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Alan Zimm interview 2/10/95

S: Why don't you tell me how you came to [Dachau]

ALAN ZIMM: I came to [Durovan-Bullchiwan] in January of 1945 which was a very, very cold day. And snow was laying on the ground much deeper than here. And, eh, we arrived at Atr - and we were actually on the train for almost 6 hours, from [Bulchwa] to [Dura]. And we arrived it was very early in the morning, ah 5 o'clock. It was dark, still, and we had to get out of the train you know, and the Germans with the dogs, and with the bayonets. [Rauss, Rauss, Rauss]. And we lined up in groups from the whole train and we marched into the camp. [Muracha] didn't know what was there. And there was in the mountains earlier a whole barracks, were up in the mountains. We had to walk up and to divide a thousand groups to each block one group. I was assigned to a certain block. We had to walk up steps, wooden steps, into the mountains and there was the barracks. We checked into the barracks and they told us, "You're going to sleep just a couple hours and next you're going to be awakened and you're goin' get some breakfast. The breakfast was unbelievable. Just a little bit of waterish soup with turnips, and they gave you a chunk of bread- black, it was black like black coffee. It was so soft you could just throw it in the wall, it would stick. So that was the breakfast, the whole thing.

And they marched you out, out of the barracks and we came into a big place in the center of the camp called a Appelplatz. We lined up in groups and the head of the [Cest}, the Gestapo, came around with two officers and they checked every - asked everybody what kind of - what's what coming [brupastu]. What kind of profession or trade do you have. So I'll told them I was a tailor. So they assigned

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me to the factory, and when we were there the two days, until we got assigned to the factory, we didn't actually know where the factory was. We were just a block away from it. It was so camouflaged that you didn't know it was a factory there. And the entrance to the factory was covered with a net of artificial trees and bushes and you,uhum, we didn't know it was a factory. When we marched in we realized what it was. The factory was a huge underground factory, it was about two miles long, and they had 48 tunnels, and each tunnel a different section, a different part of the racket was built. I was assigned to one of the tunnels, to a group of two hundred, and I was assigned to work in that area. So I-I saw machines who I've never seen

in my life, so the foreman and the engineer, a German civilian, and the foreman was also from a prison there. He said, "I'm goin' teach you how to operate this machine, what you have to do, and em, you're going to learn quickly." I said, 'Well, I'm looking at the machine there was something very unusual to me. So but uh it took me about six hours to get what I was supposed to do. So I was supposed to make a part to the racket. So hold it and still remember it like today ----- and dis to order to make that racket hard, you went through a certain operation, about 12 different operations with the machine. The German called it drapping what you put part on the machine you do certain operations with it and eh they told me you have to make it with on my shift. 20 of these. That's normal. We should not make anything which is defective. If it's defective, one they allow it but if make more than one, or three or four, then we could be considered a sabotage. People would hang for that. And then but them to hang you is no problem as if it was 1-2-3 they hang you. So I learned how to make it and ah the German foreman, the German engineer, civilian, he was a

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telling me later on that he was from Czechoslovakia. But he wasn't in fact civilian, he lived outside the camp. And he said to me do your work and no worry everything will be ok. Do your work right and I will treat you well. So ah the second I heard this I was increasing my norm and I was afraid if I make some wrong I'm ah they hang you. So I made instead of 20 I make 24, 25, and 26 and they foreman and they engineer was very happy with me, so what he did is during they give you bread additional bread in the factory so he signed me up to get a loaf a bread once a week. A whole loaf of bread. That was just like saving your life. Because what we ate there was nothing couldn't even hardly walk. So I ate the eh eh gave me this bread and told me to hide it so nobody would see it. And we had to hide it for our, in front our prisoners who couldn't eat. I ate at night time on when I was going to sleep. And in the barracks. But he was so happy with me he was a nice man. Sometimes he would come in the morning early from before when I came to the machine he would hide the sandwich in the machine for me, his own. From we brought from outside. And I was doing the worked in that factory actually for almost 4 months. And eh by the time I arrived we were evacuated. I never saw the daylight. Because we arrived into the factory in was night, dark when we left it was dark. And inside was dark, I mean it was light but no daylight. And eh eh the the Germans had the the prisoners stay eh eh eh that camp where we were with 25,000 prisoners. And among those prisoners were 10,000 Russian prisoners, war prisoners. In

eh uniform soldiers were there also. And what happen is the one time it was in February I think, I was there almost 2 months. 2 escaped escaped the camp 2, 2, people, we don't know who. So made us stay outside in winter when it was freezing cold, snow up to here. We stayed outside for

