United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with William J. Lowenberg
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with William J. Lowenberg, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on January 28, 1993 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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WILLIAM J. LOWENBERG
January 28, 1993

Q: Bill, tell me your name and your place of birth and your date of birth?

A: My name is William J. Lowenberg, Bill Lowenberg. I was born on August the 14th 1926 in a small town in Westphalia by the name of Ochtrup. It's not far from the Dutch border.

Q: Can you tell me just a little bit about your family, how many sisters or brothers that you have?

A: Yes. My parents were born in the same vicinity within a few miles from where I was born and so were my grandparents on both sides. And several generations, I don't know three or four or five, maybe longer. I had one sister who was three years younger than I am. And my father's parents lived in the same house with us on the second, two story house. And my father had two sisters and a brother. One sister died in the early '30s of natural causes. And his brother, my father's brother, and my father, they all were in the First World War as German soldiers. They were German citizens. And my father's brother died shortly after the First World War, he was gassed in France, during when they used gas in France, so he died of complications. And he died in 1920 or '21. I don't know exactly when those years, right after the war. And my mother was born in a town next to us, about eight kilometers to the west. And she had three brothers and a sister. They were some early children - born in... who died in infancy. And my grandfather on my mother's side, he died two years before I was born. My grandmother lived in that town next to Ochtrup - where I was born with her two sons. And one son lived and was married in another city, not very far from there. And we left Germany in the end of '36 about. We went over the border to Holland --

Q: Let's not go there yet.

A: Okay.

Q: Let's get back a little bit. You were very young when the Nazis took over in 1933?

A: Yah, I was six years old.

Q: Yes, do you remember any particular change in your life in terms of friends and school?

A: Indeed. I lived on a street, I remember vividly there, were four boys who were all the same age and all in the same grade. At the time I lived near a boy's school and a girl's school. It was a Catholic community. Shortly after '32, about '33 or '34, they were not allowed to play with me any longer. I remember that. I also was in, I think about the second or third grade, I was not allowed to sit in the class with the rest of the students, I had to sit in the back. The teacher I had, the one I remember the best, he was very nice to me. But the principal was a

Nazi, because he insisted that I was sitting, that I would sit in the back. I only had about one or two report cards and then I was told I would not get any more report cards. I remember that. And the other incident I remember quite well is, um, we had, we lived in a small town where there are only ten Jewish families. There was no professional teacher, and my mother used to teach me Hebrew, I'm talking about Hebrew. And so as much as my mother could taught me the primers and the prayers and the alphabets, etcetera. It was necessary that we went to the next town over, which was a provincial town, where they had a professional teacher and a school, and most of the Jewish children in that province area in the county came to this town on various days of the week. I remember we used to go there one day a week, and first myself and then my sister and cousins of ours. Another girl and my sister, and three of us used to go by train once a week, I think it was on Tuesday, it was the early part of the week. And we had to go by train which was probably about an hour and then you had to walk for a bit to go to that school which was next to the synagogue in that town. The town's name was Burgsteinfurt. And I remember one incident in particular because there are always bullies on the street. For some reason they knew that we were Jews. And one day I was attacked by a boy maybe in his early teens, 15, 14 or 15. And he threw a knife at me and cut my legs. I remember coming to school where they had bring in a nurse and they bandaid me. And then shortly thereafter I couldn't we couldn't go to that school anymore.

Q: Were you alone when that happened?

A: No, my sister and our friends, my sister's friend, our cousins were with me then. And I remember that and that's about all I remember as far as anti-Semitic attack on me physically. I was beaten up later on in the middle '30s in school by boys in the class. And then I couldn't go. I went once in the years -- they took me in the early days to the city swimming pool and then I was told that I could march with the class to the pool, but I couldn't be in the pool because I was a Jew. I happened to be the only Jew in the whole class, the whole school of 800 children. But I remember distinctly that it bothered me a great deal that I could not be part of my friends to go into the pool once every few weeks or once a week when the class went to the swimming outing, in the summer of course, it was an outside pool. But I wasn't allowed to go in there.

Q: And when they said you couldn't have a report card anymore, did that mean you didn't do any work?

A: Yes, I worked. I was a good student. I remember that. But the principal had decided that as a Jew I was not entitled to a report card. So I sat in the back of the class until '36 when my parents saw that it was impossible for us to live there. And we had relatives in Holland and we left then.

Q: Do you remember discussions in your family about leaving, was it a surprise to you when you left?

A: I don't remember the discussions. I remember thinking about it in depth that my father and mother thought that Holland would be safe for us because during the First World War Holland was kept neutral just like Switzerland was kept neutral even in the Second World War. Because the Germans needed Holland in the First War, that's where the Kaiser ended up. And I think my father believed that the same thing would happen again because they needed an outlet where they could escape to maybe. That wasn't the case because on May the 10th 1940 of course the Germans invaded Holland, and they were there early in the morning. We were right on the border there.

Q: How did you find out that you were going to Holland, who told you?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember that. I know that we went late at night by car. We went over the border.

Q: And who went?

A: My father, my mother, my sister, myself, and I think my grandfather. I'm not too sure. My grandmother had died, my father's mother had died in 1936. I remember because I was on vacation and I had to come back. I was with relatives in another city. And I don't remember if my grandfather came immediately with us or shortly thereafter. I think he didn't come until Kristallnacht, which is another story here. And he lived with us. My aunt, my father's sister, went to Belgium to live with her first cousins, my father's first cousins in Belgium.

Q: Did you take a lot of things with you?

A: No. Bare essentials. I don't remember if we even took furniture.

Q: How about a toy? You were six or seven years old. No, you were ten.

A: I was ten years old. I don't remember toys. Toys weren't as prevalent then as today.

Q: Where did you go when you went to Holland?

A: We went to a small town in the eastern part of Holland called Borculo. It had about 40 Jewish families, 40, 42 Jewish families, a very religious town, conservative. And it was a wonderful life for me there. It was the first time in my life that I was accepted among my peers. It was probably the best part of my life that I have ever had was from 1936, end of '36, until '40 because uh I wasn't a Jew any longer, meaning I was just one of the boys, one of the kids which I never knew before. And there were children my age, Jewish and non-Jewish. It so happened that one boy was my age and became my best friend. He was killed during the war with the entire family. But we had a wonderful life there. It was very difficult for my father and mother because they came with nothing. They had left everything behind. We had a house in Germany. We are not people of means. My father had a hard life and he worked

hard and there wasn't an abundance of money. To the contrary it was a struggle. And not on my mother's side, they were affluent. But we never felt poor of course, we had a good life in the family especially. But in Holland it was hard for him to begin because we had to start from point zero and it worked out quite well.

Q: What did he do in Germany and what did he have to do in Holland?

A: In Germany my father was in business with his father, in the cattle business. Most of the Jews in that area were in cattle. Most the majority were in the cattle business. My father learned the textile business when he was a young man. And when he came to Holland it wasn't possible to go in the cattle business, that would take lots of sums of money to pay and trade, so he went back in textile, which he knew. And first he worked very hard with a bicycle and suitcases and went from one farmer to the next for about three years. And my mother did the sewing. He sold dresses and aprons and whatever, and he came home with the measurements and my mother worked at night and during the days. She also had a vegetable garden and no help. But it was a good life. And then my father was able to buy a small store on the main street on this town. Somebody retired or died, something, a Jewish family, and the son I remember sold it to my father. I don't know the arrangements. And we lived behind the store which was a much better life for my father, he didn't have to go by bicycle every day. And then it developed that my father run the store. He went one day a week sometimes 2 days a week, to travel. And my mother did take a very active part in the business and did the sewing and helping in the store.

Q: Did you work there too?

A: I had to work after school hours. I had to deliver merchandise to the people that bought. I was the delivery boy. It was nice. And then my grandfather came. He was living with us then. And then in 1938, Kristallnacht, my grandmother came to live with us, my mother's mother.

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was Erica Soloman. My mother's maiden name was Soloman. She survived the war. She went to Theresienstadt. I'm sure you'll ask me about that later, but she survived the war. And my uncles, her two sons, my two uncles were arrested in Germany by the local police in a small town, a very small town there. They were the only Jewish family there. They were born there. And they were in jail, but during the night a few neighbors took them out of jail and held up the policeman who was their friend actually, and they took 'em by bicycles over the border, and took 'em over the border to get 'em from not being taken to one of the concentration camps, wherever they were taking them in those days, probably Dachau or Buchenwald. And they were immediately put under house arrest in Holland by the Dutch government. And they lived with another cousin of ours. My mother uh, my grandmother rather, I think and her two sisters married in Holland and had their children. And then the

Dutch put 'em in a camp in southern Holland, and then from there they were building Westerbork which later became the transit camp. They were in Westerbork from about '38, '39 on. They stayed there during the war and they were liberated by the British or the Canadians, I forget now.

Q: Bill, between '36 when you arrived in Holland and 1940 do you feel that this was -- when you started to say this was the best time of your life up until then, it was a much more normal life for you?

A: Well, Holland is a very good country. It was a very good country even more so then than now. Things have changed in Holland too. But the Dutch were just wonderful to us. And I felt it very strongly because I came from a very severe system of antisemitism and total separation from my surrounding area, my surrounding community where I was born and where I grew up as a small boy. When I came to Holland I was accepted like an equal. I always remember that. The children in my class, the neighbors, that's like it should have been anyhow. But... So it was most revealing for me.

Q: Then what happened in 1940 when the Germans came in, did it change radically?

A: No, it didn't change radically. It took about a year in general. Yah, there were, laws were made of course and we had to turn in our bicycles and there was a curfew at night for the Jews from 7:00 o'clock on. So not immediately, but very soon. Then of course we also couldn't go to school any longer, to public schools after about maybe eight, nine months to a year. So we went by bus to the next town over which was a large community and they had built a Jewish school. They took one of the schools that the city I think gave them and they made it into a Jewish day school. And we went by bus every morning.

Q: Were you frightened?

A: Oh, sure. Because on the buses we had to wear a star. And when the Germans came on the buses, were public transportation systems, the rails were not running any longer. law. They had a bus system between all the different towns. And when Germans came in we had to get up and go in the back of the bus. And if there were too many Germans they threw the Jewish kids out of the bus, anyone with a star, they threw us out and we had to wait for the next bus. That happened once every other week maybe, sometimes more often. And then when we walked -- for instance when we got to the town where we went to school I remember it was quite a way, it was maybe 45 minutes to an hour walk, there were no buses. And our classmates used to come by who lived there and picked us up on their bikes, and they picked us up and took us to the school. And then they had to turn in their bicycles, it was the end of that transportation system. But it was good for me because we could continue our education, and they were good teachers, and that was the end of my education at that point. I had by then maybe six, seven years of elementary education from the first grade to the sixth or seventh grade, I don't remember the details. It's a little different in Holland than it is here.

