

SPEAR (Szpiro), Harold Charles

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Two tapes

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Note: Document contains formatting issues

Abstract

Harold Charles Spear (Szpiro) was born in Danzig, and confronted anti-Semitism by the time he was six and a half years old, in 1924-1925. His schoolteacher forced him to sit down on spilled ink one day, and threatened to make him sit on a hundred thumbtacks the next day. Charles ran out of the school and refused to return. His parents sent him to live with his grandmother in the predominantly Jewish town of Pluzga, Poland on the border with Germany.

Later, he went to Lodz, and eventually biked all the way to Warsaw. He had tried to get a passport to leave the country, but was refused because he was draft age.

He was sent to various camps. The head of a transfer camp in Lublin shot anyone who looked him in the eyes. Harold managed to get himself and a friend sent back to their respective parents. But when Harold's father told him Jews were not allowed to use sidewalks, Harold decided to go into hiding in Chisava, 20 kilometers away. He stayed with a farmer and then moved into the forest.

His parents and little brother were put into a ghetto in Pluzga. Harold wanted to take his brother into hiding, but his parents refused because they thought Harold had a better chance of surviving on his own. They were taken eventually to an extermination camp.

When Harold was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the first thing he saw was a corpse hanging on an electrified barbed wire fence. Harold, a tool and die maker, worked in a machine shop. A kapo gave him 50 lashes with an electrical cord for helping a fellow prisoner. Harold became very close with a man so strong he could bend metal rods. The man, Moka K, saved Harold when he was trampled in a cattle car going to Mauthausen. Its head SS man refused to take the prisoners, and suggested shooting all of them. Instead, they were marched to Rodhausen, where Harold worked on V-1 rockets.

As the Russians approached, prisoners were loaded onto barges and then were marched about 7 kilometers to the North Sea, where they were put onto boats for a German prisoner-of-war exchange with British forces. After the war, he returned to Germany, where he found a cousin who was soon killed in a truck-train collision. Harold was treated for many months for a painful neurological condition, but was eventually cured. He emigrated to the U.S. He did not like the fast pace of New York City so he moved to the St. Paul, Minnesota area, where he joined a friend. Harold married and was about to celebrate his 40th wedding anniversary at the time of the interview.

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Tape I, Side A

Question: This is an interview with Charles Spear and this is Jennifer Clayman. Today's date is May 16, 1992 (in Golden Valley, MN). I guess I'd like to start out with--we're going to backtrack a little bit from all this that you've been telling me. I'd like to know a little bit about your family, what kind of a life you led before the war, what your parents did, what life was like at your house, things like that. If you want to start with where you were born and just take it from there.

Answer: I was born in a city by the name Danzig on the Baltic Sea. My father was a grain merchant and Danzig was on the Baltic. He conducted a lot of business, shipping grain from Danzig to East Prussia and to Germany. I remember good things about my early years until I started going to school and I started feeling that I'm in the wrong place. Somehow displaced, I didn't have anyone who would take my side when I went to school. I found myself standing up and the teacher told me sit down. I was only six and a half years old and I said I could not sit down because someone spilled ink on my seat. You better sit down or else I'll come over and help you." So I had to sit down and mess up my clothes. When I came home and I told my parents what happened, they said maybe it's an isolated case and we'll see, maybe it will never repeat itself. The next day, I came and I found myself in my seat were thumbtacks one next to another where I was supposed to sit. Again the same thing, I was standing up and the teacher said "sit down." I said I cannot sit down on a hundred thumbtacks. "You better sit down." And I told him I'm not going to sit down on thumbtacks. He said "I'll come over and help you." I ran out the school and I went home and I told my parents, I'll never go back there.

Question: You knew why?

Answer: It was already under the German occupation. That was after the 1933 plebiscite and that was the count, who they want to be under. The majority supposedly voted to be under the Germans. I started feeling the Germans in 1933 already when the first ugly faces started to show up in the ____ and all those other hordes that came marching down on that city. After that last episode, my parents decided that I'll have to go and live with my grandmother in the city of Pluzga (46) which was on the German border in Poland. They had a school that was just for Jewish kids. Pluzga had a population of 5,000 and the majority of the occupants were Jewish. It was probably 65 percent Jewish people. They were swarming into that city because it was on the border and they could conduct business. That was before the war. Pluzga didn't experience any problems in the thirties until 1939. They could freely go across the borders by having a certain pass. They conducted business there and many of them were doing tremendously well.

Question: Just backtrack a little bit talking about--. You were 13 when you said---. Sixteen is that what you said? Because I thought you said six and a half, but then you said 1933 and I wasn't--and I know that you had to be older than that so--.

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Answer: Yeah. That was long before and I must stand corrected. That's true. By not looking into what I wrote, it gets all confusing. It was long before the Germans even walked into that city; they already had their ugly faces. They were all pro-German. Even it was a city that was Polish and German. The Poles had their own rules and regulations. We lived in a German neighborhood and the street was Jundergasser (74) and that's where we lived. Yeah, I started school over there and that must have been probably in 1924 when I started school.

Question: When those things happened to you? Was that around 1924 or was that later?

Answer: Yes, '24, '25. I can't be too specific about it but that's when it happened and that's when I had to leave my parents and my younger brothers and go live with my grandparents in Pluzga. Lucky for me that I had a good school, right across the street from my grandmother's house. I was fortunate to meet some people, three sisters by the name of Landorf (88). They were graduates of a seminary, I don't know if that's how we called it, a teachers' college. But they couldn't get work in Poland because they were Jewish and they didn't hire Jewish teachers. The only place where they did hire them was in a Jewish school. Like Pluzga, we had all Jewish teachers there and I was one of their students and the other one was another young lady by the name Lipcha (98) Boglen. They are from _____. Those are the two, they didn't do it for money, they were well-off because their father went to the United States. He was a graduate engineer and he got work and he was in Texas. He was doing very, very well and he helped them out. From what I remember, I used to go up to their apartment. I remember an elderly lady always standing near the stove. The three girls dressed very, very nicely and they were all trying to help out. They only took on kids who -- and I don't know how my name came up -- maybe my grandmother passed the word that she would like I should get some help in preparing me for school because I was brought up with the German language and I wasn't quite prepared to take on a Polish school. Polish was the dominant language.

Question: But it was a Jewish school? Was it--?

Answer: The curriculum was Polish in accordance with all other schools. They had the same curriculum.

Question: The only difference was that the students were--?

Answer: Religion, which was compulsory. One religion, Mosaic, Moses they called over there, the religion of Moses. We learned the Bible, our Bible. And there was another school that the Poles attended and they had their own religion that they were taught. Poland did not separate state from religion. You had to attend a religious school. That school was, to me it was a Godsend, when I went in there. I was supposed to go in there right after I arrived over there but I wasn't prepared. I couldn't speak the language properly. I knew a few words but that wasn't enough not to be ridiculed by other kids. Those Landorf sisters prepared me to such an extent that I was above the first

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grade. The principal said, "I cannot put him into first grade because he knows so much more. He would be sleeping, he would have nothing to learn. So we'll start him out with the second grade." And the same with that other girl, that Lipa...She also went into the third grade because she was a year older. My recollections from that school were all good. I met my life-long friend by the name Edek Z (140). He was from a Jewish family. They owned a large farm, farming community, everything, lock, stock and barrel. They had 20-some homes in that area and many acres of land. Mr. Z was a gentleman farmer and they called him all kind of names like lordship because he was one of the richest men in that city. He controlled so much business that they didn't know how to address him. After I met my friend Edek, I started going to their home. It was an elaborate home with many, many rooms. They had things that normally other people didn't have like a grand piano that took up half a room and all the kids got lessons in music, different--. My friend was not, did not _____ to music and he wanted to be free like a bird.