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almost 24 hours we didn't get into the barracks, we didn't go to work either. Because they were looking for those two escapees in every barracks they looked everywhere. Under the floors, everywhere and they haven't found them. So finally they made us go back to the barracks and we what they did took 10 prisoners from the group, Russians and hanged them in the camp. For the ones who escaped they took 10 of them and hanged them. And they had a band there, music from prisoners the band was playing while they hanged the people. And we then we start keep on going back to the factory working. I worked there and worked and one time it was March, at the beginning of March '45. Somebody in one of the tunnels in one of the sections somebody sabotaged a part of a machine, broke apart of the machine, without that part they could not produce the rackets. And they I heard

the engineers talking between them selves in German. Whoever did this, must have known, must be educated person to know what he is breaking, what he's doing. Without the that part they couldn't finish the racket. And what they did was they took the whole group from that section and hanged them. All of them. In the middle of the tunnel. Put scaffolds all around. An an almost 200 hundred people where hanged in pairs. And we had to march the group they marched every group they let them hang there for about a whole shift and every group from every tunnel section had to go march thru so you hanged from the hanging prisoners would touch your head and made you look watch you that you look up and see what we do with people who do sabotage. That's gonna happen to you if you do the same thing. I was so scarred after that I couldn't sleep all night. I'm that really shook me so much that I say well we never going get out of here alive regardless what we do. We didn't believe anybody's gonna be alive for getting out from this place.

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Was so terrible, first of all they didn't give you any food, every day when we walked out to work in the front of the

steps were dead corps laying 5 of them, people starving from starvation. Because we were the good ones actually, there were people going to the quarries from there working in the rocks, quarries, drilling more tunnels in the factory and enlarging the factory. Those people didn't survive, very few of them. Every day dead people coming back. Because there were bound to kill them the ----- kill them and all the prisoners had to bring the dead bodies and lay them down in front of the barracks where they belonged to and the following morning people clean em up and take them to the crematorium. Permanently. Right there was a crematorium also. In that camp. It was working day and night that crematorium. So we we were was a terrible terrible time to was eh the the condition was just brutal in that camp. And an well I was we continue working in the factory. Till the end of March the end of March we notice something unusual. The time to evacuate the whole camp, because end of March, was the end of March 29 I would remember correctly. American planes about 500 of them showed up at one time. And in not far from the factory was a small town called Mauthausen. And they came instead of bombing the factory actually, they I don't know if they realize there was a factory or not, but there was train tracks going into the factory from outside and leaving the tunnel also train tracks what the Germans did, they loaded the racket up on the trains on the trains coming into the tunnel and covered them with straw, boxes of straw with empty boxes to camouflage them and leave in the tunnel. And

nobody knew what was on the train. Even the people leaving Mauthausen didn't know. And they were loading the rackets up to North to ship eh to use against ----- . So at one

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time they unloaded all the bombs on Mauthasuen.

Sandy. . . ?

ALAN ZIMM:

Well, after after the bombing of Nauthausen, the Germans start to

evacuate the factory. The first they evacuated the Russians, all

of them by train. Constantly trains were moving in and taking out the prisoners. That was the beginning of April. April 1st and 2nd of '45. And ah what my foreman did he left me a stor? last group to leave the camp. So everybody evacuating and I was left with 2000 other prisoners. And what they did was they gave us a loaf bread and can of meat because we were the last group to

leave. And my our um eh? which we were supposed to do there was cut all the cables from all the machines and burn all the

blueprints. That what we were doing in the factory. And we did it took us one day to do all that and then they evacuated us, also on the train. While we were on the train we did know where we were going actually, we were going North. They told us one of the guards were going to Hamburg, Germany. And there they gonna put us on a ship and blow us up. So we were very much concerned what they gonna do to us and we didn't see anybody but what they evacuated before. So we kept on going from station to station but the American bombers came in and bombed the stations before we got there. So the train was headed back. A couple hours till they repaired the trucks so we could get thru. So finally we arrived to a station in Hanover, I remember Hanover in Germany the Americans came in and bombed completely the station. And the railroads everything was flames everywhere was burning. And we stayed with before we can get thru we stayed on the train. It took we stayed there 2 days and waited until they repaired the train. The station was still burning. They made the train go thru the