Then at one point Jews could not be in the buses at all any longer. So my father thought, and because he was told that we couldn't sit at home either that we had to keep busy, and my father called some acquaintances of his and I worked on a farm. I had to go every morning at 6:00, go to a farm. I worked there in the fields as a child. My father had the store still, but they were told that if you don't work you will be arrested earlier. So my father arranged that I went to work on a farm.

Q: What did you do?

A: Anything you do on farms from milking cows to harvesting the wheat and feeding the animals.

Q: Were there other children like you?

A: No, not on this farm. This was -- other children had to do it on other farms, yes. This age group. And even old people. This was mainly because information filters down and they said if you work they don't arrest you. They did anyhow.

Q: Did this apply to your sister?

A: No. My sister, no. She was a little too young.

Q: Do you remember how you got your star?

A: No. An edict came down and you had to buy them. I remember that you had to buy them. I remember that my father had to sell them because he had a textile store. They had a J-O-O-D. Jood. That's a Dutch name for "Jew" But you could not pin them on. I remember them saying that you could not pin them on with a safety pin, you had to physically sew it on to your outer garment. That was very very important, I remember that.

Q: Did your mother make these?

A: No, no, no. they were printed by the Germans or by edict of the Germans. No, no, you had to buy them from some whatever institution. And you had to sew them on of course, you had to do yourself. My mother did it. Most likely my mother. Excuse me.

Q: Were you angry that you had to wear these?

A: Oh, I don't know. I'm sure there was an anger. It was an embarrassment, it was degrading. But there were so many things happening, one was heaped on top of the other. It was a systematic, well thought out, and very orchestrated move to degrade, to belittle, to destroy the minds of the people to make them powerless. It's not that -- it would have been simpler if they pick us up and take us to the camps, but there was a whole prelude of acts from turning

in your radios to turning in your cars and your bicycles. We didn't have a car, we had bicycles. Of turning in anything valuable, even turning in furniture. But one could not have a radio I remember distinctly. And I know the bicycles because I remember I had a bicycle for a short time during that farm episode and then I know I had to turn the bicycle in, so I had to walk every morning to that farm which was about an hour's walk. And you did it. I mean very disciplined for various reasons. But, yah, it wasn't an anger that I remember a deep anger at this point in my life, I don't remember that. But I do remember "why"? It just was to take away, step by step, your whole humanity. There was a system of dehumanizing everything we knew of from sitting in the back of the bus, wearing the star, a neighbor is not allowed to talk to you and wouldn't for fear of being put in the camps or being ostracized. Even in Germany as a child the children could not play with me. And I remember one episode, I was standing in front of my house and I wanted to play so badly with the boys I used to play with, and they just said, "you can't." And I used to cry a lot, I remember that. While I'm talking things come back to me. I used to cry. I felt it even harder on my mother and my father. See, a child has so much capacity and a lot of things a child doesn't understand, and in retrospect and I've thought about it in recent years a lot, is the anguish my parents must have gone through to see number one, their own life destroyed. They had fought for the same country that was doing it to them. My father was very popular, and my mother, in the local community, the bowling clubs and the veterans organizations. And then when their children their own life and their children, to me it must have been a horrible, horrible part of life for my mother to see what happened to her children. I mean there was no future. And where do you go if it goes downhill orchestrated by a government, not only by individuals. But they didn't give up easy, I must tell you. There's a thing I remember quite vividly. My father was very nationalistic. He loved what he did because he was a veteran, he was wounded, he had medals from the First World War. And on Veterans Day, what we call here Veterans Day, they had parades in those days just like we have here. And the veterans had their rifles and they put their rifles over their shoulder and they march down the main street, and I remember that my mother was laughing. And my father he still left to go to that parade and march in the parade, but he couldn't have a rifle, and he was a Jew. So he took a cane and he wasn't the only one, others did too, and they took a cane and turned the can upside down and put a flower on the top of the cane and they marched with their Christian friends, previous friends, they marched in the same parade and you could pick the Jews out because they carried a cane as a substitute for a rifle. In those days we didn't think much about it because that's the way it was. You made the best of everything. But when I think about it today it does make me angry obviously. So there were many instances like that, but us....

01:27:30

Q: What happened between you and your friends, did they all stop talking to you?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: All of them?

A: All of them. There was no one who dared. It would reflect even in the school. It was an orchestrated way of ostracizing the Jews. And they didn't monkey around by saying well maybe I should or shouldn't. They just didn't talk. Actually, that's why my parents left. We left early because we thought we could save ourselves. Now, my grandmother had arranged to take the whole family out of Germany to go to Chile. And she bought visas for us, for herself and her two sons. Her daughter was married with two small children, my aunt, my mother's sister. And shortly before this was all going to happen, when we would leave, we found out that they were phonies. Someone had taken a great deal of money from my grandmother. She was a matronly person. She was very very bright. She had been a widow since she was in her early 50s. And these were phony, false, false visas. So there was an attempt made to get out obviously. But then we also lived in small towns. There was no communication like we have today. And just to give you an example how small, my grandmother's phone number was number 2. Number 1 was the city hall. She had the second phone in the town. So you can imagine the system of communication in those days. No one knew what was going on except what filtered down through the government's edicts and attacks.

Q: You said you wanted to talk about Kristallnacht and bringing your grandmother to Holland?

A: Well, they came over the border that night and we knew it pretty fast because my grandmother came over the border for some reason. I don't even remember how she got there, I really don't. I remember my uncles come across, but we never saw them because they couldn't stay with us. We were not Dutch citizens, we were there on permits as aliens. And they let us stay there because my father did have a permit to move there in '36. -- but we never became, the Dutch didn't make you citizens. They didn't make any of the German Jews citizens. So I was made stateless when Germany declared the Jew status in the Nuremberg Laws. I don't remember what year that was, but I assume it was before we left Germany. I think it was in '35 maybe. So we lived as normal citizens. We didn't have to report or anything like that. Maybe they kept an eye on us, I don't know. But my uncles who came over during Kristallnacht could not stay with us because we didn't have the permission from the Dutch government to harbor even relatives, my mother's brothers. So they stayed with cousins who were Dutch citizens. They could not walk the streets. They were under house arrest and then they put them in a camp. So my uncles in essence were in camps locked up from 1938 to '45. They never saw outside life for those years.

Q: Did your father lose his store before you went to Westerbork?

A: At first no, no. The store was open, the store was open until we were arrested to go to Westerbork. But he had a very difficult time getting merchandise because a lot of us was on coupons already and the quarters were very little specifically because when the quarters were

established he had very little business, so they were based on previous businesses. But no, I remember that the store had some merchandise on the shelf when we walked out to the local school, the auditorium of the school where they assembled all the Jews that night. And we were picked up by the Dutch police. They were not Germans. The Dutch police picked up us because they were told to pick up the Jews.

Q: Were you hungry, did you have adequate food?

A: In those days?

Q: After '40?

A: Yah. Food was not a big problem. We lived in a small town, farm towns, it wasn't that serious in those days. It became serious later I am told for all the Dutch people. But we didn't have that much of a problem with food until we were arrested.

Q: And you had Jewish friends?

A: I had both Jewish and non Jewish friends.

Q: Yes. But when you stopped being able to talk or be with your Christian friends?

A: Well, in Holland this wasn't so.

Q: It wasn't so?

A: No. It was only in Germany. In Holland, no the Dutch people didn't follow that.

Q: Did you talk about what was going on after the Germans came with your friends?

A: Yes, indeed. And everybody felt sorry for you, but there was nothing you could do. They were hard on the Dutch people too and the Christians. As long as they behaved and didn't do anything political they left them alone. There was rationing. There was no gasoline, etcetera. You couldn't buy bicycles or tires for the bicycles. But in the cities it was very severe, especially later part of the Occupation. But no, it wasn't that bad. We never had a shortage of food. We may not have had everything, but there was no shortage of food for us until we went to Westerbork. Just shortage of freedom. Excuse me.

Q: What about your sister. Were you close as she got a little bit older during those years in Holland?

A: Yah, we became very close in the last years when we got older. She was two years younger. She had reddish hair and her name was Erika. She died in Auschwitz.

Q: Can you talk about her a little bit?

A: I don't know, I don't know. We had a very normal family life. And she had lots of friends like we all had.

Q: Did you play together?

A: Yah.

Q: What did you play?

A: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember. What do children do? We did what everybody else did.

Q: So you didn't mind having a little girl sister?

A: No, no. First of all you don't have the choice, and second of all she was my sister. And she was very bright. She was a good student, I remember. She went to a girls school and there were two schools, boys and girls. They were separated. And she had lots of friends, I remember that. And I was 14 when I saw her last, 15.

Q: Did you know anyone who went into hiding or did you think about going into hiding?

A: Oh, I knew quite a few people in hiding. I mean not a lot, but several families went into hiding. See, we were relatively newcomers in the town because we had only gotten there. You know, we weren't born there, my father wasn't born there, etcetera. So we knew... my father knew people, I knew that, but he wasn't -- I don't know, there weren't these connections like if you were born and raised with the same people. And then I think the other issue was finances. I mean the people were hiding people. Most people had to, most people, if not all, but most people had to pay, there had to be some resources. My father didn't have resources, but that doesn't mean that some people may have been hidden and saved who didn't have resources, it may be so, but I know the ones that went into hiding had some resources which we didn't have. And then the other issue was that it was well known that if you were caught, the Jew, you would be shot on sight or something very different, terrible would happen. Furthermore, the Christians who were hiding the Jews were treated as Jews if they were caught. They were taken to the camps or shot too. It was a heroic, heroic gesture, anyone who hid Jews. There was some abuses, but I don't think that's major at all. But the ones who hid Jews are very heroic people. And I knew some after the war, but we didn't have the connection in my opinion. And frankly no one expected that this was a matter of either life or death. All we knew is we were going to camps for the duration of the war period. And we believed it. Everybody believed it. Well, some maybe didn't, but as far as we know we believed that this was just this period of time to be in camps. Where? We didn't know. Later on when we got to Westerbork we knew we were going to eastern Europe. We

know some of them were going to eastern Europe, but letters came from eastern Europe, some of them. We knew that Mauthausen was where the first Jews picked up in our community, were taken to Mauthausen and then we were told they died there from hard labor. Our rabbi, they picked off the leadership first and the younger people. But that hiding business, it's hard to explain because we lived in an atmosphere of terrible, terrible fear, so for all I know maybe my father tried and it didn't work.

Q: When were you -- not when, but tell the circumstances of your arrest with your family?

A: Well, you were notified.

Q: How?

A: By the local police. And you were given a list of what you could take.

Q: A piece of paper came?

A: A piece of paper came. I don't know how it got there, but we got a piece of paper from the police I think that said you can only take this, this, and this, one suit or two suits, and two sets of underwear, and a toothbrush, and a pair of shoes, and etcetera. So orchestrated and without -- and the Dutch are very organized, very respectful citizens and we followed, we all followed. And we were told two days or three days before that we would have to be ready such and such an evening or afternoon, and we were taken. The local police came by, there were only one or two policemen in the whole town, and they came by and took us to the school auditorium. We stayed there for, I don't know how many hours, I don't remember the detail, but I know we went in this auditorium where I used to play as a child, as a student rather. And then we were taken by bus to the closest railroad station.

