United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with David Schnitzer
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PREFACE

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DAVID SCHNIZTER
July 17, 2013

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with David Schnitzer, conducted by Gail Schwartz on July 17th, 2013 over the telephone in the Holocaust Museum and in Forest Hills, New York. This is track number one. What is your full name?

David Schnitzer: My full name is David Schnitzer. I had a middle name but I don't use it.

Q: What was that?

A: David Leib Schnitzer. After my grandfather.

Q: Where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in Oświęcim, August 16, 1924.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, your parents.

A: My family. We were four in the family. I had three sisters and I was the youngest. I was the only boy.

Q: The only boy. What were your sisters' names?

A: My sisters' names, the oldest one was **Arusha** Schnitzer.

Q: And the other two?

A: And the middle, the other sister was Regina Schnitzer. And the other sister was Leah Schnitzer.

Q: Let's talk about your parents. First of all their names.

A: My father's name was Samuel Schnitzer.

Q: And your mother's name?

A: And my mother's name was, they called her **Lama** and she called herself Lola Schnitzer.

Q: How long had their families been in the town?

A: If I had family in the camp. No.

Q: No, no. How long had your family lived in the town? Many generations? How far back does your family go?

A: How long I lived in the camp?

Q: No, in the town.

A: Oh the town. Oh they lived there – they were born in that town.

Q: Ok.

A: All of them. My grandfather was born there.

Q: So you had a large extended family? You had grandparents?

A: Well I had four uncles and four aunts, all married with children.

Q: So you had lots of aunts and uncles and cousins?

A: Yeah well they all go, all perished.

Q: Yes.

A: As a matter of fact, I had a letter from the Holocaust Museum and it has from the **Yiskor** book the names, but they have no way to tell me what's happened. Only one, one aunt writes in the Yiskor book that she was shot and killed. And my cousin, the first cousin that I had, that he was killed the first day when the war started in 19, September 1939. The bomb killed him because he lived across the street from the school and instead to rid the school, they hit the house nearby where he lived. And he was wounded and he was killed the same day. I could never ever forget this.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father's is like this here. My grandfather, he owned a concrete factory before the first war yet. He had a partner and they made concrete pipes, sewer pipes and water pipes and all cement savers, all kind, everything from cement and so on. So he had a factory in **Breckinkau** [ph], that was in Birkenau about a mile away from the concentration camp and he produced this kind of things. He also had a railroad track coming from the main station to the factory so they could deliver sand and cement what you needed to set, to make the products. And at the same time to send out the finished products at the same time.
Now my grandfather went every year, he used to go to **Carlsbad** for vacation, like we go here to the mountains. One year, in 1917 he went to Carlsbad. On the way he suffered a heart attack and was, died on the way over. My father was at that time had to go and bury him in Oświęcim. The stone is still there in Oświęcim on the cemetery. As a matter of fact I did go there to visit it and I also have a picture of my grandfather's stone and I sent a memorial over there and I put a candle over it.

Q: Then your father started working? When did he –

A: And my father had to take over the factory because he was married just that time and my father's, my mother's entire family moved to London just before the, the first war and my entire family, from my mother, they survived in London because they were raised, I mean in the schools and so on and so on and my mother, since she was married to my father, she had no chance of going with my grandfather. And my father was responsible to his eight siblings, including his brothers and sisters. They were the youngsters, to support them and keep them and marrying them off after a while.
And he kept the factory til 1939. Then the Nazis came. They confiscated the factory and they took all the equipment back to Germany. I could never claim it because I had no proof that they took it and where they took it to. And my mother survived. She also tried it. We were not successful at all. Up to this date, I'm fighting the Polish government to recover the property which is still in Poland in Birkenau to get my property, the owner. I should be, I am the only owner. And still to now the Polish government is not budging after 60 some odd years. Because they are, they took it and they hold onto it.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your childhood. What –

A: My childhood.

Q: Your neighborhood. Did you live with Jews and non-Jews?

A: My neighborhood was strictly 100 percent Jewish. The whole town was a Jewish town, except in the suburbs where the Gentiles lived and the farmers lived. But the town itself was a Jewish town.

Q: Was your family a religious family?

A: Very much. My father was not a **Hosef** [ph] of my rabbi, but he was an Orthodox man. He used to wear a **streimel** on Saturday and used to wear **bekishe** on Saturday. And we were very observant, kosher and my mother wore a **sheitel** all the years til the Nazis came.

Q: What kind of school did you go to?

A: I just went to public schools. After this I could not go anywhere, because when the war broke out, my school ends at that time.

Q: I still want to talk a little bit before the war started.

A: Ok, go ahead.

Q: So you went to a Polish school?

A: Polish school, yes.

Q: Were the teachers Polish?

A: I went in the morning. We were forced to go in. It was compulsory, as all the people in Poland had to go to school. So I went in the mornings. I went about 8:00 in the morning, walking of course to school. There was no such thing as transportation, summer or winter. And I had to walk to the school, about two miles out and we were there with the goyim in this school. And this was a Catholic country. And every morning the Catholics had to get up and we were standing there. We had to stand up, bare headed and they had to say the prayer, the Polish prayer. But we did not, could not participate because we were Jewish. This was in every morning, they had to say their prayer and we had to stand up and listening. And this was – and the cross was in the middle of the school.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism from the other children? Or from the teachers?

A: I did, I did. I tell you what happened. We had this recess during the lunch hours. So we went to the yard and of course, the Polish hoodlums, they used to -- knew that we are Jewish. And they used to come and beat us up sometimes. And I went to the principal and I complained to the

principal. I said, look here. I was beaten up for doing nothing. You just beat me up for no reason. And you know what she answered me. He didn't kill you, did he? That was the answer of the principal from a public school in Poland. So you ask me if I knew anti-Semitism. I was a youngster, a baby yet.
Now let me tell you another experience. My father went to the factory and I was with him sitting in the factory, on a horse and a wagon and the next thing is, as we, first we came out of the factory, another farmer passed by with a horse and wagon with a whip. And he whipped my father with the whip, for no reason whatsoever. I witnessed this as a child.

Q: What did your father do? Anything?

A: What could he do? He's not going to fight somebody. He's going to have a knife and kill him. He had no choice. We kept on going.

Q: What about the teachers in the school?

A: The who?

Q: The teachers. Were they –

A: The teachers in school. The teachers in school of course they were all anti-Semites. And but we did our homework and we did the best we could. But absolutely no, no what you call the love they had for the Jews. As far as the Polack goes, they did not change and I tell you an experience, what happened to me in the year 2000 when I went to Poland and I wanted my family, my sister and my niece and my nephew and my niece they wanted to see where their parents were born. Because they were not alive anymore. My sisters. So what happened? We took a trip to Poland and I speak Polish, of course. And as we came to Poland, they wanted to see the apartment that we lived in. So sure enough I come into the apartment. I brought a box of candy. I figured I want to be nice and polite. And I knocked on the door. The place we lived in. and the next thing is, a woman opened up the door and it was a small room. And I said where is the apartment? They said they divided the apartment in two. The other half is on the other side.

Ok so I wanted to show the bigger apartment because this was one big apartment. So sure enough, I knock on the door of the other apartment. The woman opens up the door. The husband a big bull with a moustache stands in the back and he says, shows with the hand, no, no. You can't come in here. And I says to the woman, look here. We came 3000 miles. All I do. I don't want your apartment. All I came here to show my niece, my nephew, where they live, what and my sons, my sons were with me too. To show where I was born and where their mothers was born. No way. He's not, not me into the apartment and I took that and I said look here. I didn't come for the apartment. I didn't want to argument because I was afraid. He could take a knife and stab me and kill me so I walked away. So just wanted to show you how they did not change, no matter how publicity and how tried, still and all they're still the same Polacks they were. One vice -- one prime minister in Israel said they minute they were born, they soaked in anti-Semitism in their mother's milk.

Q: Did you talk to your friends, your Jewish friends about all this anti-Semitism?

A: Where? After the war?

Q: No, no, no. We're talking about before the war, while you were experiencing this –

A: Of course. I tell you. The thing is we had market days twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays. And a lot of farmers came in with their eggs and cheeses and chickens and goose and so on to sell. And of course the market was in the middle of the center of town, Mondays and Thursdays. They all came and the Jewish mothers came in for the sabbath. They bought chickens, they bought the eggs and they bought everything else. Now the Jewish people had stores around town and I guess all kind of stores, like suits and clothes and materials and so on and so on. So the Polacks, the farmers, they had the money and they figured they had nothing in their farms. They go into the Jewish stores and they buy what you call it, the clothes and they make themselves clothes and they buy shoes and so and so on. The anti-Semites were standing right and outside the stores. They saw the Polacks coming out with packages from the store and says go back to the store. Tell the Jew to give you the money back.

