them, and you got it two, three days back.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. And again I had an advantage my stuff could be washed more often, because my mother took the bag, and I believe she --

Q: They actually have hot water there?

A: I tell you exactly, I have no idea. I'm sure they did because there was central steam coming from somewhere. I'm sure they did, a militar -- today they wash in cold water so the stuff doesn't shrink or bleed, but at that time, things were washed in hot water.

Q: Now, it sounds odd to have thousands and thousands of people giving their clothes in this ghetto, to a central laundry. Doesn't it seem --

A: Everyone had it in a bag, and it wasn't taken out of the bag, it was washed in the bag.

Q: In the bag?

A: In the bag.

Q: And you got it back wet? When you got it back -- do you have any idea how the people dried their clothes?

A: You better ask my wife, I don't remember. I never --

Q: You never hung anything.

A: I never had to hang that.

Q: Huh.

A: I don't know, actually my stuff my mother brought, and I don't know whether she hung it somewhere, or whether she -- she was a very fussy lady. At home I remember when I went for vacation to her siblings, they were -- one day they were s-soaking, the next day they were boiling the stuff, the third day they were washing. And then it was washed, they took it down to the beach -- to the river, spread it out on the lawn and let it bleach in the sun. And when it was dry they made it wet again so it can bleach some more. And --

Q: Lot of work.

A: Lot of work. And when she came to visit and our kids in the white socks ran around without shoes, the bottom, the sole was gray, even coming out from the washer. She said, "You see? These machines are no good, you have to wash by hand." So she took the socks and started to wash them in soap. They didn't come out totally white, but she said, "You see? This is how it's supposed to look." What an old fashioned girl.

Q: Let's talk about your --

A: We should talk about my mother, she's more interesting than I am.

Q: Yes, yes, no. I -- no, I want to talk about your mother, and then we'll get back to the -- the -- the music. Your parents come a few weeks after you come, right, three weeks, am I right?

A: Three weeks. And I was standing on the main street with a -- right in front of the church when she walked by and she looked at me like said, did you see what you get us into? You know, I read it on her looks.

Q: And she thought that you had brought her there?

A: No, but --

Q: It was -- but because they were keeping families together?

A: They might have -- no, because if I wouldn't have volunteered, they might have still been there, at home.

Q: Uh-huh. And you too.

A: Ye -- yeah. She didn't say, but I could read it on the looks.

Q: And where did they live when they first came?

A: Mother went to Dresner, and Father went to the Hannover.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It was already opened at that time.

Q: Right. And your father is about how old at this point, in his 60's?

A: He was 64 when he went in.

Q: Wow.

A: 60 -- 60 -- yeah, 64 and a half, 64.

Q: And your mother is 18 years younger. Do they both get work right away?

A: He got a job, I don't know how he discharged it, peeling potatoes. It was a sitting job, and these potatoes were stolen from the pigs, because half of them were rotten. They had not only to peel them, they had to cut away all the rotten part. But if you were hungry you

could eat the [indecipherable] and you had some -- filled your stomach. So it was a good job for -- for some of the people. I don't know how he got it, I had no influence in that. But he -- he wasn't very happy with the whole situation. He -- he sat at home, when he retired from working, and after the war, until he went to bed, he sat at home in the living room, with reading, with a tie, jacket and shoes on. He would not make himself comfortable. He always had to be presentable. So for him this life was -- was --

Q: Was really awful.

A: -- was very tough. And Mother, again, did the best under the circumstances, and as I said, she even once was jailed, and -- by the Germans, because the woman from the upper bed had something she shouldn't have had, or some contraband under the bed, and Mother was on the lowest bed, so she was suspected of -- of is -- that being hers.

Q: Okay, we have -- I'm sorry, I have to interrupt you.

A: That's a short one.

Q: Sorry for the interruption. Y-You were talking about your mother being arrested because the -- her bunkmate, the third tier, had contraband?

A: Had some contraband underneath, and it was thought that it's hers, because it was under her bed. So she spent three days in the vault area of that commander of SS -- Kommandatur, how do you say that in English?

Q: Commandant?

A: Commandant's office, whatever.

Q: Okay.

A: And --

Q: And was this Sydel's office? Was he still there or is this later?

A: I don't remember whether --

Q: You don't know.

A: -- that was on Sydel, or later.

Q: Okay.

A: But she -- she came out of it, she was unshaken that anything could happen to her because God is always with her. She --

- Q: She wasn't --
- A: She wasn't shaken --
- Q: -- hurt?
- A: -- she knew it's going to come out well, and it did three days later.
- Q: Were you worried?
- A: Yeah, sure. Father was -- he was falling apart. And -- because th -- you never knew what's ge -- you had no impact, and -- on -- on anything like that.
- Q: Now, s -- he was living at the opposite end of Terezín from where your mother was?
- A: Mother went to visit him, he --
- Q: She could visit -- she could go?
- A: Yeah, oh yeah.
- Q: Yes. And so when she didn't come, he knew that something had happened. Was he informed in some way that she was arrested, do you know?
- A: I think through me, we tried to first not tell him, and then we said it, and we said it's nothing, it's going to come out well. Actually we were lying, because we didn't know. But -- and then in the end proved that we were -- we were right.
- Q: Now were you bringing extra food to your mother and your father? And was this mainly in the evening, when they were together? Or don't y --
- A: You made me think. Most of the time, because -- yeah, the Hannover, yes, but I also occasionally went to Mother separate and Father separate, but --
- Q: Mm-hm. Now, is there a time when they end up living together? No, they never live together?
- A: In Terezín, [indecipherable] no.
- Q: In Terezín, that's what I mean. They don't. And consequently the three of you are never living together, so that you are all separate.
- A: Correct.
- Q: Do you see them very often? Almost daily?

- A: Yeah, yeah, I -- I was -- after all the kitchens were running, I could dedicate myself to -- as I say, to some of it's menu making, and -- and -- but I did not have to stay in a kitchen, spend a shift, or so --
- Q: I see. So where did you eat mainly? Where did you take your meals?
- A: Where I was at the moment.
- Q: Where you -- so, would you wait in line?
- A: No, no.
- Q: And where would you go -- the -- where people would go --
- A: In --
- Q: Just in the kitchen?
- A: In the kitchen, yeah.
- Q: So essentially you could eat whenever you wanted, as long as food was available?
- A: Yeah, sure. Told you that my aunt was right.
- Q: Yeah. No, no, for -- for sure she was right. And were your parents -- especially your father, at some point found it advantageous that you had gone first? They -- did he realize the implication?
- A: After the war, I found a poem where she writes about it, that they thank for their life to me. Which I don't [indecipherable] I know they're thankful, grateful for their life, for my decision. They never mentioned it, and never came up and I never asked. But I found it in one of the birthday poems.
- Q: And that you found after the war?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: So you -- but you were very devoted to them?
- A: Yeah, in spite of the hittings.
- Q: Right. But they stopped hitting at a certain point, yes?
- A: Yeah, when I got bigger than them.
- Q: Did they? Were they short people, or they tall people?

A: No, Father was tall. All his brothers were tall, and his sisters, too.

Q: Yeah.

A: Mother were shorter. Two sisters were little taller, but the rest of the family was medium
s --

Q: Did they have a sense of humor?

A: I don't think so.

Q: You don't think so.

A: At least not in my presence. Not in my presence.

Q: When -- when you -- I'm going to come to the Verdi Requiem in a minute, but when you
think about -- if you close your eyes and think about walking around Terezín, and think
about what people were looking like, and smelling like and what the sounds were like --
was it hurt --

A: I don't think they were smelling bad. People --

Q: You don't think so?

A: -- tried -- those who were able to move around, took care of their personal hygiene,
including, or in spite of the cold water.

Q: And did people look depressed?

A: They -- I don't know whether it was depressed. I don't know whether -- I'm not a
psychologist, to be able to reco -- but they -- they did not look happy like as if they were
at home, but it -- they -- the feeling must have been there, that they're better off than
those who are deported somewhere, because they were 60 kilometers from Prague. The
majority was -- were Czech speaking people. If they go to the east to Poland, they'll be
among Polish people. They don't know how they will be received, how they will be, how
their life will be with them, where they are the dominant part of the population. And
that's what the Germans Jews complained about, that the Czechs, because they were first
there, had the -- the privileged status, as privileged as it can be in a camp. But they -- they
had the connection --

Q: Was that an accurate --

A: -- yeah, su -- yeah.

Q: It was an accurate portrayal?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any idea how many people understood that if they could be protected, they would not be put in the transport? You felt protected, insofar as --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- one -- one could be --

A: In spite I haven't been at the end.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: So were there --

A: You know, people tried, with connections -- if you knew someone in that office, if you knew someone very well, you could go there and say, do something with that card. So they do something, but another family has to go.

Q: Right.

A: So then you would feel -- should feel bad, although they may be going in the next transport, but at that time you did something that -- it wasn't right. When I speak in schools, I had a sixth grader ask me, "Do you feel guilty that you survived?" And that's a heavy question for a sixth grader. And I didn't. I don't feel guilty, because I would feel -- I -- I would feel guilty if I would have caused somebody else to die, but I don't feel guilty that I survived, I only feel sad for those who didn't. And this -- that -- you get some of these tough questions from those kids.

Q: Did you ever feel -- forget guilty, because clearly you didn't do something against anybody, right? But there is a kind of -- I don't know whether I want to call it moral compromise one makes. You can't be morally pure in a situation like that. So the fact that you're protected always means that someone else is unprotected.

A: Yeah. The self preservation --

Q: The self preservation, yeah --

A: No, no, the -- the act, or the thought of self preservation --

Q: Is strong.

A: -- preservation, makes you partial to yourself without regard about somebody else.

Q: And that you understood, for a long time.

A: Yeah.

Q: Let's talk about the Requiem.

A: No, that comes afterwards. First we have to talk about the inspection of the international Red Cross. And the Germans just decided what they will do, and who will be there, report card writer. We found out it's the international Red Cross, everybody was happy. Now, the international Red Cross, they will force them to make it real, a proper, a good and beneficial stay here. Give all of us to have a beneficial stay. So it was designated which way they will led -- be led, on that -- that was the main street between the square and the -- and the church. The barracks and tents, where the war industrial production was taking place was all taken down. The girls from the agriculture planted lawn and -- and flower beds on that square. And the houses on that street all got a face lift, a -- a new coat of paint. And stores were opened, money was printed. Have you seen the money? You must have.

Q: [inaudible].

A: Terezín money in all denominations, and it looks like money of any other country, except for George Washington, there was Moses with the two tablets on it. And there was not much to do with it, becau -- so they opened the bank, and you could make a -- a savings account, but there was no interest on your money, just to deposit it.