Q: Could you go back a little bit. How did you get from your house to the school?

A: I think we walked over there.

Q: With all the Jews of the --

A: Yes, they all came there. And before the evening was over they were all there, whoever were arrested, several hundred. There were 42 Jewish families in this down. Some of them had already done in hiding, and a few were picked up earlier, and some got out. Some of the more affluent ones, families, got out before 1940. They went to England.

Q: Did you have food with you, did you take food?

A: You took -- yes, we took food with us.

Q: And how long were you in the auditorium?

A: Just for maybe five, six, seven hours, maybe not even that long, I don't remember. We went direct from there to Westerbork by train to the next town where the next railroad station was, and there they put us on a train with a police escort of course. And we had these big knapsacks, you know, what do you call them, the thing you put on your back, packs, and that's all you could carry. You couldn't carry a suitcase with you, it was just all in this one big backpack, it's called.

Q: What did it look like when you arrived there?

A: In Westerbork, well you got off the train and they marched you to a barrack, an there was a processing center and registration, etcetera. But you kept whatever you had with you, it wasn't taken away from you.

Q: What was the registration like?

A: I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all. But we worked there, we spent quite a while in Westerbork. I worked there in the metal shops.

Q: Doing what?

A: Anything to do with metal shops, repairing things, because I had gone to technical school in 1938 or '39, I went to a technical school. It's like where you learn a trade. So I went back into the metal shops. And my sister became a runner for the offices there in the camp. And my father worked in -- it was a farm, the camp had a farm. That farm was there. They had cows, where my uncles since they were cattle dealers, book care of the cows so that the commandant would have milk and fresh eggs, fresh chickens, and that's what they did. They had that farm there for the benefit of the guards and the commandant.

Q: Did your mother also work?

A: My mother had to go to a place where they were doing some sewing in the hospital. There was a hospital in the camp in Westerbork, and she worked there sewing. And my father worked most of the time in the kitchen, camp kitchen, because everyone had to go and pick up their food.

Q: You said your sister was a runner?

A: She was -- well, a messenger. They used messengers to take papers or whatever. Yes, that's what she did. I remember that.

Q: What was the physical situation in the barrack, were you with your family or were you all in

different barracks?

A: No, we all went together. Always we were together. But they also had a barracks for young people. It was civilized in comparison with what I saw later. And then they also had cubicles, one room, two rooms, where families could live if you were staying there like we were staying there. But most people came in there and stayed maybe one or two days and then every Tuesday the trains went from Westerbork to Auschwitz or Sobibor. But there was a caddie[1], my father and mother were assigned to a caddie because he worked in the kitchen so we were, what they may call at that point, permanent residents, or whatever the name, it was a different name, but at least we didn't worry in the early days of going with them on the transport.

Q: Did you have a card of some kind?

A: Yes, I think so. There may have been a card, yes. But then we worked and you picked up your food and at least we had dinner together every night. Then I went separate. When I became -- I was under protection of my parents age-wise until I was 15, I remember. But when my 15th birthday was past, when I was at the end of my 15th year I was on my own, so-called. And then I was shipped to Auschwitz alone without my parents and my sister.

Q: When you were there, you were there for almost a full year?

A: About eight, nine months.

Q: Eight, nine months. Did you think you were going to be deported?

A: Oh, we all knew that it was eventually to happen. But I'm thinking by then of escape. You could escape from there because the military or the guards were not as severe there as we saw later. And I worked for a while in cutting peat, you know, peat, we cut peat and dry it. I worked with some teams there. We cut peat in the area. There, where Westerbork is, is known for peat moss, peat for the stoves for heating. So I worked there and we are out in the field. If one wanted to escape and you know what you were doing, you had to be disciplined I think.

Q: Do you remember thinking about it, or thinking "No, I can't do it."?

A: No, not then. Because first of all I wouldn't escape without my parents. I mean we had this family and had to stay together. And when I left there my parents wanted to go with me and I said no. I felt very mature when I was that age as a child. I remember that. I decided that I could handle it. I was hoping that if I would go they could stay. But then a week or two

[1] **Correction:** cadre.

weeks later, very shortly after that, when I was in Birchenov, they came there too.

Q: Let's just stay with Westerbork fora little bit. Was there a school there, was there some kind of school?

A: Yes. Actually there was a whole community of life. What I mean by that is, yes children would go to school. I think my sister did go to school. I was already past that because I worked in the metal shops and in the fields. But they had, for instance they had a wonderful orchestra. Then they had opera and theater. Because there was a whole element of German Jews who had come from Berlin mostly, from the stages, intellectual community, the artists who developed in Westerbork an infrastructure of some very beautiful entertainment. For me it was beautiful because I came from a small town and I had never been to opera before in my life obviously.

Q: Do you --

A: No, but they played the typical Strauss and Mozart pieces and all of the pieces which today we take for granted. But they had a lot of musicians and the majority, I won't say majority, but a lot of the leadership of that element were German Jews. Because they also were staying there, they were the -- of the camp. And it was done for the Germans. They wanted it. It was also done because it saved their lives and so they would stay longer. And then of course the people who were in the camp could go in the evenings after the Germans had gotten their share of it. The ones who had no freedom in the camps, there was a camp within the camp, were Jews who were caught who were hidden. And when they caught them they came into the camp and they were within a camp in the camp of Sobibor. They had no freedom at all. They could only stay in the barracks waiting for the next transport to leave for Auschwitz. The irony was that they thought they were punished more. We all got in the same train. But there was again this orchestration of fear, and of total planning.

Q: Did you read?

A: Yes, in Westerbork you could read. There was -- somewhere I remember reading. I used to read a lot when I was a child.

Q: Were you alone or were you--

A: No, I had friends. I had friends, but I like to read. I remember when we were in Borquelo, we used to go every Friday afternoon to the public library and picked up half a dozen books, my friend and I, and we read. Sometimes even books I shouldn't have been reading in those days at that age. But we read a lot and we had good guidance because they had good librarians. So we traded books before we had to take them back the following week, so we did do a lot of reading. In the camp there were some books because the camp was started before the Germans got there. The camp was started in 1939 about.

Q: Was it clean?

A: Yes, it was clean. Hygiene was good. There wasn't any problem with hygiene that I remember. It was clean.

Q: Do you remember differences in the population, richer people, poor people?

A: Not really, not really, no. The difference was the ones who were caught in hiding, they were treated very badly. They didn't get as much food as we did for instance either. There was a punishment there to make us understand that there was a wrong thing they had done. And also probably --I think to send messages.

Q: Was your grandmother with you?

A: In Westerbork, yes. She was with us in Westerbork. And she went to Theresienstadt after I had left. My grandfather was also with us, and he left I think, if I remember correctly, shortly before I did on the transport by himself. He went to Sobibor I found out in recent years looking at lists. Excuse me.

Q: When did you find out that you had to go to Auschwitz, how did you find out?

A: I did not find out at all. I only find out I have to go on the train, and I never heard the name Auschwitz. I found out when the train stopped and we got out of the boxcars in Birkenau.

Q: Okay, we have just a few minutes left on the tape, so why don't we break now so they can change the tape, okay.

A: Okay.

Tape #2

Q: Let's talk about your arrest and going to Auschwitz. You went alone?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about that day?

A: I don't remember the day, but I know I had to say goodbye to my parents and my sister, my uncles. Went in a boxcar.

Q: Can you describe that goodbye a little bit?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember. I know I remember we said if we survive we all go back to Botula. I mean that's one thing we always had agreed on. But obviously it was emotional. But I must say as a 15 year old, 16 year old it's one thing, but I think more and more about what it had to do to my mother and my father. It had to be absolutely the worst.

Q: Did you think about that then?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so because it was adventuresome to some extent. Maybe that's not a proper word, but the fear, you were under this terrible fear and now it was already several years for me, a lifetime at that point, that we lived under this. So I don't remember what my feelings were. I have no idea. But I think about it since I am a father and a grandfather, that it had to tear my parents apart, their hearts. It had to be unreal. I don't think what can describe that. That makes me sad. But in the boxcar it so happened that the girl I used to know, not dating, but friend, a good friend I went to school with, he was in the same boxcar. She was also by herself. And we sat together all the way from Westerbork to Auschwitz. And that's about all I remember.

Q: This may seem a strange question, but did you date when you were in Westerbork?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you in some way have girlfriends?

A: Yes, indeed. The camp was -- you lived a life there, whatever that means. I don't know if there was a movie there, I don't remember that, but it was -- I know we were talking about the entertainment they had there. They had a large auditorium, I remember that. And evenings there were intellectual, there were lectures there.

Q: Did you take a date, did you take a girlfriend?

A: Yes, I did date. We didn't have many places to assemble or to be alone with a person, but it was just the idea of having a friend. Yes, of course.

Q: Did that seem even more -- well, you wouldn't know by comparison, but urgent in a way to do that because life was so difficult?

A: It was urgent to the extent that you clung to each other because there was obviously a terrible loneliness in each person, and a terrible fear. But I do remember that the friendships in the camp in dating, that you just mentioned as dating, friendships were very very deep and very sincere. I didn't have anybody that I said I'm going to marry you, it wasn't even important in life to even think that, but as friendships either from before we were there or we met there and found friendships there, new friends, and you saw that among others. And then there were movements, there was a whole movement in the camp of Halutsim[2]...Zionist movement who met regular. Who had only one dream, they all would go together to Israel and they stay together. They all left together too, they all went to Auschwitz or the other camps. So there was this Zionist movement, there was a cultural life for us to the extent, self-created, self-created.

Q: Were you in any particular kind of --

A: And the Zionist group, Halutsim, we called ourselves the Halutsim which is still used, but it was a youth group, yes. I was younger than some of those kids, but I felt very privileged to be among the bigger kids you see. And the girls, we call in America dating, but that dating was a little different, but the friendships and the discussions and holding hands.

Q: Did you have you first kiss in Westerbork?

A: I wouldn't say it was the first one, but pretty close. No, yes, no, I don't know how to answer that because I don't remember the details of it. I do remember certain things which are not important, in general it's not a matter of seriousness, it's just teenagers, you know.

Q: When you say you clung to each other?

A: Well, we were frightened. There was only so much our parents could do for you. They had their own problems, they had their own fears and heartbreak. So when you were with your own age group, especially girls, and I remember a few of them, we were frightened to death, and it was important that you had that emotional friendship. I'm not talking about sex per se, we were too young for that, but there was certainly at the age in those days when you were 15 and 16 it was a friendship where you could hold hands and embrace each other. How do we know about kissing? Well, you kissed your parents and your sister, but not that emotion

[2]Possibly referring to the He-Haluts (Hebrew: "The Pioneer"),a Zionist youth group.

that we would think of today under the modern so-called post-war society thing in this country. No, it was just this deep friendship and affections. And I think they were important. Of course the last time I held a girl's hand was in the boxcar for a long time because --

Q: That's this friend?

