

Joseph Gringlas Interview

The following is an interview with Mr. Joseph Gringlas at his home in Farmington Hills, Michigan on the morning of January 14, 1993. The interviewer is Sidney Bolkosky.

Uh, could you tell me your name please and where you're from?

My name is Joseph Gringlas and I am from Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Poland.

Tell me where is that near?

It's near Lublin and Karotz. [person speaks in background] Okay. There you are.

Um, tell me what you remember about life in Ostrowiec before the war. What was your family life like and life in the town?

The town before the war, we had uh, we had uh, like a business, shoe business selling in market. It was twice a week. And uh, that was our life like, life like from then, for my father in the shoe business.

How big was the town?

The town was about, about 32,000 people. It was about half—15,000 people was Jewish people. And where I live it was like close to the market. It's either like belo...like be—like uh, it was only Jews living there that you didn't see any Gentiles. But you see in, when they went to church, they come out of church, the church was right close to the market, we felt that, that we living, not the Jews not alone living. We living in—surrounded by enemies.

You felt that they were enemies? Was there anti-Semitism in Ostrowiec?

The anti-Semitism was very big in Poland. It was a long time anti-Semitism and before the war it was worse. They started telling, you shouldn't go to buy merchandise from the Jewish people and there was big plaque on the, on the

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streets hanged, shouldn't eh, should avoid—have any contact, any business with the Jewish people.

Did—your father was a shoemaker?

A shoemaker and we're, also we're selling shoes.

Did he have any non-Jewish customers?

Oh, we had a lot of non-Jewish customers. I wouldn't say all were, were bad, but, some were good, but mostly bad. You didn't see too many good ones because the, the other ones were so many, against the Jewish people. In—as I remember, in school, we went to school before the war

You went to public school?

Yeah, went to public school and I finished public school just 1939 when the war broke out.

What was it like in school?

In school it was terrible. It was just eh, you felt that, that you're not welcome there. You're just like, like you're not in your own country. Like you are somebody—a stranger. And after the, after finish school you were going home, the stones thrown at you. It's just unbelievable. Like, things like that in a country where you were born and raised.

Uh, did you got to cheder too?

Yeah, I went to cheder uh, that was right at market, cheder was close from home. And all the time when special Sundays—I'll never forget it, when every time I ever went out to cheder and especially even it was the winter time when the days were short and at night when it gets dark. So I, as soon I went out, I went out, I

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finished going home, walking home, I was hit. They came out from church and hit because you are a Jew, you know. And as a young boy I didn't know why, why does this happen to me? And that built up terrible feeling and like, scared, you know. Then your own country.

Did you discuss this with your—I mean was there any discussion about anti-Semitism in your house?

Oh, there was, oh yeah, always discussing.

Did you come home and say I was hit today?

Yeah, uh huh.

And what happened?

That would happen, what can you do? You gonna call the police? Gonna tell anything? If anything happen to you, you call the police, they would n...never showed up. But this is, you know, you got in—you got in building yourself that that's the way life is. You can't do anything about it. It's, you have to accept it, you live there in this country, this is the way it is.

Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

Oh yes, I had Jewi...non-Jewish friend. Quite a few. In school, you know, felt like that, those are the one which is close to you.

Did you play soccer?

Play—soccer was my—I was crazy about soccer.

So you made friends maybe playing soccer.

Yeah, playing soccer. But mostly in soccer playing we had, Jewish friends close we live together. I have a brother too. He's alive and still after the war. And we

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played, he's four years older than me. So we always played in the friends from cheder or school and get together after the school and we played soccer. This was my—I, I loved it very much.

With w...w...these non-Jewish friends, did you ever go to their houses or did they ever come to yours?

Eh, non-Jewish friends, the place where they lived, the landlord was, was, was non-Jewish, was gentile. So with the daughter, I remember her and we went to school. Now she was very, the parents were anti-Semitic terrible, we knew it. But she was not. And she even spoke Jewish like I—better than me. But she, some, they understood, they felt different. Why should they treat people differently than the parents, was they can tell, educate them how to, the Jews are and get them to be against Jewish people. There were some. They were nice.

But you felt the an...the hostility.

Oh yes, any place you went, yeah.

How large was your family?

My family—we are, we had five, five in—my family was eight. Six, six children and father and mother

And...

one daugh...one sister I had and five, five brothers.

And where were you in the family, middle child?

I was the youngest one.

The youngest one?

Yeah.

Uh, and what about aunts and uncles? Grandparents?

Oh, we had uncles, had uncles uh, my, my, my mother's side, uncles was, was two sisters her family in Ostrowiec. And then she had, she had two—three brothers in United States at the time. They left a long time before the war. So they lived in United States. And there were cousins, a lot of cousins in family.

And y...your father's side?

Father's side was ano...yeah, he had uh, one uh, brother, my uncle and uh, son and, and other son with two s...two, two sons. But uh, my uncle was uh, he was older than my father. At the time the Nazis came in, then, then he was very religious—they cut his beard. And after that he got so sick and he died. So he died just during the occupation—the German occupation. And there was another brother from my father's side—he died, an older one, before the war.

Okay. What are your brothers' and sisters' names?

My broth...elder brother is Mendel. There is Jake, Yakov and Schloimo and my sister Bila and my brother, which is still living now in United States, is Sol and me.

And do you remember your uncles' names and your aunts' names?

Oh yes, I remember uncles because one of my older, my older, one of the older brothers eh, Carbin, he worked for the uncles, so I remember him. The family had cousins.

The, the whole family, cousins, aunts, uncles did you have grandparents? Do you remember your grandparents as well?

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I remember, only grandparents I remember is my mother's mother. And she was living with a, my aunt, my mother's sister.

Was she alive when the war came?

She was liv...no, the war started, she, she died before the war.

In 1939, before the war started, how, how large do you think the whole family was?

The extended family?

Oh it was uh, we were eight, let's see. And my uncle's two sons and then from my father's side, my uncle. And my mother's side were about eight children, about. It's a big family. And uh, there was another, anoth...my mother, there was three sisters in Ostrowiec. Now there's, now the...uh, and, and about seven, eight children. It was a big, large family.

Sixty? Fifty?

Yeah, about that.

About that.

Mm-hm.

How many survived?

Ok, who survived eh, so it was brother and me, two of us from our family survived.

Your other siblings were all...

My family.

all, four others were killed then.