Q: So when did all of that start? The pre -- the -- the preparation for the '44 -- do you know?

A: End of '42, beginning of '43.

Q: So it's a long period of time?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And there was a shoe store and the clothes store, and I think I told you about it. They put the -- the clothing that was in that warehouse was suddenly put out, put on coat -- a co -- coat hangars, and exposed and exhibited in that store, and the shoes, too. And that was that -- the only benefit of that money. You could buy for the -- get the money, because after three years, your shoes wear, and your clothes wear, you have not much to change. So that was a benefit. There was a grocery store, and they were selling there mustard and relish. I don't know, the Germans must have had a -- a surplus of those two items. But it was a good -- good to -- to vary a taste of your slice of bread that you got.

Q: And who got the -- everybody get the money, or only a certain portion of you?

A: Those who worked.

Q: Those who worked.

A: Those who worked. And you [indecipherable] enough you could take a friend. You paid for tickets for the -- for those performances. And I don't know what else you could use your money for, the stores, the bank, the -- the [indecipherable]

Q: Right.

A: And you could buy a stamp, that you could send somebody in Prague, which they would use the stamp to send you a food package.

Q: So you could receive food packages?

A: You could get a food package. There's no guarantee that you get everything that's in the package.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Some the Germans would steal, and some they -- take out, consider contraband. And you know, if they send a loaf of bread it was cut open to see where there's anything inside that shouldn't be there. Like in prisons. And so -- and some was stolen by the people who worked in that Terezín Post Office, other Jews. That's the dark side of the prisoners. And so these were the few things I can remember the money was good for.

Q: So if this starts in '43, all the preparations, is that when Schacter comes up with the idea of the Verdi Requiem?

A: For some reason, in January '43, the last transport was sent away, and here we are in July, and no transports since January. I have no idea why. Everybody was up and happy, that this is the end of deportations. So he also had got the courage to start to implement what he was thinking the Requiem, knowing, or at least anticipating that this choir will stay together. There was a huge uproar when he came up with that idea. All the scholars and professors, and the -- and the borders -- the -- the elder -- the -- the Council of Elders, they all protested for different reasons. The -- the scholars and the rabbis, why would you as Jews in a Jewish ghetto perform a Catholic mass for the dead, when there are comparable works on Jewish themes? [indecipherable] and so, which cannot be performed in -- anywhere in occupied Europe, and this is the only place you could. He did not give in to this. He didn't say it openly because it was dangerous to say, but I know that he -- his mind was on being -- wanting to be able to sing to the Germans in Latin what he couldn't tell them in German to their face. Like the -- the [indecipherable] the day of wrath, the [indecipherable] that it -- in this book, the names of all the sinners are inscribed, and none will escape the punishment. So this -- there were about three or

four such occasions. And this is what drove him to get it out of him, and be able, even for distance, in the absentia, to tell the Germans.

Q: You mean whether the Germans were there or not?

A: Pardon?

Q: Wh -- you're saying whether the Germans were there or not to hear it.

A: No, yeah, they were not there.

Q: Right.

A: And the Council of Elders thought, if the Germans find out the intentions behind this performance, that will really be dangerous for the singers and for him, and maybe even implications for the rest of the population. And --

Q: I ne -- I need to interrupt you, I'm sorry --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- I'm going to stop the tape [indecipherable]

A: Is another oil truck coming in?

Q: No.

End of Tape #7

Tape #8

Q: Edgar, you were talking about the council being possibly upset if the German -- I mean --

A: Really upset.

Q: -- upset if the Germans would find out. Now, let me ask you something. You said you know from Schacter what -- what he was really feeling.

A: That was the driving thought behind --

Q: Yes. Yeah, is -- is that because you were rooming with him at this time, and you talked with him?

A: Yeah. This friend of mine, the lawyer, meanwhile was deported, and we found in a attic of a house in the a backyard of one of those private houses, that must have been a mother-in-law arrangement, and the stairs up to the attic, and with a carpenter connection again, we got a -- a little separation, and we had a room with privacy for the two of us. And so I was pretty much informed about him, his lifestyle, his thoughts, and his determination. And --

Q: But let me ask you -- I -- I just want to know -- understand something. You -- did you meet him separately from joining the choir, or only when you joined the choir?

A: Through the choir --

Q: Through [indecipherable]

A: -- we met, and for -- for some reasons, including that I provided some more food for him, we ca -- we came close.

Q: You got together, I see.

A: I still mention, I don't have any complexes that he would have found in me a -- a level companion, cause I was a young guy, and his circle were the musi -- social circle were the musicians, the composers, and he had other interests. But we were very close, and very good, and --

Q: And what was the difference in age between the two of you, do you think?

A: He was born 1905, so it was about 19 years.

Q: That's a big difference, yes. But you -- you spent a lot of time together, I gather?

A: Yeah. Not a -- not a lot. We were both --

Q: Busy.

A: -- during the day we were both working, and then -- he then became part of that free time department. And I think his assignment, his job was working within this department so he didn't have to go somewhere to a -- I don't know stone quarry, or whatever he worked in in that. So that was his day job. And then in the evening, after everybody finished, they came for rehearsal.

Q: So did he tell you ver -- talk to you about wanting to do the Verdi Requiem?

A: Yeah.

Q: And he told you what --

A: And he said why, that we can't tell them in German, and I -- it's -- it's -- it has to come out, and this is one way I can get it out. And when he was told about all the dangers, he told everyone in the choir, "It is assumed to be dangerous to you, to us, to the rest of the inmates here. So if you don't want to be part of it, I don't feel bad if you leave." Nobody left.

Q: And what did the council th-think about the danger, that -- that somehow the Nazis would discover his intention?

A: That if they find out that he -- that the purpose of this was to tell them, you bastards, you going to get it at one point, that they will not appreciate it.

Q: But let me ask you something, when you read the words of the Verdi Requiem, it's als -- there's also words of forgive these people, whoever they are, who -- who, and the Requiem is speaking about both the wrath of God and begging for forgiveness, so --

A: Yes, so this -- this part we ignored.

Q: But you sang it.

A: And -- yeah, ignored as a -- as a thought --

Q: I see.

A: -- that propelled us to do it.

Q: I see.

A: And in saying the -- the Libera me, was interpreted as set me free from here.

Q: So some of it was said for the Jews, and some of it was said against the -- the Nazis, as the interpretation, yes?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: When -- when you were rehearsing, did you feel this kind of emotion, that you -- when -- just when you're rehearsing yourself --

A: No, I just felt I'm part of a group that despises the Germans and the Nazis, and that this is the best we can do to get even with them within our capabilities.

Q: What was the -- were the rehearsals more intense than when you did "The Bartered Bride," and "The Magic Flute," and "The Marriage of Figaro"?

A: It was, because it was a different language, and it was much more difficult music.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, right.

A: And much more concentration was required. And some people who didn't work in the kitchen, were not so well-fed to really dedicate themselves to such a -- that was a hard --

Q: Yes.

A: -- work on a half empty stomach.

Q: Yes, it's difficult singing.

A: Yeah. So with the fact that there were no transports, he was encouraged that he'll have an easy job, as easy as this can be. Th -- I am sure Toscanini would have never undertaken it with -- with well-fed people, to teach them without a score. So it took six weeks -- we were six weeks into the rehearsal when the rumors sprung up the transports will resume. So every time a transport is put together, people from different sectors are involved. And so the choir members anticipated that some of them will definitely be included in the transport. So they pushed him to make one performance for them, for their hard work, so they can enjoy performing it. And he would not, because it wasn't up to his standards yet. But then it became known that by September six, 5,000 people will be deported. He couldn't resist, because he knew a lot of them will be in it, and he made a performance for them and their families and friends, not the o -- open, public sh -- performance.

Q: So this is September '43?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the irony with this, the sad irony, that these 5,000 people -- about -- he lost about half the choir, and these people went to Auschwitz and they came there, and they were treated differently than anybody else who came before them and after them. They could

retain their clothes, they could retain their luggage, and they went into a camp which was from then on called the family camp. They lived together, not in privacy, but families were together. And they were there for six months, and they were not working, they did not -- and this Freddie Hirsch, he took care of the kids, entertained them and taught them. Als -- also made sport with them, and art, and he really took care of the kids. And this group was held there while the Germans were negotiating with the allies in exchange of the German prisoners of war for these Jews, and also some war material. They wanted some trucks, and -- and of course the allies wouldn't give the Germans another few thousand soldiers that will then turn against them, and trucks that they will use in the war against them. So when the negotiations fell through, in one night, all of those who were still alive from the 5,000 went into the gas. Was exactly three months -- six months later, on March eight. And this is also -- on March seventh is the -- was Masaryks' birthday, President Masaryk, the first -- the creator of Czechoslovakia. So could be that had something to do with it, because they were -- they were planning the -- timing some things to coincide with some -- something that gives you a bigger -- a ce -- bor -- bigger pain.

Q: Was Schacter worried that he was going to be deported at that point?

A: No, hadn't --

Q: No, because --

A: No.

Q: Was he protected in some way, do you think?

A: Not that I knew, but those people who put together the transport list had some kind of directives whom to leave out, as long as it was possible.

Q: And as far as you know, who was it who put together these transport lists?

A: There was a department, it was called evidence. Evidence is where all the files about every single one who came into Terezín was kept. A card with a name, with a transport, date of birth, a transport when they came in, and -- and also the transporting date when they left Terezín. I did after the war search, y -- my parents survived, in spite of Schliesser being sent to Auschwitz, and myself, my parents survived. I thought the easiest thing would have been if he had written on top of the card -- of their card, do not deport it, initial it, that would have been the easiest. I got copies of those cards, there's nothing there, and I was researching how he did it, because he must have done it, because it's inconceivable that two, old, useless people would stay there, especially before the Red Cross came, they deported a lot of old people, they wanted only -- they wanted the Red Cross only to see young, good looking people.

Q: Maybe there was a special section for cards, a different place.

A: So the -- the staff in that office --

Q: Would do it.

A: -- did it.

Q: And was that then approved by the council, or did they just do it themselves?

A: The head of the Council of Elders had to sign the transport list.

Q: List.

A: And then later we get to why he was -- and the whole Council of Elders was sent away. He must have found out where they go, and what's happening, and their destination, and he refused to sign it. He told the camp commander, you sign it. So he, the camp commander, must have guessed that he knows what's happening, and didn't want the word to be spread among the inmates because a panic would be created. So the whole council left. But even though in September six, and the -- half the choir left, and they have -- they have -- he has recruited new people and started the whole thing from the beginning with them. And he lost one more time, less people, and recruited new and started a third time with new people. And then in January '44 was the first performance.