Question: So you were friends in school? Were you friends in school and--?

Answer: Yes, that's where we met and we are friends still today. He used to live in London, England. Now his residence is in Spain on the Mediterranean. Then he got a home also on the west coast of England, where the weather is more to his liking. He suffers from arthritis and he cannot stand the weather in London.

Question: I want to talk to you a little bit more, just about school and--. Did you stay in school, in Pluzga and you went all the way through high school?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So you stayed there?

Answer: I stayed there until I finished the seventh grade. The schools over there were seven grades. Our curriculum was broader than normal in other schools. We learned so much that it was almost like high school equivalency.

(Tape is paused).

Question: You were talking about school and about--. I asked you if you went through high school and you were saying you'd gotten to the seventh grade and were talking about--.

Answer: The school gave us an education equivalent to a high school. When I finished public school, grade school, and I came to Lodz to continue --.

Question: So you were really young when you went to--when you started in Lodz?

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Answer: Yeah. Seventh grade is about 13 or 14 years old. We didn't have a high school in Pluzga. It's not like the United States that any small community would have a high school or for that matter, a college. You have to go to the capital city to attend a college. We are not as progressive as other countries. Russia, they had higher education in smaller communities. If I wanted to attend another school, I had to go out of town. The same happened to my friend Edek. He went to college and he attended a school, a trade school over there where he took pre-engineering courses. I attended a school that I felt would help me if I ever should come to the United States, I'll be able to get the same kind of a job and be able to support myself. It was a school that was teaching people how to make nylon stockings. At that time, it was in its infancy. They just started making them and it was one of the most lucrative professions that if someone wanted to get into a good-paying job, to be a nylon maker, he had it made. The school for that was paid for by an American organization by the name ORT. My uncle's brother-in-law, rather sister-in-law, was the president of the ORT. Through her, I got a scholarship and I was able to attend because living in another city and paying for schooling, even though my parents were not poor but it was beyond their means. For me, it was like a Godsend I was able to attend that school. Also, in the evening, I went to classes which I learned things that, of higher education, before college, like a junior college or something of that sort. My time was quite taken up with school, trade school until about 2 o'clock. Then from 4 o'clock until 7 o'clock, I was in a junior high school, not junior high, junior college. I also went twice a week to Hebrew education.

Question: This was all in Lodz. How many years did you spend there?

Answer: I lived over there until the Germans marched in. I felt that Pluzga didn't offer me much. It was too small of a community. I used to go back for vacations. I spent a few months and then I had to go back. I saw my parents once or twice a year.

Question: How did your parents feel about that?

Answer: I lived there with a family and they rented a room to me. I ate over there, boarded. It wasn't an easy life but I felt if I want to succeed in life, I'll have to sacrifice something; that was playtime. I had many friends and the only time we could go out and have a good time was over the weekend like Saturday and Sunday. We met and we used to go to a movie or some other place of recreation until the war broke out and that ruined everything. As a matter of fact, in between time, my relatives in the United States sent me some papers to come to the United States as a student. I had everything ready, the only thing that I needed was a Polish passport. Wouldn't you know, the Poles refused to give me a passport to go out of the country.

(A pause in tape)

Question: I just wondered why you couldn't get a passport?

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Answer: Everyone at the age of 15 was considered eligible for the draft. Consequently, I was in that age bracket and they refused to give me a passport. They said, "You cannot go away now, our country is in mortal danger of being overrun by the Germans and we need every able-bodied person." They refused to let me go. I hired an attorney and I told them the army is going to exist without Harold Spear. They don't need me, it didn't help. I had to stay.

Question: Where were you going to go in the United States?

Answer: To New York City. I had relatives who were quite well-off. They had a factory for men's clothing and _____. The gentleman who started the factory was my grandmother's brother. When I went over there finally, he was already dead and the children had control over it and especially one son, Norman Cohen, who was running that factory. He was empowered by his father's Will. Norman Cohen promised to give me a job and educate me and teach me everything and advance me in the business. But that was only on paper and that's as far as it went. I don't know if I'm jumping ahead of myself. In order to clarify that, when I finally came to the United States, a letter was waiting for me that I have a job waiting.

Question: The same job that was promised beforehand?

Answer: Yes, the job that I envisioned -- his father's Will specified there was a job that would advance me in that business. Every three months, I would go to a different place or they would put me into different areas of the business so I could learn it from the bottom up. When I started to work in accordance with the provision, I was supposed to be advanced every three months. It turned out I was working as a -- cutting cloth for the cutters to cut it down for jackets or coats. We had to unroll it and cut it into certain sizes. I was there four months and nothing happened. At one time, a fellow by the name Jacoby, a distant relative, came over and said to me, "You know, I feel sorry for you." I said "Why?" He said, "You know you are starting out the same way I started out in that business. At that time Norman's father was running the business. He told me also that he's going to do this and that and he never lived up to it. The same thing is going to happen to you. What I'm doing now, this is my job." He showed me a broom. He said, "You'll wind up doing the same thing. When they have no use for you, they'll give you a broom in your hand and you'll have to sweep the floors. You're young, run away from here." This is my beginning coming to the United States.

(Pause in tape)

Question: Okay. You left off with--you had just finished talking about your schooling and you finished describing what happened to you up until the beginning of the war, of being in school and all of that. Your script starts with your bicycling to Warsaw.

Answer: I see. I biked all the way to Warsaw. Is it down? Oh, okay. When I arrived in Warsaw with the bike, I had a reception committee of German SS people, who stopped everyone from coming into the city. They diverted all the people to a city by the name _____. It was a large city and there was a German outpost that screened everyone who came over there. Me being in the age that they thought maybe I would have been a Polish soldier, I disguised myself as a civilian. Actually they didn't care, all they wanted was people to go to work for them and clean up all of the work that had to be done in the farms. Because all the able-bodied people were in the war. I'm not sure if I brought this up.

Question: It's okay. Go on.

Answer: Well, when we went over there, they sent us by cattle car and the city was St (398). We were assigned to a camp, it was all built with tents and they put us up in tents. There were about 150 people assigned to each tent. The lodging was, we were lying on the ground with a little bit of straw as a mattress and one blanket for each person. At that time, it was already fall and the weather got very, very chilly at night and being that we were near the Baltic Sea, we felt it very, very badly. We had to make the best of it. I had a friend and we joined teams. He was a barber by trade and did barbering in the tent. Since money had no value for us because we couldn't buy anything for it, he was bartering a haircut or a shave for either bread or a blanket. Eventually, we wound up having enough blankets that we didn't feel the chill at night. Food was meager but we made it last. We got along just fine until one day Swiss Red Cross people saw us in those tents. They gave them a bawling out, "How can you do that, keeping those people in tents when you are freezing inside a house if you haven't got heat. That made them do double work and they put up barracks and we moved into the barracks around December. It was quite a difference from the way you lived in the tents. The tents, incidentally, had no sanitary conditions. We had to go out into a latrine that was in the open. That's what really stirred them up. They said a person could freeze by the time he goes and does his physiological duty. The barracks were put up at a very fast pace and we moved into them, only to find out a month later that we were going to be shipped back to Poland.