Others was sent away and killed, right.

And aunts and uncles?

All aunts all went...

To Auschwitz.

No, they didn't go to Auschwitz. The time after—it was in the—before they started the, sending out the peo...Jewish people from my home town, I was working, my brother was working. In my home town there was a big factory, it's uh, metal—big metal factory.

The German factory?

It was a Polish factory before the war, but the German took it over in.

Was it Hochofen?

Hochofen, yeah. And, and my brother and me worked at uh, this Hochofen. So, the way we—and when the Auflösen come and the liquidation of the Jewish people in my hometown. And at night before, when that happened, we had a feeling already they're surrounding, Ukrainian and Germans surrounding our town, because we hear, they systematically did from one town to the—another town and we knew it was getting close to our town. That was a Saturday night. And I, my, I went to go, I was going to a night shift in that metal factory and my brother was in day shift. But, so I went the Saturday night, at night when I went to, to work—to go to work to that metal factory. So I knew already I'm not going to see my parents anymore, that was the last time. 'Cause I know about, cause I knew it, I'm going to exist for awhile because I'm working, they need me for their war, so they're going to let me live awhile. And so I, I had a terrible feeling I know that's, I'm going to see my family. And that same—next morning, it was

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Sunday morning that liquidation started. And my brother was on the list that he worked on that, in that, in that metal factory. So at night after the whole day when was the Aus.the Aussiedlung, that liquidation of the Jewish people. So he came around, five, six o'clock they took him down because he was on the list as working. So they picked him up from the, from the people and he and I saw him in the, in the evening in the factory. So I was crying terrible, I knew that what happened that time.

You were fifteen.

I was about fifteen years old.

Do you know what happened to them?

Uh.

Aussiedlung. Resettlement, right?

If something happened after the, when I was, I was in that factory, they didn't let me, in the morning when there was the liquidation, they didn't let me get back home, they, at the time because they, they kept me there. Usually in the night cause I work, I was working, the morning I would go back to home. I would go there by guards, you know, they take, go there to get you, it was a ghetto. But after that night with the liquidation, they didn't let me go back to home because that was it.

They kept you in factory?

Stayed, stayed in the factory all day long and when I saw my brother coming in, in that day at six o'clock, he came down and they kept us in the factory for a few—for a week, because there's no place where to go. They kept—we, we were

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sleep, laying down on the ground there for a few nights. Then after those were left from us, from the factory, working for the Germans, they took us to give us a little, few blocks in my hometown. We should live there, live in that, those whatever place we stayed. 'Cause it was unbearable to stay laying on the ground in the, in the, in that factory. So we came—it was after a few days we came back, they give us uh, like a few streets. Those, the people what worked in the factory and, and I talked to the people that were stay...there were some people there. I don't know they working, I don't know where, but they, from my hometown, they told me they saw my father and mother and my sister. However before we came back to the ghe...ghetto to stay there, they told they took them away. That means that my father and mother was hidden and sister at the time the liquidation. But prob...a few days later they got out, took them out and they were sent to Majdanek.

Majdanek.

Yeah. So it was just about an hour before when I—they took us from the factory, to that little street to live. So that, that was the feeling that uh, that they were sent to Majdanek.

Did you know what was going on at Majdanek?

No, I—I know yes, I don't know, I wen...I knew what was going on at Majdanek because uh, we had an, we knew already that, going on that they, they send them to gas them at that time.

You knew about the gas chambers.

Yeah.

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There were rumors?

That time was rumors that they're killing them and they—and those people were taken to work they just keep them for awhile because how long can you exist if you don't, if you're not getting food and you work hard labor, you don't gonna to exist too long.

When, when was this, do you remember?

1943, I think.

'43.

Yeah, I think so. End of '43 like.

Um.

Yom Kippur.

So it was in the fall.

fall, yeah.

Let me take you back a little bit. I want to know more about your family.

Yes.

Was it a religious family?

Yeah, my father was very religious. He wasn't fanatic religious, but religious.

Not—did he?

Kept holidays and Saturday not working.

Beard and payes, did he

Beg your pardon?

Beard and payes?

A short beard.

Short.

Short.

No payes.

No, no, not like that, not like that.

Not, not Hasidic.

Not Hasidic, no.

Um, so, so you had a religious education...

Yeah.

as well.

Mm-hm.

Tell me a typical day, you would, in your life when you were maybe fourteen years old, before the war started. Ten years old. You'd go to school and then you'd go to cheder after school?

Yeah, I was going to school from eight o'clock 'til about twelve—one o'clock and then came home, ate lunch and go to cheder 'til late evening. So it kept me busy all day long. Some days like we're off so I could play, play soccer and you know, like young boys playing around.

W...what was the Friday night like in your house?

Friday night was, was you knew that Saturday's coming. Lighting candles, my mother used to bake—my mother used to bake challahs and salt every time for Shabbos. And uh, it was good feeling you know. Like something changing from the week. It's really, we, but our house was never a religious house, not beca...I

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mean, but a, a Jewish house, not eh, I mean talking about, not fanatic, not like a Hasidish but was, we knew that, yeah.

Would you sing Zemirot and all that?

Yeah, I would sing songs and, and we a lot, in especially Saturday night my, I remember as a kid that my family went with other brothers and s...sister came together, we sing, we drink and, and felt, felt good about it, being in the family.

Uh, when do you think you heard about um, what was happening in Germany before the war? Did—was there any talk in your house...

Yeah, there were.

about politics?

Oh we always read papers. *Forward* was our paper in the house. And uh, so we read what was going on in Germany, what, what happened to Jewish people. It was—I ass...before the 1938 yet, before they marched in Czecho...Sudetenland they took over the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland the Germans. We knew this was going on with the policies against the Jewish people. But we—a, a few weeks before the war we didn't believe that. Nobody could believe that uh, they would go in and just liquidate the Jewish people, like gas them or you know. Nobody could imagine something like that would happen to—could happen to pe...human being.

Did you know the war was coming? Did you think that there was going to be a war?