Q: With the new -- with the new group. Did any of the soloists get deported --

A: No.

Q: -- or was it only among the choir?

A: Maybe some. I didn't know all of them --

Q: [indecipherable] yeah.

A: -- but those [indecipherable] Schacter did not.

Q: Uh-huh, in -- in the Requiem group --

A: Yeah, no.

Q: -- the soloists did not get deported.

A: No.

Q: I see.

A: And he had two for each part, should something happen to one, he has a replacement.

Q: Another person.

A: [indecipherable] good organi --

Q: And when you did the September performance, September '43, before that first deportation, was that with a piano accompaniment?

A: Everything was only piano --

Q: Only piano.

A: All the time, only piano.

Q: And did he --

A: And when I listen now to a Requiem with a concert, and a -- the -- the trumpets and the drums, I said how -- it seemed to us like -- like absolutely perfect performance, just the piano.

Q: Right.

A: And a crappy piano on top of it. How did they bring out all these -- these impressions, these results [indecipherable] of -- that the orchestra can provide.

Q: And did he play the piano, or did he do the conducting and someone else played?

A: No, bu -- there -- during the rehearsal he played the piano, and do -- and during -- in the performance, Gideon Klein played.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: They were very close together.

Q: And did Gideon kli -- Klein ever play at the rehearsals?

A: No, no.

Q: So it's a -- it's somewhat odd, however, to play only at a performance, and never at a rehearsal.

A: Gideon Klein had other work to do --

Q: Yeah, well he's --

A: -- he -- he was composing --

Q: Right.

A: -- and he was playing per -- giving performances. Schacter, that's why I said he didn't tolerate any inattention, because everybody had to look at his eyes, and see when he gets the signal.

Q: Do you remember anything ever going wrong in the concerts?

A: Wrong?

Q: Yeah.

A: In the concert?

Q: Yeah.

A: I'm sure it did, but everybody was so grateful for it that -- that either they didn't notice, didn't want to notice, didn't make an impact on them, they were happy to -- to be part of it whether active or passive.

Q: Now, once you started giving performances, or Schacter is conducting the performances of the Requiem, starting in January '44 -- January '44, right? You give about 14 or 15 --

A: 15, yeah.

Q: 15 performances.

A: And each time with less singers.

Q: So you ne -- he never restarts again, he just accommodates?

A: Only three times. Only three times he started to -- with new people. And then after the 15th, he was left with 60 singers.

Q: Out of 150.

A: And not the same amount in each voice.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So he didn't want it. But then came the order from camp commander, that he wants a performance of the Requiem for high SS officials who came from Vienna and Prague, from Berlin, to shake the hands of the Red Cross people who were also invited -- no Jews.

Q: This is -- this is Rahm, right?

- A: Rahm, yeah. And you know they had to pay homage to the Red Cross [indecipherable] and so now, I didn't know -- he didn't want to do it with the -- with the regular choir, but it was an opportunity he was dreaming of. Not only can he sing it to them for distance, but he has them right in front of him, they are sitting there, and he can really tell them. And the paradox again is, that we all thought -- we told him, and the Germans were the only ones who knew that we were actually singing our own Requiem. You know, they knew where we will end up. They didn't think that there would be some survivors. So that was a mutual giving it to each other.
- Q: And the Germans knew what was being sung, because they knew the Catholic liturgy.
- A: I think -- I'm sure, yeah. But I think they -- they thought it's a -- it's a musical performance, and -- but they also understood the meaning of it, and what's going to happen with us, that this is --
- Q: Your own Requiem.
- A: Our own eulogy. The -- when this Red Cross came, I couldn't understand that they accept the German conditions that they will not interview people at random on the street, only special auditioned people that the Germans prepared to meet them. And they knew that they're saying lies, but it was again against the threat of the whole family being endangered if they refuse. So they did it. But I don't -- still don't understand, if you were psychologist, rather than philosophy doctor, I would ask you, how is it possible to audition, and indoctrinate little kids to the same performance? When they came to the playground, and there were some kids who never been on a playground because they were not allowed at home to go, the little ones. When they came for the chocolate bar that was on the table in front of the playground, the only one uniform was Rahm, and they had to address him uncle, and they, "Uncle Rahm, again chocolate?" As if they were already fed up with chocolate, and there were some kids who never knew what chocolate was because it wasn't on their ration tickets at home. This I don't understand, how they got the kids to do that. Maybe they told them you're going to play a theater or whatever. But this were tough for me to understand.
- Q: Did you see that? Were you there?
- A: No, not --
- Q: No.
- A: -- not, I didn't --
- Q: Were you told that at the time?
- A: Yeah, yeah, by the -- the -- those who were in charge of the kids. And the agriculture workers, and my wife among them, dressed in shorts, and nice blouse, marching by with

the rake, or the -- the -- the spade over the shoulder, singing happy songs going to work. And the orchestra was playing in that pavilion on the -- on the sta -- on the town square. It was a real happy town. This doesn't belong to my li -- yeah, I hear the party. After the war, in -- in Newton was a Harvard philosophy psychology professor who researched to write a book about the Red Cross, International Red Cross at that time, what they should have done and didn't do, and they shouldn't have done and did do. And he was researching it, and I knew about it because I was translating his papers that he brought from Germany, from Austria, even the French. And at one point he told me he had an appointment with the then president of the International Red Cross, Dr. Rossler. In his office, in his factory -- he had aluminum, a huge aluminum factory in Switzerland, and he came there, and the secretary says, "Oh, Dr. Rossler called, he apologizes, he'll be an hour, hour and a half late from another appointment. Make yourself comfortable in the library." Brought in cup of coffee, said [indecipherable] whatever. And he perused -- and he found documents that he had branch factories in Austria and in Germany where he used prisoners from concentration camp. So how much was his enthusiasm to confront Germans, the Nazis? Speaks for itself. So --

Q: Were you supposed to be interviewed by anybody during this time? Where -- where were you when they were visiting, did you see them?

A: I -- I was just doing my work, I was not --

Q: Are you surprised that nobody said anything?

A: No.

Q: No. You think that fear was --

A: And I'm sorry they didn't, but some single guy who didn't have a family could have spilled the beans, but it wouldn't have helped, because this was called the International Red Cross, but the seven directors all were Swiss.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: There was no internationality in that.

Q: I see.

A: And so it was very well done, like a real Potemkin village, that the Germans orchestrated. Before that cross -- Red Cross came I mentioned the old people -- a lot of old -- thousands of old people were deported, and after that, it must have been under the influence of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto that the Germans did not want it to happen in other ghettos as well, so all able bodied people who were not necessary for the war industry, and like agriculture for where they produced for the Germans, and those who were necessary to maintain the functioning of the town, of the ghetto as such, the physical functioning, were all deported, and Schliesser was gone, and I was among -- the

kitchens were running, so I was no l-longer needed. So that was end of September '44. I went and --

Q: Let me -- let me -- let me hold it for one second. This performance for the Germans, was it Germans sitting in the front row?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you can see them, and who -- do you see Eichmann. Is he there?

A: I didn't know Eichmann --

Q: Oh.

A: -- I -- he -- he jus -- it is said that he was there, but -- and it -- we often heard Eichmann is in Terezín, transports will go. They knew that he was in charge of transports. But I never saw him face to face, so I wouldn't have recognized him among that group.

Q: Now, I know that you reported -- you reported in octo -- October one of 1944.

A: October oneth, okay.

Q: So then [indecipherable] what happens between September -- the perfor -- the -- wait a second, June -- I'm sorry, June of '44 and October? Does Schacter keep you folks singing? There's a few months there after -- after the Red Cross visit, or is he deported?

A: He was deported after me.

Q: After you.

A: I didn't know -- when I left --

Q: I see, he was still there --

A: -- he was still there, and I didn't know or think that he will be also deported.

Q: I see. So does the choir -- does he keep working with people? Do you --

A: We -- we went -- after the Red Cross visit, we still did -- we perfor -- we performed, and that was not much of a choir required, Pergolesi's "La Serva Padrone", it was mainly soloists and a small choir, but -- and we were doing mainly get-togethers with anyone who wanted could come and -- and listen.

Q: So it became much more informal?

A: Yeah, informal.

Q: Uh-huh. Did you end up learning music? Could you read music by this time?

A: No, but Schacter taught me. He started to teach me to play the piano, then I started to read music. And unfortunately, it didn't go for very long, and after the war I had no chance to resume. I had to work to maintain my parents and myself because we had nothing except what they had left from the 110 pounds. I had nothing, coming from Auschwitz. So there was never an opportunity for me to break and study music.

Q: Right. We have to turn -- change the tape.

End of Tape #8

Tape #9

Q: Edgar, prior to the -- the visit of the Red Cross, which was as far as I know, June 24th, 1944, di -- th-the painter's affair, they arrested the pain -- the artist was before that, am I correct?

A: It was before that.

Q: And so they were deported before the performance?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that also surprising to you that that happened?

A: We found out that -- why it happened, I don't know that -- how -- how it became known, but we found out in the -- on the street that the Germans were [indecipherable] for this.

Q: Right, for the sort of undercover --

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Now, you said that Schacter was a very sweet guy when he wasn't being a conductor, but once he was going to be serious about his music, he was a tyrant. Was he also charismatic? Was he also a very compelling person, or was he just very strict when he was doing his --

A: While we were working?

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't know what do you mean by charismatic.

Q: Well, we --

A: He just was -- he demanded full attention, there was -- there was nothing else but rehearsing, and if you wanted to be with him, you had to pay full attention.

Q: I think what I mean is, obviously people wanted to be with him.

A: Yeah.

Q: It wasn't just the music, because you could have somebody in front of you who is conducting, who you didn't want to be with, right? I mean, the music alone wouldn't necessarily be enough if someone wasn't interesting, or taught you well. I mean, he had to have something.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: When he was teaching you piano, was he easier on you?

A: Yeah.

Q: He was?

A: This wa -- yeah, well this was -- he was not aiming to make me acam -- academy member, but he was starting to teach me music. Whether it was the relationship that he was easier, but he did not have a -- I don't think he set a goal for himself where I should be at what time --

Q: Right.

A: -- with my piano knowledge, but [indecipherable]

Q: Now didn't he also give some recitals, piano recitals, or did he accompany people?

A: I think he did accompany some. Not very often, but I don't think he gave recitals --

Q: Did he compose?

A: -- because there were better pianists than he was.

Q: Uh-huh, than him, uh-huh. And was he a composer also?