A: This friend, yes.

Q: What was her name?

A: I don't remember her name. I know we went to the Jewish school together, I told you about, and I don't remember her name. I remember her face. But I remember the person because we were in the same boxcar.

Q: And you sat and you held hands?

A: Yes.

Q: And did that help?

A: Yes, I would think so. I'm sure it did because it's got to help a little. And of course we were separated when we got out of the boxcar.

Q: Tell me about the trip?

A: I don't remember anything about that. I know they opened it once for air. We didn't get food. Apparently we took food I think. I don't remember how long it took, but I remember that someone said we are going past Berlin or the bombing building. And we heard bombs drop. That's about all I remember. I remember very little.

Q: Do you remember noise, smells in the boxcar?

A: Well, obviously the human, there were no toilets so whatever happened I'm sure. But no one died on that trip. Subsequent of course I have other stories to tell you. But on that trip no one died that I knew of in our boxcar at least. Maybe in others older people. And there's very little that I remember.

Q: There were other people your own age on that boxcar or were there a variety of people?

A: A variety, older people, younger people, babies, you name it, all of us. The ones who were in that camp within the camp in Westerbork, they had separate boxcars again for reasons that only the Germans will know. Just to have more fear than fear, create more fear than fear. They weren't with us. We never saw them. And them some of them, one particular family,

this boy was my closest friend from the day I came to Holland until they went in hiding, he was in that group. They were found, they were in hiding. No one survived in that entire family of many people, 30, 40, 50 people. That entire family was hidden somewhere. No one survived, no one. So I remember he was in Westerbork. I saw him through the barbed wire. We couldn't talk to each other, just wave to each other. I couldn't even send him food. That I remember.

Q: Do you remember the opening of the boxcar at Auschwitz, do you remember what kind of a day it was?

02:11:40

A: I don't know. I know it was in the late spring of '43, somewhere. I don't remember exactly when. And I remember the enormous screaming, screaming from the outside of get out, get out. And instructions where to put your luggage, so-called. We had to leave it right outside the boxcar in a big heap. That's all. You were not allowed to take anything. And then I remember, what I remember vividly, we were marked, the men on one side, women on the other side, and I remember standing in front of --and I know that my mother had put double shirts on me, double sweater, everything was double to make sure and I looked quite heavy and was well fed. And I know men were putting this stick out to me and he said "Wie alt?", how old. And for reasons I have never been able to say, I said "achtzehn," 18. Now, why, I think only God helped me at that moment because one thing I always wanted to be older. I always wanted to be with older people, more mature people. So I said 18, achtzehn, and he used the stick and told me to go this aisle. I forget which side, I think to the left. And then I saw other people going to the right, and I was very almost annoyed with myself that I had lied, because if I had told the truth maybe, I thought I was almost punished because I saw the others going on the trucks and I know we had to march because I figured if they go on trucks and we have to march so I thought gee, why did I not tell the truth, I would have been able to go on trucks. God knows how far we have to march. But obviously as you all know the ones on the trucks went directly to the crematorium. And we went from there, we marched to, just a very short march, I'm sure, to the camp where we then were undressed --

Q: Well, wait one second. When you were in that selection process was there a lot of noise, was there a lot of confusion, were people screaming?

A: No, I don't remember screaming. The only screaming I remember was from the guards and the prisoners who had to get us out of the boxcars, because it was a matter of you didn't walk, you ran. You had to be fast, fast, fast, schnell, schnell, schnell, heraus, heraus, heraus, schnell, schnell, schnell. We didn't know why. Today I know why, there were boxcars waiting to be unloaded. But it was always whatever you do, schnell, schnell, and heraus, heraus, heraus. That I remember. And we didn't have a chance, I didn't at least, have any chance to talk to those prisoners who were assigned to that command to do that work. And of course language was another problem. We were from Holland, the majority spoke Dutch,

and we would speak German. No one spoke Yiddish. In Holland Yiddish was not known. I never knew Yiddish until I got into camp. So, yes, it was a rush act, schnell, schnell, schnell.

Q: When did you find out that this was Mengele?

A: I don't know. Shortly after that. Malach-Ha-Mawies, the angel of death. I remember when they talked about the Malach-Ha-Mawies when we got to talk to some other prisoners. And I met a family friend there, which probably was my best -- that was probably my most important moment to survive. There were a couple of others, but when we left the Umschlagplatz where we got out of the boxcars we were taking into a barracks. I remember we were stark naked. Men only. And they were tattooing us. I remember that. And a boy, a man, a cousin came up to me and he recognized me. And he was on the first transport which had left Holland to Auschwitz. There were only one or two alive on that transport, and these were young people. The first group out of Holland were young people. The biggest part was an orphanage of German Jewish boys and girls, but I think there was only boys that I knew, I remember. And they took all those boys, they went in the Jewish orphanage in Holland and they emptied that orphanage. They were not orphans, they were orphans in Holland, they were children that the parents had sent to Holland through some arrangement. And he was from Dortmund. His name was Hans Gelpter. He's still alive, thank God. He's a doctor, and he's now in Africa. And he knew me, and we knew, we had a lot of mutual friends, and he knew my family and I knew his family, only by name. But he knew more about my parents, there was an apparent friendship there or something or acquaintance. He knew my uncles. He had also been at Westerbork. And said a few things to me, what to do and what not to do, I remember that. But I felt that I saw someone I knew which had a calming effect. And he also told me that this the first -- the reason he came there, he had the freedom of the camp because he was one of the early ones. The end of '41 I think they took him, or very early .42. But for six months there had never been a transport kept alive of Jews. This was the first one, he told me. That's why he was so anxious to see who was there since he was amazed that they kept this one alive too. He saw all the previous ones, and they were weekly, every Tuesday they left Holland and crossed the border. So we talked and he said I'll come and visit you, I know where you're going to be. Because he worked and he was very handy, he could fix typewriters or sewing machine, he could do anything, and he still can. He's also a magician. That saved his life. And he was very good to me by telling me what to do and what not to do. And we would go to Warsaw together and also to Dachau. So he was my big brother, so-called. He was protective.

Q: Did he see you before you were tattooed?

A: About that hour at that point.

Q: What was that like, standing there with all those -

A: I have no idea. I mean the fear was so enormous that they grabbed your arm and just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom and you had a number on. And I don't remember, I don't

remember if it hurt or if it didn't hurt. I have no idea.

Q: Were you shaved?

A: Yes, shaved. We were bewildered, you know. I mean it's hard to describe. And from there we went to the barracks and we went through the sauna.

Q: Do you want to explain the sauna?

A: Well, it's just a shower, and they use some chemicals for delousing, they called it, and they put it on the arms and between your legs. And we all looked alike at that point, we were all bald, and we got clothes. We were given clothing, a striped uniform with a pair of galoshes, what we called wooden shoes with canvas on top, and that was it.

Q: Were you given a hat?

A: And a hat, indeed.

Q: All men were given a cap?

A: Oh, yes. That seemed to be very important for whatever reason. Whatever, it was used for another item of "Mützen auf or Mützen ab"[3] and you went through the gate with the music. I remember, the next thing I remember we got into the barracks and the way the sleeping arrangements, you know, the bunks where they pack you in, and the toilet facilities in the barracks which was just a big barrel. And the food distribution where they got -- you know, you got a bowl and they gave you some soup.

Q: An individual bowl?

A: No, I remember in Birkenau you had to share it with two people to one and three people to one. Whoever could get the biggest gulp out, he got the most before he --

Q: We forgot, what is your number, can you just show your number? Your number is what?

A: 145382.

Q: Big number.

A: I ran into somebody in France just recently on the trip we took with Army and for some reason we were talking and this man had a number very close, as close as I've ever seen, he

[3]**German:** literally, "Hats off, hats on." Accompanied by gesture of removing and replacing a hat.

got there the same day from Drancy, and we were about maybe a hundred numbers apart. I never seen one that close. I've had a tough time. It was so heavy, the transports were coming in so fast, so many in that particular period that some of my friends have just ID cards, some card system there in Birkenau, they don't even have one on me. I've sent one to the Germans, it was a German place somewhere I was told, in Bavaria I think and they're still researching it. But they told me that there was a period of a month or two that they couldn't keep up with the administration of it. And they told me that yes these numbers were there, we know that, but we are at a loss, we couldn't keep up with registering the Jew numbers.

Q: Let's talk about you going in to the barrack for the first time?

A: Wooden slab, sand floors I remember. The rows and rows and rows of bunks. And there were beatings already right away.

Q: Who beat you?

A: The Germans, the guards, and the kapos.

02:23:16

Q: Could you describe?

A: Well, the Kapos were German fellow prisoners, Christians not Jews, who were in the German prisons for anything from car theft to bank thefts to homosexuals of course, a lot of them. A lot of those German Kapos were homosexuals. And so were the barracks elderly.[4] And I remember very distinctly that the barracks elderly he went and asked everybody where they were from and who could speak German. I was one of the very few who spoke German. And then he asked me where are your folks, and I told him, and he was from the same area that I was from in Germany. He knew the town very well. And since I spoke German he used to ask me every so often explain that. Not all Dutch spoke German in those days. Now, they speak more languages because of communication, etcetera and open borders. So he every so often used to give me a piece of bread also. He was a German federal prisoner. He was in the German Gefängnis[5] but he was a kapo. He never hit me, that one, the barracks elderly. The others it was different and the work teams, and so he used to take pity on me. Because he slept separately. There was a section where this orderly slept with a wall around it. And he used to give me every so often a piece of bread. And then of course I saw my friend as often as we could sneak or when there was freedom a little bit. He could walk around the camp a little bit more than anybody else because he was there for a long time. And one time he worked also in the Schreibstube, where they do all this--

[4]Blockältester.

[5]**German:** prison.

Q: Explain that.

A: It's what they call in the Army the office part of the camp. He worked there for a while because he typed. My friend Hans was a very talented person, and still is. And then we went out -- working on the railroad, on the street gangs, on the street, digging in the street and repairing the street, working on the streets working near the crematorium. I remember that.

Q: Was that near your barracks?

A: You had to go through the gate marching, and you have to take your hats off and you have to look, you know, to the band and they counted, and it was right outside the camp where we worked on the work gangs. I did not go to Buna.[6] I stayed right in Birkenau.

Q: Did he help you get this job?

A: No, no, it was just every hundred, you know. They count a hundred. And then of course the worst part was this punishment on Sundays. Sundays, you know, they had to check everybody that could work on Monday again, but they kept us standing outside for hours and hours and hours, six hours, eight hours. People dropped like flies. And you just didn't stand, you had to do it in a squat position with your hands out. Everything was done to degrade you more and punish you more.