Eh, yeah, because we knew that Germans started in Czechoslovakia there's going to be a war because it didn't—we knew that we didn't. It was so powerful, build up this machinery and we read about it, how strong they are, that, that this was not

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just this, just Sudetenland because Czechoslovakia gave it to the Germans. It's not, this is going to be stopped. It—he's got appetite to take over a lot of, mo...many, many more countries in Europe. And then before, start, before the war with Poland it was terrible—just felt that if we gotten out, there's no place to go and, and we know what's coming to us. But we didn't, we knew it was going to be terrible but, cause he was, Hitler was against the Jews all the time for years, not just before the war. So we know it's coming, but nobody expected that we're not going to be, they're gonna, they're gonna kill us, you know. They're going to send us to labor camps, that they're going to liquidate the Jewish people, send them to gas chambers. No, nobody could realize something like this, could think that that's going to happen. But there was no way out, there was nowhere to go, nowhere—place to.

Anybody talk about Palestine? Were any of your family Zionists?

Eh, no there was no Z...ever, were not.

Was anybody, was there a Zionist movement in?

Oh yeah, the Zionist movement, Zionist groups, young groups, was always, but, eh.

But your family—what, stayed away from them?

Uh, I was young. And other and other brothers were busy at work and I don't think they. Yeah, my father be...belonged to Verein. You know, from Verein?.

Yeah.

For the workers, Verein.

Was he was Bundist?

No, not Bundist...

He was just...

just eh, for—'cause he was working, a worker like that.

Um, so it was a skilled workers Verein? The shoemakers union maybe?

Yeah, I would say, yeah eh, could, like, he was, like somebody'd come in when, after his shoes made and do it, yeah. And uh, but mostly we uh, my father's business was eh, we, to...we went, we went to Warsaw. And from Warsaw we bought the best used shoes, you know, in the big city, in the province, my hometown, Ostrowiec. And then we sell in, in market. And I used to go on vac...on vacation time, there was before the war that, I was school, going still in school, before I w...so I was, I was able to go without, you know like if you go with your father you're allowed, you can go with your father. So—and then other time going my father to Warsaw and buying shoes. And...

Did you go to Lublin a lot, as well?

No. Lublin, I had, Lublin I had a cousin living from my mother's side. There was a cousin living in Lublin. But never went to Lublin, Lublin.

But what, do you remember when the, when the war started um, the first time you saw the Germans when they came in?

Yeah uh, I didn't know that, there was the war, it already started and they told, the way, I. We were told that the English and French going with—help Poland so and so when they came in I didn't know, I thought maybe it's French Army. They never told us that, that the Germans already crossed my hometown. So I

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remember I was out the side on my street where I lived and I walked dow...and they were marching in, the German Army and I, I was out of side on street and I saw on, on the helms?

Helmets, yeah.

Yeah, helmets, saw that signia of, uh...

The swastika.

Swastika. I knew for I looked, I knew we're in trouble. I know we had the Germans already in my hometown.

What was your impression? They marched into...

Terrible.

the streets.

It was a scared impression. You know, the all—mostly looked like giants. I was a young boy, they look it up like, like giants! Like they were marching tall guy, tall, strong man.

And were there people in the streets, greeting them?

There was no greeting, it looked, you know, like,

They were just watching.

just looking, watching them. And after that, started problems. They killing in the street. And I remember they—all the doctors, a few days that they came in, they locked, all Jewish doctors and lawyers were ki...taken out and killed.

Shot.

Shot to death. That was the intelligentsia, the first few days they, they killed them.

Were they killing Polish intelligentsia as well?

They—I remember eh, once where they, yeah, there was something, they were killing Gent...it was the heads of eh, very important eh, Gentiles from Ostrowiec. It was something like the partisans did something against the Germans, so they took out about thirty of those heads, I mean all educated men from Gen...Gentiles, my hometown, they hanged them. I remember exactly when we marched that time when I went from the factory back to the town where I told you that place we should live, we saw them hanging on there, they showed us how they hanged on that.

So you, you were what, fourteen, fifteen?

I was, yeah.

When you saw these men hanging?

Yeah.

Did you see?

But I never knew exactly what, why they did it. But after the war, when I went back to Poland I wa...I he...I learn about it because of the partisans did something, so they hanged all those Gentiles.

Did you know that they were shooting Jews? I mean did you see it, hear it?

Yeah. There was two, I remember exactly. There was two SS men eh, head, heads from the SS from my hometown and they were eh, having them uh, their eh, dogs, German Shepherd and were, so...some Jews yeah, we had to, had already wearing those eh, our Jude.

The armband.

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Armband. And so they knew exactly who uh, if you weren't, if they caught you not wearing it you're going to be killed right there on the street. There was a special warning in the streets written on the walls. So I—a lot of times they, they, I saw when I walking through and saw that like two SS men with those dogs allowing to—the dogs to go to tear apart the Jews. And then they took out guns and killing. I saw right on the, on that, on the street killed.

Was there a ghetto opened in—there was a ghetto I assume.

Yeah, there was.

How long after the Germans came in did they set up a ghetto?

Oh, the ghetto was set up uh, about I would remember about a year or half a year, something like this. But we had to wear right away armbands.

First thing.

Yeah.

Was there a Judenrat?

There was a Judenrat too because the Judenrat wha...wha...tha...a...at the time they needed some people for work. So they went to Judenrat and Judenrat they uh, knew exactly to, to, you know, they, to ask the Judenrat how many they need for work. The Judenrat gave uh, had us to go to—to work for them. At the beginning that was just like, you know, work for them then you went back home.

Did you know anyone on the, on the Council, on the Jewish Council?

I knew the—yeah, I knew the people. I was young but I knew some of pe...people yeah.

How did people feel about them? Were they uh, there Jewish police as well?

There were some Jewish policemen too, yeah.

And how did, how did the Jews in the ghetto feel about them?

They felt—that mean that eh, we knew that they were told to do it and they have to do it, you know. Some were, were helping, you know, trying to help the Germans even to show that they are working for them w...w...wanted them to do. But some they, well, they knew what, that's going to happen to them either. So they just weren't so strict.

Now how did, how did it come that you were taken away for work?

Ok, now after, after liquidation, as I told you, that I was uh, working for that Hochofen.

Yeah, tell me how you came to work for Hochofen first.

How eh, first we worked, they took us, to a—if you knew, only thing I'm feeling was if you're going to work for something they're going to hold on to you. They're going to let you stay. So I was only—I—my brother and me we were young. The other brothers were working, they had to work for life so they couldn't work, they went, one was a tailor and one was a carpenter, so they, they didn't work for that, in a ??? we worked, we worked, like my brother and me worked for that Hochofen, so that's what we—that, that, the way they, we knew that the feeling that the only way to exist for awhile is to work. So I went working in the factory, started working something else, go for just take train, laying those metal for the trains to go through.