A: No, no.

Q: So he was primarily a conductor, yes. Did he ever conduct some of the work of the composers who were working in Terezín, Olan, or --

A: Very few of those works were presented to the public. They -- they played it, they performed it for the critique of the other musicians only. So those compositions were not heard in public in Terezín.

Q: Although "Brundibar" was, wasn't it?

A: "Brundibar" is another story. That was composed in Prague, still, and when Krasa was deported to Terezín, he left the manuscript with the director of the orphanage, who was a musician himself. And unbeknownst to Krasa, this director, Freundenfeld was his name, studied with the kids "Brundibar," and performed in Prague.

Q: In Prague.

A: And Krasa had no idea about it.

Q: Huh.

A: So when we came to Prague -- to -- to Terezín, he continued to work with "Brundibar" with an enlarged ensemble, it -- other kids, not just those from the orphanage. And he -- and Krasa was -- was very happy with it. He did not interfere or participate in anything else, or any of those performances. There was a time when Schacter auditioned -- not auditioned, rehearsed with the kids, but he never conducted "Brundibar." It was always this Freudenfeld.

Q: Huh. So often the person who rehearsed the kids would not necessarily be the one that would --

A: No, it was not very often. This Freudenfeld, he was dedicated to that. There were 55 performances of "Brundibar".

Q: Of bru -- yes. Did you see it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you like it?

A: Yeah, it was a -- it was the same -- the same motive as the Requiem, just a smaller framework that -- that was the -- especially with a [indecipherable] with the finale, where they sing we have overcome the oppressor, and we won, and victory is at hand. That was -- and the Germans didn't know, because they were singing with -- in Czech. So that was a similar kind of a resistance, or at least a sole improvement and spiritual enlightenment as the --

Q: But what -- from what you explained, it's clear that the Germans are oppressors, but it was not clear to you or your colleagues that they were murderers.

A: No, that --

Q: So --

A: Now let me -- there was a -- one guy from Terezín went to Auschwitz, and one of the SS men, a disgruntled SS man was a schoolmate in Sudeten. He brought in the SS uniform and took him out on a motorcycle from Auschwitz. And he came to Prague -- to Terezín, and he spoke with Edelstein, and told him about what's happening, and nobody would believe him. This is impossible, it is -- it's unthinkable. But then there were some other -- for instance, those people who were helping load or unload the -- the dep-deportees noticed on the wagons that the -- always the same ones were coming back, you know, they are numbered, coded, numbered. And so one of them knew there is somewhere a board loose behind the frame of the -- of that little window that's up there, the barred window. He said, when you arrive, look where, and write it down, and put it in there,

under that trimming. And it came back Auschwitz but the person could not describe anything back -- because when you come to Auschwitz, you don't know what's happening, you know -- know you're getting a rougher treatment right away, but you have no idea. I know from my own experience.

Q: How did you find out about this man who was taken out of Auschwitz by the -- did you find it out when you were in Terezín or after?

A: After.

Q: After.

A: After.

Q: You think you would have believed him, if he had told you? What do you think?

A: If I had known him as somebody who does not exaggerate, I -- I might have --

Q: When you think about Edelstein just saying it can't be, when he's -- finally has before him, someone --

A: It's odd.

Q: -- do you think about what -- what's the matter [indecipherable]

A: You could think he wants to make himself interesting, or -- it's -- it's unthinkable to a normal person. Not that I consider myself totally normal, but --

Q: And do you think this is '43 or '44? Or earlier?

A: Four ya -- '44.

Q: '44. And are there no other rumors coming through? Nothing?

A: No, no.

Q: Nothing is coming through to you because you're so isolated.

A: No. It was a -- one other person that escaped from Auschwitz, a -- a Rudolph Vrba. I don't know how he did it, I know that there were a group that dug a hole, and covered it up, and put on top something that repels the dogs, so they wouldn't give it away that they are in there. And they -- they escaped -- some of them --

Q: There are four Jews at that time --

A: No.

- Q: And Vrba was with a man named Wetzler. The two of them escaped together. And then Mordowicz and Rosin escaped. And they told what was going on.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And they went to Bratislava, so they were close. It's interesting. After Epstein is taken out -- you know, it's interesting, he doesn't believe this guy, but he doesn't want to sign.
- A: Yeah, he --
- Q: So what is he -- what -- what do you think he's thinking?
- A: I don't know, I think if it is really true, he doesn't want to have the responsibility. He may have weighed -- like --
- Q: And who comes after him?
- A: A German, Dr. Epstein. And he was not a -- really a strong person to push for improvement, so -- so he did what he was told, and then he was shot, and the new camp commander was an Austrian SS man, and he put in an Austrian man to be the head of the council, Murrelstein. He was not a very nice person. He was very self-centered. And after the war he wound up in the Jewish archives in the Vatican, in the library.
- Q: Really?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Working there?
- A: He was a rabbi, this Murrelstein. And he lived his life out in the Vatican.
- Q: Interesting. Did -- did you know Edelstein at all?
- A: Yeah, but not --
- Q: Not well?
- A: No, not --
- Q: No.
- A: He was I -- you know, there was a guy experienced, traveling to Palestine, and on -- on German insistence, and tra -- I was a nobody.
- Q: When Schlisser -- Schliesser was deported, he was deported before you.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you then think you were vulnerable to being deported if he was -- if he was deported?

A: I didn't think I was vulnerable, I thought my parents would be.

Q: Uh-huh. You thought something else would protect you because you were younger?

A: No [indecipherable]

Q: Or something.

A: Yeah, I was the big shot, so I didn't -- wasn't concerned about myself, I was concerned about my parents.

Q: When -- when you think back now before your deportation, and you -- and I don't know whether you thought about the three years that you were there, and thought about what the council did or didn't do, did you have respect for the council?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did.

A: Definitely. They tried their best. Of course, as -- as -- as the carpenter stole a board, and the cook stole a -- a piece of bread or something else, they also did favors for their family and maybe even close friends, that were at the -- at the cost of -- of other -- somebody else. I -- I don't think that anybody under those circumstances would stay totally clean.

Q: Right.

A: And the wife's father did. I'm sorry, I have to apologize, he -- he was straight like an arrow.

Q: Did you know him then?

A: Yes. I didn't know her, but I knew him.

Q: [indecipherable] you knew him.

A: He was the head of the police, the secret police that without uniform made inspections in kitchens and in storerooms and warehouses. And his job and his dedication and his whole thinking was if nothing will be stolen by individuals, everybody will have more.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And that was his driving force.

Q: And his name?

A: Oskar Fuchs.

Q: Oskar Fuchs. So he's one of the rare people who stayed --

A: Absolutely.

Q: -- completely straight.

A: His wife had to deceive him when she -- when Hana brought home some tomatoes from the field, she gave him half a tomato at lunch, and he said, "Where did this come from?" She said "Oh, your daughter worked so well, the supervisor gave her a tomato."

Q: So that was okay. When -- when -- did you receive a notification that you would be deported, eventually did you --

A: Yeah, everybody did, you get the piece of paper, tomorrow, or after tomorrow at this and this time, report to the Hamburger --

Q: Do you remember that moment when you -- this is mail, I guess. I mean, it seems so odd, but how -- was it handed to you? Is there a -- a place where you --

A: It was brought to the place of your residence, wherever you lived. In barracks it was easier, a room, so they put through the five, six, seven from this room, and then they gave it to the room Altesten, there were room supervisor, whatever she was called. Was called eldest, the eldest there, I mean that, even if they were not the oldest. And this was brought, I think just put in under the door where you lived, it was not even handed personally.

Q: Did your heart sink when you saw this?

A: No, I li -- I don't think heart sank, I -- so I'm going, and I'm going to do something somewhere else. I don't think --

Q: And did you go -- who were the first people you told? Did you go to your parents right away? And --

A: Father was devastated, and Mother, she was such a believer in God, that nothing could shake her.

Q: Really?

- A: She was the -- sure that I'm coming back.
- Q: Did that give you strength, her -- her being so sure, in some way?
- A: I didn't think myself that -- that I would not come back.
- Q: You didn't.
- A: So you go somewheres --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- do your work there, and then when the war ends --
- Q: And the war --
- A: -- you go home.
- Q: Right. And you were allowed how much? Were you allowed to bring a bag of something?
- A: There were no -- no prescriptions for -- as to weight, but it was one duffel bag with the -- with the bedding, and -- and another luggage with some clothing and shoes.
- Q: Now this was not a passenger train that you went on.
- A: No, that was not.
- Q: This is a cattle train.
- A: It was not any more. And there were a lot of people, about close to 70, and not everybody could sit at the same time, you had to alternate. And if one of the older people fainted, or died, then they lied there, so it took up two additional spaces for someone to sit down. And -- sorry -- we didn't know how long we're going to be on the trip -- on the train, but it took three full days and there was no food, and no water in that enclosed truck -- wagon. There was one -- it was called comfort bucket in the corner, without any privacy, and [indecipherable] but you had to go, you had to go. And with 70 people in three days, that bucket was full very quickly, and the same kind of -- of atmosphere there were not -- as with the old people when they went to the bathroom and couldn't hold it, it was horrendous.
- Q: So this is the first time, for you, to be in this situation, that so deteriorated, physically and --
- A: Yeah.
- Q: -- otherwise, yes?

A: And while we were the -- very soon -- I don't remember how soon after the door was locked and sealed, two boys from that home for the boys have attached themselves to me. I don't know why, I wasn't a father figure, but I was a tall guy, and somehow they felt confident. And we stayed together the -- the three days in the wagon. And when the door opened, there was -- wild guys came in, in those prison uniforms, and started to yell in German, out, out, out, hurry. I looked back, and I could read backwards, from the back that sign, "Arbeit macht frei," and Auschwitz. But it still didn't mean anything to me, I [indecipherable] we coming to labor camp to do --

Q: You saw a sign that said Auschwitz?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes?

A: On -- on that building, the railroad sta -- the railroad -- the -- the railroad station. And one of those wild guys saw the two boys who were with me, and he asked them how old are you? And they say 15. He said, "You are 18." Without explaining why he said it, and where they should use it, and was also a man -- well, there were several men supporting themselves on a cane, and the same guy told them, don't come out with a cane, leave the cane here. Also, not saying why, so I'm sure the guy didn't listen, if he needed a cane to support himself. And we were put on five abreast lined up, the whole contingent. And we were moving forward, and you can -- forward I saw two SS uniformed men with white gloves. And when my -- when I was in the first row, they went to the -- through the five, and he just looked at me and waved me to one side. And the boys were next to me, he asked them, "How old are you?" Now it lit up in their head, and they said 18, and it was their luck because he send them to the good side. So then we were -- when there were enough people together, we were marched along a -- those barbed wire fences. And there was a guard, a SS with a rifle over his shoulder walking at [indecipherable], and I naively asked him, "What are those chimneys?" They're not only smoke coming out, also sparks, and flames. I didn't smell anything, and he said, "Oh, that's the bakery, they must have burned the whole load of bread."