Q: Oh my

A: So this is what I want you to know what the Polacks are. And this was all til 1939.

Q: Were your parents Zionists at that time?

A: My father was a Zionist yes. My sister too. And let me tell you another -- you're talking about anti-Semitism. Every time there was Easter time, Christmas time, we used -- my father used to take me to shul three times a day. Mornings and nights. So what happened was that they announce in the synagogue before Easter and before Christmas, Jews don't go out in the streets. Easter is coming up. They have a special day; so is Christmas. They all come out from the churches with the Madonnas, with the pictures and the Marys and they walk down the streets and there will be riots. So the Jews had to stand out, stay out of the streets and stay home. Because they were afraid they should not attack the Jews. So just shows you what Poland was like before the war. And this is my experience as a child.

Q: Did you go to Hebrew school?

A: I did. Now let me tell you. So what happened was in the morning we used to go what you call it til about 2:00, we had public school which was compulsory. After 2:00 we used to go **Hadar** and then to yeshiva, so we spent about from 2:00 til about 6:00 at night we went to Hebrew school and also we went to the yeshiva to learn **Homesh** [ph] and **Mishnah** [ph] and **Gemara** and all kind of things. After every single day except Saturday. And on Saturday my father used to send me to his uncle's and to his relatives to find out what I learned during the week And they questioned me about different kind of subjects if I remember. And this I get a reward, a piece of cake, a piece of chocolate, some candy. This was the reward I got.

Q: Were you a very athletic child? Were you a strong, physical –

A: Athletics. We played soccer as a child yeah. I mean this wasn't a professional stadium, but just a yard and we, a couple of boys got together. We played soccer.

Q: These were Jewish boys?

A: Jewish boys.

Q: You didn't have any contact with –

A: With the Gentiles, no.

Q: With the Gentile boys.

A: No not at all, not at all. Except in school. I had to meet them, yes.

Q: In school. Was it a boys and girls school or just a boys?

A: No, no just boys.

Q: With just boys.

A: There were boys separate and girls separate.

Q: You were at school and now what happened when, in September 39. What do you remember about that?

A: September 39 was like this here. The anti-Semitism was so great that people expect and knew a war is coming up because they were talking about it, they were talking about it and everybody, Jews already were so depressed because the economy was so bad, they squeezed the Jew out. They forbid already Jewish slaughter. They forbid already a Jewish students to go to school. To gymnasium and so on. Anti-Semitism in the army was terrible. My brother in law he was, there was compulsory service in the armed forces in Poland. And you –

Q: Are you talking about before September 39?

A: Before September 39.

Q: Ok.

A: Let me just tell you. So what's happened is, my brother in law he was 21 years old and people at 18 or 20 they had to register with the authorities and they were what you call a drafted. He was A1, he was drafted. And they took him into the army. It just so happened that my brother in law was a very bright young man, very smart and very in. And they're looking for officers to put them up in the arms. So sure enough he came in before a board, and they asked him what is your religion? And he said the religion of Moses. The minute they found out the religion of Moses they rejected him. He could not become an officer in the Polish army. Ok I just want you to give the details til what happened before the war.
Now before the war, it was a terrible situation. People did not know what to expect. They wanted already to have a war because in 1914 the war was on civilian people were safe. They sent them away, mothers and children and so on and so on. The people thought that this is going to be the same thing like it was. We did not know what goes on in Germany. So –

Q: When did you first hear of a man named Hitler? Had you heard of him before September?

A: We did, we did because we did hear about it but didn't know what goes on because there was no such thing as propaganda of any kind to hear what goes on. Poland kept on saying we are strong. We don't get, even in the border we, he wouldn't give up. You are fight to the length and so on, so on. It didn't happen because they collapsed in no time at all. So what happened was when the war broke out, I told you. My cousin, my first cousin, was bombed. By the way, my father, I was sleeping at my grandmother's apartment because she had a bigger apartment too, and were four in the house, so I slept in my grandmother's apartment. She lived on the same building the same floor. So what happened is, 4:00 in the morning, my father wakes me up. September 1, 1939. He says you better get up because we have to go to the basement because the war just broke out. Ok, got me up. And the next thing is we went down to the basement to

shelter. And the next thing is after the alarm was off you know and so on, we went down the street. As we went down the street, I did meet my cousin. We were talking and so on, and so on. So we all, after a while alarm came on again. I was running to my home and he was running to his home. Sure enough a bomb dropped in front of his house, where the soldiers were stationed in the school. It was across the street from my cousin's house and they bomb hit it and he was wounded and he died on the spot and they took him away. It was my first experience what happened.

Q: You're 15 years old at this point?

A: My sister what?

Q: You are 15 years old.

A: Yes, that's – I was not, I was just bar mitzvah a year before.

Q: 15, you were 15 years old.

A: If I was assisting.

Q: No, 15, one, five. 15 years old, your age.

A: Age, yeah you have my age. I was born, age 16, 24.

Q: That September first.

A: September first correct.

Q: And then what happened.

A: Then what happened. Then it was like this here. The city was in panic because we didn't know when the Nazis are come, when the Germans are coming in. We didn't know what to do so what happened. Everybody was trying to run away. We didn't know where to run. We figured we go to a bigger city which was Kraków, which was about two miles, about two hours away from us. So my sister was very energetic. She goes down to the street. She sees a big truck and she asked the truck driver if he would like to take us to Kraków. And the truck driver agreed for payment.

Q: Which sister?

A: My older sister. My oldest sister, my oldest sister was ten years older than I.

Q: Her name.

A: Her name is Rose, Arusha.

Q: Ok so she asked the driver.

A: So she asked the Polish driver if he would take us to Kraków. He says by all means. So sure enough he came in the front of the house and we picked up whatever we could. And we went out to the truck. We took our neighbors with us. And our neighbor was also sitting there. And the next thing is as we would go down, the Polack couldn't wait already for us to leave. So they can come in and clean up and everything what was left over there. Even the nails shouldn't stay. And the next thing is, we looked around. There was absolutely no police. And no military Polish police on, what do you call it, no police. No protection whatsoever. We were afraid even the Polacks themselves shouldn't kill us. So what happened. We took off by truck. We all were loaded up. And our neighbor and even people couldn't walk. They threw away the walking and they are running. To, out of town because they knew that otherwise they will be in problems. And sure enough we kept on going. By the time we went, every time people piled up on the truck. By the time we hit Kraków the truck would hardly move. It was loaded with people and finally we did come to Kraków. We came to Kraków, we figure that in Kraków there will be no

Germans. Sure enough, the patrols were already walking in Kraków. And my father and my mother had what you call it relatives in Kraków. So we were staying in my grandmother, great grandmother's house when we came into Kraków. As we came into Kraków, the patrols, the German patrols were walking the streets. So my sister, my sister Arusha, the one I talked about wanted to see what goes on. So she opens up the curtain and as she opened up the curtain, one of the Germans a sharp shooter, shoot her through the window and missed her by millimeters. She would have been dead on the spot, missed her by just by a second. And she, that's how she – now after we came into Kraków, my sister was standing there and she didn't want to go back to Oświęcim because we were staying there for a while and after a while my mother said let's go back to Oświęcim so we went all back. As we went back, my sister was blond and blue eyed so she was acting like a, she wanted to be like a Polish girl to survive. So what did she do? She changed her name to Wanda, a Polish name. So sure enough we went back and she remained in Poland, in Kraków. And meantime we were in Oświęcim. As we came back to Oświęcim there was a Jewish what you call it, a Jewish committee. The Germans formed a Jewish committee.

Q: A council, you mean a council.

A: A Jewish council. They were in charge. They dictate them what to do. So what's happened was the Jewish, they came to the Jewish council. They need volunteers to come to Auschwitz, to the concentration, there was not a concentration camp yet. The thing is breaking up at Birkenau used to be barracks before the first war. Used to be, belong to Austria and Hungary empire. This was the empire of Austria, Germany, Austria, Hungary and a big empire. They called it Kaiser Franz Josef was in charge. That was a big empire. And what happened is this used to be barracks before the first war. All the soldiers were stationed there. The artillery and horses and so on, so on. So after the first war, this barracks were abandoned and they were standing still in Birkenau. **Brzezinski** [ph]. It was about a mile from our home town. From Oświęcim, outside town. So what happened was that the Jewish committee was ordered to bring volunteers to bring in and to come in to the committee. So sure enough they wanted the volunteers to go and to clean up the barracks because they were filthy all the years. And sure enough they picked up volunteers. And my father wanted to go. I said no, no dad. You stay. I go and I went instead to Auschwitz. And at that time I met what's his name, Himmler. I didn't know who he was but I

met him over there. And as I went there, over there we used to go there during the day and they used to bring us back at night. And we went there about a couple of weeks to clean up the place.