Tracks you mean?

Tracks, you put the tr...and this, I was working with that and that was very hard working, because to, especially the clay dust digging in the sides that the tracks. And that, that was in the factory, started with us, wo...and, and I was working that group that does tracks. But then they needed for the, for the—to make this metal they need a lot, to throw in the oven all kinds of material like eh, cokes, called cokes. It's, it looks like coal but it's not, it's lighter and those what gives that heat for the oven eh, for the ovens to burn. So I unloaded—I was taken in, I, for unloading those cokes for the ovens. And the, the tra...the bags was so big, I was little, I was young. And I had—we—three or four people asked unloading a bag like this, it's unbelievable. Anyway.

How many...

When, when we went back to the ghetto after working in that Hochofen and we went and they give us that few streets to live, all that group, it was a lot of people from us that work in the factory.

You worked for Hochofen for how long?

Oh, I was there about uh, five, six months, something like that. And then.

From 1940 to...

Yeah oh, I was working before yeah, as soon as I started, not just the time of liquida...I was working there five—because at, at liquidation if you want to go and save yourself, go to work. You couldn't get in, there was a list that you worked there, see? You had to be working a long time to be able to, to be—having there.

Before we go, you were supervised by German civilians...

Eh?

at Hochofen?

Is—there were Gentiles working the same as Hochofen, Gentiles working with us.

Got—everyday morning going to work and going home.

Polish.

Polish, yeah, the Gentile people were Polish.

And the supervisors were German?

Yeah, they were soldiers, you know, like...

Military.

Military guard...guarding us, you know, around the huts you were with the guns, make sure that you're working, you know.

But did you have any civilian supervisors as well?

They Ukrainians, yeah. And eh, after being there quite awhile, eh I mean working there and wh...and then they—I was with my brother at that, that little ghetto where they, what's left of it when the people that working at Hochofen and, and on a Sunday, they made a liqui...like, like eh, as, a Appell to get them all out, outside.

A roll call.

Yeah, roll call and then we came out outside of and eh, it was SS, it was already cold, wintertime I remember and eh and then we had to stay in a line. And I don't know before that I, they ask uh, who wants—who knows about shoe making.

There were asking who and I don't know, I thought maybe instead of working

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hard at Hochofen maybe I can get something to work with shoes, I'll be—it's be easier for me. So I registered as a machi...at work, I can work on shoes. So they uh, at the Appell they called me out and other people, I don't know what other, they didn't and they send us away to Blizyn. ??? with my brother, I was separated from my brother. It was terrible because I, at least I had my brother there with me. I lost him too. And I was sent to Blizyn. At the time of the Appell, but they, by that separation, sending u...us away, sending me and other group away from, from Ostrowsa. It was suddenly, we were staying in Appell suddenly I saw a child coming out. The Jewish uh, must have been two years. I don't know where or when it came up from the homes and while and then one of the SS eh, took out a gun and there was something on the side a little bit like, there was some like uh, like trash on the hill. So he called the child to get on the hill on the trash and took out the gun—we saw—everybody was standing seeing that, kill it right on the place. It must have been, just walking, the child was about two years old. It was terrible for me to see that. So we knew that's going on, we—you know, but this it stays in memory forever.

How did you feel being separated from your brother?

Okay that, I was so terrible because at least we went down to, in that factory we could meet some people we knew from—Gentile people and, and my, my brother had eh, in this eh, court was—I find these zlotys. For awhile we have some money in case we can get something with Gentile, buying some food. So it was—if the—both there in my hometown with my brother and the factory was a little bit easier that you can get some food because whatever the Germans, whatever you

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got from that was not too—you couldn't exist. So, that was, he had some money put in, in a...

In his pants?

Sewn in that coat. And I was separated, I didn't have anything. And we, ri...I was sent to Blizyn. And Blizyn was terrible for me. It was, Blizyn was a terrible because it was surrounded with Ukrainian and SS. And uh, that Blizyn was that—because I was raised for the shoe mak...be able to work with shoes so they sent me to Blizyn. And I was still young at that time and Blizyn for me was terrible. I was sick, I had ty...si...typhus at that time and I was with temperature and was put in like uh, Krankenbau and coming out of the Krankenbau after that uh, I, a lot of, from, it was typhus, got up and died. I now, I was—I know, I was lucky, I was out, I got out, I felt better and the, the temperature went down. And I went out but you had—I was so hungry, terrible. 'Cause after eh, you were hungry, I never eat but then after, it's terrible, you're going, like, s...you're going crazy, what—you need food. And, and that time was eh, and eh, o...I tried to organize from the kitchen some—when they put out.

Stealing, you mean.

Yeah, to steal something. It was a Jew...in Blizyn it was a Jewish policeman at the door at that, at that kitchen in front. If anybody goes and get something he was hitting. He was hitting on the head. That's a...it was terrible. He wa...the Jewish guy was from Radom—the policeman. And uh, it was crazy, he, he hit you over the head because you wanted to get some food. And then he called you back after awhile and give you a little bit food. I couldn't understand what the—first he hit

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you and then he ha...have you back, give you a little bit of food. And that one time at Blizyn I was, remember, I had—I, I tried to organize a few potatoes. A friend of mine with—from Ostrowsa and we went in, there was a—in Blizyn there was a open—a barrack, it was open, nobody, nothing was going on. So I went in, I made the, the fire, with the uh, can and put the potatoes to boil, to get, boil the potatoes and I look around, the head from the Blizyn comes in. Head from the, the SS head. His name was Nel, comes in and saw me and I don't know what happened, I got so scared, he was so tall and I, I ran out of the building through the feet, through this boot, they were in boots, I run out

Between his legs?

From the legs. I ran through it. And, and I was scared terrible because I know he's going—in the Appell they we...I had been, I was called. And that evening, every evening we had to go out in Blizyn, Appell he counted we are all there, if nobody escape. So I was, they would call me up, my, I had a number. At that time there was no uniform. There was by the number, I think 167, number white and number down by my knee. And they called, he knew it, my number and he asked the other boy was stay there, in the, when I run away from him. He, he asked him who, who I was and probably gave him the number too, why he was scared too, so at the Appell five o'clock in the evening when we stayed in Appell. My number was called and I knew, when, I knew anytime they called you out, anytime something happened, they called you out from the group there was a ??? surrounded by woods at Blizyn and the Ukrainian, two Ukrainians with the guns loaded and taken out in the woods to be killed. So I knew exactly, this is my end. But I don't

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know what happened. They told that and there was in the—I was hit, I wa...that, that, the head of the uh, Blizyn, the SS man told—he was telling what, to kill, to go in the, in the, in the woods to be killed and I was given twenty-five on my tush. He...