Q: You didn't smell anything?

A: No. It could be the wind wasn't coming in my direction.

Q: But you were in Birkenau?

A: Birkenau.

Q: Mm-hm

A: And until we met some veterans, didn't find out what this -- these chimneys are. We were brought to a huge hall, with nothing in except benches around, and pegs on the wall. And

the pegs were numbered, and we were told to take everything off and hang it on a peg, and remember the number, so you can get back to your clothes. Till the last moment were deceptions. And everything you have in your pocket, throw -- there's a blanket on the ground, throw out everything.

Q: And who's telling you this? Are these --

A: SS.

Q: SS.

A: These were SS people. Throw everything down. And don't let us find anything on you, you'll get severely punished. Then we were shaved, every hair on our body, and with me they had a lot of work because top of my head to the big toe, I'm hairy. And --

Q: And they shaved all over your body?

A: All of the body, and then they did it with -- they never changed the blade, that was dull, they were pulling the hair, and ripping the skin, and after that, we were washed down with some disinfectant that burned in those scratches. And then we were brought into shower. Hot water, nice showering, after three days in fil -- filth. There was no food the three days, and we still were not eating before the shower. And from there, not coming back to the peg, but another door, they chased us out, naked and wet from a hot shower in the cold, wintry night, to another barrack, and then we're marching along a counter, behind which some prisoners were sitting and throwing at us a pair of pants, a jacket, and a pair of boots. And the hat to take off -- not a hat, a cap to take off when you meet an SS man, it was for no other reason there. And those -- that clothing was without regard to our size. So it was up to us then to exchange it so it fits. And we were brought to a barrack, and I've no idea where I was in Birkenau, I couldn't -- couldn't identify where we were. But the kids were with me, the two, and we were not working while we were in Auschwitz, in Birkenau. During the day we were just in front of the barracks, hanging around, loitering they call it. And [indecipherable] we went for the soup and the bread. But every other day, or sometimes every day, and sometimes over three days break, people came to look for workers in their factories. Civilians accompanied by an officer. And we wanted to get away from those chimneys, so whatever, whoever they were looking for, we applied or [indecipherable] and we got away to a welding job, they were looking for welders. There were 350 of us, and at that point, when we were accepted to become welders, they started to tattoo us, the numbers.

Q: So your -- how long are you in Auschwitz before --

A: I have no idea, but I know it --

Q: Week? Two weeks?

A: -- I know it wasn't long.

Q: Wasn't long. Could have been a few days?

A: Yeah.

Q: But you were eating?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes, they were feeding you? So once you s --

A: Yeah, Auschwitz diet.

Q: Right. Worse than the Terezín diet, right?

A: Mm.

Q: So once you decide that you're going to say that you're welders --

A: I said anything I was --

Q: Anything, right.

A: -- but before they came to me, they had their contingent --

Q: Right.

A: So --

Q: So then they tattoo you?

A: Yeah. And now if you were psychology PhD, I would ask you a question, but I have to live without the answer to that. There were three guys doing the tattooing, and I was at the edge of my life, or edge of death, or whatever you call it in Auschwitz, and I went to see which one does it the nicest way. And in that line I lined up. I've seen guys with, you know, irregular numbers, b-big ones, small ones, sideways and so. I wanted to have it neat.

Q: Can you show us your number?

A: I can show you this, and it's very regular and neat. It has to be read this way, I don't know why they didn't do it here.

Q: Yeah.

A: 11636.

Q: It's E11636.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And from that moment on -- I don't know when in Auschwitz they called us by a name, but they must have, because people who were with me, I know in alphabetical order, they have either higher or lower number. So --

Q: So you must have been lined up alphabetically.

A: Alphabetically either by name, or they had documents, I -- I'm sure they had documents, because they came from Terezín, the documents came along.

Q: The documents came to Auschwitz from Terezín, so --

A: Yeah, the names of -- of the deportees.

Q: And were cards made out for you in Auschwitz, do you have any idea?

A: No, nothing was -- I -- I have no -- nobody asked, interviewed, nothing. Th-They may have called my name, I don't remember that part. Just judging by the fact that I -- those whom I meet, whether their name starts with a lower or higher letter in the alphabet, they have a lower, or higher number of the --

Q: Right.

A: -- the tattoo.

Q: I think we have to stop the tape and change it.

End of Tape #9

Tape #10

Q: So you're in Auschwitz for a few days. Do you hear the orchestra when people --

A: No, not in Auschwitz.

Q: Not in Auschwitz?

A: No. Although I read later on that they supposedly played upon arrival for the -- for the arriving prisoners to -- still to give them a -- an impression that they're coming somewhere to a spa where the orchestra plays for them. But I -- I have not heard or seen the orchestra in Auschwitz.

Q: I see. So when people were going to work, you didn't hear anything?

A: No.

Q: And were people near you in the barracks going to work?

A: No.

Q: Going in and out -- no they weren't?

A: No that was -- that was just those who waited to be taken away --

Q: I see.

A: -- for jobs.

Q: And where were you sent? Aft -- after your tattoo, you weren't -- you had the same clothes, the same shoes, but they just tattooed you?

A: Yeah. And we went to -- by tractor, or we walked, I don't remember cause I forgot. We went to the train, by whatever method. It was the same cattle wagon, and we were going to Gleiwitz, which is nearby, and it also took longer than it should have taken because the military transports had priority on the track. That's why it took three days to go to Auschwitz, a trip that shouldn't have taken longer than five, six hours.

Q: But you -- you were in Auschwitz before the uprising, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: The uprising the end of October, so you have left by this time.

A: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: So they take you --

A: You mean the crematorium -- yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah, the blow up, yes. So you're by train to Gleiwitz. And what happens when you come to Gleiwitz?

A: From Gleiwitz we marched through the streets, into the camp, there's a huge camp. And the whole camp was -- all inmates in that camp were working in a -- a railroad repair shop that was fixing wagons that were damaged by the Royal Air Force on the way to the front. So with my experience, I did get a -- a cutting torch, at the gate, cutting off all the damaged parts of the wagon, and then the wagon went further on to be -- to -- to parts to be measured, and re-install the good parts. And the job had a good side and a bad one. Everything in life, I guess, has a good and a bad side. The good one was when a wagon with garbage came in, I had the first pick. The bad part was that was in the open gate, and we had nothing, we had no underwear, no socks, just those cotton pants and the -- and the jacket. And -- very cold. My meister was a -- a Pole -- a German Pole, or a Polish German. A Pole of German nationality. He wasn't especially good, but he was one of those who was afraid to be good. He wasn't -- he wasn't very bad, but y -- we worked 12 hour shifts, six days a week, one week day, one week night. And when we went to work there was music in Gleiwitz, and when we came back was music.

Q: Musicians sitting outside, or walking --

A: What?

Q: Where were the musi -- or was the --

A: Next to the gate, standing --

Q: They were standing near the [indecipherable]

A: -- the musicians were standing next to the gate as we came in, and if we didn't march in proper step, we were helped by a kick to improve the step. Big guys like me deteriorated in Auschwitz much faster than the little skinny ones. I guess our body required more than they were offering, and a lot of pussyboils presented themselves on my back. And the pus rubbed off on the jacket, and when it dried, it rubbed back into the wounds. I also had some that were not opened, were -- the skin didn't break and the pus was pushing, and it was terrible pressure, and they were very painful. And I didn't want to go to the infirmary because the Germans didn't like sick Jews, they liked them less than the healthy Jews. So -- but it became unbearable, so I went. And there was a French doctor, I don't know whether he was a doctor, or just filled the position of a doctor -- a -- a prisoner, and he --

for anesthesia he put me down on a table face down, and for anesthesia he used three guys, two sitting each on one of my arms, and one sitting on my legs, and he proceeded to open those closed -- it was a split second unpleasant, but there was immediate relief, the pressure was gone. So you bite your teeth together, and -- and I went immediately back. There was no -- no bandage, no stitches, no nothing, just cut open, relief, and I went back to the barracks, and next shift I went to work.

Q: And you're welding?

A: Pardon?

Q: You're welding?

A: Welding, no, cutting with a torch. I'm not -- welding is putting things together, I was --

Q: Together, you were cutting things -- and the two boys were also with you?

A: Each one, yeah. In -- one in the carpentry shop, he -- because one worked in -- in Terezín in the carpentry shop, cause 15 and older had to work, and one of them was carrying the plumber's toolbox. So -- and they found similar jobs. Whether they said what they did before, what their experience was -- I couldn't say what my experience was. And that second cook was in that same transport, and he came also to Auschwitz into Gleiwitz from the same camp.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. And so one day on the way home -- there was nothing -- I went -- we went full to e-elaborate on that job, other than only once in those 12 hours you were allowed to go to the bathroom. They took your number down, and if you came again, they kicked you out. The guy who was there was called scheiss meister. [indecipherable] to spell it.

Q: She may know how to spell that.

A: I -- I don't know what people did who had diarrhea, but there must have been people with diarrhea. I have no idea. Th -- one day was really, really sick, tired and -- and I -- I really couldn't perform. So I found a place, and with these radiators with the ribs, you know? There was one that allowed a little space between the wall and itself. I leaned down behind it, and there was nice, warm, and I fell asleep. It wasn't difficult for me to fall asleep until I've been awakened with a -- a rifle butt by an SS man. I think the -- the -- my meister must have told the guard that his helper is missing. So he found me. I'm glad I'm not bald because I have a very ugly protrusion still, on my head. And so he kicked me in the behind and sent me back to work. I was lucky he didn't deport me. So I did my work again, you know, you get this kind of encouragement with a boot, you continue to work. One day after the shift, we go back to camp, there was a snow on the floor -- on the ground. And I had wooden shoes, those Dutch wooden clogs, that was the only shoes that fitted me, that I got exchange. They were good -- a good and the bad side. The good was

it insulated from the cold of the ground, but uncomfortable because they were not flexible. Walking back to the camp, I see ahead of me a huge -- only maybe it just seemed that -- that huge to me, onion on the edge -- on the side of the road. So I look back where the guard is, and told the guy behind me, step a little bit out of formation, cover me. And I bent down, and picked it up and put it in the jacket to take it to camp, because whatever either one of the three of us found, stole, or otherwise, we shared. So I took it in to share it with them. And we were brought in and lined up on the roll call area for frisking. We were frisked on -- infreque -- not infrequently like little, but unannounced because we were working with tools, and we could have made some weapon, a knife, or -- or something which the Germans did not like very much. So what do I do with the onion? If I throw it away and don't say it was me, everybody gets punished, the old theme of collective punishment. If I say it was me, they beat me to a pulp because they won't believe I found it, they will think I stole -- they will insist I stole it. Only one way out, to eat the onion, quickly. This is with the peel and with those little roots on it. The eyes were -- tears were coming down my cheeks, and the nose was running, and sweat in that cold, wintry day, sweat was coming up on my forehead. And when he ca -- I finished it before he came to me, and I didn't dare to breathe while he was frisking me. And why I am saying it is a day or -- or t -- the next day or the day after, these wounds started to get smaller and less pus-y.