Q: How did you know it was Himmler?

A: Because later on I saw the pictures and I said to myself that was the man I did see. I didn't know this is Himmler. I later on when I saw the pictures of him and I came back and I said oh my god, I saw him with my own eyes. So sure enough every morning we used to go clean up. Week, day after day after day. They didn't pay us. They didn't feed us anything and in the meantime the Germans gave out the rations to Jewish people in Oświęcim so we had rations and little piece of bread and so on. And there was a curfew. After 9:00 nobody could go out. Everybody stay home and we had to have armbands with a Jude on it, yellow arm bands, the Star of David and the Jude in the middle.

Q: How did you feel as a teenager, having to wear that?

A: I didn't know what it's all about because it was still. Everything was so strange to me. I was never used to something like this here. All of a sudden it all changes. I never went through something like this in my life. I lived among Jewish people, among my friends. And all we knew. Fridays and Saturdays we used to go to the synagogue, used to celebrate all kind of holidays and so on, so on so to me everything was so strange. I could not believe what goes on here. In the meantime the Germans, in the meantime they got what you call it beaters or killers. They just sat like this here. All the radios be confiscated. No more radios. You have to bring the radios. If not, condemned to death. Every day new bulletins came out and so day after day after day it gets worse and worse and worse. Now –

Q: What were your parents' state of mind at that point?

A: My father had two brother in laws in America. So he wrote them letters before the war yet because he knew something is coming. And he begged them to send him visas to come to America. He never had an answer.

Q: Did you talk to your parents about what was happening? I mean you were a young teenager. Did you talk it over with your parents?

A: Well, after the war.

Q: No, while this was happening in 39.

A: I did not talk over. I didn't know what to talk about. It was something I – everything was so strange. Everything was -- it was not normal. Everything was upside down. I wasn't used to this kind of stuff. Used to have a free time, and we'd go out and we lived in a town with a, mostly among Jews and we didn't know nothing else. The only time I met the goyim, only when I went to school with them, that's about all.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: At home I speak Yiddish mostly.

Q: Did you know any German?

A: Yes. I know German because my father when he was born, it used to be Austrian empire so they spoke German.

Q: So you could understand the German soldiers and –

A: I still speak German of today, today too.

Q: So you can understand them and could you understand any of Hitler's speeches, things like that?

A: I didn't listen to his speeches. We had no radio.

Q: Oh you had no radio, right.

A: No, they took away all the radios.

Q: What about the newspapers?

A: The newspapers were no newspapers. Everything was in German propaganda and so on. We didn't buy these papers. We didn't read anything.

Q: So what kind of work. You said to clean up the barracks.

A: Yes, we had to clean up the barracks. And we came home every single day.

Q: And for how long did you do that?

A: Oh we did it for a couple of months. And afterwards they decided to make Oświęcim, Auschwitz, **Juden rein**. It means clean of Jews. And the declared it a Reich. This belonged to the Third Reich. And Oświęcim will become a Reich, and all the Jews will be evacuated to the ghettoes. So we were evacuated to **Sosnowiec** to ghetto. They called it, what did the call it. It's Sosnowiec.

Q: Yeah, Sosnowiec, right.

A: Outside of Sosnowiec there's a ghetto.

Q: Was that what, early 1940 or when was this?

A: Yeah that was beginning of, the end of 39, I think 1940. Now right away, my grandmother used to go for the summers, she used to go to my aunt, my father's sister. She lived near Kraków in **Wieliczka** which is a small town outside of Kraków. So she used to go there every summer

for the summer time and she was staying with my aunt. And sure enough she was lucky that before and almost at the end of 39 she passed away. And my father still had a chance to go to bury her in Wieliczka. And as I came into Poland, I wanted to go to Wieliczka so the Jewish committee in Poland told me don't go there, because there's absolutely nothing. There is no cemetery, there is no nothing.

Q: So you went into a ghetto in –

A: Yeah, **Środula**, they called it Środula. It's empty. The ghetto was called Środula.

Q: Was that in Sosnowiec?

A: That was in Sosnowiec. It's a –

Q: Outside of, yeah. And what were the conditions in this ghetto?

A: The conditions the ghetto was like this here. They gave you rations and I wasn't there too long because they were trying, they were grabbing me and they sended me to a committee and they send me away to a camp, to an **arbeitslager**.

Q: A labor camp?

A: Labor camp. Because the committee picked up all the people and they sent us away to a lager camp and the labor camp was named, was **Blechhammer.** Blechhammer was an international camp. They called it the Hermann Goering work camp. Hermann Goering, they called it like, his institute, his work. And over there we had all kind of international people, prisoners from different countries.

Q: Were you the only person from your family that left?

A: In the meantime, yes. No my sister – wait a minute. To begin with, now wait a minute. To begin with, they needed volunteers to go to camp and they needed a bookkeeper. So what's happened? My middle sister was what she called -- her name is Regina Schnitzer. She was a bookkeeper before the war. So they found out that she is a good bookkeeper and they told her we need a bookkeeper and you have to go and we send you away to a camp. And is the first one to be sent away to a camp. And she was in a camp by the name of **Annaberg**. And over there she had to register people. I tell you about her, different, what happened to her. Anyway –

Q: You're in Blechhammer now. But –

A: I was in Blechhammer. But she was –

Q: Were you by yourself or any other members of your family?

A: If I – I had nobody else. I was the only –

Q: Just you?

A: Just me for the time being. Yes. My parents were still in the ghetto.

Q: Can you tell me what life was like in Blechhammer?

A: I tell you what it was. To begin with, it was like a death camp. But the minute we came in, they stripped our clothes and they gave us what you called stripes, with wooden shoes. And the next thing is they gave us what you call a, the beds were one, two, three bridges on straw with no brav -- blanket to cover yourself up. They got us up 4:00 in the morning to walk for two hours to the place where we supposed to be working. So it took us two hours to get there. People were beating up and people collapsed on the way over. They couldn't take it. I was a youngster yet. I could still, had a little bit energy in it. So what happened is our job was to cut out woods and then carry it on our shoulders thousands of pounds of trees to carry on shoulders, all day from morning to night. Lunchtime they give us what you call it soup which is like dishwater. That's

how it tasted with a small piece of bread. And this, and then they took us back let's say 6, 7:00 or so and they took us back to camp under the guard of machine guns and SS goes behind us. And a lot of people collapsed. A lot of people were beaten. They couldn't make it up. Like I say it was a death camp. People were dying right and left.

Q: Was this all men? All men?

A: All men, yes, yes. And then they brought us -- so took us what you call it, we only slept a couple of hours every single day. And so on.

Q: Yeah and so this was what 1940, the –

A: This was in 1942.

Q: So between –

A: I was in ghetto and after this, in 41 they send me and they send me to Blechhammer was 41, 42.

Q: So you were in the ghetto for a year.

A: For a year, yes.

Q: OK and then you were 41 to 42 you were in Blechhammer.

A: I was in Blechhammer yes.

Q: Did you have any contact with your parents? Any connection, any –

A: No, at all.

Q: So you didn't know yeah.

A: We couldn't correspond. There was no way you could write or do anything.

Q: As a teenager –

A: Well I tell you a story about, you are talking about. My sister happened to be on Polish papers. We was, she acting like a Polish girl in Kraków. And she was a privileged. She could write letters because as a Polack she could still write and the censor, it went through it and was no problem. But what happened was in the back of her she saw a Polish girl. She says there goes a Jewish girl. And she told two Gestapo men that this is a Jewish girl. And sure enough she had a letter written to us, to, to ghetto where she is and what goes on so she saw what's going on. So she took the letters and swallowed the letters. And the next thing is they took her down to the Gestapo headquarters in Kraków and nobody got out alive from the Gestapo headquarters. So sure enough they kept on squeezing her that she is not, she is Jewish, that she is not Polish. She was what you call it blond and blue-eyed but they didn't believe her and they kept on squeezing her and telling her you're Jewish, you are Jewish, Jewish. And she kept on saying no.
So the Gestapo man says if you are really Polish let me see if you know the Polish prayers. You hear this. So she went, she sits in a school every morning, we have to say stay there when they say the Jewish prayers. So she memorized it and she prayed and she made the Jewish prayers in front of them.