Twenty-five?

he said it, at Appell.

With a wooden cane?

Yeah, with uh, with uh, you know that leather.

A leather strap.

Yeah. You know and I—they brought up two chairs in front, in front of Appell. Everybody saw it. And I was—had to let down my pants and there and there was two Jew...the Jewish policemen were doing it. The head of Jewish policeman of the group. One was hitting one side, twenty-five, that head of the SS man told to give me twenty-five. So he, that one was hitting one side and one the other side, the two Jewish policeman. And I, after twenty-five, gotten pun...lashes, I went in that barrack, barrack and laid down on, I couldn't on front—my stomach, cause I was bleeding like, like it's, it was like edges in my tush, there was bleed, bleed, blood coming out. And I was scream...I was crying terrible. This wa...I'll never forget that. [pause] And then I was all the time in Blizyn working, I mean.

Did you go to work after that?

I, I couldn't work, I couldn't—laid down a few hours, but

You mean the next...

yeah...

day you were working, the next day?

next day I had to go work otherwise, you couldn't stay in. If you stay in they're going to kill you. So I had to work. And.

Were you working in a factory there?

Yeah, we worked—at beginning at Blizyn, when I was, gotten, gotten into Blizyn I worked with shoes. I made shoes with wood, wooden soles and sho...leather. That's what the shoes are made of.

Do you remember what the factory, was it Heinkel?

The b...?

The factory, was it Heinkel? The factory that, at...

It wasn't a factory, it was a barracks. Worked in the barracks.

Oh I see.

Yeah.

Was there, was there elsewhere a factory?

Old, old barracks. We were the pioneers in Blizyn when I came. We were—they starting building barracks there.

Uh-huh.

And what they put, what they give us, the dinner time, lunch time they give you out a little bit of soup, it was more water than, than potatoes. And you tried to be the last one so you can get a little bit from the bottom, potato, get a few potatoes there. And it was that—I was in Blizyn there eh, quite a. Yeah, there were other things in Blizyn were the Steinbruch. Steinbruch, that means the...

Stone quarry.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

Stone, taking out from the ground and you had to cut eh, cut it, knock it on piece, for pieces that stones. And one was SS, SS guide us. That one, it was quite a few, we had a Ukrainian one he was com....uh, and his name, I don't remember his name, but he was something with his hand. I think what happened, those SS were injured on the front, they sent to the camps taking care of us. And they, they were sick. They're screaming like, they start screaming on you—and take out the gun they know that, you know how you could feel like you see on somebody else they shoot like this. And eve...uh, I forgot his name is, SS, tall guy but something was the hand he was screaming, he was hitting in, hitting everybody's—"Los, los, los," should walk fast.

It was in the quarry.

Beg your pardon?

In the quarry, in the stone quarry.

Eh, the, Steinbruch was out of the ca...of that lager, it was, you had to work out with SS Ukrainian to outside work.

But he was, he was the overseer of the Steinbruch?

He was the head. He was the head of SS, but Ukrainian with the guns guarding around. Nobody escapes.

People were shot?

Yeah, people were shot. Somebody trying to escape. I remember in Blizyn somebody trying to escape and they brought, they caught him and brought him and they—and I saw two Ukrainian guards hitting him, hitting as so that he was fainting out, he was almost finished. Then they took water on him to revive him

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and hit him again. That was in Blizyn. It was quite a view. Another incident I remembered was two—my hometown, brothers in Blo...in Blizyn and they, I, I think their name is Pfeffer, very rich people and he saw, he was standing next to me and he saw his brother taken out and killed by the Ukrainian. So Blizyn was terrible. It was, it was a terrible—it was, to me, it was just being young it was just unbelievable to survive it.

You were fifteen years old?

Yeah.

L...l...let me ask you a question about, you said that the food was, there was no food.

There was only piece—there was a bread divided about, I imagi...about eight or ten people, one bread.

Who divided the bread?

It's from, from us, they gave out, everybody had a, a group and divided.

Did they, did they...

Yeah.

appoint somebody to divide the bread?

Yeah, uh-huh.

Who, then everybody watched, is that what happened?

Oh yeah, everybody was afraid of getting sma...smaller than other one. It was terrible.

W...was there rationing in the ghetto too?

Yeah, the ration in ghetto you had to ha...we, in ghettos we have cards and that's only you get food is on the cards, you know. But eh, as long as you had some money with you, you could buy some more food from the Gentiles.

Like, like?

Yeah, like, like for, for heating like, things you needed you could during the ghetto.

How would you get your food in the ghetto? Your family received cards.

Yeah, you receive card you could get a bread for your family in.

Stand in line?

Stand in lines uh, getting up in middle of the night, so otherwise you come there would be no bread. So to get first stand at the, at the bakery.

And what was the ration?

Ration was, we.

Just bread and what?

Just bread and bread, bread. And then you had to cook something to make, it was terrible, there was no food.

W...were people dying in the ghetto of starvation?

Yeah, there was some people dying.

Was there typhus in the ghetto?

There was typhus, was sick you know.

And, and anyone in your family?

No, my eh, I—in the eh, no, there was, I, until day of liquidation my family was still together.

And they were all taken at once.

Yeah.

How many people lived in your house during the ghetto?

You mean, how many? We were, we uh, we lived in, but our family lived together in a house.

In a house or in an apartment?

There was like a house, yeah, it was a house.

And so there were eight of you in the house. Did anybody else?

But no, was this, one of the son's was married and wasn't with us anymore. It was two—two actually was married and they, they lived together.

Is that?