Q: Really?

A: The one onion did a marvelous job. But it was only one, and we continued days and weeks without another onion, so it opened up again, and the -- the pus-y routine has reappeared. But it gave me enough respect for onions that I am consuming an awful lot of them, cooked or raw. And recommending it to everybody. I don't remember much of happenings inside the camp. This other cook, second cook from Prague, he had the chutzpah on a -- in -- on the -- on the road in the camp, to stop the camp commander, who was a s.o.b. you can say, no? That's in public. He was the -- previously the commander of the crematorium and the gas chambers in Auschwitz. And here was the lager kommandant, always walking with a dog.

Q: And his name, do you know?

A: Yeah, Moll. And he stopped him, he said, "Herr Kommandant, I would like to work in my profession." And he said, "What's your profession?" He said, "I'm a cook." He said, "Did you tell it when you came into this camp?" He said, "Yes." So next Sunday on the roll call, they pull him out and put him into the SS kitchen. I wouldn't have dared to say I'm a cook when I said I'm a welder. I thought, you know -- anyway, he -- I never -- already the oldtimers in the kitchen, the veterans, they wouldn't let him anywhere near, and he has to wash dishes, the floor, the tables, just the dirty work. And one afternoon there was some mashed potatoes left from the SS menu, and he made like a decorating bag out of paper, and made some decorations like for a cake. And the SS in charge of the SS kitchen was a baker, or a -- a -- call it baker patisserie, or the fine -- fine baker, you know, the -- how do you call it?

Q: Pastry chef?

A: Pastry chef. What would I do without you? Couldn't complete the interview. He saw this, "Who made this?" And he said, "I did." "You did?" He immediately made him the proviant meister, which was in the storeroom, giving out to the cooks the -- the food, the -- the -- the items to cook. So he had everything, he was in there alone, no other veteran -- prior veteran. He took care of everyone from Terezín he knew. He saved my life.

Q: Really?

A: At 4:30 in the morning, behind the barracks, we crawled to that SS kitchen -- and several people, and he threw at us a -- a boiled potato unpeeled, or a piece of bread, or whatever was left over. And when I was at night shift and couldn't come to the kitchen, he left me some food on the beam in the latrine. Not a very aesthetic place, but who cares? And all these things, whatever he sa -- left there we -- the three of us shared. And I don't think I would have made it without him. And so now again, nothing extraordinary. I was lucky, I was never present at -- when there was some hangings, or when somebody got 25 or 40 lashes. I never -- when I -- when we stood in the roll call place, I bent my knees not to stick out, because I was tall. Cause they -- the tall ones and those who were in some way different than the rest, they pulled out for the nice jobs like cleaning latrines, and so -- so you learn how to survive.

Q: And are you now hearing rumors about the war, that the Russians are getting closer? Because it's now what, November or December?

A: It was January already.

Q: It was January already by this time, okay.

A: And we did hear faint explosions like bombs and so. And one day at n -- noon -- before noon -- before noon at the factory, over the loudspeaker came an announcement, all prisoners assemble where we usually assemble after the shift to go back. And there was not much talking. They counted us and marched us back to the camp. No music was playing. Lined up on the roll call area. After awhile we were sent to the block -- to have -- to enjoy our own luxury, each one had a blanket. We brought our blanket and it was a godsend because we could wrap it around and be a little less cold. And soon thereafter we were marched out. That was already afternoon, again without music, and that was the beginning of what they call a death march today. With the kids on my side, we are together. And there were no more kids, they were already adults, you know, this kind of a circumstance matures a person quickly. And --

Q: Are you still wearing --

A: The shoes.

Q: The -- the wooden shoes?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so we marched until late at night, and we came to an already abandoned camp, evacuated -- another evacuated labor camp. So we were herded in, and right went into the bunk and fell asleep. There was no food, no drink. We were able to pick up some of the dirty snow from the road. And early morning I was -- it was not -- before dawn, they woke us up, and the Germans insisted that we go as quickly as possible. Now, we noticed whoever fell, couldn't make it, was shot on the road. On the first day with one of the kids, we were supporting one who couldn't road -- couldn't walk any more, you know, the shoulder, and under the arm. And we could do it as -- as long as he could move his feet -- his legs forward. But then he became totally heavy, we had a dead weight, and we ourselves were already weak. So we just couldn't continue to drag him, and then when we heard the shot it was like -- it felt like I was shot, you know, the -- the guy -- I felt guilty that time, I felt guilty that I didn't try more. But it wouldn't have helped, I could have only weakened myself, and wouldn't have helped him.

Q: So you both let him go, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you heard a shot?

A: Yeah. And then the next day after this camp, we were marched again, there was no food, no drink. Continued with the dirty snow, and at late at night again, we came to a barn. We were herded in, the -- they -- they closed the barn. And that was nice because there was something, we didn't recognize it in the dark, hay or straw. We crawled in and had a warm, soft sleep. On that day my -- on top of the shoe where the laces are -- there are no laces on the wooden, but on where on other shoes are the laces, a little triangular piece broke out, and two sharp corners were digging into my foot. And that was very unpleasant. I don't know where and how I found a piece of wax cloth, I think in that barn or around it, and I wrapped my feet into that, and that's like McDonald uses this checkered tablecloth?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That kind of material. It did not insulate me any more from the cold, but it didn't hurt like the -- that shoe. But early in the morning on the third day I felt -- I -- I will be one of those shot on the road. I am weak, tired, tough trying to drag my feet. And the kids were in -- in fairly good shape, because I mentioned the smaller ones and skinny one tolerated it better. So I said, if I stay here, I get shot. I try to escape. Whatever chance I have, I will take it. If it's 10 percent, I'll take 10 percent of success to escape. And so I told them, stay together and help each other if you need to, and I can't any more, and I have no use to you anyway. So we come to a forest, tall forest on both sides of the road, no moon, real

dark. So that was the moment. I slipped to -- into the ditch on the side of the road. I don't know why I didn't encourage the kids to do it too, but I felt I don't want to be responsible in case -- you know, to suggest something where they may suffer. And I laid down in the snow, face down. And there was -- must have been a zealous guard who shot me. And whether it was the dark, or whether it was frozen fingers, I don't know. He shot me under the arm, and the bullet got stuck in the rib. And the snow -- the -- the blood was color -- starting to color the snow, and that was good, because nobody else attempted a second shot, that the guy must have had it, you know, but -- so when the column past, I suddenly had strength to pick myself up, and went into the forest, and found like minded people, other prisoners who escaped, having been lucky, not getting shot. So we huddled together and used the blanket in ma -- outside in -- in January in the forest with this -- just a cotton uniform, and I think we all slept, sitting, holding each other. And in the morning we went to the edge of the forest, that the road we came from, looking whether we find a sign where we are, what's happening. And we see the top of the hill another camp. The gate is open, no guard in the watch tower, and prisoners walking in and out. So inside the forest we ran -- suddenly we could not only walk, we could run, near to that camp, and we asked one of the prisoners, "Well what -- well what is this?" He said, "I don't know, but before dawn, all the Germans jumped into car -- into the trucks and took off." Didn't even take the time to liquidate the camp, with machine guns, and -- and hand grenades. So what really happened, in that area, a Russian tank force cut a wedge into the German front. And of course they didn't want to be caught by the Russians, so they jumped in the trucks and left in a hurry. We -- I went into the camp, and saw guys from our camp. I said, "Where were you located?" Sort of the last block, because that was the last group that arrived there. And I found the two kids there, and we started to look for food, but we didn't find any, because those who were there already, they plundered the -- the -- the potato storage, and all -- all other storages. But somebody told us there's, on the side the road, is a abandoned village where the German population ran the same way as the SS, and there's food in their pantries. So we went there, not far, and there's food. Everything except bread. They must have taken the loaf and bread and ran. The speed at which they ran wa -- showed itself. That was unfinished food, even unfinished food on the table, and the rest was burned in the oven, or on top of the range. So we had food, and there was no -- at that time there was no refrigeration in Europe [indecipherable] I don't know, a few people may have had a refrigerator, and -- we want to break --

Q: I -- I --

A: -- at the refrigerator, okay.

Q: At the refrigerator, yes.

End of Tape #10

Tape #11

Q: Edgar, you didn't describe your wound and what happened, because it seems impossible that you were running after a night of bleeding. So what happened when you met these people?

A: I -- after I picked myself up from the ground, I was pr-pressing my arm against the wound, and lo and behold, among those in the forest was the French doctor.

Q: Which French doctor?

A: The French doctor from -- that operated on my back.

Q: You're kidding.

A: No. And anybody who has some function in a concentration camp has different degrees of privileges according to the degree of the function. And it must have been his privilege to have a pocket knife, which we were not allowed to have. And people see that around this time without other guys, just with snow as a somewhat numbing agent, and he had to make another hole because the bullet was away from where it entered. And he pulled it out, wriggling and wiggling. And I continued to do the same thing, holding my arm against the body until the blood dried, and -- and later on I started to take advantage of my profession, and -- by feeding myself, I gained enough healing power that it healed without bandages, without stitches.

Q: Really?

A: There was no -- there wa -- there was no doctor --

Q: Did you eat more onions?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did you eat more onions?