And after a while I was run over by a lorry and I wasn't in too good a shape, but I was managing. And I was hiding after that with my legs cut. And I was beaten a few times on my back. I still have some scars there. But my friend came to me and he says I'm going to get out of here, you go with me, there is a transport leaving. I don't know how long I was in Birchenov exactly, it wasn't maybe three months at the most, and it could be even shorter. We were in a daze, we didn't know if it was night or day. There was just this fear, this schnell, schnell, schnell, and no food, and the hunger and the beatings and the screamings at night. He says I am going on this transport unknown. They're putting together 300 names and you're going on it with me. I said whatever you say. What did I know, I was a kid and I trusted him because he was older and he was already seasoned, so-called. And he says I volunteered you, we are going on this transport now. He says the worst that can happen we'll get killed this week rather than next month. With some kind of luck we'll get out of here. We'll never survive here. There is no chance that anybody gets out of here. That we all knew. We were told that no one gets out of Auschwitz and Birkenau. That we know. It's just a matter of time how long. And we knew that the commanders who worked in the gas chambers were every 90 days approximately, some of them even every 30 days were killed. So they killed those teams that worked in the gas chambers and the crematorium. But they were given good food and then they didn't realize they were going to be killed in those 90 days. And when you got sick it was automatic

[6]Auschwitz III, or Buna, was a factory for the slave loabor production of synthetics under the aegis of the German corporation IG Farben.

Barracks 13, for any reason. And they check you ever Sunday.

Q: What was Barracks 13?

A: That was the last station before you went to the crematorium. That's where they assembled them. So we went into boxcars again --

Q: Wait a minute, let's not leave Auschwitz so fast.

A: I was in a hurry to leave it.

Q: I know. Let's go back a little bit. Do you remember roll call?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Was that different from what happened on Sunday?

A: No. But Sunday lasted longer. During the roll call you got some tea, you know.

Q: Do you remember how long you stood on roll call?

A: Oh, it varied. Some of them were very very long. Some of them were very long. But on Sundays it was worse, and they then made you sit in a squatting position, halfway down. And there were a lot of beatings to scare you more.

Q: Did you try to avoid being beaten?

A: Listen, there was no chance that you avoid that. I mean if they picked on you they picked on you for whatever reason. And they found enough reasons. There were always reasons. I was just lucky, I didn't get beaten as much as some others. Maybe I was shorter. Who knows?

Q: When did you find out about the gas chambers?

A: Right away. We knew it within a day or two, maybe even sooner. Not until we got there. The smell, the smell. I mean they were going, seven of them at that time and they were all around the camp.

Q: What did it smell like?

A: Burned hair, burned flesh. It was -- it didn't feel normal, just the sun, the wind, you never saw birds, you never saw green. I mean if there would be a green leaf ten people would jump for it. I mean because everyone was terribly hungry. And so it was the smell, the stench was just awful. Plus the fact there was no hygiene as far as bathrooms. There was no such thing.

There were latrines, but there was --

Q: Can you describe?

A: In the barracks all they had was a very large wooden barrel. And during the night I remember, during the night to used to, whoever was in charge of the night shift, I don't know if they call them guards, but they were assigned there to stay up during the night to empty that. They used to wake you up with a stick, hit you over the legs or whatever and you had to jump out of your bunk and carry this thing down the street. I don't know far, but you can imagine a big -- it's like a big wine barrel, bigger than a 60 gallon barrel, even bigger, and you had to carry that, three people, four people, sometimes two people. And they had to watch, if you spilled it you got beaten up. If you didn't spill it you got beaten up. And it was so bad because some people just couldn't handle it mentally or physically, they were too weak. And I remember once, the first or second night in there, there were two brothers that were Dutch, they couldn't speak German. I remember this distinctly. And they beat one brother to a pulp, he couldn't carry it, so they just beat him to a pulp. And his other bother was watching. So it was one after the other, it wasn't a matter of a single issue, it was hourly. It never stopped, it never never stopped. Did it get better? No. Did it get worse? Yes. And that's why when I said we were convinced we would never get out of here. But then there is something about the human being that you always have hope. Because the ones who didn't have hope they disintegrated real fast. And for some reason I didn't. I always had hope. But a lot of people just --

Q: Where do you think you got that from, where did it come from?

A: I don't know.

Q: Were you religious?

A: Well, yes, I was very religious. We were very conservative. We went to Temple, to synagogue. We had kosher food at home. We fasted whenever the Jewish holidays dictated that. And we prayed after dinner. And we prayed at night when we went to bed. My father did not light the fire, my grandfather did. Not my father anymore, I learned it at bar mitzvah time. But most of the time I had to, for a while. But that doesn't mean whether or not my grandfather read the Torah on Shabbas. And my grandfather's brother was the _____, did the kosher slaughtering. It was a small community, this is back to Germany. So my father was the alternate with his cousin, president or vice president of the congregation. It was a small little building they had. So we had a very religious life. And in Holland even much more so. The town we lived in was very religious. We went to -- every night, Temple. We went most morning and on any holiday mentioned in our religion, it was an event. Plus we studied Gomorrah and Rashi. I used to be able to read that. And we studied Mishna. So I've done all that from when I was about ten until I was arrested, those years. And it was very serious and most pleasant. And every day we had Hebrew school after the public school,

every day, including Sundays. So it was a wonderful life -- we have everything. And they had social events all the time, literary evenings, and that's usually when they brought in speakers. And my father was always kind of the master of ceremonies. He was a really entertaining, and he played music. So there was a whole wonderful life for us especially in Holland. But going back to Auschwitz, it wasn't an event that is even where you can call it human. It was at the other end of anything you can imagine. The beatings, the devastation of the people, you could see it, and the loss of everything. And then I worked in the work gangs and we saw them going into the gas chambers. A lot of them didn't know. The majority didn't know when they came right up the railroads in boxcars. They didn't know. We knew. We didn't tell them, what's the use. And the work gangs, we were right there. The gathering, we were supposed to be gathering the -- on the crematorium. But you did what you had to do.

Q: Did anyone who was marching, were they close enough to ask you what was happening?

A: No, not that close. And if you did talk to them they beat the hell out of you. I mean it wasn't a matter of -- as an example when a guard threw a cigarette away, if you picked that cigarette up and you were caught you were dead. You didn't go near the towers because, you know, they used to throw cigarettes out of the tower. The newcomers didn't realize, they went for the cigarette butt and they never made it back.

Q: What happened?

A: They killed them, they shot them because they said well you're escaping, escaping. These things you learn. That's when I said friend taught me a lot of things real fast. I had the fastest college education in about a day or a day and a half. Those things are pure luck.

Q: Did you pray?

A: A lot.

Q: When you were there?

A: I remembered the Shabbas. Yes. And I still do. And I take deep pride I think that I don't know any Jew who went through this, I don't know one, not that they are religious, but I don't know any Jew that I know personally who went through that who converted. And that gives me deep pride. Now, do we have a reason to convert or just drop the whole thing? Yes we do, yes we do. We saw there was no God in Auschwitz. But then there was a God, for me there was one.

Q: In Auschwitz?

A: Really. I got out. I got out. My parents didn't. My sister didn't. But I still believe in God. I

couldn't function otherwise. And I don't want to be even thinking that. I do not to be a very religious Jew, not particularly. I got to Temple and I keep the holidays and I fast and I don't eat pork. But that is maybe because it's maybe a different world today. If I were living in a certain area where this was more handy for me or I could find less excuses, I would like to live that way, I would like to spend more time studying the Torah and _____, I just don't have that. I don't live in that -- which is only a cop-out on my part. I understand it fully. But I'm still dreaming that some day I'll have the time to do that. So I have deep pride that my kind of Jews who were int eh camps with me stayed Jews. And there must be exceptions I'm sure. There may be. But this is an important thing that I can think of. The same thing I believe, the deepest pride I have, I have -- and we were liberated -- the towns around the camp. And I will tell you and I have double checked there with my colleagues, there wasn't a German killed by a Jew who was a prisoner. We took their food and we took their clothing because we needed it. We didn't beat him up and we didn't kill him. And I think that that gives me probably more pride as a Jew than anything that I can think of. That we had seen the killings and we shouldn't have been killers. There wasn't a German killed by a survivor, the Jewish survivors, because we didn't want to live like they lived with what they had done. And we didn't stoop down to the levels that we had seen humanity, but we wanted to get out of there the faster the better. That I will tell people as often as they ask me. There was no German killed by Jews after the war.

Q: What did you think of other prisoners when you were there and yourself, what was happening to you and how did you view each other?

A: There wasn't an intimate relationship. First of all we didn't know each other. We were all thrown together. I didn't know -- I don't think I knew anybody. Maybe one or two, maybe. But that doesn't mean we were in the same bunk together. And if you weren't in the same bunk together you had no time to do anything else. So there was very little social intercommunicating, discussion, because during the day you couldn't because you were watched all the time, there was no talking, and at night it was too difficult. Furthermore, it was a matter of survival too. You were constantly watching over your shoulder. To the extent that you did receive overnight, if you got a piece of bread in the evening you'd eat it as fast as you could.

Q: Why?

A: Because if you kept it out they stole it. Somebody -- people were not human. I'm not saying that they were thieves, they're not thieves. You ate it so there was no possibility you could lose it. And were that hungry anyhow. But I don't remember in those days, and maybe later on when we get into the other camps we can talk about that, but it was a little different atmosphere in some other camp I'm thinking of for the moment. There was some discussion, but as far as Birkenau was concerned it was all we saw was killings and dead people and beatings.

Q: And at night?

02:43:39

A: At night they were running into the electric wires. They had the a special commander with cars who would go along the wires to pick up the people who run into wires. If they had the courage to do it, they'd just get it over with.

Q: Did you ever think about that?

A: Not to go into the wires, no. Once I tempted a guard to shoot me, but it was later.

Q: In Auschwitz?

A: No, not in Auschwitz. Later, I wanted to get it over with. But he didn't.

Q: You talked about getting a bowl. Was that an individual bowl or was this a bowl that was shared?

A: No, it was shared. I remember you had to share it. Two people, three people, four people.

Q: How many of you were in the bunk together?

A: I don't remember. But you couldn't lay on your back. That much I remember. You had to be on one side or the other side.

Q: Did you talk at night?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Could you sleep?

A: Yes, I'm sure we slept. I'm sure we slept. Because, you know, you worked during the day. I'm sure we slept.

Q: Do you remember noise in the barrack, smells?

A: Oh, the smells, I don't remember the smells. I know there were smells. There had to be. I told you about the toilet facilities. Yes, noise, screaming, people would -- I know it was bad. I don't know the details. I feel that, and it took me 40 years to even talk about it, I also feel that I really don't want to wake up totally to remember everything. This is the first time, as you well know, that I am doing this. And I lived in San Francisco all these years until I got involved in this Holocaust movement in the '70s, and I don't think anybody knew I was in the

camps. I don't wear short-sleeved shirts.

Q: You don't have short-sleeved shirts?

A: No.

Q: Why?