Question: Where was the place where you were, were you stayed? Were you in Germany?

Answer: In Germany, yeah. That was near Stetten (465). Poland claimed that those are the occupied territories that they used to own at one time. They followed all the directions of Himmler on how to get rid of the Jewish people. They put us up in rows and they made every Jew come forward. The gentiles were not touched, they told them to go back into the barracks. We were put up on trains and shipped to Poland. We wound up in a city by the name Lublin and it was a miserable camp. The SS fuhrer of the camp didn't like anyone to look him in the eyes. That was a death sentence. If someone looked him in the eyes, he took out a gun and shot him on the spot. When I heard about it, I said I better stay a mile away from him. I started

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looking around and when I came to the office, I noticed a guy who looked familiar. I went over to him and I said "are you by chance Zweig (497) Silverberg?" He said, "Yes how do you know me?" I said, "You came once to our Betar (494) group in Pluzga and you made a speech and that's how I remember you." "Oh," he said, "in that case, you deserve something special. Do you want to go back to your parents?" I said, "Of course I would like that." He said, "I'll work out the papers for you and you can go back in two days."

Question: Were you in a work camp in Lublin?

Answer: That was a transit camp where they kept on shipping people in different directions. If I would have told them that I don't have parents, that I don't have anyone to go to, I would have been shipped to a camp, a steady camp to stay there. But as long I insisted I wanted to go back to my parents, they made out the papers for me. Before I left his office, he said, "You know, looking at the listing here, I see there is another person here from your hometown by the name Josef U (529)." I said, "Oh my G-d, I know him very well." The man said, "I'm going to make out the paper for you and him and you'll both go the same time." Sure enough, two days later they put us on a horse and buggy and took us to the station. They told us to take off the yellow stars because we would have been harassed everywhere we would have gone. We went on that train and four hours later we were at our destination. The area where we stopped was never used for a stop except if someone wanted to get off at that place, otherwise it was going through with that area. We got off in there, nobody else. I was hoping that we might be able to find someone going the same direction to hitch a ride but luck wasn't with us. At that time, going at night was a no-no. If they caught somebody walking at night, they didn't ask questions, they just shot them. We took a great risk and we walked 11 kilometers to the city of Pluzga and luck was with us that we didn't see a single person. We went to our destinations; he went to his house, I went to my house. I knocked on the door and my father came to the door and said "Who is it?" I said, "It's me, Harold." "Oh my G-d," he yelled out. "You wouldn't believe it, our son is here!" He opened up the door and it was one o'clock and we spend maybe four hours overnight reminiscing about what had happened. We talked a lot and finally in the early morning, I went to sleep. I slept until about 8 o'clock in the morning. They told me that in the morning, every able-bodied person had to go out and do some work for the Germans. They kept a close watch on everybody and if that person didn't come out, they wanted to make sure that he's not skipping town or trying to get away from working. My father told me, "You better go and be with the group." Since I was new in that city, they ask me what kind of work I could do. I had a background in tool and die making. I told them that I took it up in trade school. They said "Oh, a guy like you, we could use." They assigned me to organize a group of people who have some knowledge about how to fix their stuff that gets damaged. They said, "We can give you a lot of work and you'll be busy. You're going to have a better quality of living than all the others have because you'll be working for the German army." That didn't impress me a bit. From the day I went over there,

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when I went out in the street, my father said, "You're not allowed to walk on the sidewalk. You have to walk in the gutter."

Tape I, Side B

Answer: When he told me that, I feel like someone would have jabbed me straight in my heart. "What do you mean?" I said. "Why can't I walk on the sidewalk?" "That's the law. Go and argue with them." So when I heard that, all the promises they made to me, that I'm going to have good eating and good lodging and whatever else, as I said, didn't impress me at all. I started to look around and see if I can find a place where I can hide out and be sure that I can maybe live through the war. I met a fellow who was working nearby where I was and he said, "I have the same idea, I would like to get away from the city." Sure enough a few days later, we packed a few things that we had and we went 20 kilometers from the city. It was an area by the name Chisava (16).

Question: Did your parents know that you were going?

Answer: Yes. I told my parents. They tried to talk me out of it but they felt if I can help myself and hopefully survive, they said by all means. "We are too old to start a lifestyle like that, not to know where we are going to sleep tomorrow, where you'll be the next day. But if you feel you can do it, by all means go ahead." I went with the fellow one night and we wound up there one early morning. We went to see some people who used to live there before the war, by the name Boldratt (26). They recommended staying with an elderly person who was handicapped and used a crutch. Boldratt said you may have to help him out many times because sometimes he cannot get off the bed but once he does get off the bed and you put the crutch under his arm, then he's all right. We stayed with them, with that farmer. Of course, we had to pay him and since we didn't have money to pay him and he didn't want no money _____. He said, "I can't buy nothing with the money that you'll give me. I need some provisions, something that I could use in the house. If you can give me something like meat or sugar or some other foods, that will be greatly appreciated." So we bartered with him for the lodging and we stayed a few months with him. Until one day, when we went out, we saw a sign from the Germans that said anyone who could help deliver a Jew to them would get five kilos of sugar. I knew then that our stay over there would be limited, but we didn't give up. We went and moved into the forest, dug in there; we made a tent, improvised from some trees. We started housekeeping in the forest.

Question: It was still winter when you started, wasn't it?

Answer: Yes, what we did is, we dug an area that was maybe four or five feet into the ground. It wasn't easy because everywhere we put a shovel in, there was a tree in the way there. We had to chop it out and we didn't have tools, proper tools. But in order to feel warm, we felt that we've got to go under the ground so that will protect us. That's how we managed to build some kind of lodging that we could

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stay in there and feel that the elements are not going to be against us. I started going to a city by the name Bi (64) which was also about 25kilometers from Chisava. That area was called by the Germans, it was not an integrated area that they claimed was their possession. Chisava was their possession, Bi they claim is a protectorate. They wanted to make the people vote for them in case it will ever come to a vote to show that they are willing to stay with them. That's why they're called protectorate. Germans were hoping that eventually the public was going to be voting for them to remain over there.

I went over to that city and I had my father's cousin by the name Russik (76) and we were told that sugar is in abundance over there. You can get as much as you want. We figured out that I'm going to go, that my friend Bro (80) will stay in the place, just in case something, a message or something else, someone will have to be there. The first trip we had to cross a border and it was uneventful. It didn't bother us at all, we just slipped through the border and the Russiks were very nice and they accommodated me and helped me also to find the sugar that I needed. I spent maybe three or four days over there just to get a little rest and then I started on the way back. The way back was a little harder. We had to hire somebody who would transport the sugar and make sure that that the sugar was not going to be seen. He put some sheep in the wagon and hid the sugar under that double floor. We could not go with him because we were Jews and he was a Pole, and transporting Jews would have caused him problems. I went by myself and a number of other people who would try to cross the border with someone who knew the area and also knew when the guards were changing. We made it across the border and I met up with that man who was carrying that stuff. He was recommended by Mr. Russik, who knew him from before the war. He said "He is beyond reproach, you don't have to worry. When you get there, he'll wait for you and he'll have it for you." Sure enough, when I went back to Chisava, he told me where he's going to be. There was only one beer joint. He said, "I'm going to be in that beer joint." I went over to him and he had that stuff for me. I paid him and I made arrangements that I'm going to use him again next time. My friend Bro and I picked it up and we took it over. People were already waiting for it. Of course, not for money but bartering for other foods. What we wanted mainly was bacon and ham. Those are the items that we are lacking, everybody was lacking. But the farmers had it in abundance. They're putting it away and hoarding it. For the sugar, we got all that stuff that we needed. I took off that stuff that we got and we hid it. A few days later, I had a message that my grandmother was very sick and she was not expected to live another day. I filled a knapsack with a number of provisions. My father and my grandmother were very religious and they wouldn't eat it. But the rabbi told them that if it is a life-threatening situation you are allowed to eat haza (pig). I brought it over and my grandmother, it was like she waited for me. She was still alive but she didn't last the next night. She just fell asleep and never woke up. We went to the funeral and my parents had some provisions. My father wouldn't eat any of that ham or bacon. My mother and my little brother had it. I didn't want to stay long because every so often the Germans used to come and see who is alive and who is dead, to keep track of how many people are still left. I was afraid that if they run into me, I'd be in bad