Ok, [looks at photos] this is one my brother and this is my sister. And this is my brother, he was married, he was a ta...tailor. Uh, the—he, this brother is uh, my brother, he was in the army, before the war, Polish army and eh, he was a time went to the army and after he had finished the army in Poland the war broke out and he was called back right away to the, going into the war. And, and he was called away eh, yeah, back to the, to the eh, troops. So I—we and we got the uh, like somebody told us that they're going through my hometown to Warsaw, going to the front. And whatever his unit was, was Jaroslaw—in the east side of Poland, and we hear that it's going to come down. So we stayed all night long at the,

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down at the station to see him. And that is, then the train came in, we saw a lot of people coming out and we couldn't see him at all. We stayed all night, the family went to see him because he's going to the front. And we saw—at the end, th...he was at end of the wagon, we saw him waving with the train was going away.

Is this Sol?

This is my, this was my brother.

Your oldest brother.

No, no—all the, he was not old—the middle.

Mendel?

He was Yakov.

Yakov.

Yeah. So.

And did he die in the war?

He—but the funny thing after the Warsaw was—I mean, was eh, the Poland—Warsaw was—capitulate. We hear that some boys coming home from my hometown, they saw him getting away from the front. We never see him. We don't know what happened.

He died in the war then.

So.

In the fighting.

He, no, he, he, I was, we were told that, boys came home that was in unit with him that uh, ??? was ne...near Warsaw, that he was front finished, there was, but

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he was still alive after the, the, the, the fight. But never came back. We don't know what happened.

[looking at pictures] And, and this is your sister?

Yeah, this is the only sister I had in family.

And what and this?

This, this is my brother. Schloimo. He was married to her.

And this?

Ok, those, this is my, my early parents. Eh, those pictures I got because I went to Toronto and I knew my, my, my brother made one—his wife, my sister-in-law has family in, in Toronto. So after the war I had a fam...I have a feeling I'm going to find something. But I knew the name, but I didn't, didn't know what's going on, they live in Toronto, can you imagine. But I remember as a kid they would, I was told they, they worked at, the—at business in food, food market. So I we—came, after war when I came to United States, I went to Toronto and I ask about that name and they told me, "There he is! He's got a business at food market." You know, but he took me home. And I found picture, my bro...because this was the wedding. She sent to Canada, as she had sisters there. They were supposed to go to Canada before the war, but never could make it up there because the war broke out. So I was so happ...glad to find pictures from my sister and brother. Now this, my brother and soldier Yakov eh, a cousin in Toronto lived, after the war. He left just uh, '38, before the war broke out in Poland. So he lived in—cousin lived there in Toronto. He had a picture, a little picture in that. So th...I was

Joseph Gringlas Interview

so happy when they came, I got pictures from my fam...somebody to—that I had family.

Um, tell me a little more about um, working at, at, at um, Blizyn. Is it Blizyn?

Yeah, Blizyn, it's, uh.

It's not Budzyn?

No, Blizyn.

That's a different camp.

Different camp. Blizyn. That's located, it was fifty, I knew exactly, it was fifty miles away from, from Ostrowiec to that lager.

Fifty?

Fifty. Fifty miles.

Miles or kilometers?

Fifty kilometers.

Kilometers, so it was thirty miles.

Yeah.

Yeah.

'Bout thirty-five miles?

Thirty-five miles.

And the, the camp was surrounded with guards, with Ukrainian guards. Those Ukrainian—it was terrible. They were trying more harder to, to satisfy the SS to, to kill Jews or to do harm.

Did you ever encounter any Wehrmacht soldiers? Was there a difference between SS and Wehrmacht?

Joseph Gringlas Interview

Yeah, there was a eh, in Blizyn was, it took, it was SS, it was gendarmerie. SS were greenish uniform, gendarmerie was a lighter uniform. And Ukrainian was there. And Wehrmacht, Wehrmacht you'd cou...counted when you were out of—some working for them, they would count a lot. But not in, not in the, in mostly in the concen...we counted SS Ukrainians.

Was it all the same whether it was Wehrmacht or gendarmes or...

Oh yeah. One thing in Blizyn I have to tell you. There was somebody, they called him ???, that was the name we gave him because he had, he was limping on the feet. He was a gendarmerie.

And Gendarmerie were Polish police?

No, no, the Gendarmerie was the German Gendarmerie.

German, ok.

So, he only from Blizyn he was good. Why was he good? Because he told you, he wanted—he didn't he...he was under Höss, doing something for him—working for him. He wouldn't hurt you. So you knew that if he doesn't hurt you, he's got some feeling. And one time I remember Blizyn, he took us...I was talk, I was talking about that gendarmerie which were more underst...some had some fe...humane feeling. And, and they needed two people to dig out in the woods in Blizyn. A grave, so, usually you thought you were going digging for yourself.

You knew that? You'd seen that happen.

Yeah, that's the way, the reason, it helped you out. So I need two men. And I was taken out for group to dig with another guy that grave. And that Gendarmerie what I told you, he was, he was really good feeling. He said to me, "No, this is not

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for you, this for somebody else. But I'm sorry I have to do that." he said. He didn't hurt us at the time. We dugged and they took us, took out the other people to be killed and be buried there. Bad. There was another Gendarmerie, it was terrible. He was, ev...even if you worked he would hit you, you know sometimes you didn't work, you'd say why even work if he's going to hurt you. Eight, eight lashes, give you on the head, that's, that only they hit is on the head. And he was uh, he was hitting right on head for no reason, we worked he came and, "Jude, Jude, Jude, Jude."

So you were beaten on the head as well?

Yeah.

They—you spoke to them in German?

They spoke to you, [laughs] we didn't, we couldn't speak too much them. They spoke to you, said "Los, los! Arbeit!"

And this other man, this good Gendarmerie,

Yeah, the good one ???

he also spoke to you in German?

In German yeah.

And these are SS men?

No, those were Gendarmerie, SS were uniform, the green uniform.

Ok, so the Gendarmeries were

Gendarmerie, it was a different type of unit of the military.

Military police.

But they were just lighter color uniforms.

What happened um, after Blizyn?

Blizyn uh, after being there probably a year or so and we knew that the Russian front is getting close, close to Poland you know. So they liquidated Blizyn and sent us to Auschwitz. So they loaded us...

How did they do that? Did they call everybody out?