A: Because I never. And I'm not the only one. I've heard this by survivors, it's either sympathy, and you don't want that sympathy. You don't want to advertise it. And I also believe another thing, Joan, that there were a lot of survivors who was ashamed that they were alive after the war. For whatever reason they survived and the rest didn't. And I think it also had to do with another thing, when we came back from the war there was no one who was interested. We had no one to talk to. We had no one to talk to. Now, it's a little different. But there was no oral history project, there wasn't even a social worker. There wasn't even a friend. There were no friends left. There were no parents. And everybody had problems after the Jews came back from either hiding or from the camps, and everyone was trying to put their life together. And the survivors, nobody was interested in us. We made it ourselves. We had no one. I had no one to talk to, and I know my friends didn't either. And we didn't talk to each other because we already talked to each other. We saw it with our own eyes how much more. My friend who I told you about, my friend I saw again in Birkenau, he visits me every few years. He's been here about a dozen times. He lives in Bodachia (ph) now, in Bodachia now,_____. We never talk about this. When I bring it up sometimes just to -- he says next issue. We never talk about it. So we had no one to talk to. So why advertise it.

Q: When you were in Auschwitz his name was?

A: Hans.

Q: Hans. He warned you about things in Auschwitz didn't he?

A: Well, in general.

Q: What was going on, what kind of work he was doing?

A: Well, I know what he was, he worked and he was at that time when I met him he was in charge of about maybe a hundred people repairing sewing machines and typewriters, something like this. Because he was a mechanic who knew how to teach those people. It was for the administration there. And then he also was a magician, so he had to do magic for those people.

Q: He performed?

A: For the Germans.

Q: A lot?

A: Not at the time I got there.

Q: Did you ever see him perform?

A: Not there, no. Here in our country, oh yes, when he put magic -- together. He's now well known. He became well known after the war.

Q: Did you know other boys your own age in Auschwitz, 16? You were about 15, 16 years old.

A: Yes, well there were some of them the same age. Most of course were older. I don't remember. I don't remember anybody except Hans, my friend. And the others were all strangers to me. I was thrown in with them.

Q: You were near the gypsy camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember seeing the gypsies?

02:49:00

A: Yes, we saw through the barbed wire, yes. Well, at camp I remember a lot of people in there, very heavily populated. And they had their own clothes and they were men, women and children. And I remember at night they used to play the violin. I remember that distinctly. This wonderful deep staccatto and the music the gypsies played. I know someone in our area who is a gypsy and I ask him to do it and they can't do it like that, not the way we heard it, the way I remember it. The shadows as you know, the gypsies, the Hungarian gypsies especially. So I remember that music, I remember that music. And I also remember they beat them up a lot. They used to beat the gypsies a lot -- screaming, we heard the screaming. But that was all over the camp. That's about all I remember. I wasn't yet long there, you see.

Q: Were you surprised that there were families together?

A: To us there was no surprises. I mean it was all happening, things that we had no relationship to, neither did we understand it. I mean we just accepted hour by hour, day by day. I mean things were moving so fast, but there was hunger and the living conditions and the beatings and the killings. I used to see there the camp commander, I think was _____(ph), I think it was, used to drive through the camps of Birkenau on a motorcycle with a pistol and

whoever was in front of him he shot.

Q: Did you see that?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Is that the first time you saw somebody killed?

A: I don't know when I saw the first person killed. I don't remember. But I remember him doing that. On a motorcycle, running through the camp, and if he saw somebody in his way he shot them. And we saw in front of the gas chambers when we worked there, you saw them throw the babies in the air, smash the babies against the walls when they were standing in line.

Q: You saw that?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you think about nothing, were you frightened?

A: Well, it all was part of everything. I don't remember my emotions, because if you stopped working they beat you, so you kept on working and shuffling with a shovel.

Q: Did you dream at night?

A: Then?

Q: Yes.

A: I don't remember. I don't know if I dream now. But I remember, I don't know, I still, and maybe it's not the proper way to express it, but I have this deep down feeling that I was in a coma, in a hypnosis for the entire duration of my camp life. I mean maybe it's because you were so young. And probably that's what it is because very few older people, very older people couldn't handle it. I was a child and maybe that's what gave me the benefit. Now, today I think different than I know I thought then. And only in very recent years, especially of the work I'm doing now even though it's voluntary, and some days I feel maybe I shouldn't have gotten involved in it, but then I also feel very strong, almost overwhelmingly that we have to tell this story. There was another drive I think I had and always had, everybody, to be able -- and I wanted it so badly, there was nothing more, than anything else that I wanted to get out and tell the story, and I think that drove me more than anything else.

Q: You thought about that?

A: Yes. And I believed I was going to do that. I always believed that I was going to tell the

story. Because it drove me so much that how well they know -- I remember I used to hear the scream "Sohor, Sohor," remember.

Q: Who would scream?

Q: Whoever the Jews were when they were beating them, "Sohor, tell, remember, remember what they did to us." I learned sohor very early in life.

Q: This hope that you had and the sense that you would get out and tell the story, do you think that was essential to you're being able to --

A: Well, it didn't help me of creating the situation because I think the situation was created strictly by accident and maybe with the help of God, but it certainly helped me to keep my senses to the extent and to have not all these horrible things penetrate my mind, because I'm certainly not a criminal. And what I have seen I should be a criminal. It happened to a good friend of mine, a friend I had in camp, a young boy my age who came out, and we can talk about it later, and became a criminal, a son of a rabbi, a Polish boy. He became a criminal in Amsterdam after the war.

Q: Let's stop now. The tape is going to run out.

A: All right.

Q: Let's stop.

Tape #3

A: That's another story.

Q: -- later we can go back to your friend who became a criminal.

A: That's after the war. It wasn't really a nice story.

Q: Had you seen women in Auschwitz?

A: We saw them at a distance, very distant. No, we didn't see them close. When they march by sometimes, but not very close by.

Q: Did you notice when you saw them marching that they were in a different condition than the men?

A: Oh, yes. But we knew they were women because they had dresses rather than jackets or pants like we had. But then they were bald. As you well know they were also shaven. But we knew they were there, we saw them. You couldn't talk to them. You couldn't talk to anybody from any other camp, any other compounds, so-called, what you may call compounds.

Q: Did you ever see women guards?

A: Oh, yes. With the women, yes, women kapos. And we know they treat the women very badly, very very badly, and we knew that .

Q: Worse than the men?

A: Well, we heard a lot of screaming. The screamings we knew. We heard the screamings. That we knew.

Q: Did you stay on this road work the whole time --

A: I remember, yes. He worked on the work gangs. All I remember there were work gangs in the camp, outside the camp.

Q: Did you lose a lot of weight?

A: Yes. I never became a Muselmann. Do you know what a Muselmann was?

Q: No. Explain it?

A: A Muselmann were really the ones which it would be unfortunate to see today on television

when you see Somalia. That's how a lot of not all, most of our people looked. But if you get to that stage, since there was no help, that's how they ended up. And they called them newswoman. I can't watch that on television I swear. I've seen a lot as you well know. When I see that Somalia thing, I'm ashamed to say that I cannot watch it, I have to turn my head away. It bothers me no end. And that's how a lot of our prisoners, all throughout the other camps too.

Q: Did you ever see yourself in a mirror at Auschwitz?

A: No.

Q: In a glass?

A: No. In Warsaw that's different. And you'll find out why in Warsaw, because the buildings there they got into, but not in Birkenau, uh-uh.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to say about Auschwitz?

A: No. A lot of things are in my heart and my soul and my mind, but I don't know anything in particular I can think of at this moment except that it was so overwhelming. People say well why didn't you do something, why didn't you escape, why wasn't -- the question isn't even justifiable because in Auschwitz the fear, the electric wires, the beatings, the hunger, the starvation, the degradation, you know, the way you were treated, you never had time to think. And then again I have to admit I'm in such a hypnosis still about that today, that now when I do remember things like chlorine, I can't stand the smell of chlorine. When I have chlorine in the water sometimes, especially here you Washingtonians, I can't stand your water because it has a chlorine smell and it reminds me of Auschwitz and Birkenau, and all the camps for that matter.

Q: Why does it remind you?

A: Because they used to spread chlorine around for disinfectant and that smell was always overwhelming. And the burning of hair, I can't bear to smell that, for me. Or flesh because it reminds you of the crematoria. But you asked me have you been back to Auschwitz, I will not go back. I will never go back to any camp, and I can't. I don't want to wake up. I think that's what it is. I'm afraid to wake up, really wake up. And since I'm having a very good normal life, and I think I can function quite well, I believe, maybe not everybody agrees with me, but I agree with me on that issue, I don't want that potential interference. So I want it to stay the way it is. That's why I've never done an oral history until now. And look how many years, 48 years, right. Yes, let's leave Auschwitz, and maybe something else will come to my mind. But it's very deeply buried, it's very deeply buried, and let's leave it that way for the time being at least.

Q: So let's talk about your friend coming to see you about going on this trip unknown.

A: Yes, it's called transport unknown, something like that. And we went on that, 300 men from Birkenau. I believe they were all from Birkenau.

Q: And he's the one who helped you get on this?

A: He helped me indeed. Without him I wouldn't be around there. And how he did it I have no idea. And it could very well be that part of the barracks I was in, I don't know. I remember he said you must go on this. Because I asked him -- no, I didn't ask him, he told me. I said what should I do, and he said you go because I'm going on it and he took me. And then we went back to the boxcars one day.

Q: Took the same kind of a trip?

03:09:46

A: No. I remember they gave us a piece of bread when we got into the boxcar. That I remember. I don't know why I remember that, but I remember that. Maybe I was very hungry. And then we went in a boxcar. I don't know how long this trip was. It couldn't have been very long. If it was a day or two or one day, I don't know how long it was. I know that we ended up in a very large railroad yard in the city, and then of course we found out it was Warsaw. And this was in the summer of '43 I believe. I don't know the dates because we didn't know dates. The only reason we knew it was Sunday in Auschwitz was because it was selection day. That's the only reason we knew that. And then we were marched from the railroad yards in Warsaw to this bombed city, this bombed section of the city. And there were fires still going, and there were many dead bodies laying in the streets and a lot of debris. And I remember there were no barracks, that there were sections of barracks laying there. They marched us into the ghetto. We found out later this was the ghetto. And we marked in, and I think the first couple of days we slept outside somewhere until they built this barracks, a wooden barracks. Better ones than we had in Auschwitz I must say that.

Q: And who built these, did you?