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shape because no young people were there, only elderly people. I slipped away the following night and I went back. Before I left him, my father told me news was spreading that they're going to liquidate the ghetto. "It's only a matter of maybe a week, two weeks. I'll let you know. There are always some people that go over there and I'll let you know in plenty of time."

Question: Was this in Pluzga? A ghetto in Pluzga? I didn't realize that.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. They put them up in barns. My grandmother had to move out of her house that she occupied maybe for 50 years. Her children were born there. She was in very poor health. There was only one thing that they allowed her to take and it was -- the German said, "I'm going to turn my back. You carry the bed out for the old woman." He called her a very demeaning name. "Take the bed out but I won't see it." She lived in a barn with all the other Jewish people. There were maybe ten barns on one street. My parents, my grandmother and a few other people occupied one barn. Just like my father had said, they let us know that the ghetto will be liquidated. They would like very much to see me before they go. Again I went through the night and met with them. The following morning, just as scheduled, the horses and buggies were lined up for all the people to be taken away. I wanted to be with them as long as I could. The guy who carried my parents, I knew him from before but he pretended he didn't know me so I wouldn't ask him for any favors. I didn't need any favors from him. I just sat on that buggy of his. He said, "I don't know that you are there and I don't want to get into any trouble. If you see a German coming, jump off." I only wanted to get closer to that village, Chisava so I wouldn't have to walk so much. I went back to say goodbye to my parents and I went back to Chisava only to find out that they were expecting to be overrun by the Germans. Apparently, the five kilos of sugar were too tempting to the Poles so they gave us up and told them where we were hiding. The following morning, the Germans came with the dogs. We heard the dogs from a distance so we had a chance to hide. We had a couple of guns, ammunition and some other things. We buried it at a distance so as not to be found with it because that would have meant a death sentence. They took us also by horse and buggy to a city nearby, where people from all the ghettos in the area were brought. When I went over there, a fellow I knew said, "You know, I just saw your mom and dad and your little brother. I saw them over there. If you go where I point, to a group of people, you'll see your father and mother are over there with your little brother." I went over and I had a premonition that this would be the last that I will ever see them.

Question: Did you know where they were going to be going then?

Answer: I knew. Where we were living we was able to get newspapers. There was a little underground movement. We got some information through our radios that they're trying liquidate everything and they already told us, the Poles, that they are going to use gas to exterminate the Jewish people. I said, "My G-d, how could anyone do something like that?" Well, that's what they're planning to do. The first thing that we found out is that they were crude. They were taking in people into trucks and they had the

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exhaust pipe going into the truck so carbon monoxide they killed them in the truck. My parents were taken to a city by the name Helno (240). I didn't find out until I went to Israel and met a guy from that city where they brought all of them over there and shipped them to different extermination camps. He said, "I worked in that camp and I saw them. There was nothing I could do because about four people watched every Jew, so they shouldn't do anything that might jeopardize -- might rescue somebody." He said, "I can give you the exact date when they were killed." He said it was Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Rosh Hashanah when they killed them. When I saw my parents, I begged them to let me take my little brother. He had so much to live for and I felt he was so bright, if he would have lived, he was a wizard in arithmetic, math. He could multiply something and give me the answer before I could even write it down. I felt it would be such a waste to let somebody like that fall into the filthy hands of the Germans. My parents said, "You by yourself have a better chance than with him. Besides, he's too young, he needs parents." I didn't want to tell them what I knew. It would have only put fear into them. I left with that and said goodbye. I was loaded up on a truck and we went to the city of Lodz and my parents were taken away to that city of Helno, that was an extermination camp. When I came to the city of Lodz, I told the guy who was recruiting the people, a fellow by the name Beeboff (284), that I had a background in tool and die making. He was the head of the ghetto in Lodz. He said, "I could use somebody with your experience." I went with a number of other people and we went into that ghetto. The first stop was the administration office for the people who were shipped into the ghetto. They put down everyone's names, where they came from, the age, profession, or what they can do. While I was looking at the people who came out of that office, I noticed my uncle, Morris Frelich (298). I tried to motion to him but he was busy writing but finally he noticed me and I went over to him. He said, "Oh no, you're not going anywhere. You're coming to our house and you're going to work in here." I told him that I promised to work for a metal shop. He said, "Don't worry, as long as I'm here you can stay in here. This job is much easier than to go and work in a factory, a metal fabrication factory." I was there with him probably two months.

Question: Two months before they liquidated--before the deportations started, is that it?

Answer: No, the ghetto was not liquidated. The ghetto was still in existence I think for about eight months.

Question: But before they started taking the ____ (316)?

Answer: Yeah, so my job was to unpack the suitcases of anyone who came in. I didn't have anything, I didn't have to put anything down. But there were some people who came like from Vienna, from Rolland, from many other cities where they had lived a normal life. They were not persecuted as we were. They came with suitcases jammed with all kinds of stuff. I couldn't believe it, so much stuff. The Germans were standing there, trying to make sure that we are not going to swipe anything. They told us that if they catch anyone trying to take

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something from those suitcases and put it in his possession, they'll shoot him on the spot. It was so tempting and I knew if I could get my hands on something like that, I could probably live until the end of the war by bartering that for food. One time I had a chance, I took out some earrings and some other gems and I stuffed it in a crack of the table. Then, when we were done with the work, I took it out and took it into the office and hid it there. I thought what if someone finds it. Well, luckily it was a good hiding place. It was there when we finally got our papers that we were done with the work over there because nobody was shipped into that ghetto anymore and they were starting liquidation of the ghetto. I went to that office, took it out, put it in my pocket and walked home. I didn't say anything to my uncle. He was very fearsome and he told me time and time again, "Don't do anything that could jeopardize your life. I'm responsible for you so listen to me." But I felt differently and I thought if I'm going to be able to take something like that, it will prolong my life. I hid it at their house where nobody could find it and it was there for a month. I started to work in that metal fabricating shop. The shop was just a shell, there was nothing in there because the machinery had been pilfered by the Germans. They took it out and shipped it to Germany. But since they wanted to have us work for them, they brought in new machinery. We had to mount that machinery back on the ___. I was called in by a fellow by the name Pl_ (374) who was the head of that department. We started mounting each of the machines. Because of that mounting, I went down underground because in order to have those machines sit stable and not move, we had to pour foundations, cement foundations. I saw that the place could be a terrific place to hide out in the future. I was only going around and thinking about how to evade them? How to get away from them without falling into their trap? Whenever I saw something, I made a mental note of it, to go back into that place. We finished mounting that machine and then they transferred me to a different department that was more the thing that I used to do. We were trying to make bottles for the Germans but the bottles that they were having made had to go through five or six different processes. It took a long time and many man-hours and they gave us an assignment to make bottles for the Germans that could be made in two operations. Sure enough, we worked out a design whereby we took a long piece of wire and with two hands, we bent that wire and we made that insert in the middle to buckle on the letter. They were very satisfied with that -- like I cared a lot. We made a good impression on them. Whenever they came, they said, "What you did; we are smart but you are smarter than we are. You knew how to do it in such a short time." It tickled me.