Yeah. They—we knew that something had happened. How did we knew, they, they at the time when they liqui...they're going to send people out from the, Blizyn, they surround with military—that was military with tanks in the morning. So nobody escaped from there. And we had, there was a feeling already that the Russians going in the, get...getting after the Germans and they're getting closer to, to Poland. So eh, they starting liquidate Blizyn. So in the morning they surround...they took us out from the barrack in they—on the Pla... Platzappell and they counted us and then what we saw right away there was—those were military. Those were not citiz...military soldiers, Germans. 'Cause they needed a lot of more to guard us. So there was most of the guns just pointing at us, like this. What are they going to give, give us—kill us, but no they want to take, watch u...they guard us, that we go over to the train. And the train went to Kielce through the woods. And suddenly we hear guns. Yeah, at the trains we're loading, they loaded us on the trains.

Was this the first time you were on a train? Had you, had you uh, gotten to Blizyn on a train as well?

Yeah, I think that Blizyn, yeah, it was, I was.

Or by truck?

No, was I think trucks. I can't remember. But from Blizyn to go and they took us up from Blizyn it was on trains, from Blizyn to going to Birkenau-Auschwitz quite awhile because...

What kind of trains? Cattle cars?

The train was uh, uh, like wagons, but not passenger, it was like, uh.

Cattle cars.

Cattle train...

What was it like...

And they would.

in the train?

It was, they put us in a lot of, lot of in the train, uh.

What was it like in the train?

Eh, like train like you, commercial trains like loading any coals or metals, trains like that. And they put us together and on the, on top of the train was SS sitting with a gun—machine gun. And we're going through by the eh, going with the train from, from Blizyn to Birkenau-Auschwitz. There was fighti...in the tr...going through, through the, through the trees, through the woods, we heard fighting like comi...like somebody shooting at the SS. And, and oh, I said now it was partisans hitting the train. And we thought we happ...we were happy. Maybe we were going to liberated right there. But I guess the power—they overpowered them and train went through to Blizyn...

How long...

Joseph Gringlas Interview

to Auschwitz.

how long did it take to get to get from Blizyn to Auschwitz?

Blizyn to Auschwitz it took uh, let's, if I remember exactly it was quite a few hours.

But not overnight?

Not overnight. It was during day light.

Do you remember what it was like inside the train? Was it dark, was, was it smelly?

I, I can't imagine so many people all together—you couldn't—it was terrible.

Any food, water?

There was no food.

And obviously no toilet facilities.

Not at all.

So what happened in there?

You know I was just thinking today what happened, I just, I can't remember what happened we need to go, urinate or going to bath....I don't know what happened, I can't remember. Maybe we didn't need, we didn't, we didn't need to.

Did people die in the train?

From, from Blizyn to Birkenau?

Yeah.

Our group, I remember on the train, no, I don't think, nobody died.

Was it silence Were people...

Beg your pardon?

were people yelling, talking?

Joseph Gringlas Interview

Yeah, talking, we knew we're going to Auschwitz. We knew—we had...

You knew.

We knew we were going to Auschwitz, yeah.

And what had you heard about Auschwitz up to now? Did you know where it was, what it was?

Eh, we didn't know actually, we didn't know where Auschwitz was, no. In Blizyn when I was in, in Konzentrationslager I didn't know. I, we heard that the Auschwitz, something came, there's a, I guess gas chambers. And the, the gassing in, in, in, you know. When we went and we going there we know that, that's, that's the end of us.

And the...the...they were all men? You were all men?

Yeah, women in Blizyn but only mostly men.

So you, you arrived at.

There were women too in Blizyn, you know, but I—they were working with women's things, clothing and that,

But not in the trains.

but not, in the train I remember being in the group with men.

When you arrived at Birkenau and the train opened—the door opened, what do you remember happening then?

We arrived in Birkenau and eh, and the train opened up and we saw standing right, SS with, with those dogs and it was terrible. At that tr...eh, but a lot of other trains come in there, Birkenau was with women, with children, with a lot of family you know. But from Blizyn we were not, we were just work from Blizyn.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

So we came there and we opened up maybe—there was a lot of SS and they were saying eh, to right to the left. What they say that—you, you did what they told you to do. We didn't know what's, which way's going to be good, which way is going to be bad. But we found it out. That I was put on, on the side to stay on for awhile. The other group, sent right into the gas chamber.

You went through the selection?

Yeah, this was selection. And another thing I remember, I had a, a can, a metal can and I was so thirsty. I arrived in Birkenau, it was terrible. I, I'd be—I was, needed dr...to drink, I didn't talk about hunger, but the drink, I was thirsty. And it must be a rain, rain before we came and there was a ditch, it was like ditch from, you know things where they making bricks.

Mm-hm.

It was like, it was, the color of the water looked like a brownish color. I drink that from that can. I, I was so thirsty. Never forget. Things stay—sticks out with you.

Do you remember at the front of the line on the ramp, at the selection, was it

Mengele who was in front?

It must have been, I—but I didn't know, who's Mengele. But I saw SS man.

???

After the war I found out that was, yeah, yeah.

So you were sent to one side or the other.

One side or the other side.

And what happened then?

Ok, I eh, next eh, when we, then they took us to our barrack. Big barrack. And for a lot of people had to be, be in barrack and to lay, you know, to lay on those wooden things. And they, they didn't take us to work, so if you, you know. But so they took us in a quaran...call it quaranti...quarantine...

Mm-hm.

Quarantine?

Mm-hm.

They checked us if anybody. I'll tell you this, this was a, after we were there already selected to work. They—checked us if we have any sickness or what, because they're afraid if any sickness it's going to spread.

How did they do this, some doct...some SS men came into the barracks.

Yeah and they said, yeah, exactly, doctors came in, the, the German doctors. They checked and see if we, we were sick.

Say take your clothes off? Did they make you take your clothes off to examine you?

At that time it was—the clothes were, yeah, I gotten the clothes there and when we, after selection in Birkenau, we gi...they give us uh, striped uniforms.

Did you go through showers?

Yeah, we, we went to a shower through, but we just, we, we sele...we didn't, they, the shower was to clean us...

With disinfectant.

In the shower. Yeah.

Yeah.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

But uh, other people were arriving, we didn't see them anymore. But we knew what's happened to them.

Different showers.

Yeah.

Right.

They went to a shower where no show...

Gas.

returned. And uh, and we were staying in Birkenau a few days at
quaranti...quarantine? And then they saw us, we were, we went si...any sickness
which can be, you know, infected or something.

**Now you had had typhus, when they came to examine you did they, did they ask you
if you were sick, did they?**

What do you mean, going back to Blizyn?

No, when you were now at Birkenau...

Yeah.

You had just been sick not too long before.

No, in Blizyn, that was a long time ago.