A: Okay, now we stopped before the bullet -- or that was after the bullet --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: We stopped in that village, and I mentioned there were no refrigerators used. If this is a kosher tape I can't mention it. People were -- had all kinds of preservation methods of food without refrigerator. So the first thing I found was a -- like a gallon jug glass jar, with roasted pork, covered with rendered lard, which prevents the -- the oxygen reaching the meat, and the meat therefore, does not spoil. And after months of Auschwitz diet, and three days absolutely nothing, I dug into that lard, and ate it like that. No bread, no nothing. And I still don't understand that this didn't kill me faster than -- than the

Auschwitz diet. But it had a effect -- had it's effects. This was a huge place, the -- that camp was called Blechhammer, and it was part of a huge industrial complex. All the camp inmates were working in it -- of forced laborers from occupied countries were there, and POW's were also there, and were working. We found the camp of the British prisoners of war, and for some reason -- they were bombing London, but for some reason they were treating the British POW's very well. We found in that barrack warm uniforms, boots, socks, scarves, caps, coats, and a lot of toilet paper, which saved us from result of the way we were eating. There were 10 of us in -- in one of those barracks, there were two toilets, one on each end, and that wasn't enough. So they brought from the village, I don't know, somewhere, a huge half barrel, like a big whiskey barrel. I put two boards across so four could sit at the same time. That bad it was. I started to improvise cooking, and one guy was helping me, and eight did -- the rest of the 10, the eight went to town to bring supplies. The one kid I mentioned was working the carpentry shop in Terezín, he made a sled so more stuff could be brought. And there's one point he brought the whole -- took out from one of those houses a kitchen stove, including the pipes. He installed it, and then we were really cooking. The Russian soldiers came to eat, to us, because they didn't get food like that. It was another compliment for the aunt. And we're cooking till 10 in the evening, and by 10:15, there wasn't a bite to be had. That's how we ate. No -- no control. And the Russian soldiers told us how wonderful Communism is, everybody is even, and it's the best system, until a Jewish officer came, a Russian Jewish officer, said, "Don't believe a word." We were thinking of Communism, because that's a -- was presented to us as a real equal society, a society of equal people. But he set us straight. We were six weeks in that British barracks, because between where we were, and our home, they were still fighting. You know, from the east front, we were here, and Prague was here, and the Russians were only getting there. So for six weeks we suffered terrible diarrhea. And in spite of it, I gained 79 pounds within six weeks, with my own cooking. I said -- what's her name, I fi -- know this -- this diet advertiser, Jenny Craig would have gone crazy if she heard that somebody gained 79 pounds in six weeks. And everybody -- after six weeks we moved out of there, and went to Katowice -- here come friend of the spelling. And they put us up in the schoolhouse where or -- other -- other form of prisoners were. And the Polish Red Cross gave us identification papers based on what we told them, because we didn't have anything to show. But we needed something because we were in the Russian occupied zone, and I don't know how long we were there. One of the tenant was a chemist, and he found a job in a smoke factory there, to earn some money. And next day he comes and says, "Come with me, they need a cook in the employees cafeteria, in the manager's restaurant." I have absolutely no recollection that I worked there, until I read one of the two kids memoirs, where he names the factory. So the name immediately sprang up, and I knew I know it. But even with that knowledge, I could not remember that I worked there. But I must have, because they all told me, and I brought food to the school for them. So -- and I don't know how long we were there. Somehow time is not very noticeable, if you don't have a calendar, you don't have a routine, and that responsibility. Okay, and then we picked ourselves up and went home by means of freight trains, military trucks, horse-drawn carriages, walking. We were already strengthened -- strong by that time. The day we moved out from that British barrack, the diarrhea stopped like immediately. And our digestive systems started to work normally, cause we didn't eat like pigs any more. Oh, there was a -- and one story, and

it's a funny story, one of the guys came and said down a little past the village is a pig farm, and a lot of pigs there, and nobody's watching them, feeding them. So I found some -- a little hammer and a piece of rope, and we said we go down and get ourselves a pig with the sled. And I go there, and there were lots of pigs running around, and they were in the building. So I found one, tied a rope to his hind leg, and tied the rope to the -- to that column, the supporting column, and hit him on the head, that's how you kill pigs. But the hammer was small, and I was not strong enough yet, and when you hit them here, it swells up and you can never break his skull any more. So it was screaming there, and suddenly we hear machine gun fire. I -- oh my God, the Germans are back. So we look out, and on top of that farm, a Russian column, military column pass by, and one was shooting the pigs with a machine gun, and they were throwing them at cars and trucks as they ro -- drove by. And the guy sees me with a knife, and commandeered me to about 12 or 13 pigs to eviscerate them. They want -- he want only the meat, not the innard. So I did that, and I said, "Now I worked for you, now you come and shoot my pig." And one of those wanted only the two hind legs, it was a [indecipherable] soldier. So we had one and a half pig, and a innards from a liver, and the organs from 12 more pigs. I don't even know how we brought it all on that sled. We were rendering the lard till 10 at night. And there was no worry about refrigeration, it was cold enough. So that -- we consumed all that -- I'm sorry -- okay, we started on our way home from Katowice, and we had to go -- I told you all the means we went, but I have to turn around to tell you -- to give you the direction. We were here, in Katowice. We went to the Ukraine, to Romania, to Hungary, Austria and Prague.

Q: That's a long trip.

A: Yeah. And in Ukraine was an office of the Joint, and they were giving to Jewish prisoners some onion. But you had to prove that you a Jew, so if you knew a [indecipherable] or something, a prayer, was fine. If -- some of those who never learned anything, they had to take their pants off to prove they are Jewish. And --

Q: How did women prove they were Jewish?

A: That was my question. That was my question and still is. So came to lac -- I think two days after, one day or two days after the war officially ended, and right away I went to Terezín to see if my parents are there, and they were there.

Q: Were you shocked?

A: No, i -- when something nice happens, you don't get shocked. I asked Mother, "Weren't you worried?" "No, I knew God wouldn't do this to me. He will send you back." Such a strong belief. She didn't -- it's [indecipherable] it's good, I mean a good disposition.

Q: But your father was worried?

A: Father was worried and he was -- he was very excited to see me back.

Q: To see you, yeah.

A: There was meanwhile a quarantine in Terezín because some of the death marchers were brought near there, from Poland to Mauthausen, either through the Czech territory, or right outside, where Terezín was the nearest place, so they brought all these sick people in, including the dead. There was a crematorium in Terezín. They started first, when few people died, individual graves. My grandmother is in an individual grave. Then mass graves, without -- without coffins because the Germans wouldn't supply wood for that. And when that wasn't enough space for mass -- more mass graves, they built a crematorium, and the bodies were cremated. So I [indecipherable] was a quarantine, and people brought in typhoid, and scarlet fever, and all kind. And I must say, my wife, I don't know how she did it, they were friends from before, that's when they started to believe what happened. Her friends she has from before, one in one place with typhoid, one with the scarlet fever. This one couldn't eat, so she took his food to the other one, and she never got anything, and was lucky. I went home, and started to look for an apartment, and there was a -- you know, you couldn't like here go to someone, to a landlord and rent an apartment. That was all operated by a -- a housing cop -- not a cooperation, a state housing office. And they didn't come Tuesday, come Wednesday, come the afternoon, come day after. I said, "What the hell happened? The Jews didn't come back. The Germans you have expelled, what happened to the apartments?" I was too di -- naïve and dumb to know that he wanted some -- something for the apartment. So it took almost two weeks before I lost my patience, and I took a chair and banged it on his desk, the desk collapsed, and I said, "And you are next." The -- "Wait, wait, wait, maybe we can find something." In the afternoon I had a apartment and I was mad at myself that I waited with this -- with this extended patience, that I waited that long, I could have had an apartment two weeks before. So then my parents came and -- thought you said you wanted this after -- at another time, or just so long -- as long as the tape runs?

Q: Well, let's see, how -- how much more time do we have on the tape? Oh, well let's continue a little bit.

A: Yeah. So --

Q: Do you bring -- do you bring your parents from Terezín?

A: I brought the parents from Terezín and now we -- I don't know where we got some furniture. Maybe the house -- th-the apartment was furnished, I don't remember the details. But I took two jobs because I needed to earn enough money for the three of us, and provide the things that we did not have after coming back from Terezín. So one job was where I took my apprenticeship, a day job, and then I worked in the evening in a restaurant where they also had the bar. And that -- there I worked at -- at night, and a lot of people who returned came to that evening restaurant and to the bar. And in October '46 -- until October '46, when I was inducted into the Czech army as a reserve, in the reserves, cause I was older than inducting age, for five months. And somehow, a United Nations request to the other states was to reduce the military, the numbers in -- of the people in the military. And the easiest -- the Czechs and for others, I guess, was to get rid

of, was the shortest ones in, because they had not invested a lot of effort into them, and the others were already more valuable by having been trained. So I was let go on the New Year's Eve, 1946. And then I worked in a hotel in Prague. I have a certificate informing me and everybody else who wants to look at, that I worked there to their full satisfaction. I don't remember the kitchen, the time that I did work there, the people with whom I worked. And it's a -- it's an hotel on -- on the Wencel Square. And -- and that's it, I have a -- I have a -- a [indecipherable] or certificate that I -- document that I worked there. Anyway, in the spring of '47, I si --

Q: Don't you meet somebody New Year's Eve, on 1946?

A: Oh my God, this woman. Yes, I did, some -- meet somebody. I thought she will tell the story.

Q: But you met Hana, your wife, yes?

A: Yeah.

Q: At least the person who became your wife, you didn't know that [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, one of the friends whom I also met in Terezín after I came back, with a New Year's Eve party in her sister's apartment, and invited me. I don't know, I came only back from the military, how I found out there is a party, how she got to me, I don't remember that. But I know that I went, and Hana came with somebody, who was another fr -- childhood friend, who was much younger than she. A he friend, but not a boyfriend. And also somebody who came back alone. So they went together, and I don't -- didn't know how tough it will be to live with her, but somehow I started a relationship with her. And I -- I don't like dancing, but I thought it's what girl's like, so I invited her to dance. And she called the other girl, in whose house we had the party. "Edgar wants us to come - - wants you to come to dance." And she said, "Well why didn't he call me directly?" She said, "I don't know what." So I was dancing with both of them, and I hate to dance, always did. But I thought it's -- you know, instead of the other introductory sentences. And then the second time I said, "Would you like to come without a chaperone?" And somehow we did, and we had a relationship until, I think a few weeks, I don't know. I don't know about time, she -- she remembers better. She remembers even -- she said she could never -- you won't have a problem [indecipherable]. She even remembers what I supposedly promised 53 years ago. She still [indecipherable]. I have [indecipherable] cook, I want to be a good cook, and there was not much to cook with in Czechoslovakia after the war. So I wrote to the Swiss Chamber of Commerce that I would like to work there in the coming season, and I started in -- to work in Switzerland. But before we -- I went to Switzerland, there's another thing I don't like, I don't like movies, because I can sleep cheaper at home. And she insisted she wanted to go to a movie. I said, "I am not going," Yes, and she want -- I said, "If you want to go, you stand in line for the tickets." And she did, and she came with the ticket, and I said, "You know, maybe we should not go, and should go to your apartment, have some other kind of fun." And that was the end, she walked away, and I didn't see her until I came back from Switzerland.