Q: The Polish prayers?

A: The Polish prayers, of course. So they saw the Polish prayers and they realized that she is a Polack. Anyway, they send her away, not as a Jew, but they send her away as a Polack.

Q: Where did they send her?

A: They sent her to Auschwitz.

Q: Oh. Why? Why did they send her to Auschwitz? She was Polish.

A: They sent all the, a lot of Polacks they sent to Auschwitz to work. She was not the only one. And I tell you a story, what's happened in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz there was a lot of peasants, Polish peasants. They couldn't read or write. And they wanted to, they were allowed to write letters to their loved ones, their parents and so on and so on. So what's happened, since they couldn't read or write and she was perfect in German. And she was perfect in Polish, so they asked her if she could write letters for them. And they gave her some kind of a reward, a piece of bread, a piece of this and this. So she wrote these letters. So what happened is that the commander inside in the camp where she was, was in charge of that group and looked at her. He said listen, I know that you are Jewish. He told her. Because none of them could read or write and don't you ever write another letter because you're going to be sent right away to the oven. And she stopped writing.

Q: So you're in Blechhammer for how long did you say?

A: Blechhammer, I was there for quite a while. And then the next thing is they sent me from Blechhammer, they sent me what you call it to a, to Annaberg. Yeah, Annaberg was a camp which was international camp. What means international. They brought Jews from all over Europe, Jews from Belgium, from Holland, from France, from Italy, from Greece. All the Jews came in from – they brought them in by rail from every – at night they came in and they brought them in and they had to dis, or take off their clothes and so on. And they had big barrels that are standing there with that had lines and they had to separate all the clothes and separate. So we had a job while I was in Blechhammer, I mean in Annaberg, to pick up all the stuff they have and put it in the barrels. Like they had hidden diamonds and rings and watches and so on. And the barrels were filled up and the next thing is were shipped to Germany and they bought weapons with it.

Q: Annaberg is near what?

A: Annaberg is in **Niederschlesien**. It's in Germany also. So we were in Annaberg. We worked what you call it making the autobahn at that time. On the autobahn means the highway like we have the highways here. They built the autobahn in Germany. They have the highway go to all of Germany and this was our job, doing it the whole day and when they came at night, we had to do this kind of selection to select all the things what they brought in from the different countries. Now the people over there, they weren't there too long. Because the Gestapo came every week and we had an appeal in the blocks. I mean they made appeals and the Gestapo men picked up the people, one, two, this one, this one, this one and they were all sent out to Auschwitz. This was all the Jews, different kind of nationalities. Like Holland, French Jews, Polish Jews, all these Jews. And this went on for months and months and months.

Q: What was your health like? What condition were you in?

A: Bad. I mean the food was lousy. It was a piece, small piece of bread with a little bit water and we had to survive. That's what we had to do.

Q: Were there other young people like you?

A: They were mostly older than I am. I was a youngster among them. There were people in 40s, in 50s and 60s. And these people could not survive because they didn't have the energy. So what happened was I was still a little bit energy because I was a little younger than they were and I could do, at least I could hold on with my life. But one thing, I did not, I did not give up hope that I will lose my life. I always had faith that one day I'm going to be rescued and I'm going to be back with my family. I had my hope. And don't forget the wires were connected. Everything was wired. Everything was electrified and so on and so on. And they guards were watching with towers and so on.

Q: Did you have a number on your arm?

A: Not on my arm, no. They gave us no numbers. Only Auschwitz had numbers. I had a number but not on the arm.

Q: On your uniform you mean?

A: Yeah.

Q: And so did people help each other out? Did the other prisoners help each other out?

A: There were, there were, everybody was stealing somebody else's bread. That was helping out. Everybody was hungry. Everybody was starved. People, we went out. We were eating grass because we had nothing to eat to fill out our stomach. That's how bad it was.

Q: And you were wearing a striped uniform?

A: Yeah, of course, same thing.

Q: The same thing and the wooden shoes?

A: Yeah same thing.

Q: And so you stayed how long in Annaberg?

A: Annaberg. I was there about two or three years til the camp was completely liquidated. And after this I think less than three years. And the camp was liquidated because they send out most of the people, they sent to Auschwitz. And the people who remained, they had to close up the camp and they sent us to a different camp. They sent us to a camp by the name of **Graditz**. I don't know how far it was. Walking distance. So we had to walk to Graditz. And we came to Graditz. We had the same thing we did in Blechhammer. We were cutting woods and carrying woods and carrying and so on and so on. The conditions were horrible and people were dying right and left. Cond – they what you call it. The health problem was so bad that people collected what you call it, became no water, no soap, no nothing so people could not wash or clean and we were so filthy so everybody had lice. So lice developed typhus, so everybody was sick with

typhus. And the camp, nobody could do anything because they close up the camp because the camp was full of typhus. We have 1200 people there. And we were living on the bridges one, two and three on straw and people were hallucinating because the temperature went down. No medication, no water, no nothing. People were dying right and left. As I was laying, the next thing is that moved over to my right side and sure enough the man was dead. I pushed him over and the next thing is the man on my left side, the same thing happened. They pushed over his, to my side and sure enough he was dead. I myself was sick with typhus. I had a high temperature. I don't know how I made it out. So we had from 1200 people, 200 people survived. And from the 200 people we could hardly walk. We could hardly do anything. So what happened is we had to take out all the bodies who were laying there. We had to bring them to the yard and, and people were digging a big pit and they threw it into the pits and they closed it up and they put what you call it all kind of the infections on top of it, that the infections shouldn't go.

The Germans would never walk into it because they didn't want to get typhus. And after we survived, 200 people, we could hardly walk. And the next thing is they had to close the camp because the camp has nobody to be working. So they had to send us back to another camp. So we walked about a whole day to another camp, the last camp was named **Langenbielau.** Langenbielau was a camp what the Germans where making air force parts, for the air, for the German air force. So what happened. The machineries were all by Germans and since they were losing the war almost so they needed all the Germans to go to fight for the war. So they took away all the Germans, all these machineries, all the people who worked on the machines and they took us and we should go and they teached us how to run the machines. So we had to take over their machinery and they sent them away to the front lines, to the Russian lines.

So we worked there for – I was there since beginning of January 1945. This is the time when we came in. And we were of course surrounded by SS guards and the camp was surrounded by electric wires and so on. And now that we worked there in camp and the rations were terrible. Same thing, but we survived somehow. Very few people going and coming. People dropped dead. So what happened was the Germans wanted to save bullets. They let them die in the street. Now in 1945 this was already May 1945. May 1945, the war was getting very bad. We hear some kind of rumors that they're losing the war. We didn't know what was up.

Q: Up to that point did you know what was happening in other countries? Did you know what was happening to all the Jews?

A: No, no, no.

Q: You had no information?

A: No, not at all.

Q: Ok.

A: We didn't know.

Q: You did not know.

A: So what happened was that in January 1945 like I told you with the camp we worked. And sure enough every single day we had appeals. They were counting how many people are still there. The Germans were counting. One day it was May the eighth 1945 I, I couldn't, I was sick like a dog. I couldn't get out and I looked out and I see everybody is standing there for two, three hours and I don't see nobody, no guards, no nothing. What's going on. We didn't know what was going on. The guards were running away. The whole thing was, the guard, the guard houses were empty. But we always are afraid to go to the gate because the gates are what you call electrified and we are afraid that they put what you call it dynamite all around the camp. If you cross it you were killed. Going across. So we didn't do anything. We're standing there and waiting. Came about 12 noon in May the eighth 1945. All of a sudden we hear cannons booming. And all of a sudden a tank break through the gate. A tank, a Russian tank and he comes in and people standing there didn't know what to say. You are liberated. You are free people.

Q: And did you believe it?

A: I couldn't believe it. I was, I was, I couldn't believe anything anymore. Because after all the years, I didn't know is right or wrong. The only thing they warned us. Don't go out to loot the Germans houses because we shot and kill you. So we are afraid to touch anything. They didn't feed us. They didn't give us anything. They just told us you're free to do.

Q: Did you understand Russian?

A: A little bit.

Q: And what did the other people say, the other prisoners say?

A: They were happy that the war is over, that –

Q: Was there any kind of celebration?

A: Well what kind of a celebration could it be? We were happy that we can be free people, go out and be a human being again. We are not in a camp any more, appeals any more, working conditions again and guards who are watching us all the time. This was the beauty part.