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flames it was burning on each side with the train went thru. Finally, after about 6 days on the train we arrived at a

small station called Bergen. That was a junction a railroad crossing. And there trains coming from other directions too with prisoners but we eh other places. So I had overheard the Germans the guards talking between each other now we have a chance to go into Americaner? or to the English, Germans. We had to surrender to either to this one or that one. So I knew the end was coming. But there still was get it was guns like there machine guns around you all the time. And no food. And everybody was from the group we we came from Bergen, half of the people were dead actually. If we if I wouldn't got the loaf of bread and the can of meat was hiding under my shirt I would never survive either. When we arrive there, before we arrived at that station, we stopped in an area with a farm like a farm. The train stopped for no reason, I don't know. This asked the guards wanted to have some water for themselves so they stopped the train, and eh eh I said to the guard who was sitting next to me, can I go with you get something I saw some prisoners over there in the field. Had some piles you know that could mean all kinds of things. So a French man in Belgium, war prisoners also grabbed by the SS. But they were not like us, they was a a was war prisoners they were treated differently like us. So we arrived there when in the the SS got took some watering and buckets and I said does this can I go over to the prisoners maybe get something to eat there. Mushner! Mushner! So I ran over there to the Frenchman I couldn't talk French I say Mzham Mzham food. And they let me take potatoes and turnips what they had there whole

potatoes I just put them in my shirt and put some turnips. . .mumbling. . .my friend was me we ran back to the train. I had 2 of my close friends I gave them some

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potatoes to eat, whole potatoes we ate that's all we were eating. Finally, after that we arrived at Bergen they made us get out of the train, and line up whoever was living still line up and we could holler I could still walk. But eh some people could hardly walk. So we hugged each other five in a row, and made us walk and there were a whole column of prisoners walking a a 100's and SS were all around us with machine guns, bayonets. So we walked and walked and we started to walk 9 o'clock in the morning. When we arrived there. We arrived at the camp. It was a camp I don't know what camp it was--it was three o'clock in the afternoon. Turn right, you go in there, and the gate opens up, and we walked into this camp, Bergen BElsen. But here were two camps actually, one was half a mile further down, where the women were, women, and this camp wa a vacant camp what the army used, soldiers used this for themselves they had no space where to put us. They put us in this

camp. We stayed in the camp--everybody, they assigned us to different barracks. We went in to lay down, there was nothing in, er, no tables, no nothing just straw on the ground and cement. We lay down, we were so exhausted we just lay down and fell asleep. we must have slept about a day an a half there. When we woke up--
was, probably if was about the twelfth of April of 45. Suddenly we looked out of the window and they say, I was with a Polish young priest, Polish ex-soldiers in civilian clothes, we were together--Jewish prisoners were there very few--from the whole 35,000 prisoners there in Bergen Belsen, there must have been 200 of us left from all over. So I said what are you making out of this. He said, Oh, I looked, he looked and leaned his head out of the window. He said: the German army is here, the army, not the SS. The SS is somewhere else out there setting up guns, machine guns,

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heavy guns, and and all kinds of equipment, war equipment. I said: What do you think they are going to do? He said: Maybe they are going to kill us all here. Nobody believed they're going to survive. Till the last minute, we didn't

believe. Suddenly a grand battle erupted. Without, without any warning, the they shooting the German with heavy guns, machine guns are shooting, and and and we hear from far away distance artillery, shooting in our direction and explosions all around. The camp was in a wooded area, all woods, no human beings around there, and not far from the camp was a road, in the woods going between the woods, a road going somewhere, we don't know where. The battle took about 24 hours, a day and a night, and the following morning, early in the morning, the guns were silent, nothing moving, nothing, er er, eerie feeling--you don't know what's going to happen. Laying down nobody there to lift his head. I said to the chaplain, the young priest: What do you think is happening? He said: I don't know. I said: Let's look out and see where they are, the Germans. So he picked out his head up to the window, the glass was gone, the windows were shattered, all was gone. He said: We don't see any soldier--all gone. What happened? He looks around, there's nobody here. So we looked out the little window. The SS is still there. But they had put on white arm bands on the arms and there still were the guns. And they came, guarded by Hungarian SS, all around. We can't get out from the blocks; we're sitting in there with no food. We stay already there almost four days without food. it was the 13th of April. After it was quiet. The sun was out, nice. We looked out the window and suddenly like an earthquake, everybody's running, all the prisoners are running to the middle of the camp. We didn't know what happened. They

don't care about SS, they don't care about the guards, they

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are running. So I said to my friend: What we shall do? He says: Let's run too, see what's going on. We jumped out of the barrack of this barrack--we run. They knew what was going on there. There were mounds of potatoes, mounds of turnips covered in the ground for the winter for the soldiers there. They prepare for the winter, and they were still in the ground, and with their hands, everybody grabbed with their hands uncovering the mounds. we uncovered potatoes and turnips, I said: Well, this is something. They didn't care who's shooting, or the German are there or nobody. So I grabbed some potatoes, we're eating while we're digging, we're eating already because we were so hungry. We didn't know what to do. So I grabbed two turnips put under my shirt on my shirt, a couple of potatoes, and I said to my friend: Let's go back. I don't want to stay out here. We can get shot here. So we run back, we lay down and we're eating. We're waiting, it's quiet, nothing happened, SS is there, the Hungarians outside the fence with guns and they're wearing the white arm bands.