A: Yes, the prisoners had to do most of the work, but it was German supervision. There were foreman there who were not prisoners. But the prisoners did all of the labor. Us guys. And then when we started working, and the reason we were there, we were sent there to dynamite the ghetto, to destroy all the evidence, to dynamite all the buildings, to preserve as much raw material as we could find from transformers to cable, electric wiring, copper wiring, wood. And a lot of prisoners polished bricks because those buildings, and I happen to be, for a reason that I don't know why, but I was on the demolition team and we had to plant dynamite, dynamite they called it, underneath the walls. And then the Germans handled the plunger, the wires. We had to set the wires. And I remember a few occasions they, for joy

rides, they'd push the plunger before the prisoners got out and got away from the walls. I got hit over my legs a few times. We didn't run fast enough because we had nothing, we didn't have decent shoes, and couldn't walk that fast because we were not that well fed. And that's what I did for quite a while. And then for a while I did, and another groups of maybe 30 guys, we had to find transformers in buildings, electrical transformers, and we had to put them on trucks. And that also was part of the war machine. And then I worked for quite a while in the railroad yards where the equipment was transferred to and from the eastern front, the Russian front. So that was about what we did. And one day I remember -- oh, and my friend Hans was my helper and sometimes I got upset with him, he once said I got a good job, he said I have five people going to some work detail on the other side of the waxer to a German army camp, army whatever, maybe we can get some food there because five guys maybe they feed you. So he put me, and I remember, and I was reminded of it recently when two boys, two boys from Croatia, from Zagreb, they were very nice boys, you know, my age, and two others, and I forgot the others, I think one was a boy from Berlin, and we went there on a truck to this army post, German army post. They were all SS troops, most of them. And we dug fortifications. We have to dig trenches. And they beat us up terribly that day, just beat us up terribly. And two of the boys were killed that day. One of the brothers and one other man. So out of the five only two walked out. So that night when I found my friend I tell him don't do me any more favors. And so that was Warsaw. And then I worked in Laundry for a while. And my friend he had a job of assigning detail sometimes so he was always helping me, he was always helping me. And Warsaw was different because we lived in this ghetto. A camp, about two camps they was building. And they give us one camp and then we built a new camp. We all got to do that. So out in the big ghetto there and the first camp, and then during the winter, in the spring, in January there was another camp, and 300 were amplified by several thousand, a lot of Hungarian Jews. And at the tail end we got out of Warsaw, there were 3,600 prisoners there. And a lot of them died even during this period while we were there. But 3,600 and they were mostly Hungarian Jews.

Q: All men?

A: All men. No, we never saw women. The only time we saw women was when we were in trucks going to some work details on the streets. In addition to that they also did a lot of shooting of Polish political prisoners in the ghetto in our camp and we had to burn the corpses. There were a lot of corpses when we got there first. We found basements full of corpses. That's a prison they had there and lots of bodies we found. We burned them. There was stacks we had to build. And one day we spend a few days in the Pawiak, I don't know about ten of us who got sent there for a detail, and --

Q: Do you want to explain Pawiak?

A: Pawiak was a fellow prison in the City of Warsaw. I don't know if it's still there. But we were sent there for some work detail. I remember spending there a couple of days. I remember, the only thing I remember this heavy heavy stone buildings. And the fed us soup. That shows

you what you remember, some odd things. And it tasted like pure soap water. So I asked them why is there so much soap in there, and the reason, this person explained, whoever it was, said apparently the soap, and I'm not talking about the Jewish people, I'm talking about the prisoners in this Pawiak, the reason they gave them this soap, they threw a bar of soap in every soup kettle because it would decrease their sexual desires. Soap or whatever chemical, that's what they explained to us. Because it tasted like soap, which was even delicious, better than what we had in the camp. But I remember they used that. We didn't have that problem, the Jewish prisoners, believe me. So Warsaw, we didn't have the hunger because we found a lot of food in the buildings, staples. There were still staples to be found, barley, things like that.

Q: And you were allowed to keep these?

A: If you could find it and could hide it. If they caught you you were in trouble. But we also had other avenues, and while we were in the ghetto the Poles came in and bought the bricks, the polished brick, and we used to find clothes and save them bundled up and sold them the clothes for a piece of bread or a couple of onions or some garlic and even sometimes vodka. And they brought things with them and they thought it was our's, those Poles who came in, they had this cart with a horse in front of it, so they brought in food, not because they liked us, only because it was a business deal. I didn't speak Polish, but we had Poles who could speak the language. And then there were what we found also was in the early days when we were in Warsaw, Jews were in the bunkers, who once had done the uprising, and they were still in bunkers and they came out when the dynamiting started. And when the Germans of course saw them they shot them on site. But I remember also one day there was a boy and a girl came out. The Poles had been supplying them with food. And they run out of money and out of gold and I saw a Pole kill this girl. He killed her because he didn't want to have her alive so in case she would implicate him. They weren't very nice. And they were very bad. And so they didn't help us out of any human point of view, they helped us because it served them. And I remember we worked in the railroad yards and they had Germany material like uniforms and shoes, etcetera. And we sold and traded, not so much traded, with the Polish railroad people, traded with them for food. So the hunger was not as bad in Warsaw as it had been in Birkenau.

Q: What was the barracks situation like, you said it was better?

A: Well, it was more modern. I'll use those words. But they were a little better and there also was heat, there was a stove there. A typical Polish stove out of stone I think they were made. I remember there was heat in there. Not always that we had something to burn, but there was enough wood laying around because of the demolition we did on those buildings, so it didn't cost anything to the Germans. But there is one point I want to make that just came to my mind. I happen to believe very strongly, and maybe that's in conclusion later on, that this entire issue of the Jews, Auschwitz, etcetera, the destruction of the six million of our people was a very large money-making event for the Germans. That served and financed the biggest

part of the war industry. Because a few realize how much we were told what to bring. You realized that every person who went through Birkenau that I know of, and other camps I'm sure the same, and all the gas and all the crematoriums in the different camps, they looked in your mouth and if you had gold fillings -- had rings, my mother had a wedding ring and my father had a wedding band, so did everyone else who were married couples, there was enormous hordes of gold. And I remember one day in Warsaw I found in a house, someone had found, and we had four diamonds, four diamond stones. Was worth about, maybe 5-6 carats of diamond. I didn't know anything about that, but somebody said it's a very good amount. I sold it for a little piece of bread to a Hungarian because he only got there three days before. He thought he made a big purchase. Well, I had the bread and I lived and he had no bread that day or for two days, so he didn't get anything for two days. So there was so much, I mean dollar bills, gold laying on the streets, silver. But the wealth of just the clothing alone, you'll see the lists that we have at our museum, and the valuable things just pulled out of that ghetto, and that's done in many places, that financed the Germans. It was a money making event for the Germans. It was a money making event. Aside from they hated the Jews and wanted them all killed, but they made money on the deal. The clothing, the hair was sold all over the world, recycled in some form.

Q: When I mentioned whether you had seen yourself in Auschwitz you said no, but you didn't explain?

A: We, we were working in all these buildings, while we were working there were some mirrors there and you saw.

Q: Were you surprised at what you saw?

A: No. You didn't have much time for that. It didn't make any difference. It didn't make any difference. What did a mirror mean to us, what did a piece of gold mean to us. Gold had nothing to do with it. There was no one to sell it to or give it too. It was almost laying on the streets. It had no value, what could you do with it? If you couldn't get food with it, it doesn't mean a damn. So that taught me, and I've said it often to younger people, that wealth is only good if you buy a very fancy painting, it's only good if you can enjoy it and look at this painting. But what happens if you need to sell it and there is no one to buy it, then whatever you paid for this write it off real fast. It has no value if you can't sell it, if there's no buyer. And that's what happened when I had those four pieces of diamonds in my hand. I had one buyer and he didn't survive because he gave me his bread. He was dumb enough to do it, but I was at that point seasoned, and I don't want to say smart, certainly seasoned that I knew I couldn't do anything with the diamonds except I needed a greenhorn to sell it to because I was hungry.

Q: Were the relationships among you as prisoners there, 3,600 you said, not that you had relations with 3,600 people, was it different than Auschwitz?

A: No comparison. Much much easier. It was easier. But we were under the treat of being killed by selection. We died because there was typhoid in Warsaw by the way, and I had typhoid, but a very mild case, and I wasn't in the Krankenbau, in the hospital so-called. But I got out not very much before when the Russians broke through and got out. But I was in there for a while, not long. And many died because there was typhoid in there. That's why they kept shin the camp. There were 3,600 left at that point. And I think at one time there was probably close to 5,000 there. The camps replenished. That number is -- but I know it was more than 3,600. And he was told to kill them all. And I'm told, and this is all hearsay, that the Polish underground who was watching the camp very much so because they used to take, the Polish Resistance --brought them in the ghetto and shut them in there with us -- on one wall there and we had to turn them then. The Polish underground allegedly told the Germans that if you kill all these people you'll never get out yourself, I'm told, because it was not difficult for them to do. And we heard the rumblings of the big guns that was here already because the Russians were breaking through. So one morning they had 300 in the beds still, who couldn't get out of the bed. They shot them. 300, correct. And 300 were kept there. And the reason I know is because a fellow I was friendly with because he was my age, was a Berlin Jew, and he was selected to be _____ and he had to stay there, that 300. And those 300 were kept there to destroy all evidence, and they were killed. That we were told later on. I don't know how I know, but I know. And because they were killed while we were marching out already, they just burned the barracks or dynamited. It was done very very fast. And 3,000 marched out, and we marched and we marched and I remember two things very distinctly. Number one, that you tried not to be in the back because we heard the machine guns going constantly and we were told that anybody who drops out is going to be killed. And they left their corpses right on the road. So they had maybe four or five machine guns in the back of some army truck and they shot those people. All men, there were no women there. They were all men. And we marched and here is the thing I remember as much as anything else, we came, it was in the summer, it was very hot, no water, and for some reason it rained once and we were going like this with our soup pan and we tried to catch the raindrops. We were very very thirsty, almost to the point of sanity. People were going insane, people were drinking their urine. And all of a sudden we came over on a bridge, and over the bridge we saw a river. And they took us over the bridge and there was a huge field there, an open field and we went in that field apparently to stay overnight, but to wait for something. And we pushed, the masses pushed so hard, and I happened to be in the earlier part of this grouping of 3,000. Of course it was not 3,000 anymore, but I was in the first, maybe the second hundred or third hundred, very up front. We got into this river, you could wade into the river and we drank and we drank and we drank. But the masses in back of us were so anxious to get to that water they kept on pushing and they pushed us too far in the river so we couldn't walk, and they wouldn't stop. And the Germans didn't know what to do, so they thought that we would go in the river and get to the other side and escape. So they start shooting from the bridge and from the other side. They used machine guns. They shot. And I remember, because I wake up often, that river turned as red as blood. And the Jews wouldn't stop. Our people would not stop. They kept on pushing from the back. And they couldn't stop the Jew and these people. On the German side, they kept killing with bullets and they brought the dogs

in. And the people in charge made those soldiers, those German SS go in the water with the dogs and when the dogs got into the water the Jews stopped. They wouldn't stop for the bullets. That I remember. And then they stopped pushing. I was out by then. Because, you know, I got out because they pushed and it came up to here in the water so I got out. None of us could swim. I don't know how many could swim. I know I couldn't swim. I told you I couldn't go to the swim because I was a Jew. They never taught me how to swim. So the soil was just bodies and blood, and I could only think about why they called it the Red Sea. There's no connection there, but it was red as pure blood. And they killed a lot. They killed, in my estimation, at least 1,000 people there, maybe more. No one knows. But there were very few who got into the trains. And I don't remember if we walked much more, but in the end we got in boxcars. I know the town, that much I remember, Zychlin. That much I remember. Because you could see the names on there, and I remember Zychlin, so I knew that we had marched due west from Warsaw and then we start trip in boxcars again.