I worked in that department for a few months. When I went to work one day, I noticed some signs that said the ghetto was going to be liquidated and anyone who wants to get a real good job, the earlier he goes, the better the job prospect would be. For me, that was no inducement. I felt that as long as I can stay here, I'm going to stay. If I can stay until the war is over, that will be better yet. One day, our director from that factory came in and said we are going to stop work at three o'clock because we have to go to be present at a public hanging. I

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started to inquire, asking "What is that public hanging?" They told me there was a fellow from across the street. They were making for the horses--.

Question: Bridles?

Answer: Yeah, whatever. They used to get a lot of leather so they could make things for them. One guy who didn't have shoelaces cut a piece that fell off, so he tried to make a shoelace. They saw him and that was good enough reason for them to hang him for that. We went to a place in the ghetto where it was sparsely occupied because it was only land and it was called Marishein (470). All the goods for the ghetto were shipped in there. I always kept my eyes open. I wanted to find a place where I can hide that nobody will be able to find me. I saw over there they had some warehouses where a person could hide and probably live through the end of the war. We knew the war is coming to an end but we didn't know how long it's going to last. I told a fellow from our factory, "You see this place over there. It'll be an ideal place to hide out." The first thing he asked me, "Where are you going to get the food from?" I said, "Well, that's something we've got to work out." He said, "How're you going to work it out?" I didn't want to tell him that I have some jewelry that I could barter, because you didn't know who you can trust. I decided that it's not going to work out for the simple reason that you just cannot get food. It was a bad time to barter because everyone was thinking about being shipped out and they didn't want to be caught with jewelry because right away they would ask them where they got it. Nobody wanted to buy it at that time or barter it for food so that fell through. When we returned the following day to the factory, that fellow that I helped to mount machinery came to me. He said, "You know we got an order to dismantle the machinery. They told us two weeks is all we are going to get." I said, "You must be crazy, two weeks. The machines weighed tons, how can you--it's impossible." He said, "That's what they told me. We started to dismantle smaller and large machines. By the time we got halfway, the two weeks were over. The German came in and started swearing and he said, 'I'm going to shoot you all.' I knew he wouldn't do it because he couldn't get anyone else to do it. He begged the Germans, that Mr. P___ (538) he says, 'Give us another two weeks. He said, 'You must be crazy. I'll shoot you first before I'll give you two weeks.'" We started working at a little faster pace than before. Two weeks went by and we still didn't have that done. Another two weeks and we didn't have everything dismantled. That Mr. P came begging us, "Please, please. They threatened me with execution if I don't force you to work at a pace that will get everything out of here within a few days." I knew that by cooperating with them, the sooner we get done, the sooner I'll have to go to a concentration camp. I felt if I can prolong it for another week or two weeks or a month, that would be much better for me than going into the concentration camp.

Question: Had you heard, in the ghetto, had you heard about what the camps were like? You did know?

Answer: Yes, the Poles brought in some news. They were not the best source about anything that was adverse to the Jewish people. They tried to shove it down our throat. "They

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are killing them by the thousand, by the millions,” they said. We didn't know whether we could believe it or not but it was the truth. They told us about a camp that I was going to be shipped to. They are gassing them by the thousands every day. One day I noticed that I had to go through a square, where all the people were going to be assigned to a camp. They didn't tell us we were going to a concentration camp. They just said we are going to a war camp. I noticed there was information on the bulletin board that R ____ (599) was going with this transport today. Anyone who would like to be assigned to this same transport and be sure that they can get the same luxury as he gets, let them enroll. The fact of the matter was they didn't give him any time at all. They put him right away into the gas chamber, him and his wife. I outlived him. I stayed there I think for another two weeks. Finally, they stopped giving us the rations. They said, “Okay, you don't want to go to the transport, you won't get any food. That was -- (End of Side B, Tape 1)

Tape II, Side A

Question: And so?

Answer: I felt that someone was looking at me and I turned my head and I saw a blonde young woman with a little boy next to her. I was sure, at first, that she must be a German. She didn't have a trace of Jew in her, blonde, blue eyes. She came toward me and she said, the first question, “A re you going with this transport?” I said yes. Then she introduced herself and said her name was Lessman (09) and this was her little brother. “This guy is impulsive. He doesn't listen and going to a camp where his life is going to be in jeopardy, I need somebody to keep an eye on him.” All of a sudden, I was appointed a guardian of a little boy.

Question: The boy's name?

Answer: Lessman, I can't remember his first name. I don't recall. She said, “I'll be eternally thankful if you could just make sure that he's not running off, that he's not doing things that he shouldn't be doing. I give permission to give him a kick in the pants if he does it.” She said goodbye and said she's working for a tailoring factory. They're going to be another three weeks in the ghetto and then it will be liquidated. Theirs will be liquidated too. (Two ghettos?) The boy and I arrived the following morning at a camp. The first thing I saw was a human body stretched over the barbed wires. One of his hands was spread out like he was trying to conquer the wire gate.

Question: Where was this, where are you now?

Answer: In Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the front of the camp was a placard, Arbeit Macht Frei, work will free you. I knew we came to a place that it's not going to be so easily to get along with. I figure that here we've got to be very, very careful what we do. Otherwise, we are not going to survive. I told that little boy, “Y ou better

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shape up. You are not at home, you cannot get away with it. If you want to live another day, listen to what someone tells you. I'm not trying to put the law down to you but I promised your sister I'm going to keep an eye on you and I mean it." The following morning we came out in front of the barrack. It was a tent actually...

Question: Is that where you stayed the night before?

Answer: Yeah. A tent, half-round tent and there were people sleeping on the ground from one side and the other side, maybe a hundred people in each tent. We were assigned to one of them and they started shouting "Rouse, rouse." (52) to come out, a selection. They want to select who should live and who should die. They were doing the job of G-d. You learn fast when you are in a situation like that. I noticed that the little boy was put on the left side. We were told that the left side is the side that goes straight into the frying pan. I motion to him that he should crawl over to my side. He started moving and they hit him over the head but he didn't give up. When the SS man turned around, he ran to the other side. Then later he said, "I told you to stay over there." I said, "This is my brother, I can't let him be without me, I've got to watch over him." Okay, okay. He hit him over the head, he hit me over the head but he let us stay. I told him after that incident, "We've got to enroll to go out to work, not to be in this camp because any day, you escape today but you won't escape tomorrow or the next day. I said we've got to go out and work into a satellite camp where they haven't got extermination. He said, "Okay if I see something that's going on, I'll come and let you know to go over there." He kept on looking all day and the following morning, when I was going to be tattooed, there was a line and I noticed a truck standing not far from over there. They were taking only people that had the tattoo so I went over to that truck driver and I ask him if he needs some people. He said "Yes, I need some people, carpenters, mechanics, all the people that could repair stuff that goes wrong in some of those mines where you dig the coal." He said, "We have a big camp, a number of camps in that area and we are all working for that mine. If you can do the work that you claim you can, you can have a good position there." He told me right after I get the tattoo, I can come over. I started looking for that Lessman boy, but he was nowhere to be found. I begged the driver, "Could you wait another half an hour? He promised he's going to come here." He said, "No way, it's getting dark and I have to be on my way." I got separated from him. I went to a camp by the name Fersengruber (IO 4) and when I arrived, I found out that I had a cousin in that camp. and then a second cousin who was a kapo. I tried to look up my cousin and his name was Kott, Dave Kott. (109) He looked just terrible like he's not going to last a week, his cheeks sunken and he had a yellowish complexion. I said, "What are they doing to you?" He said, "They're killing me day by day. I just cannot be in that mine. It's too much for me." I promised him I'll see what I can do if I get assigned to one of those places that are going to make repairs for the mine. I'll see maybe I can push you in into that. I also promised myself I'm going to see that kapo. His name was Yanek Koltz. (121). I didn't wait long. I saw him marching down. I said, "Yanek." He said, with his arrogant expression and filthy language, he said, "You so-and-so, what