So in the afternoon around the 14th, they said to us: You know what? the loudspeakers announced: Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock, the Swiss Red Cross is going to come in and go take you over. We will nothing to do with you anymore. Tomorrow morning nine o'clock. Nobody believed it, because they were lying to the last minute all the time. So why would the Swiss Red Cross, why would they put white arm bands when the Swiss Red Cross is going to come tomorrow morning? While we were debating that--it was about 3-4 o'clock in the afternoon--the sun was out and the fourteenth of April. Suddenly we hear the tremendous roar, noise, roar, uh, heavy artillery or tanks are moving from somewhere. And it comes louder and louder, so one of the officers, a Polish officer was in civilian clothes; he never

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let anyone know he was an officer. He said according to the noise what he can hear, they're not German tanks. They're either Americans or English. So sure enough, the noise was so loud, we looked out the windows, we were not afraid anymore, to look out, and sure enough, in that road to the woods you could see tanks, with stars on it - white stars

and all kinds of markings but no Germans.

S: We've gotta stop and change the roll...

ALAN ZIMM: As we looked out the window and noticed those tanks, there were all the tanks, everyone was jumping up and down, hugging and kissing and now we finally believe we're free - we gonna be free! What was happened, they didn't come the camp; they passed by and went to the small town of Bergen to secure the radio station. And then the SS told us, "You have to line up tomorrow morning exactly at nine o'clock in front of the barracks." [At Palank], we couldn't sleep hardly that night; we wee so agitated, we're so anxious to see what's going to happen, because even the [less many] people didn't believe they would be liberated. So in the par - the next day in the morning, 9 o clock, exactly. The gate, far down the camp was a gate. The gate opened up and a jeep with British military police, dressed in red with red hats and white belts and white gloves and all, green and white. Everybody said, "What, who are these people?" Nobody could - they'd never seen any soldiers dressed up in a war like that. And the jeep with machine guns, 4 soldiers and two soldiers behind, and they came into the camp and disarmed the SS. Took the guns away from them and put the men aside. And behind them was a truck with loudspeakers, every language, they were speaking to us, "My dear friends, you are now liberated by Allied forces. And

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the German army , the German SS has nothing to do with you; you are free people and you are now liberated with Allied forces." It was so emotional, that moment, that everybody was crying. And they were jumping up and down and running to the English soldiers and they were throwing cigarettes and candy to everybody. And we were hugging and jumping around in front and then behind them were coming trucks with soldiers. And they were right away taking over the whole camp, and setting up microphones with music was playing, like that, and we were, this was the liberat-, they were liberation. And we were, everybody was running around, we didn't know what to do - where to go, what to say. We were jumping and hugging each other and kissing and embracing. And they disarmed all these Germans and the Hungarian SS and they took over the whole camp. And they took the guards with the SS and the Hungarians as prisoners. And there was a fenced-in area and they put 'em in that fenced-in area. What happened after the liberation actually, the Russian kapos set up a tribunal. I couldn't go there and I didn't want to bother with it, and took all these kapos, the German SS, and they sentenced them to death. While the British took over the camp, they let the prisoners rule and do what

they want. And they executed about 50 of them, at that time. I couldn't watch it; they did all kinds of terrible things to them. To the guards, the SS guards. So we stayed there about two days, where as no, the British didn't bring any food. They just took us some crackers and cookies and and candy. That's all they had, the soldiers. I said, "Where's food?" The prisoners demanded food, they, we didn't eat. They said: The ships hadn't arrived yet. They have to bring..the ships ar coming to Hamburg and we'll unload the food for you. But by the time the food comes here, we're all dead. So the Russians war prisoners there

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which were liberated, they said: We don't have to wait for the British to bring food, there are Germans living outside the camp in their villages--we're going to take it. And sure enough, they had jeeps, and trucks the Russians right away took over German trucks and went out to the villages. Within a few hours they brought in chickens and all kind of pigs and cattle and goats, you name it, they brung in more than food. ? fires and kitchens were cooking and everybody had food to eat. They were preparing food for us. So this

was the way we stayed in that camp a couple of weeks until they organized everything. They gave us DP identify cards and they disinfected everybody, you know, gave care, took care, and then different people came from different countries. The French came in French officers and soldiers, they took them home right away, about a week after liberation. Trucks came in for the Frenchmen, trucks came in for the Danish, the Hollander, the Belgium, there were prisoners from everywhere there. And all the nationalities from western Europe, they were taken home right away after the liberation. But eastern Europe, like we were from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, they didn't take nobody home, the war was still on, the fight was still going on there. And we were staying in that camp Bergen-Belsen until the war was over

and when the war was over, it was June the 8th, before the war was over after the liberation, the German ? found some airplanes while the war was still on, five days after we were liberated they came to this camp, dropped off bombs, five prisoners got killed by these bombs after the liberation. So finally we were ready to go leave the camp, the war was over and they say we cannot go to Poland now, cause why? They said: Now all the leaders are in Berlin, in Pottsdam. Truman came to Pottsdam, and Churchill and Stalin