Q: What did you do? How long did you stay there?

A: Well in camp I couldn't stay too long. I was sick like a dog. I couldn't do anything. So sure enough my friend says to me you can't walk. I could barely walk. I take a little wagon. We put you up and let's get out of the camp. We can't stay here.

Q: Was this another young man your age?

A: Yeah, a little bit older than I am. So anyway he said I take you in a wagon and we take you out of here. So he went off. We came in. I tell you what he said. I, we going and find out if we can get some transportation. To get out of here. So sure enough we come to an estate that was

like a governor's place, like the German governor. Lived in an estate, tremendous estate. Horses, cows, you name it and sure enough we come to the estate. We see the keeper of the estate. We ask him a question, if we can borrow from him a horse and a wagon because we have some stuff in. We'd like to take it out. He says sure. He was afraid because he knew what were done. He was a German. So he gave us a horse and he gave us a wagon. So we took the horse and the wagon and we came back to the camp. We took up whatever we had left and we came back. We wanted to give him back the horse and the wagon. So as we came back to the estate, sure enough silent, nothing. Just dogs barking all over the place. We couldn't understand what's going on. We were afraid to go inside. Sure enough we go inside, we look in the barn where they have the horses and things. Sure enough a whole rope hanging every, the governor and his wife and the keeper and all the helps, they all hang themselves.

Q: Oh my.

A: So we were afraid to, we figure that the Russians would say that we did the one who hanged them. So we went outside. We talk. I spoke to the Russian, one of the officers. I says officer we came here to get the horse and wagon. We came into the barn. The next thing is I see all the people hanging there. So he says to me where. So he comes in to me, he takes the machine gun. He shoots down at them to make sure they are dead.
And then he told us you can stay here and stay till you feel better and stronger and then you can go your way. So let me tell you something. We were in the estate. They had, you name it, they have it. Eggs, butter, cheese, clothes, shoes anything you can imagine. You could never believe what we saw, what happened over there. And we recuperated there because we were staying there about six weeks to get ourselves back on our feet. But we were skeletons. I was 70 pounds. I could hardly walk so we were standing there for a couple of months to get –

Q: Was the town also called Langenbielau?

A: The who?

Q: Was the town that the estate was in –

A: The town? It was, it was near Langenbielau.

Q: That's the name of the town also?

A: I can't recall. I don't – it's like a governor lives here in Albany, they have the estate over there.

Q: So you stayed there for six weeks?

A: The who?

Q: You stayed there for six weeks?

A: I stayed there for a couple of weeks because we could not walk. We couldn't and he told us you can stay as long as you want and you can leave any time you want. So what's happened. He did not bother us that we should go, we should leave or anything else. There was nobody in charge. Except the Russian soldiers, that's all.

Q: Right. And so then what did you do?

A: We came to our senses. I mean to our energy a little bit. We walked out looking for relatives, looking if we have living ones. Maybe somebody's alive. If somebody's still here. So we went, everybody went different directions and sure enough somebody told me, oh I saw your sister. Oh you saw my sister? She was in a woman's camp. And sure enough we were united. I saw my sister.

Q: Which sister?

A: It's the one, the bookkeeper and we were united with my sister.

Q: Where was she?

A: She was at a woman's camp.

Q: Which one?

A: I can't recall exactly the name.

Q: So you were together with her.

A: I was together with her and she says let's look for other relatives. Let's see if we have the other sister, Leah was the younger one. Let's see if we can find her. So she went off. We walked, we went all over. We asked people, back and forth.

Q: Is this all in Germany?

A: Everything in Germany.

Q: Everything in Germany. Ok.

A: Yeah so sure enough because everybody was in camps, different camps. So sure enough, we walked, walked. This one, question here, question there. Sure enough somebody told us they saw our sister, the youngest one. She survived. Ok. As we go along. Sure enough we found her. And we were united. All her teeth were knocked out. She was toothless. Beaten up. Hardly walk and sure enough after this we decided we can't stay here. We have to go. So we went what you call it to the DP camp. The DP camp was not too far from Frankfurt in Germany. And so we went there to the DP camp. They gave us a place where to stay. They gave us food. They gave us clothes. They gave us all kind of things. And I can't recall the name even of the camp. Anyway, we were there quite a while and I was there quite a while. And the next thing is people came telling me that the sister was in the Polish papers, that they had that she is in Poland. You hear.

So sure enough I said where in Poland. So she told me in a small town in Poland and she's supposed to be a director of a camp, of a Jewish camp, what you call it, sponsored by the United Nations Relief organization. UNRO. So I said how can I get from Germany back to Poland? So I hired a smuggler to smuggle me across the border to be able to get to the Polish, to the Poland. So sure enough I told my sisters, look here you stay here. I'm going back to Poland and I will see if I can find her. I went back to Poland, I went back, paid the smuggler and he went to the p, to the bridge. The bridge was lit up and the smuggler says you wait til the lights will get off and you cross the bridge. And sure enough when the lights get off we all crossed the bridge and we were on the other side. This was already Polish territory. As we went there to Polish territory, we had to go and we kept on walking, walking, walking and the Polish, and this was through German occupied territory at one time. So sure enough the Polacks they show us, they say listen, don't go walk down but the Polish people will grab you to work because the bombs what they were ruined, they want that you probably grab you to work to fix it up. But we were afraid. We're not afraid. We were just out from a concentration camp. So sure enough I was there with another friend and as we were walking the Polish comes up, and the military. Says come over here, he says to me. What are you talking about, I just came in Poland. I just came out from a concentration camp. Me and my friend. I'm looking for family. You want me to work now after I was spent so many years slavery and so on. Oh. He said listen and you go back to the town, the first thing you got to do register with the military. You hear this. That's all they're interested in. To have another military.
So sure enough we went back to our town, to the town where my sister was.

Q: What town was that?

A: The town was, what did the call it. I'll come back to that. Anyway this was a town which was another Jewish kids, orphans. They was there and she was the director of that camp. And sure enough I come into the town. I meet a friend of mine which I knew before the war, yes and he was a privileged person. Why? He had a motorcycle. And a motorcycle. How come he got a motorcycle? His aunt was a communist before the war. And after the war they rewarded a motorcycle. The Polish government. So since he had the motorcycle, I says to my friend, listen can you take me to the camp. I hear my sister's supposed to be there. Sure enough he took me to

the camp. And I come to the camp. It's empty. Nobody is there except the cook. I said, I found out that she's supposed to be here. So the cook came over to me and he said listen, your sister is here but the Russians wanted to have a show. So they have out of town another part of town, all the kids went over to perform in the show. So she's on the other side of the town. So sure enough I talked to my friend to take me over to the other place of town. He found out that I am already in the camp where she is supposed to be. He walked over and I came over there and we criss crossed. First. So sure enough we were united. After all the years.

Q: What happened to your parents?

A: My parents were sent from the ghetto, from Środula, they were sent to Auschwitz. My father was what you call it sent to the crematorium in May. I have the papers because they sent me from the Holocaust museum the day where he was, what they tell him **eshtomen**, [ph] he died. You know how they write. So I had the original paper from the Red Cross that he died particular day. My mother survived the war.

Q: Your mother survived?

A: In Auschwitz.

Q: Now you've reunited with your sister and then what do you do?

A: Then I was united my sisters and my mother said before the war that we should all meet back in Oświęcim where we were born. Ok. So since we were already in the DP camp, and they went back to Poland so what's happened was that my sister says it's no use to go back to Poland. Anti-Semitism, the Russians told us don't go back because they will send you to Siberia. You never have with them again. So we decided not to stay, not to go back and we decided to stay and wait until we bring them over to us. So we were staying what you call it in, in the DP camp and they were in Poland. And they were in Poland. My sister and my mother and my sister got married in Poland to a Jewish man. And sure enough he, at that time, Poland allowed people to have a little business. So he had a little business. And she went off. They did not allow the Jews to leave.

And then it came an order and so my mother was elderly and she could leave. Well what happened was so we arranged for somebody to sponsor my mother to America. But since my mother was crippled from the war. She could not walk so she wouldn't be able to get a visa to come to America. So we decided maybe she cannot. They will allow her to come in. So we had a woman, somebody who sponsored her as a maid to come back to Canada. So she went off. She got the papers and meantime, as she go in for the papers. She was in Paris. She was in Paris at transit and she was in Paris for over a year waiting to go in. And in Paris, in the meantime, she was waiting. And finally she went in to Canada. She went to Canada. She was living there in very harsh conditions. They were, the climate was bad and everything was bad. I couldn't go there. Nobody could go there because we were not citizens. I mean I tell you how come we came to America later.