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do you want from me?" I told him we are related and he said, "We are related? Come on over here, let me give you a hug." He lifted up his foot and gave it to me, oh boy! Knocked me down cold on the ground. He said, "If you ever come close to me, I'll finish the job on you. No relatives, nothing. I don't know you, you don't know me. Just get lost." So I knew I had to keep a distance from him. A day or two days later, they called my name and said I should come this and this hour. They're going to take me to a shop that's not finished yet but we have to start working on it. We have some work to be done for the mine. I went over there and there was another fellow by the name Adash Karp (141) and he was selected to be the foreman. I introduced myself to him and he said, "If you claim that you know all of that work that you said you do, we are going to be good friends." He didn't know too much but what he didn't know, he made up with his mouth. The first job was an elevator shaft that had to be repaired. One of the gears was stripped and we either had to buy another gear, which was not available because they quit making those. All of the factories were geared for production for the war. So, we had to improvise and put in two gears, teeth we called it. We had to take out those two that were stripped and file them down and put in two in their place. Since we didn't have anything to weld it, we had to drill a hole into that gear and then set it up with some screws so it will work for the time being. Then that other Karp came over and said, "Boy-oh-boy. You really surprised me. I don't know where you learned it but whatever you did, it's terrific." They put it up and it worked and I didn't hear complaints for quite a while. We could weld to it and repairing it was no problem. The shop took shape. Each and every one had an assigned area that he worked from with the tools assigned to him. I tried to get my cousin to come in and I talked to that other Karp. I said the guy is dying by inches, couldn't you find something to do for him? He said, "If I take him in and he doesn't know the basics, you are not going to be hurt, I'm going to be hurt. I don't want to jeopardize my life for somebody I don't even know. That was the end of that. I worked in there for a number of months. One day, a fellow who worked across from me was bulging. I said, "What have you got in there?" He said, "I went to an Italian prisoner-of-war camp which was adjoining and they gave me some potatoes." I said, "Empty out everything and put it in here in my workshop." I thought that maybe I will be immune, but him, they would probably kill. Sure enough, a minute later the head kapo came in and said, "Where is that Jew who just took some potatoes from the prison-of-war?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "You don't know? I can point him out to you. I have been watching him." So he went to him and started kicking him and beating him, and asking where are the potatoes? He said, "I haven't got them." It was true, he didn't have them. He had him on the ground, kicking him mercilessly. Finally, I went over to him and said he brought them over and he dumped them in my workshop. He said to come with him and he took me to his place. It was a tiny booth and somebody was holding my head. He kept on hitting my back with an electric cord. I felt the first ten, but then I didn't feel any more. Either I was numb or-- he gave me 50 times in the back. He said, "Let it be a lesson to you. Don't help anyone out. If you want to be a good Samaritan, you will wind up dead. The next Saturday, we went to take a shower and when I exposed my back to the water, it's like a million pins kept on hurting me. All of a sudden, the SS men, the lagerfuhrer came in. He

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noticed the bruised back. He came over and asked who did it to you. I said, "Nobody did it to me, I had an accident. I fell and that's what happened." He said, "I can tell, this is not a fall, someone must have hit you." I said no. If I would have told him the truth, he would have gotten off scot free. He would have done nothing because he was the head of the kapos and I would be probably the one that could be dispensable. He could dispense with me but he couldn't dispense of him. So I figured I'll stick to the lie and I stuck to it. He said, "Well, have it your way. And for all your information I want to tell you, I'm here to dish out justice." Justice! He said, "If someone beats you up like that, you come to me and I'll see to it that it won't happen again." Go to him, to an SS man and seek justice. Well, that was in October, the month of October. During the night, we had been hearing from a distance thunder-like sounds and we knew that the Russians were coming close. We were told that they are going to liquidate the camp and we'll have to relocate somewhere else but it didn't happen until December. One night, they woke us up. We couldn't even dress ourselves properly and we had to march about 30 kilometers. That wasn't a march, that was a jogging, we kept on running like someone would be chasing us. We came to a city by the name Glivitz (263) that was German territory and it was a railroad hub where all the trains kept on coming from Poland, from Germany, from Czechoslovakia, they all came there. On the way to Glivitz, I noticed a guy where I was walking and minding my own business that he looked familiar. I went over to him and I asked, "Are you Myron Mak? (275). He looked at me and said, "Oh my God, yes, I am Myron Mak and you are Szpiro." I said yes, I am. He looked like he's not going to last an hour. He was suffering from dysentery. He couldn't keep anything inside him, it kept on running out from him. I told him, "Lean against me and I'll try to walk with you." But he was much taller than I was and he slowed me down because he himself couldn't walk fast. Finally, we came to the end of the line. There was an SS man by the name of Debrowalski (289) and he claimed he was from Romania. He said to me, "You schwartza Juda (290), you black Jew; if you are not going to move up, I'll shoot you and him together because once you come close to me, I have an order to shoot." I tried to get Mak to cooperate, "Please let's walk a little faster." But I couldn't carry him, that was impossible. Finally, it got to a point where the SS man with his gun came to me and to him and said, "All I have to do is pull the trigger and you'll be both dead. I'm giving you notice, move up." When Mak heard that, something came over him, he started running toward the SS man and the SS man started shooting at him. The SS man grabbed a hold of him and threw him into the ditch. He told me, You better get lost from here because I have an eye on you. You'll be next." I heard his advice and I got up into the middle of the line. I ran up close to my good friend, Moka K (317) while I was (almost?) trampled on the trip from Glivitz to Prague, Czechoslovakia. He said, "You stay with me, walk the same pace I'm walking and if you get tired, I'll help you out." Coming back to that Moka K, the way I got acquainted with him. He was a man of immense power. He could take a bar, bend it and make a flower out of it, a heavy bar, an iron bar. He entertained SS people by showing them what he can do. Somehow, I couldn't believe it but they wanted to preserve him. One day, one SS man came into our shop and said, "You know that Jew that bends the bar? We would like him to come and work here." So that other Karp said the only place that we are going to have available is when we get a