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and the French prime minister, and all around Berlin is all blocked off, you can't move nowhere. So finally we had bicycles, five of us, to Poland together. We drove the bicycles into the city of Magdeburg, which was occupied by the British all of it was British zone. We stopped there, and the British were nice to us and the Polish, there was a Polish army there working also, ? with the British. They took us under their wing, so to say, and they put us in a hotel and we stayed in a hotel until the conference was over. And they gave us food and shelter and everything. And then finally we went back to Poland, took us two months to reach Poland after the liberation. I went back to the city of Lodz, where I was in the ghetto before there. I arrived in Lodz, they told us there is a place to go where you register. we registered with the survivors, all the survivors coming from all over, different places. Then I met my wife there also after I came back to Poland. You want me to go on still?

Sandy: I want you....wait, wait. OK.

ALAN ZIMM: I was very, more afraid to go to Poland than staying in Germany. Because I had already at the time after we were staying in Magdeburg for two months. There was something going on in Poland against Jewish people returning

from Germany or from Russia. As a matter of fact, there was a city called Kelze?? Poland where some young Jews coming back from Russia wanted to go to Palestine, as no Israel then. They had a kibbutz like. The Poles attacked the kibbutz and killed most of them. It would be -- in the resistance ? they were fighting, they killed some Poles too and there was a panic among the survivors coming back to Poland and among those which were liberated in Poland also.

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There were people, the Poles were making pogroms, so they somehow, I don't know if it was the American government intervened with the Russians--the Russians occupied Poland also, there was a Polish army also. So they took strict measures, the Russians, then after that. And we were, then I came back to Poland and met my wife in Lodz. She worked in a store, a delicatessen store. The owners of that store were my friends during? the war when I was in the ghetto, in Lodz. They survived, they saw, they were mesmerized. They said: How did you survive? I said: I came from Germany back. They had another store there, I met my wife. I said to my wife: I'm not going to stay here in Poland very long.

I'm going to stay here just a week or two at the most, I'm going back to Germany. I went back to my town, my home town for a couple of days, and I was very much afraid when I went back to my own town. I stayed only there 2 days and slept in a hotel and I went back to my street where I lived and nobody was there. I could find nobody, my relatives, no Jewish people were there. I meet two people--they also came back from Germany. So I went to one of my neighbors, a Polish neighbor, and asked him: Did anybody come back from Germany or from Russia? He said: No, Nobody is here. When he saw me, he crossed himself. He said: How did you come back? He thought I came from somewhere out of the world. from outside, from heaven. He couldn't believe anybody survived. So I stayed only there overnight in a hotel, ??? to Lodz. And from Lodz my wife has two sisters. One sister came from Germany, one was there liberated herself?. She was not in a camp, my wife, she survived as an Aryan, as a Polish Catholic. She had paper. She survived in Warsaw after the uprising she survived in there and came to her home town. That's where we met. I said to her: Let's go back, I'm going to take you to Germany back. Had two

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sisters, I took all of them together and went to Germany, to Berlin and there is Berlin was a camp what was set with Americans, Schlachtsee, a camp for DPs. And they went into the camp and we registered there. And they stayed there until the sisters were evacuated when the Blockade of Berlin was, they evacuated to West Germany. And I went while I was in Poland somebody came back from Germany. They told me they saw my brother. I said: What brother? My older, Salomon, he saw him somewhere in the French zone of Germany. I went back to Munich. That as the headquarters for all survivors of Germany.

Sandy: Why don't you tell me about the ...brother, ok? Start from the beginning.