Q: And then you started up again.

A: Yeah, I don't know why, but some -- something told me to --

Q: Something told -- told you to [indecipherable]

A: -- go -- to go and see her.

Q: And you married in 1949?

A: Yeah, and then she proposed and wouldn't take no for an answer, so --

Q: There you were.

A: I'm in it.

Q: Right.

A: For life.

Q: Well, I know there's much more to say --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but I -- I think we'll have to wait for another time.

A: I thought, three o'clock, that's nine to three, six hours, that's six o'clock. You did a marvelous job, and these two guys, too.

Q: Well ha -- they're great. Tell me, if you can, how you think your experience affected your life? Did it change you very much?

A: The camp?

Q: The camp, Terezín -- Terezín, Auschwitz, Gleiwitz. Did you become a different person?

A: I don't think so, I -- I think I didn't have time to reflect much. I [indecipherable] the Swiss took great advantage of me because for a g -- a guy who wants to come, they didn't ask me, I asked them, so I thought -- and I went -- I worked in the restaurants, when you - - first in Interlaken, then in Lausanne, and in the [indecipherable] the hotel school, operated by the chef's association. And in the afternoon, from two to five, when a hotel [indecipherable] five to work for the dinner, I went to school there, and then I was in -- in Arosa for the winter, and from two to five I was cleaning. And next spring I went to Lausanne where I learned my French. And at that time the Communists took over in Czechoslovakia, and I didn't want to go back. And at that time Czechoslovakia, on the

Russian request, have supported Israel with selling arms, training pilots, and letting every Jew go who wanted to join the Israeli army, the Hagana. So I told my father I-I want to go to Israel, then we can [indecipherable] and live a certain time on the [indecipherable] there's a ship. At that time I already knew more about the Communists. So -- and bec -- I went to Israel and when things calmed down, they come and joined me, about a year or [indecipherable]. They couldn't imagine to a --

Q: Yes [indecipherable]

A: -- foreign country, that just finished a war. And so I went back and said, "I stay as long as I can leave legally."

Q: Right. And then you left in 1950.

A: And then as I said, she proposed, and somehow she got pregnant, and they had to close the border, and I didn't want to go with a baby, because most people who left [indecipherable] with a baby to chloroform it, and so it doesn't cry, and bring the attention of the border guard. So we left [indecipherable] I worked in the Israeli embassy as a chef when I came back. And they helped me, and I helped them, because when the borders were closed, they were helping people who had no papers to move to Israel. And suddenly all the ways were closed, and something seemed to maybe work, and I was the guinea pig, and [indecipherable] really volunteered to find out, and it succeeded for the benefit of them and mine.

Q: I know this is cutting your story short, and you were in Israel until '62 --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and came to the United States, yes? So the tape is going to run out, so what I want to do right now is just thank you very much, for a very long, and very interesting story.

A: You don't have to thank me, that -- this was the longest presentation I made, and that -- it wasn't complete ye -- isn't complete yet, so what I'm glad that I have a -- a -- you know, when I speak elsewhere, I get maybe two hours, I'm happy. But here I could provide details and think about them, all not to -- it's blinking -- not to --

Q: Right.

A: -- not to think which details to leave out and so on.

Q: Well thank you so much.

A: It was my pleasure, no, it was refreshing. A refreshing lunch, refreshing company.

Q: Good.

End of Tape #11

Tape #12

Q: Edgar, what is this photograph?

A: This is my grandmother on my mother's side. I knew her only three years, a-actually only towards the end, she died when ou -- little after I was three years old, and the only thing I remember, that she always wore an apron any time of the day, and that she told my mother, "Don't hit the boy, he's such a nice child." So she loved me already when I was three years old, and my mother was hitting me before then, keep me straight.

Q: And do you remember her na -- do you remember her name?

A: Catherine Heller, H-e-l-l-e-r, née Pick, P-i-c-k.

Q: Okay. And who is this?

A: This is Mother's father, actually my grandfather, Joseph Heller. I never knew him, he died 1916. And his wife must have been 11 years a widow, because she died 1927.

Q: And this photo?

A: This is my father. In Czech he's called Aloise, but everybody called him sophisticatedly Louis Krasa, before World War I, in Vienna. And the interesting part about his moustache is that overnight he put it into a re -- what to -- wintra -- what do they used to wear to -- to --

Q: Mask or so --

A: -- no, just to --

Q: A wax?

A: No.

Q: [indecipherable] he waxed it?

A: No, h-he waxed it anyway, but overnight he put it into a --

Q: Sling?

A: A -- a sling, not to mess it up.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And that's only if he slept alone.

Q: Right. Go ahead.

A: Okay, this is sitting on the left of his parents is my father with his four brothers, they must have had same time a break during World War I, and the fifth brother, I don't know why he isn't there. All in the military.

Q: Did they all survive World War I?

A: Yes.

Q: They did?

A: Yes.

Q: And this photo?

A: These are my parents on their honeymoon in the Bavarian Alps, but the Alps in this picture are in a studio, just a backdrop.

Q: And what year would this have been, do you know?

A: Tween -- 1922.

Q: And this photo?

A: This is Mother looking me over when I was three months old.

Q: And you were born in 1924?

A: Yes. So it fits in with a '22 wedding.

Q: Right. And here?

A: This is me, Edgar, with my faithful horse at age two.

Q: And this po -- this photo?

A: This is in Karlsbad where -- on the promenade, where pictures were taken professionally of the whole groups, and Mother happened to be in the front, and me putting even more in the front. It was about three, three and a half, four years old.

Q: And here?

A: This is me, Edgar in the first or second grade, in Karlsbad, and that was the German grade school. I mean the grade school in German language.

Q: And who is this good looking fellow?

A: This is me again, at age 15 or 16. We never really put any dates on it, so -- but today it doesn't matter too much.

Q: Were you already an apprentice?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Yes, of course, if you were 15 or 16. And this group?

A: This is the kindergarten, Karlsbad, which I attended I don't know how long, one or two years.

Q: And this picture?

A: This is my apprenticeship, and I'm standing next, or behind the head chef, and I don't have to say which one it is. You will recognize him.

Q: And this group?

A: I -- I don't know how I got into this group, because these are the waiters, the storekeeper, the dishwasher and the bartender.

Q: And who's that [indecipherable] who's that?

A: Yeah, that's him.

Q: Him?

A: Him, me.

Q: And here?

A: This is in the same work location, after work. Somebody caught me with a camera on the way out, dressed in street clothes.

Q: What is this a photo of?

A: This is a portrait made in Terezín by Leo Haas, I think in 1943, I'm not sure exactly when.

Q: And this one?

A: This is a caricature, and the interesting part of it is that his signature is expressed in drawing of a hair, which is English for Haas.

Q: So is that how he signed his cartoon?

A: Car -- yeah.

Q: His caricatures and cartoons --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- because regular pictures he signed --

A: Haas.

Q: Haas.

A: [indecipherable] his name.

Q: And this one?

A: This is -- this picture I asked Leo Haas to do for me for my mother's birthday. I think it's written the lower left corner, I'm not sure. I should have looked. The date is there, and I had nothing else to give her so I gave her this picture.

Q: And the date for this drawing? And what's the date for this?

A: March 20.

Q: And the year?

A: '44, yeah.

Q: And what is this?

A: This is a picture of the Charles Bridge in Prague, made by Fritta. I don't know whether he made it from memory, or from another postcard, but the interesting thing of it is that all the pictures of Charles Bridge are made from the other side with the Prague castle in the background.

Q: And how did you get this photogr -- this painting?

A: He gave it to me as a --

Q: He gave it to you?

A: Yeah.

Q: And this one?

A: This is made -- this is watercolor of a less known painter on the -- on the wall on -- on the outside, the town wall, facing the church in the background. His name was Otto Samisch, S-a-m-i-s-c-h.

Q: And when was this photo taken?

A: This is in the apartment of the American commercial attaché, Mr. Williams, where I worked as a chef and butler for his family in parties that he gave in his house.

Q: What year?

A: 1946.

Q: And what about this?

A: This was after -- this picture was after induction into the Czech army reserves, because I was a -- beyond the age of regular induction. Must have been between October first, 1946, and the year's end.

Q: And who's this?

A: This is my mother in either 1947 or 1948.

Q: And this is in Prague?

A: Yeah.

Q: And this one?

A: This is my father in 1948, also in Prague.

Q: And this photo?

A: This is Mother's 85th birthday. I'm not sure where it is, but she's there with her friends in Prague.

Q: And this photo?

A: This is a Friday night, Mother lighting the candles, with her headcover -- emergency headcover, in our dining room in Newton. And looking on is Hana, my wife.

Q: And this?

- A: And this is the -- a caricature, drawn by Leo Haas, of Hana's father in Terezín, in 1943. And you can't see it in this small dimension, on the bottom is a -- like a sheet of paper with a heading report, and a arm reaching out, chasing a cook. Because her father was the -- the head of the -- we call it economic police, whose charge it was to avoid, or minimize, at least, theft in the ghetto.
- Q: And how old was your mother then, do you think?
- A: How long what?
- Q: How old is your mother?
- A: Oh my dear. Is there a year on it, in the pic?
- Q: No.
- A: There's nothing that --
- Q: No, there's not. And Edgar, what is this?
- A: I have received this from somebody -- I hope he's not mad at me because I don't remember his name. This was made, and also Hana's, in a jewelry shop that existed in Terezín, where the -- the prisoners made -- made jewelry for the Germans, and most of it was sent to Germany for sale. This is some scrap metal, I think, because it's not silver. They -- on the top you see the cook that it was you symbolize my profession there. And then the AK is the designation of the first transport, Aufbaufkommando, which is the construction command, or construction detail, and the 268 was my number, and I think it was in alphabetical order, organized. And on the bottom is the town emblem of Terezín, and the 1944, that's when I must have gotten it.
- Q: Did you ever wear this as a pin?
- A: No.
- Q: No.
- A: No --
- Q: Joan, could you put your finger in just for scale? Just so we can -- an idea as to the size of it.
- Q: Is that okay?
- Q: Yeah, it's about four inches long.
- A: Yeah, little longer maybe.

Q: A little less maybe, don't you think? How lon -- how long do you think that is?

A: I think it's a little more than four. The -- each of these segments is about an inch --

Q: An inch.

A: -- and a half.

End of Tape #12

Conclusion of Interview