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blacksmith. If we get a blacksmith, he could work with the blacksmith and hit the iron while it's still hot. It took us a few days and we ran across somebody, a Jewish man who was a blacksmith from years ago from a city in Gloslavik (349) in Poland. He knew his trade and from that time on, the blacksmith and he got to be inseparable. I befriended him because when he didn't have much to do, he came over and talked to me and we got to be very, very close. He impressed me; I had never seen anyone that could do things like he did. The guy took a bar between his teeth and two people on each side were hanging from the bar. Didn't bother him. Coming back to that -- I walked with him until we got to Glivitz and when we arrived over there, they assigned us into open wagons. It was December; it was very, very cold. We started out; they assigned, I think, about 100 people to animal wagons, the owners shipped animals with it. When they put us in, there was no room to turn around. We were packed like sardines. A few hours later, we started to notice that people had been trampled because if someone couldn't breathe properly, the mere fact that he was squeezed so tightly with others, robbed him of his breath. People kept on falling down. When a person fell down, the people kept on moving forward because the vacuum, they pushed one against the other. He was trampled, that person. There was no way to help anyone because you couldn't go and move ten or 20 people from the area, to get to the bottom of that guy. Toward morning, we came to Prague, Czechoslovakia. I said to my friend, Moka K, "You know, how often will I be in Prague? I'll take a look at what's going on, how the other half are living. I couldn't believe it. There were hundreds of Czechs near that area where the train stopped. They kept on encouraging us to jump off the train and they're going to help us. It was sheer nonsense because every wagon had two SS men with machine guns on an elevation to watch that nobody jumps. They were even shooting at people who kept on throwing down a cup to catch some snow because everyone was dehydrated. They were shooting at the people who tried to get a little snow. I kept watching them but I said "It's a noble gesture but it's not feasible. In my condition, I couldn't even run ten feet. How can I outdistance a bullet?" While I was thinking about it, I felt enormous desire to fall asleep. I felt I kept on sinking and sinking. All of a sudden, I felt that I'm being trampled. I felt that someone was walking on my head, on my throat, on my body. I couldn't help myself; I figured well this is it. The next thing I knew I woke up and I was laying next to that Moka K. He made room for me to lay next to me. He pushed everybody from the whole--he threw them to get to the bottom, to get me out. He knew where I was; I pointed out to him when I came to the end of the wagon. I said, "I'm going to be right here" and he knew exactly where. When he saw people trampling on somebody, he kept on pushing them and throwing aside to pull me out. When I came to, he said, "You're a sight to behold. G-d almighty, you are swollen, your head is twice the size and your face is one great big bruise. Just stick close to me and I'll make sure that you'll get over it." We went to a concentration camp by the name Mauthausen. Our SS man, that lagerfuhrer, the head of our camp, he was a shrewd fellow. He knew if he gives up that position to be lagerfuhrer, he will have to go to the Russian front. He tried in the worst way to keep us intact. He tried to make a deal with that Mauthausen lagerfuhrer to take us in and give him a position there. That lagerfuhrer told him, "My advice to you is take them into the forest and shoot them. So he said "No, this I'm not going to do." We started from over there and we went to a

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camp by the name Rodhausen (481). Finally, he got what he wanted and that lagerfuhrer took us in and he tried to be very close to the group that he brought over. One day, he came to me and said "There is a position available. They are making the V-1 rockets here. I know that you were very good over there. Would you like to try it?" I said, "If you think I can do it, why not?" He recommended me to go and work with a German civilian. Every morning at six o'clock, that German civilian came and picked me up in his Volkswagen, a small, a templewagon (503) with three wheels. He picked me up and took me over into the mountains. They had thousands of feet of -- where they had been establishing an assembly in the mountains. They called it "Stchone" (513). I started to work over there and the work was so diversified that nobody knew what others were working on. Each person had a different assignment so that nobody would know to give out the secret. I had one assignment; I did wheels, had to calibrate them and make sure that they were to one thousandth of a millimeter tolerance. That didn't last long because at that time, the Russians kept on coming closer and the southern army kept on moving up. They decided they were going to ship us to a different place. They packed us one morning on barges that normally carry grain. It's not meant for human occupancy. We were traveling a night and a day on the Elbe River. One morning, they opened the doors, I couldn't get used to it, I was blinded by the light -- I hadn't seen any daylight. When I looked around, I saw dead bodies. People who were just dropping dead from -- they suffocated. We stopped at a city by the name Liebeck (559). We got out, whoever was still alive. One of the SS men said to the guy who was running the boat, "At least you are not going empty, you are going to have dead cargo on the way back. A cruel joke but--". We started walking from Liebeck until we came to an area S (573). It surprised me, this was an intersection in the middle of nowhere. There was one big building, a barn and a house. I asked what is going on? One of the Ukrainian SS men said "This is the house where Schmidt, our SS fuhrer lives with his parents. He put us up in the barn because it was getting dark already. It's the only night I enjoyed a good night's sleep. I was sleeping with Moka K next to me. When I got up, I noticed a fellow who looked like one of the Goldrans brothers from (603) and I said, "Yurek, what's the matter with you? You don't look the same to me?" He said, "I'm so sick, I don't think I'll make it another day." He had dysentery. I said, "Come on, get up because if you are not going to go and walk, they will shoot you in here." "No," he said, "I give up. I had it. This is the end of my line." Sure enough, a few minutes later, they started shooting everyone that-

(End of Side A, Tape 2)

Tape II, Side B

We walked seven kilometers to the North Sea. It bothered me that I couldn't figure out what they want, are they going to push us into the sea? One of the Ukrainian SS men said, "You need a little recreation. You had a hard time, we are going to put you on a sea boat." Then another one came and said, "We are going to exchange you for German prisoners-of-war with the English." Nobody knew what was going to happen. We saw three ships in the distance. The biggest one we could see was the *Capacorna* (14). Next to it from the right-hand side was the *Athens* and the one behind the

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Capacorna we couldn't see the name because the *Capacorna* was the biggest and we couldn't see what kind of a ship it was. They took us and loaded us on those ships. They counted 100 people and we just -- I was separated at that point from that Moka K. I went to the *Athens*, Moka K went to the *Capacorna*. We were maybe 350 people in that ship, on the lowest deck. It was far from luxury. We were fed a very poor diet, you couldn't even, it was mostly water. We had been smelling the food that they had been making in their kitchen, the fresh bread and everything. That was only for them. The following morning, we heard airplanes flying over our ship and coming very close to it. The captain of the ship decided quickly. He said, "You guys from down below, whoever speaks German, come on up here to the upper deck." I went up and a number of other guys went up. We were wearing those striped uniforms. He said, "During the day, you have to be on the top deck. When the planes go by, they will see that there are no soldiers on the deck and they won't bomb it." He was smart. The *Capacorna* was not as smart and the next morning, when the English came, they started bombing the *Capacorna* and we could see from a distance, the ship was engulfed in fire. I don't know what happened to Moka K -- either he succumbed in there--. I had also a friend that I knew from the camp by the name Blockman (51). He came out with scars all over his back from the fire. He saved himself by jumping into the salt water, which scarred him for life. It didn't take long, a day at most, when we came up to the upper deck, we didn't see an SS man. I started looking around to make an excuse (?) and there was nobody in sight. I went into the kitchen and there was fresh bread being baked. Like a fool, I grabbed a piece of half-baked bread, hot, and I stuffed it. I got very sick, it didn't agree with me. But the English came on the boat and they said in German and Polish and English, "Be patient, we are going to bring boats and load you all up and take you off." That took them maybe an hour, at the most two hours. They came with large boats and took us down. They were not organized because they were not prepared for what they saw. There were hundreds of people shabbily dressed in those uniforms. They said, "Frankly, we are not prepared for what we saw. We give you authority to go into any house (where?) that is deserted. If nobody's there, take it over. We'll support you, if someone comes and claims it, you just tell them to go to the authority." I just didn't believe that this can be true. I didn't want to go to a house that maybe some SS man was occupying. I went to a barracks and I found a quiet corner and I went to sleep. It was a barracks for marines and I found a uniform, a marine uniform. I put it on just to get off from that striped cloth. The next morning, I went out and I start to look around to see what is going on. I met a fellow by the name K (89) who was married to a girl from our city. He was wearing a practically new suit. I said, "Where did you get that suit?" He said, "I found it in the house I occupied." The suit didn't fit him. He was a tailor and I saw he had improvised -- shortened it and cut it down in width but it was still a fairly new garment. He said, "If you want, you can come and occupy the place with me." I just couldn't take it. I was still afraid that any minute the Germans were going to overrun the place and take us back. I went into the city and I met some civilians that the English brought over to take over, to make a camp for all the people that were liberated. He said, "These barracks here are going to be designated for all of you, where you are going to be put up. We'll try in the future to find out if any of you will be able to emigrate to different countries. In the meantime, the UNRRA which was