Q: And why did you go?

A: We back in boxcars for quite a while, I remember. And there was no water and no food. I remember that. But I know we used the dead bodies to sit for seats or benches alongside. And I remember that --

Q: Who did?

A: And then --

Q: So that was the worst experience in those boxcars?

A: That was, yes. That was the last time I was in a boxcar. And I remember when they opened the doors it was Dachau, and very few got out of the trains. I believe only maybe 200, 300, 400 at the most.

[Technical conversation]

Q: I hate to ask you to do this, but can you re-describe the boxcar trip from Zychlin to Dachau?

A: After we went through that river, I don't know how much time there was, not much time until we were back in boxcars in Zychlin. I know that's where we started this trip. We were in the boxcars and for how long I don't remember. I know a lot of people died en route because we had no food and no water after we had gotten out of the water that day in the river. But no food. And we ended up in Dachau. That much I know. We were in Dachau. And I think we were only in Dachau for maybe a day or two or less and we went to Allach, which is a side camp to Dachau. We ended up there. No, pardon me. We went to Dachau, I'm too early, to Dachau, and I don't know where we were in Dachau, but I know that about 200 to 300 only got out of the boxcars. We sat on the corpses.

Q: You said that this was the worst boxcar experience?

A: Well, because there was these people, first of all they were in very bad shape when we got started on this death march, then that river episode. We had drank too much water without food and there was dysentery, what do you all it, dysentery, right?

Q: Dysentery.

A: Dysentery. So everything there was just horrible. And they died. Some were delirious. And when we got out we were in Dachau. And we didn't stay there too long. And in Dachau, I don't know how, but I think we went in boxcars again, but I'm not too sure. It could have been trucks. I think it was trucks. I remember that. We were taken out of Dachau again and we were taken to Landsberg area, Kaufering area, and there were a lot of small camps. We were in a camp and there were other people there already and we were thrown in with them. I don't know how many. I think there were maybe 1,000, 1,500 people in this camp. They were barracks. They were put on top of --they dug a hole and put a V, two roofs, I can't think of the name right now, but you had to step down. You sat down there on the ground. And we were in there for quite a while, from '44 until -- we worked in various things. The biggest work they did was digging underground munitions factories. What the Germans did, they built those V2, it's V2 things they were building out there, but we were building the buildings for that. And they used us prisoners, thousands of prisoners, to build a mountain, a mountain of dirt and sand and gravel, and when the mountain was high enough, maybe 40, 50 foot high, they carried over the wooden pallets and wheelbarrows and then they poured cement on top of it and then they washed it out. So they built a building reversing the trench, see.

Q: Did you do that?

03:44:15

A: Yes. I worked there to carry dirt up these planks, you walked up and you dumped it and you got more. So you had this hugh mountain. And then they put lots of cement around it. I don't know, I didn't know much about construction, at least not what I know today. And that was used for the V2 rocket engines up there on the buildings. We lost of lot of people there because there was typhoid again. The food was very mediocre of very bad. There were lots of beatings but not as much as we had seen in previous camps. Everything was bad. And the attrition was very very high. But there bodies weren't burned. They were taken to a site in mass graves, hugh mass graves. I don't think they have ever been found. I wouldn't be able to find them. They were huge mass graves. It's not very far from the Landsberg prisons where Hitler had been. It's very close by there. But huge mass graves. And it was so bad that we had a lot of suicides there. People were going into the electric wires. And I remember that's the only time I ever saw cannibalism. There was so little food in '45 there in January and

February and March that we saw that they were cannibalizing the bodies and people were eating it.

Q: Were you tempted?

A: No. No, I never was tempted. I wasn't that bad off. I was bad off, but not that bad off yet. But I have seen it. You saw it. And the Germans caught those people and they killed them. So either they were dead or they went into electric wires.

Q: So this was surrounded just like the other camps?

A: Yes. Except it was smaller than the other camps we had been in. There must have been maybe a dozen of them out there in the area. There were a lot of them. It was Mühldorf and Kaufering and Landsberg, and the names just --

Q: Were the procedures the same with roll call?

A: Roll call, the same thing. The same thing and work, work, work, and no food and there was typhoid around and it was --

Q: And what did they do for uniforms, did you have the same uniforms?

A: Always the same. All the same uniforms, yes.

Q: You didn't change?

A: Well, I don't know how we got -- we may have given them when they were torn and you got others, but we always had those stripers. And I remember it got very cold in '44 and '45 because it's in Bavaria. And that took a lot of lives.

Q: Were you able to get additional clothes somehow? Did you steal clothes from the people who died?

A: Yes. If you could, but you had to show them -- there were inspections too, so if you were caught, if you were caught anywhere with more than what you were supposed to have you'd wish you hadn't done it. They killed you or beat you. Then there were many days when the people did escape or tried, and they caught them all. I've never seen anybody that I know of who got out. And when they caught them, they had latches and they had this bench you had to bend over like a table, and lots of hangings, lots of hangings. As you may notice I haven't gotten into any of the gory things about brothers had to hang brothers if they knew it, and lots of beatings right in front of the prisoners when there was roll call. Daily almost. Findings ways to keep your mind -- a lot of beatings, a lot of hangings. Not so much shootings. Shooting was only when they started running. And they tempted you constantly by throwing

a cigarette butt out and if you were dumb enough to run after that you were dead. But lots of hangings. And then they brought in next to us a camp with women, with 30, 40 women. And they used them to do their kitchen work and I think administration. And they have used these women.

Q: What do you mean?

A: They used them as prostitutes. They are mostly -- they were Czech, some Hungarians and some -- Jewish girls, all young. They killed them at the tail end.

Q: How did you find out about them?

A: We saw it.

Q: You saw it?

A: They were right parallel to our camp.

Q: So you could see them being raped?

A: No, we did not, but we knew it. At night we used to sometimes be able to talk over the wire a little bit. It was very dangerous to do it. But one of our buddies was an electrician, was the camp electrician, he was from Berlin, and he used to arrange there was a short sometimes so we could toss some food to the girls.

Q: And so the women would tell?

A: Then they would tell the stories. And in the kitchen, you know, they did work in the kitchen so we had contact with them.

Q: So this must have been very shocking.

A: Yes, well, there's nothing shocking that we saw. Then I worked -- from there I worked on the railroad yards in the town. I think it was Kaufering, I'm almost sure on the railroad yards there, to do the loading and unloading. And there was one guard he said to me, he found out I spoke German, and he gave me, he says I want you to listen to this, he says, if it gets very difficult to go and take off and go to this address. Which on the surface sounds very benevolent and I should have maybe done that, but I didn't trust him. So I said "Danke schön." I thanked him. I didn't take that chance. We were so mentally programmed that we couldn't trust them. I couldn't true. And this may have been a sincere person, I don't know. I saw him every day at the railroad cars where I worked and he said that to me. Because he asked, he said does anybody here speak German, so I put my hand up. And after maybe a couple of weeks he saw the same face and I saw the same face and he said that to me. I didn't

trust him, I didn't do it. I wish I had done it a few weeks later when we were on another death march.

Q: To where?

A: From that camp back to Dachau. It was in the last week of April. We marked and we marched and we marched and a lot of boys got killed. And then one night they had us on some farm I think it was, and the Germans, part of their troops had already deserted, the Germans, and they were scared for us, but we didn't know that, but in retrospect I can figure this. They said to us, look you all behave now, everything is fine, we are instructed to take you to near the Swiss border. We had no idea where we were. We are near the Swiss border and we are taking you by orders of the International Red Cross over the Swiss border tomorrow morning. And I remember that night when they told us that, we all started crying of joy. We were free. They told us you are free. I remember distinctly, very distinctly, you are free but don't run away because you'll be better off if you stay with us because you are going to Switzerland. To us this was of course the beginning of a new life. And we stood there and cried. I remember that. And especially one friend who was from Brussels. By that time I had made some friends. We had been together for a long time. We stood there and cried and cried. And then morning came and we started marching believing we were going to the Swiss border and before we knew it we were in Dachau. The gate closed and it was Allach really which was a side camp of Dachau. So we were back behind the wires. And then within a few days we saw the Americans come in, on the 30th of April that morning. Then they came over the little hill and we had to tell them we could walk, I could walk. We could tell them and others could took. There were a lot of non Jewish prisoners there, political prisoners, Dutch, French, Belgium, Poles, mostly Western Europeans. And they had to tell the Americans not to touch the wires, they were under high tension. But the night, the last night in that camp, the night of the 29th and the 30th there was a bombardment in that camp. The Germans had for some reasons -- batteries around that camp, that I remember seeing, and the turned those batteries into the camp that night. They killed a lot of kids, a lot of people, mostly Jews. They turned to the Jewish part of the camp. The Jews were separate from the Christians. And they put their guns, aircraft guns go on an angle towards the sky and they put right through, straight out, horizontal into the camp and killed a lot of our people the last night. And then the next morning the Americans came and they had to get the engineers to take the wires and the electricity off the wires, and we were liberated. And the picture you see that we use at the museum, that liberation picture, I'm in that picture. I think I know who it is. I think I know who it is, that person that I see there.

Q: We are running out of tape, I'm afraid.

A: Okay.

Q: So what I would like to do is have them -- can you stop the tape for a moment so that we can get this.

A: Let me take the watch off. They too, my bar mitzvah watch.

Q: Would you like to stand up?

A: That's as close in as I can get.

Q: Yes, that's good.

A: Can you read it? What are you reading?

Q: 145342.

A: 382.

Q: 382. We had numbers in Dachau too, but they weren't tattooed on. They had numbers in every camp. This is only Birkenau. Can I take my arm down?

Q: Thank you very much.

A: All right. I made it very easy for myself, I didn't go into any emotion.

Q: Why?

A: Why? Because it's hard to explain it. I don't remember how I felt. I know one thing, I felt very lonesome and very angry and like crying. I always remember that when I saw my parents go to the gas chamber I couldn't cry, I was so hardened already. See, but then I'm very grateful because I'm not that hateful. I just put it out of my mind. When I think about it, I pick up a book. I don't want to think about it. I read. I've done that ever since '45. If it starts to come into my mind, I pick up a book real fast. That's the only way I can survive.

Q: Well, thank you for being here.

A: Okay. I think we got everything. The liberation we got in here.

Q: We didn't go afterwards.

A: Yes, the liberation. Then I went back to Holland, you know that, which is unimportant.

Q: Okay.