ALAN ZIMM: Well when my wife's sisters were evacuated to West Germany to Landsberg, a camp Dp camp, my, I married the youngest sister, is my wife. I wet with her, she was, we stayed in Munich. I said: I wanna go see the lists of all the survivors in Munich they had the headquarters, the lists were printed on all the wall around the building inside. So I looked fort my town. Poland, and then by town. I noticed my brother is living, one of my brothers survivor, and also noticed a sister of my best friend, I went to school with before the war is also a survivor, and she is in that camp where my two sister-in-laws are there in Landsberg. I said: I'm going there by right away by street car it took about 20 minutes to get there to the camp. I went there, I looked

her up and when she saw me, she unbelievable, she couldn't believe it, it was a very emotional reunion with her, I said to her: You know what, my brother, Solomon is living in the French zone. I don't know how to get there where he is. You see? your brother Solomon is here. He here? Yes, he

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came here, and he is in the camp. As a matter of fact, he stays in my room here. But the went out for the night to see a movie, they had movies shown in the camp--this is the American zone--so there are movies shown. I'm so exhausted, I said to her, and I want to go to sleep. She said: Well, lay down on the cot--she had cots all over--that's your bothers cot, but we managed to get another one here. so I lay down and fell asleep and by 11:30 at night he comes back. He noticed I was a sleep--he didn't know who I am--I'm nothing. She said to him: Why don't you go over and see who's sleeping there. He looked, he sit down, he walked back to her and said: I don't know. I haven't seen him for 6 years, my brother--She said: Look again. And he goes over to the other side of my bed. He said: That's my brother! He woke me up form my best sleep. The reunion was

so emotional, we both cried without stopping. And that's the way I met him after the war. In Munich , in Landsberg, I mean in the camp. And from then, I had to go back to Poland, I went back to Poland again from there. And later on I came back to Germany and stayed with my brother in the French zone--he lived in the French zone--and I took my wife there also--she wasn't my wife yet, but we got married in a small town in Germany Saldau, a very small town not far from Constance an Bodensee, I don't know if that is a familiar town--and the wedding, we had to bring a rabbi from another town, from Ulm, also a DP camp, a big camp, they had a rabbi there. He came in to perform the wedding, it was outdoors. The small town came to that wedding, the Germans, because they hadn't seen a wedding like that for 50 years, they say in that little town. And we got married from and from there we went back we came to the United States.

Sandy: Tell me...

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ALAN ZIMM: Yes, the rabbi performed a real orthodox ceremony

we break the glass and everything. They say it was for them so unusual, the people were so anxious to see it, I mean, we lived with a German family there, and they say they haven't seen it for 50 years a wedding like that in that town. Very few Jewish people lived there before the war even. Only one person lived there, very famous person, Albert Einstein's first cousin lived nearby in a little town, in that little town and I speak with Einstein, I met him, I met him, he came to the wedding, we invited him. He was at the wedding. A little town called Buchau, it is the only town in Germany where a synagogue had a bell, a ringing bell like a church. It is the only synagogue in all of Germany that had a bell a ringing bell.

Sandy: OK. Now go back a little bit to liberation...

ALAN ZIMM: After we were liberated, what happened is they segregated everybody by nationality, Frenchmen in this block, Poles in this block, Russians in this, Czechs in this, Belgians--there were so many blocks, every block, it was many more that had two blocks for certain groups. So our group was very small, so we stayed with the Poles together, we hanged out the flag the Polish flag, and a blue and white flag, Israeli flag, in front of the barrack. Everybody had to hang out their flags they had made out from different pieces of cloth. So the Russian soldiers, officers were from the honor guard, and marched in unison, a group of about 30, to every block, saluted and had a speech, the captain spoke, and when he came to our block--it was

very moving--he said, the officer, he said he knows what happened to the Jewish people, knows what the Germans did.

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And he knows there are few of the survivors here, he knows also we don't have a home where to go to. And he finished and saluted it. It was very moving, we all cry. [long pause] It was the incident what happened after the liberation.

Sandy: Tell me a little...

ALAN ZIMM: Afterwards. But two weeks later, they brought in food and supplies and feed, fed everyone, and kitchens were set up, we get food and they processed you, you know, the name with country you came from where you were, they gave you DP cards, identity cards.

Sandy: What about..?

ALAN ZIMM: They gave these things out, yes, everybody. and they had put up running water in the blocks so there was no

running water before. And they had disin--and also disinfection, delousing, you know, of people, white powder like sprayed it everybody all over. And constantly, every week, they were afraid of typhus breaking out which in other camp typhus broke out, was disease, killed a lot of people then after liberation. And also another incident, there was a group of musicians in the camp, musicians in the camp during the war, Germans had prisoners, musicians. They were Poles, ???, The camp we are in was a military camp, actually. There was a drug store there in the camp. I didn't care about going to drugstore looking for medicine. What happened these poles went into the drugstore, into the basement. They found barrels with alcohol, loaded up, took out the alcohol from the barrels and bottles and started to drink. They didn't realize it was wood alcohol. Poisonous

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alcohol. And all of them got poisoned after the liberation. 30 of these people died in the camp from wood wood alcohol poisoning. That was such a horrible scene, for here, it was, it was screaming and and convulsions was, we couldn't, we had to run away and hide in the rooms. What was going

on, it was after the liberation these things happened.