So what happened was that she was living in Montreal Canada. And Poland decided that Jews can leave, not to America, no place else but to Palestine. At that time it wasn't Israel, was Palestine. So sure enough my brother in law and my sister picked their selves up and they went to Palestine. As they went to Palestine my mother had a chance to bring them over to Canada because mothers could bring in siblings back to their country. So mother arranged it and she brought over my brother in law and my sister to Canada. And they remained in Canada and they died in Canada.

Q: Did your mother have to go through a death march?

A: To where?

Q: Did your mother have to go through a death march? When she –

A: To what

Q: A death march. When she was in Auschwitz?

A: A death m –

Q: March.

A: She was, you see what happened. My mother, it just so happened that my sister was on Polish papers and she was in Auschwitz also. And my sister was acquainted with the fuhrer which my mother lived and she kept on telling her I have here a very good friend before the war and she helped me a whole lot. And I like to help her. And she helped her a whole lot and she sent her food over the border. Over the line and every time there was an appeal, a death appeal, she was notified, the lager Fuhrer was notified. My sister that this is the appeal. So what happened was they arranged it for her to put a uniform on her that she is what you call helping out cleaning out the places and so on. So they did not take her to the death camp. And that's how she survived.

Q: But did she have to go on a long march after –

A: After, no. After you mean after the war?

Q: Well in January 45 when Auschwitz –

A: You mean in January 45. Of course. They had, they had liquidated Auschwitz.

Q: Right and what happened. What did your mother do then?

A: Listen to this. When they liquidated Auschwitz they had to go on a march all the way to Bergen Belsen. Which is all the way. My mother could not even walk cause she was crippled that time. So my sister arranged a little wagon and they pushed her and they pushed her and they went along all the way. And people died on the way over but somehow, some way for day and night, they went til they came in to **Gross-Rosen**. When they came into Gross-Rosen they were liberated by the British. And since they were liberated they were staying for a while and like I told you what happened, how it happened afterwards.

Q: To get back to your story after the war.

A: After the war?

Q: Yes.

A: After the war, we were what you called applied for citizen, coming to America. So my sister the bookkeeper, she wrote letters. And sure enough President Truman made the decree that 60,000 people who survived the war need no visa. They can come to the United States without a visa. We did not need papers, we didn't have visas. We can go in. if you register, you go. So my sister went and registered me and my sister and my brother in law and we all registered. And sure enough we came on the first boat who left Bremenhaven in Germany. And we left what you call it, for America. And the name of the ship was Marine Fleisher. It was advertised in the papers. If you look up the New York Times you see my name and my sister's name come on that boat. We have, we are registered on that. The New York Times says has what you call it a print out of it.
So we came into America. I told you. I had two uncles living there before the war. Didn't I tell you this before? My father wrote a letter to them. They could not, no appeal.
So sure enough as we came into the piers my uncles were standing there and waiting for us. And we were very happy to come to America. We were penniless. We had absolutely nothing.

Q: What did America mean to you at that point?

A: Oh.

Q: You were what, 22 years old.

A: I tell you when I saw the Statue of Liberty, I said this means something to me. When I saw the first American flag, I was really fascinated. It was some thrill to go to the Hudson River on the boat and see the beauty, the cars, the movement and so on. It was something I never saw in my life.

Q: Did you know any English?

A: No. I did know because we had a teacher in Poland. My sister, my older sister arranged a teacher to teach us a little bit of English but it wasn't too much. So when we came to America I registered to go to night school to pick up the language. And I went to night school on the Lower East Side. There was a Seward High School and we had night school, night classes and I went there and I picked up the language. I graduated over there. I graduated as a, I don't know what do you call it.

Q: You got a degree?

A: Hunh?

Q: You got –

A: I got degree.

Q: You got a degree.

A: That's the only thing, that's the only education I had.

Q: And what about a job? Did you work?

A: Yeah a job is like this here. The United Jewish Appeal gave out jobs to refugees when they came over so I got the first job in the garment center. Yeah they gave me a job. A job for $32 a week. And I just say I work on 30, 37th street off Fifth avenue. The man was manufacturing housecoats. And I was spraying what you call it materials back and forth. I worked there for a while.

Q: And you were living on the Lower East Side?

A: Yeah. The thing is when we came we were living with my uncle for a couple of days when we came off the boat. And my uncle arranged for us an apartment because my aunt, her father was a baker. And her father had a family of two or three and the next two years in the summer we came in, in May and May the 20th we came in. we landed in New York. So what happened was that he used to go to the mountains to bake for the summer. He used to go every summer, he used to go there. They called him up in a colony someplace in a hotel. And he was baking all kind of stuff. He was a baker by trade. So the apartment was empty because he took the family with him. So my uncle arranged for us to stay in the apartment for the next two months because while he is away we can stay in his apartment. In Borough Park. So we stayed in the apartment at Borough Park. After two months we could not stay there any longer because we knew they are coming back so we had to look for an apartment. So we went all over the place looking. We found an apartment on 242 Rivington Street on the Lower East Side. It was a, these houses were abandoned. They were closed up because they were deteriorated and so on. But since the war ended, they needed places for the soldiers, for people to come to it to live. So they opened them up again. It was a walk up, three flight walk up and no hot water. The bathtub was in the kitchen. The toilet, excuse me, was in the hall and there was no -- steps of course going up there. So the apartment at that time we rented, we paid about $12 a week. It was a railroad apartment. You go from one room to the next. And that's where we lived there for a while. And after a while, my sister was married already. And my other sister, the youngest one, did get married and she moved to the, to Second Avenue, near – Second Avenue and Fourth Street or someplace so she got married. In my uncle's apartment. And she moved out. And since I couldn't stay there too long, I went to a furnished, I rented a furnished room in the Bronx and I lived there for a while. And after a while I lived there and the next thing is I figured I can't stay and work my life all the time, for $32. So I went to the owner and said listen, I've been working here for a while. I'd like to have a raise. So he gave me a two dollar raise. I says if this is what I'm going to wait for, forget about it. I could never get married. I could never have a family. I could never do anything. So what's happened? I quit and I looking for something to do. And a good friend of mine came along. He said listen. There is a store to be bought on the Lower East Side on Orchard Street. Are you interested? I said of course I'm interested. I want to get out. So sure enough he came with me and we, and the man was a very sick man. He couldn't hold on because he had heart failures and he couldn't stay. And his son was a _____ school. He was not

interested in the business. So he got, we got this business from him. We bought it from him. He gave us notes to pay off. And we took over the business. I was in the business with my partner. Unfortunately my partner passed away a year afterwards.

Q: What kind of business was it?

A: A wholesale and retail clothing. On the Lower East Side. 98 Orchard Street. And I was there for many, many, many years and the next thing is there was a Jewish section and people were interested in what you call it the businesses there because the very religious people. They had to be closed on Saturday and the holidays. So was I. I was closed holidays and Saturdays. So they were looking for business where they can stay there. So they approached me if I want to sell the business. And since I was – it was six day business it was, I getting up 7:00 in the morning til 7, 8:00 at night. I was tired of it. I said ok, I sell you the business. I sold them the business and I retired.

Q: When was that, when did you retire?

A: Hunh?

Q: When was that? When did you retire?

A: Well I retired in the 70s.

Q: And did you get married?

A: Yes, so what happened is, I was still at that time, somebody introduced me, a blind date and I met my beautiful wife, what you call it she was an American. And we went on a blind date. In three weeks, I gave her an engagement ring and six weeks later we were married.

Q: What year, when did you get married?

A: In 1956. And thanks god, I had two sons and they are all here and thanks god I am a grandfather now. And I'm retired.

Q: Can we talk a little bit now about your feelings and your thoughts?

A: What can I, what feelings?

Q: Do you think about what you went through during the war years more?

A: I tell you. I still have nightmares. Every night I go in. I remember my family. I remember my father and mother, my aunts, my uncles. We were such a close knit family, we lived among -- we were with each other all day in and day out. It wasn't something you need a telephone to call. Just walk in, walk out. It was so close that you could not separate us. You see. This was a something what's a knit. Like you knit something and you can't separate it. So what happened was, it was something up to this date, I am still crying over it. So you ask me the feelings I have. I have absolutely rotten. I will never ever forget them what they did to us, what they did to me especially. To our family what they did. How they tortured us, how they beat us. How they starved us. I mean how can you even talk to these people? You can't even imagine the kind of feelings I have for them. I have absolutely no feelings, for them no. They were not humans, they were dogs, they were, they were animals. That's what they were.