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our body of the world organization, the United Nations, will be helping you out, you're going to get food. Any one of you who is undernourished will go to a hospital and we'll build you up." It started to look like it would be a long-range project and I started to feel a little better. After a few months, I ran across a guy who came from Italy. I talked to him and asked him about a cousin of mine. He said, "I did run across your cousin." He was from a neighboring town and he knew him. He said, "I saw him in Bari, where there was an Israeli legion. He was there with the Israeli legion." I decided that I was going to look for him. A day or two days later, I was hitchhiking on the trains going down south until I came to Austria. From Austria, there were no trains going to the Alps and we had to go mountain-climbing to go across the border. I came to Rome and then from over there I hitched a ride to Bari, only to find out that he had been there and he left a short time earlier. They told me most likely he went to Ts (139), which was another side of the peninsula. That was an area where Jewish people were training future sailors. Was Palestine but they had long-range plans and Ts was the place where future sailors were trained over there. He wanted to go to Israel and when I came to Ts, they told me that yes, the guy was there. They said he wanted to go to Israel but "we cannot ship anyone to Israel. We ourselves have problems if we want to go back because the English are blockading the whole sea over there, the Mediterranean Sea. They won't let any boats go to Israel." I decided to go back to Germany and I wound up in a camp Bergen-Belsen. Most of the liberated people from that area were situated there. I ran across some friends I knew from camp. We four boys occupied a one-room apartment. We started making plans about what to do with our lives. One fellow by the name Alex Epstein (161) befriended a nice young lady, Sophia Levy. He got married over there. Blockman, I mentioned him before, had a friend in Sweden. The friend had been sent to Sweden because she was very sick and was taken there to be built up. Blockman decided he wanted to go to Sweden to marry her. I was left with one other guy --Fogel, Kubat Fogel. We decided at that point that since he wanted to go to Australia and I wanted to go to the United States and they didn't have a consulate over in Bergen-Belsen, so I'd have to move to Munich, where there was a consulate. About two weeks later, I found myself in Munich. I started to look around where many Jewish people congregated. There was a cafe by the name Grunwald and I started asking if they had seen my cousin. They said, "As a matter of fact, he was here a little while ago. If you stay here long enough or return tomorrow, you'll find him, for sure." Sure enough, I ran across him the following day. We decided to move to a smaller community and it was about 10 kilometers from Munich. I mentioned (188) and we took a nice apartment and we lived in there for maybe seven, eight months. During that time, my cousin found out that he has a brother in Engleberg, Sweden. He had been sent to Sweden because the Swedes took in people who were undernourished or were too young to be on their own. The brother was a youngster so Sweden took him in and sent him to a little camp, a school established to teach young people. When we found out, we wanted in the worst way to go and visit him. But we couldn't get a permit to cross the border, so we notified him that we were going to be at the border crossing. He came to see us. We spent a day with him. He had to go back to be in the school. About four or five months later, he got a permit to go to the United States. My uncle that lived in New York, and he worked out some papers to bring him over. In between time, when he left, I went by train back to

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Bergen-Belsen mainly to do a little business because we lived privately and we were not supported by the UNRRA. We had to support ourselves.

I got very sick one night and I had excruciating pain. Kubat Fogel said, "You know that the only thing -- the best thing I can suggest is to take you to the hospital." I went to the hospital, I was limping I didn't know what happened to me. They diagnosed that I have sciatica. They treated me like a guinea pig. They kept on shooting me with novocaine and more novocaine but I didn't feel any relief. For a few minutes, while the novocaine was working, I was all right, but then the pain started to come back. While I was in the hospital, I got a message that my cousin was killed in an accident in Munich. He was hitchhiking a ride from M -- (230) to Munich. The truck that he hitchhiked on tried to cross train tracks ahead of an oncoming train. There was no barricade to stop him. The train hit the truck and killed him instantly. They wouldn't release me but I told the doctor I'm willing to pay a nurse to go with me to Munich. I said I would like to be at the funeral. They assigned a nurse and I took a train and I went to Munich only to find out that I missed the funeral by six hours. When I went back to our apartment, I couldn't believe my eyes. Someone had pilfered the whole place. I didn't even have a pair of shorts to change into. I asked the landlady, "Who

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did this?" She said the Yiddisha Geminda, the Jewish people assigned. They organized a group of Jewish people and they made them (do it?), one said he is a rabbi. The other said he is going to be the president, they appointed themselves! When they found out my cousin had been killed, they came over and they said "We are taking possession of everything. We are going to give it back to them when they come." She said that the Szpiro was going to come and he had to have the stuff. He said they can come to us and we'll give it to him. Only to find out that nobody claimed that they had it. They hid it -- each one took something and I had to go out and buy everything from top to bottom to get dressed. I didn't have anything to change into. In the meantime, I had to have that nurse because every few hours, she had to give me novocaine. I begged her to stay with me a little while longer so I could have something to change into.

The second day, I checked into the Munich Nerve Clinic. They considered that a nerve disease, something to do with the nervous system, was causing the pain. They started treating me in an entirely different manner than I was treated before. I was there six months and I didn't make any progress. The doctor that was assigned to me said the only thing he could suggest was Badhaden (282), Baden-Baden? which treats people who have rheumatism, arthritis and also sciatica. Mud baths could help. I went there and they gave me that treatments and I started to feel better every day, to a point that I didn't limp any more. After three months, I was able to get discharged and go back to Munich. When I went back to Munich, I found out that I had papers already to go to the United States. Six weeks later, I was already on my way to Bremerhaven, where I boarded a ship and I went to the United States. My uncle and my cousin came to greet me. I stayed with my uncle for about three months. After that, I decided that I was sick and tired of New York. It did not impress me too much. In the morning at six o'clock, I had to be on the subway in order to make it to work that started eight o'clock. I didn't get home until about six o'clock. I could barely eat the food and I had to go to school. It was a pace that I just couldn't take it. I started to look around and see if I could settle some place that is not so hectic. I found a friend who lived in St. Paul and I contacted him. He told me you come, be my guest. If you like it, you can stay. If you don't like it, you can always go back. I took him up on that. I came on a Wednesday, and on a Thursday, I already had a job. They hired me to work for Burt's Shoe Stores. I was with them over a year. In the meantime, I met my wife and we got married in 1952, August 24, 1952. Soon, we'll have our 40th wedding anniversary.

(End of tape.)

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