Sandy: ??

ALAN ZIMM: After the liberation what happened, when we stayed there, we stayed there a couple of weeks in Bergen Belsen. We stayed there after liberation. First of all the war lasted another three weeks, but we stayed there about 6 more weeks. When they found out in a small town nearby called Celle, C-e-l-l-e. It was a small town where a German family, a German family, was a small synagogue, they hid it from the nazis all these years and protected the Torah, the scrolls, the holy books in the basement. And the British came in and liberated it. They went to the British and told them: there was a small synagogue. We protected it. Sure enough, the synagogue was a little ? of this house. And the British told us: You have to go there, looking out only for the Jewish prisoners, war prisoners, we were liberated. So we went there and we told them, they took us by truck there to the little town, it was about 10 miles away, and on Friday services, it was a British chaplain, a Jewish rabbi from the British army in uniform. He went to the basement and took out the scrolls, the Torah, and he walked up with the Torah where the ark was, there was no scrolls in there, and made us walk behind him. And each row of the whole synagogue was British officers, soldiers and they were making films of this. We walked up and ? more like a stage, you know, where the Torah was sitting under

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the curtain. And there was table where he lay down the scroll on the table and he conducted the service right in that service. It was very moving even the English cried. Then they took us back to the camp. We stayed there, like I told you, and later on we left.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: After everybody, you know, grabbed the potatoes and turnips and went to eat, it lasted only for about a day and a half. Following day everybody is hungry again, no food and we're not liberated yet. So when everybody was walking around in the camp looking for something to eat, so the SS came and said to us on the loudspeaker: We have some bread and canned goods for you on trucks waiting there. So everybody is running to that area. So the major from the SS, a doctor, you could tell he was a doctor, he wears special insignia, he came and he stood in front of these trucks and said to us: Please do me a favor, do not touch any of that food, do not touch it, don't take it. Everybody says: Why? It's all poisoned. You all gonna die

if you eat that. So I just moved to my friend and said: Forget it. I'm not gonna eat that. I'm tired? of waiting here. A lot of them were screaming their head off: We're going to die anyway from starvation. Better to die with a stomach, some of them were saying that. So the German was pleading with them, the doctor: Please, wait another 24 hours. You're going to be free, the English are going to be here. Nobody believed him either. People in those days were cynical???. We saw so many things in the past where the Germans would talk and doing were two different things. They always lied to you, the Germans. They tell you're going to unlousung, the Baden, and they were killing there.

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That's why a lot of people really don't understand how could so many people go without resistance to fight against them, because they misled people. They didn't tell you what they were doing. They had false signs on the doors, Badanstalt it was gas places, they were gassing people. I wa aware of these things I had heard it before. I was the first one actually to notify what the Germans were doing to human beings, before Auschwitz existed. The day the Russians, the

Germans invaded Russia, June 1941, the same day they started to kill the Jewish people in the town where I was born nearby a place called Chelno. I was the only one actually with another man to escape from that place from Kolo. When I arrived in Lodz, in the ghetto, to tell those people what happened to the people, they never believed it--even the people in the Lodz ghetto didn't believe what they were doing with them. They were going outside, nobody, volunteered. The Germans were telling: we need volunteers to go to the Russian territory, we occupied so much land, we need people to work on the farm. And they believed it. They took them to kill them. That's the way they misled the people, they made people also lay down their clothes and put their names on their clothes and made people pay money for the trucks, for the gasoline. They made them pay 4 marks for the gasoline to take them to the extermination. Not really, so everybody was saying: If they were going to kill us, why would they take money from us? Why would they make us pay for gasoline? They made such tricks, they used such psychology, how to get the people to be exterminated. so the people didn't realize it what was happened to them. But I knew already then, I knew already then not to trust them. Because I had the experience from ? from Chelno where they were exterminating the people. But when I came to the ghetto in 42, the people the people, the leadership in the

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ghetto made me be quiet: don't make panic, be silent--they knew, I told them what happened, the leadership. They survived the war because of me from the Lodz ghetto. I met them after the war. In Lodz where I met my wife.

Sandy: ??