Q: Your thoughts about Germany today? What are your thoughts about Germany today?

A: Germany today is like this here. The young people have nothing to do with it. The old people will never talk what they did. The old people will never talk to their children or grandchildren what happened. Only the people when they found them out, they found out what they did. Otherwise, they keep quiet and live a good life, nothing bothers them. They lived out their lives. Believe me we didn't have it, what they have. They still live on pensions. Then they go out on vacation. They live their lives like nothing happened.

The younger generation had nothing to do with it. They, I don't think so they all of them know exactly details what went on because they were never told.

Q: Your feelings when you went back to Germany?

A: If I will go – I never went to Germany.

Q: Would you ever go back?

A: No.

Q: Because?

A: I will never ever step the grounds on German soil.

Q: Because?

A: Because what happened, because the way, the way I was treated. The way our country was treated, the way the people was treating us. They, they look me, they looked at us like we were dogs. We were no, no people at all. Animals. How can I go back? How can I go and see a country which, what they did to us.

Q: What were your feelings when you went back to Poland?

A: Poland is like this here. The Polands they hate us all the time. They hate the Jews all the time. And Poland I only, I did want to go. I did want to see the soil of Poland either. But the reason why the forced me. My sons and my niece and my nephew they kept on pushing because they were born here. They don't understand the way I feel. I you see, you must remember one thing. When I left Poland, Poland was my home, my friends, my family, my synagogue, my shul, my Hebrew, everything.

Now I said to myself where am I going to go back, to who. I have no friends over there, I have no family over there. I have absolutely nothing, absolutely zero, what am I going to see, who am I going to see? As a matter of fact when I was in Kraków we were waiting at the airport. Sure enough the Polacks were standing at the airport and waiting for their relatives coming from Chicago, from New York, from all over.
And I said to myself look here. They are looking because they are waiting there. They are going to have family. Who have I have? What do I have? Who is waiting for me? I only went for one reason. I didn't want to go but since I speak the language they wanted to see. They pushed me. I should go and I have no choice but I have to listen to them and I went with them.

Q: Are there any sights or sounds or smells today that remind you of your war time years? Anything that brings it back?

A: Like what?

Q: Well any sounds that you may here today that brings back memories or anything that you see?

A: I have no idea what songs. I don't know what you –

Q: Any sights, something that you see that triggers a memory from the camps or anything that reminds you

A: No, no.

Q: Nothing reminds you?

A: No, no.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: What?

Q: Do you get any reparations from –

A: Yeah, I get a pension yes.

Q: You do? Do you think you would –

A: This was guilty money. They could never pay what they did. The whole treasury of Germany cannot pay what they did to our people. Can you imagine a million and a half little children, cousins, nephews and so on, they killed for no reason. Because they were Jews. My little cousins I played with them, day in and day out. They were what, they were two, three and four and five and seven and ten. All these young – they were babies. They were children. Well what were they? What did they do? What do they, what would they, what would they murder somebody? What did they do? They took them against the walls and they hit them against their will and they killed them. They shot them and so on and they gassed them. A million and a half , it's not a day. Here when you see it, a sign, a ship, what do you call it. A fish that sings and lands on the land they carry on for days. How to save the ship, put them back in the ocean. And here we talked about a million and a half children. Six million Jews. How can you, how can you even compare. One individual look what's going on here when you read in the papers about this man who shot that guy. Look what goes on. For days in and days out. Demonstration big and poor. How many demonstrations did the people have when we were what you call sinking in. Did any country open up a gate and say come in, we save you, we do something for you. Not one country lift their finger. Not one of them. We could be saved, but nobody. The doors were closed. Absolutely. We were doomed to death.

Q: When your son, you said you have two sons, when they were aged 16 to age 21, that was the age that you were when you were in all those different camps. Did you have any special -- was that a difficult time for you when they were age you were?

A: No, I wouldn't say because I did not want them to depress them in some way. I did not want to go through the whole routine, depressing them. They have a life to live. They are young

people. They born in the United States and why should I spoil something that their way of life. Why should I go out and depress them in such a way. Can they feel the way I feel? Can they have the same feelings I have? Can they understand me? My own wife wouldn't understand even what I have. You must understand you cannot have the same feeling no matter, unless with your own eyes you see and you hear. You see the hanging, you see the shooting. You see it. Day in and day out. Starvation. Typhus and so on. How can, how can you tell somebody to have this kind of feelings.

Q: When did you tell your children about what you went through?

A: I tell them all the time, but I don't want to go through this whole thing day in and out. I don't want to make a conversation from it every day.

Q: No, no, how old were they when you started—

A: Oh they were, they were about like 16, 17.

Q: Is when you started to tell them?

A: Yeah I still talk to them, to my older son I still talk about but you see he is understanding. He understands but he can't have the feelings.

Q: How do you feel about being Jewish?

A: I am very proud of it.

Q: You went through such terrible, terrible things

A: Even so. I never gave up on the faith. I never gave up my faith. I always go what I say thanks god that you let me live. There must be a reason to let me go, so I can have at least somebody to remember that. This is how I feel.

Q: Do you think what you went through affected your political views in any way.

A: A political view like what? To begin with I believe there is only one place which is Israel because this is the only place that anything what happened, anywhere any place where you can stay and you can live and you can survive because what I saw during the second war was all the doors were close and nobody opened up the door. And nobody want to let you in, they chased you out, they send you away and so on. So what else is there? There is only one place in this world. America is a beautiful country. I love America. I was what you call very, very successful here. I came penniless and thanks god, I am ok. I am not worried about it. But the thing is this year sitting on the back of my mind. I always say to myself, god forbid if something like this should ever happen, at least we have a place where to go. At least there is somebody to look after us. This is a kind of security which we didn't have. We didn't have guns, we didn't have planes, we didn't have tanks, we didn't have anything. But thanks god that we have it. And we have to believe in it.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember?

A: What I thought of my Eichmann trial. I found you know what he was. You know exactly what he did. And the Eichmann trial is like this here. It's something that he was the organizer, he was the killer but you cannot take one man and say he did everything by himself. He was part of a wheel which was part of the wheel which did what they did and whatever he deserved wasn't enough. It's just too bad he couldn't live and live the life we lived and starving the way we were starved.

Q: Do you think you would be a different person today if you hadn't gone through what you did? And had the losses that you had?

A: If I would be a different man.

Q: A different person, yeah today.

A: If I did what?

Q: If you had not gone through what you went through? The terrible times that you went through.

A: If I, what do you mean would I be a different man?

Q: Do you feel you're stronger today because of what you went through?

A: I tell you, I feel very happy that I have a family. I have a home. I have a wife. I have children. I have grandchildren. And this is my happiness. Everything else I just have just to wipe of my -- The thing is the memories are coming back but I can't bring it back. I cannot go through, and I cannot go through what is in mind to change anything. I can't. It will stay with me as long as I live. I will never ever forget what's happened to me. I will never ever forget what happened to my family. My loved ones.

Q: Has the world learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: No. As I see it, as it is now. The anti-Semitism is still here. It's hidden but it's still here. You cannot deny that it is not. Every time there is something. If a Jew does something, headlines are coming up. If the Gentiles will do it, you didn't see this. I read a book now about Mr. Mark, the oil man. I don't know if you read it or not. King of oil they call it. Did you read that book?

Q: No.

A: The book is the King of oil. You know he was pardoned by Mr., by President Clinton.

Q: Oh Mark Rich.

A: Mark Rich yes. I read the book now about him. The thing is if he wouldn't be a Jew you really think for one minute they will go through the routine they go through. Do you know how many swindlers and how many guys that do worse things than he did? And so he didn't do anything wrong but what happened is, still is, he's a Jew and remember that you cannot take it this way, no matter what.

Q: Are you more comfortable around other survivors when you meet people?

A: Oh yes. Because we have to talk a lot. To begin with a lot of them are not here anymore.

Q: Do you belong to any survivor groups?

A: Well not exact. No, no not at all.

Q: Did you ever belong to any?

A: I go to the meetings, I go to the places but I am not -- there is nothing yet left any more you see. There is absolutely nothing. What is there? My people from my home town I don't, I can't even count them on one hand. And people from outside, I cannot connect with them because they have different ways and they had, they suffered different ways too.

Q: When you hear the work Auschwitz in today's world, what do you immediately think of?

A: Today, Auschwitz.

Q: Yeah when you hear the word?