ALAN ZIMM: I wasn't taken to Chelmo. What happened is. In the Kolo, in the city of Kolo, they started to take our groups, 300 a day 400 a day. So I grew up with Polish people in the ghetto, I lived with them together next door neighbors were Poles, my best friends were Poles, went to school with together. So one of those boys, my friend from school, his brother was taken by the Germans as a truckdriver to take the people from the town to Chelmo. They say from there they are going to the Russian territory to work on farms. When he came back he noticed, they were taking the people from his truck into putting the gas, to truck with gas, carbon monoxide. They Germans had built special vans in the beginning, big vans, they could put 50 people in a van, and the exhaust pipes from the trucks, from the gas, from the trucks would go in the vans inside was hermetically closed. The carbon monoxide was killing the people inside. And from the trucks, from those trucks,

vans, those truckdrivers had to take the bodies out, take them into the wooded area where they had ? many people from the towns strong people had already prepared ditches, dig ditches, big ditches and threw bodies in, they covered them up. And he came back and he told me, listen tome, my brother could not sleep all night; he wouldn't talk to nobody, he couldn't eat what he saw there. So he crossed himself: Please, I give my honor to my brother not to tell nobody, but I'm telling it to you: do not go there. He

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wouldn't tell me the rest of it, but I found out later how they were doing it, they were killing all these people there. They killed 380,000 Jews there, Germans at Chelmo. That was before Auschwitz existed, before anybody knew anything. In 194.. after..it happened in December 42, they start to kill the people. And I knew it already then and I told to my brother and my sister, two sisters I had. She survived in ? Lodz ghetto. And with me. The rest of my family was killed also in Chelmo. So that's what happened that wy I knew how what they were doing. When I came to the ghetto, I already knew then. The people in the ghetto

didn't know anything, the leadership didn't know it. When I was working in the ghetto, it is a long story..

Sandy: Going back to liberation...did the people...??tell me about that?

ALAN ZIMM: When we were liberated, it wa so, everybody was so enthusiastic,so they they so emotional. The people were so happy they grabbed this jeep, carrying this jeep, the British soldiers got out, they were carrying the jeep in the air. All these prisoners, yeah. They were so happy to see the British, they say: We're free, finally we're free, we are really free?? Then they start to believe they are free. They were carrying this jeep in the air like they are walking through the camp all around. That day is unforgettable, unforgettable day. That we were so, I was .. On the other hand hen we realized later that we had nobody to go to, there was a different story, but the first two days, the emotional outburst, the happiness was undescribable, you cannot describe this,the emotions of the people of the prisoners from all the people when they announced to you the first time in all these years that you

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are human beings, m that you are people. You are not treated like nobody, worse than animals. The Germans were patting their dogs while hanging people. They were patting their dogs, making nice to their dogs while the people were hanging. It's how brutal they were, how cynical. There were thousands of them then doing like that. After the war, they disappeared a lot of them.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: Yes, for awhile. Bergen-Belsen. I stayed there for about six weeks.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: No, only the sisters stay there. I went away from there. I lived in Berlin for a while and with a civilian?? family, was a Jewish, the wife was Jewish, the husband was German. That's how they survived the war, and they had one son. He was a friend of mine, that's how we stayed together a lot. I lost track of him and the family after the war. I lost track of a lot of people I haven't seen since then. I hope when we go to Miami now we have a gathering there next week, I'll meet some people I haven't seen for so many years.

ALAN ZIMM: When we looked out of the window, and we saw the tanks passing by, some of them white stars, some of them British markings, with British flags, we all jumped up and hugged each other, we were so happy to see this happening, that we were finally to be free. We waved handkerchiefs out of the window to them. They saw us, they were standing up, some of them, and we were waving to them,

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but they didn't come to the us, they went to the town the railroad junction, to Bergen to liberate that town. And we said. why? Everybody was had a big let down. Where are they? they went and they didn't see us probably. They went by to the little town. so the following day in the morning they came into the town to liberate us. the cap. They liberate first the camp, the town, Bergen, and the next day in the morning nine o'clock they showed up in the camp. when they arrived, that was the most emotional phase, time, we were liberated. When they arrived the German say??, they told us something different. The told us the Red Cross is going to take us over from Switzerland. They were scared we were going to lynch them, the prisoners are going to lynch

them. But in the morning 9 o'clock when the gates opened up, we saw the jeep coming in with the military police and the British, the way they were dressed. Everybody looked and they said: Who are they? Then the loudspeakers with the trucks behind them announcing, and calling us people, everybody, eh, eh, we are people again, humans. And they said, they announced in every language, Polish even in Yiddish, it was something, the Jewish people, and they said from now on you're free people, you are liberated with allied forces. The Germans have nothing to do to you, they have nothing to say about you, they are our prisoners now. You are free. That's when the all pandemonium broke out. They were throwing cigarettes and behind them was a truck with soldiers coming in and they set up microphones with music right way playing and they took over the whole camp.

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