A: When I hear the word Auschwitz, it puts what you call it, a chill in my body when I hear the word Auschwitz. Because I lived there and I knew the town and I knew the people in the town and I was like I told you. My father had a factory half a mile away from the camp. You talk

about Poland. I am trying to claim some kind – I told you property. They would not give it back to me.

Q: You said you have grandchildren. How –

A: One child.

Q: And do you have any message?

A: One grandson.

Q: Do you have any message for your grandson?

A: Do I what?

Q: Do you have any future message for your grandson?

A: If I have a message?

Q: A message for him?

A: Well he is too young yet. He is only six years old.

Q: No, I know but I meant in the future?

A: Of course I have a message. I am going to write a story about it so you should have it when he gets older to be able to read it.

Q: You'll write a story about what you went through. Is that what you're saying?

A: I didn't. But I'm going to sit down and write it. Because my sons they know and just to write a book I wouldn't write a book about it. Who would be interested in my book anyway?

Q: A lot of people.

A: The thing is if I mentioned the word Auschwitz, maybe they'd be interested. If they see the headline Auschwitz. I was born in Auschwitz, maybe they would be interested.

Q: You have different views of Auschwitz. You have the war time but the earlier time which was a good time, right?

A: Yes, of course. The best time was before the war.

Q: Before the war, you have good feelings?

A: The best time, the best as a child.

Q: Did you raise your children in a religious –

A: Yes, they are both college graduates and they went to yeshiva yes. And they pray every single day. Yeah they put the **t'fillen** on and so on. They are religious. I mean they are not fanatics but moderate.

Q: How did you feel about the civil rights movement in the United States? I mean your civil rights were taken away when you were in Poland. All your rights were taken –

A: I tell you. It's a different ball game with the civil rights. You can't compare the civil rights, our civil rights. Our civil rights were taken away completely. In America the civil rights are not taken away completely. They still have courts, they still have judges. They still have something. You cannot just throw it out. You still have a chance to go into a court house and claim your

case. I didn't have this case. I never did. I could never go complain. I told you. I went to the teacher. He beat me up. You know what she told me. It didn't kill you. I mean this is the answer I get. Now how could I go and complain to anybody.

You're talking about the civil rights here. No comparison. I don't say they don't have their, they shouldn't have a civil right. They are entitled to all kind of things but to say that's not discrimination. I would say definitely there is. You still go. There is a woman here. She was a cook on tv and they fired here because she mentioned the word and that was the end of it. I mean it just shows you that it's still here, but the thing is people still can complain about it. And that's the results and that's what happened. If you, if you come and out of the line then you going to be punished in a way, manually or prison, one or the other. You can't get away with something like this because it's still a democratic country. A civilized country. People still listen to you. People still go after you. I mean if you have some problems or so on. I did not have these kind of rights. So that's why I love the United States. I like the constitution. I'm a good honest citizen. I follow all the rules and regulations because I love this country. This country gave me a home. This country made me a citizen. I am entitled to all kind of things that the people of the United States are. I can even run for office if I wanted to. I'm a little bit too late, the age. So I can't do it anymore.

Q: Let's talk about the day you became a citizen. What was that like?

A: Well the thing is this here when I came here, I had to live here five years to become a citizen. And before I became a citizen I had to know my senators are, who the court house is. What the Supreme Court is. How the constitution works and I had to bring two witnesses to testify in favor of me that I am here and who I am and so on, so on. And today you don't have it any more. They have a lot of immigrants that they came over, illegally and overnight they want to become citizens. I think that's wrong. I don't believe – I went through five years to be a honest citizen, to become a citizen. I think that everybody should have the same kind of thing what I did. It shouldn't go when you come in, you go through the door and I want to be a citizen. I mean this country would be in ruins if this is the case. Every hoodlum is going to come in and overnight he will become a citizen. But that I knock them in some way. They should work. They

should do the same thing I did. To be honest about it. Work at it and become normal like everybody else does. This is the way I look at it.

Q: Do you have any friends from your childhood?

A: If I what?

Q: Do you have any friends from your childhood? After the war did you keep up, did you get in contact with any people?

A: Yeah I have some, yeah.

Q: People that you knew in your town?

A: Yeah sure. They live in Cleveland, they live in different places. They don't live in some town.

Q: You keep in touch with them?

A: Yeah I do, yes.

Q: Is there anything else –

A: Don't forget the people I am touch with are more my age. Nobody is a youngster.

Q: Speaking about being a youngster, you were so young. You were 16 when the war started, or 15 really when the war started, and so you lost your childhood from that point on.

A: I lost my education. I lost my childhood. It was, it was unbelievable. I could have gone to school. Maybe I could have become a lawyer, a doctor, a scientist, whatever. I lost it. I could not go back after I came to the United States because I had to make a living. And nobody was going

to give me anything. Nobody give me handouts. I came empty handed with no money at all. Nothing, just the clothes on my back.

Q: So you never got that part of your childhood back, the ages from 15 to 21.

A: If I did what?

Q: You never got that part of your life back from the age 15 to 21.

A: No. Like I said to you. My education stopped at 14. My yeshiva education, my school education stopped at 15. Like I say to you, I went to night school here to pick up the language. And I think I speak ok.

Q: You speak very well. Is there anything you wanted to add that you wanted to say before we close?

A: I want to tell you one thing. It's a very important thing that you took the interview. It's a very important thing for future generations to find out because things will be forgotten. It's a couple of years we die out. We're not here anymore and what, how else, how else would history be continued without having these kind of conversation of mine and from different people and films and so on. Because as you see it year after year, less and less people talk about the Holocaust. The only time is the agencies and people like they were the Washington Memorial and so on but otherwise you can see day in and day out less and less people think about it and there are a lot of deniers that it never happened. You go into Iran, they deny it ever happened. You go into the Arab countries, it's just a Jew propaganda. It never happened. I mean how can you talk to people if they don't even understand that things do, did happen because you don't deal to, in democratic countries. You deal with animals all over. They only have one religion which is Moslem and that's all they believe in. The Jews have no right to live. The Jews have no right to exist. They come from pigs. They come from animals and so on. This is how they talk. So how can you talk to these people. The only one is that we as a people have obligated to keep on repeating over and over and over again so our children and our grandchildren can never ever forget. Yesterday we

celebrated the day of **Tisha B'Av** ok. Day of Tisha B'Av was 2000 years ago. The temple was destroyed and other people were killed. Didn't know we still keep the date. We never forget it. We still pray, we still fast, we still do it. And now in our case things little by little will be forgotten.

Q: Have you been to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington?

A: I was there, yes. I have put on the computer my name and my family's name.

Q: Good. What are your thoughts, were your thoughts when you came to museum?

A: If I came to the –

Q: When you came to the museum, what were your thoughts?

A: Oh a couple of years ago. It must have been about ten years ago.

Q: And how do you feel about having the museum in Washington, DC?

A: I think it's an important place because it's where the capital is. It's very important for people to come in and see what actually happened. Not everybody can go to Israel and go see **Yad Vashem**. I was in Israel. I saw Yad Vashem. And here in Washington at least they have a chance to see – by the way in Auschwitz I also went to a place where they opened up a synagogue and it's a huge synagogue. And I put my pictures from my sister and everything in that synagogue.

Q: This is in the town of Auschwitz?

A: In the town yes.

Q: And you've gone to the camp itself?

A: I went to the camp myself too. I show all the, the horror. I saw the crematorium. I saw the **tallisen** which are hanging there. I saw the suitcases. I saw the children's clothes and those clothes. I mean a million and a half children. A million –

Q: When you were in the town, did you feel any connection to your childhood?

A: If I did what?

Q: When you were in the town, when you went back, did you feel any connection from your childhood?

A: No, because there are no Jews there and all you see is Polacks all over the place. The streets are the same. The houses are the same but the thing is you have absolutely no connection to anybody. How could I have any feelings there? If at least I had one friend, I had one synagogue. I had one, one place I can go and say hello. Nobody, nobody. Don't forget this was after 60 years when I was there.

Q: Again, anything before we close. Anything –

A: Like what do you want me to tell you.

Q: Anything.

A: I am very thankful that you took my telephone and you took it on the machine and so on. At least some memories will come out and some people will listen to it. Some people will have a little bit of feeling for it. Because like I say to you, our generation today is busy with jazz with all kind of things but this is something that's not in the daily routine. That's what I will say. So I'm glad that you have it at least on record that people at least will have a chance to listen to it.

Q: Well thank you very much. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with David Schnitzer.

A: Ok, thank you very much.

(end interview)