That was be...long before.

I was out of the typhus already.

So you passed.

I passed, yeah. I passed, they, cause they checked us over again, we can work.

Mm-hm.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

So uh, after being there in Birkenau and I don't—I, let's see I remember Birkenau was, I can't, I don't understand 'til now what happened. A lot of Jewish people were gathered and was praying. They were praying out—they were, you know outside of Birkenau tremendous bar...barrack, you know and they were praying. I said what the heck they're praying now that we're dying. But they're praying, that God is going to help us? I know that books, I don't know how they got in, I don't know—can you imagine?

In the barracks? Was this in...

Huh?

in the barracks?

It was a big barracks, but between the barracks outside, you could go—you went out of the barracks.

They were praying outside.

Yeah. And you were surrounded, you couldn't go in place because you were surrounded in electrical wiring and guards, SS guards. And another—and they didn't take you to work, you just walk, stand around all day long. And at—after awhile I was taken to a fort, in next to our—every barracks in, in area was with wires. And next—we could see through wires the other camp, another camp, but is same area but, but separated with wiring. It was a woman camp. And I was picked up in a group in Birkenau to go—it was a ditch between going down the bottom on the, on, outside the barracks they cleaned us. So we saw how the women without no hair and uniforms. And we were, we could see the women there, they was separated from the men. So I worked there. And all—and then and

Joseph Gringlas Interview

I told you a lot of people were sent out. It was not, Birkenau was not a camp, a working camp, it was liquidation camp. There's, there's no work there. So they—it was no good. Because if you don't work, you're gonna go to camp, to concen...to the liquidation of uh, the gas chamber, today you're going to go next day, you know. That was the problem. You felt terrible. At least you work you know they're going to keep you for awhile.

Let me stop. When you, when you looked at the women in the next camp...

Yeah.

did you think you might see one, someone from your family?

No, because I don't know, I, I had a feeling that they were sent right away to M...Majdanek. They wouldn't—they didn't go to Auschwitz. They went to Majdanek. And we knew Majdanek was not a camp uh, working camp either. Those were killing, gas.

???

Yeah. And so, eh. What's talking about?

So you were, you were in Birkenau and you were worried that there was no work.

Yeah. No work. Then they co...somebody eh, from the Gruppen SS came out, a German and he came out, we need for, for making, for making some...doing something, flowers, this was in there to make it look nice, inside flowers. And they called who's a gardener. I had learn in Poland I was eh, I was taught how to do farming and flowers and so I said, "Yes, I am a, I can do flowers." And I volunteered to do, I want to do something. So they took me to work and when I got that job of putting flowers in the ground. So I get double piece of butter and

Joseph Gringlas Interview

double portion of bread because of that. It was wonderful at that time in Birkenau to get a double portion. So I, I worked on the flowers for them and they liked it the way I did it. And then there was a lot of people—as I explained, there was a lot of other people didn't work. And they stepped on the flowers. So when they came out, the guy said, "What you doing, why didn't?" And they were, I think this was a, one of the civilians from us, I mean from the, the, he was a Kapos. Told you what to do. And he said, "Look what you have to do, watch it what they're doing." So he gave me a big stick and you have to hit him, hit him because they shouldn't go to step on. Nobody in the world would believe I took the stick and gave back that Kapo. I said, "Not me. I'm not going to hit anybody." And, and so I lost my double portion food and double bread. It's unbelievable. Because you feel like people are hungry they would do anything.

Mm-hm.

I couldn't, I couldn't take a stick and hitting the people there. I know what, what they're there for. So, I lost that wo...the job from work and doing with the flowers. And then I worked uh, on a different, unloading. I, they were looking for something to do but it wasn't, you could see there was no, this was not for people to work there. It was just waiting to be finished.

You saw the chimneys.

Hm?

You saw the chimneys.

We saw the chimneys, yeah, we couldn't miss the chimneys. They were so large and tall you couldn't miss it.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

And you smelled the smoke?

The sm...yeah, at night and even when they start, when it getting dark, you could see the sky all red. A reddish sky you looked out to see, you know what's happening there. And the smoke coming out from the chimneys. [long pause]

Tell me more about that.

Ok, being in Birkenau? I was there probably about five, six months. And then suddenly, it was a Sunday, I don't know how we knew it was a Sunday, Sun... They told us from the barrack to come out. From the barrack we stayed to get out of the barrack in uh, a empty place. And told us whatever we had on, the striped uniform, to strip completely naked. And we—and they put us in, into another big, empty other, empty barrack, completely empty.

So what did you think was going on at that point?

That was, we knew what's going on, they're going to take us to the crematory.

Mm-hm.

And we kept—they kept us all day long, 'til the evening, starting getting dark. A few SS men arrived and that was Josef Mengele. How I, I—at that time I didn't know what his name was, but after war when I saw the picture, I remembered. So he was—there was a few other SS, one corner of the barrack—long barrack and between the barrack was like who was in ??? you could still, still see that. It was a building, like a medium, you know, built up like half of the ways through that you couldn't jump over, you have to go through like all arou...one side to the other side to get through him. It was in a corner in that barrack. And there was a group I know, there was a few hundred of us. And he had put bright lights on us on top,

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from the, from that barrack. And he was standing, he was in ??? He came to me and when you, when you've got to, there's—well he was staying, going around. So, he asked me “How old are you? Wie alt bist du?” I was fifteen, I told him I was eighteen. I said, “Achtzehn Jahre.” “Kannst du nach arbeiten?” That means...

Can you work...

can you still work? I said, “Jawohl.” So he took me out of, out of, separate line from that to take a different, a different place. And from us there were, there, one was older than me and maybe looked worse than me, they took him away to the, to the gas chamber. Anyway, that was the epi...episode from w...which I was selected to go to work. And I didn't know where we're going yet.

No clothes.

No, no clothes.

And you were moved to one side.

Yeah, one side.

Where did, where did they put you then?

They put you in a different place. They put me, put different place.

Separate barrack?

Separate, yeah, separate barrack ????. But and we put on back the, the...

Same uniform.

uniforms. A night before that, I don't know how we got that—there's Buna. Buna was Auschwitz too, but Buna was a big factory, I.G. Farben and we and there's a factory. I forget something we heard about forty trucks of load of people from Buna came to Birkenau. I don't know how—it must have—that news must have

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come from somebody from the, from the crematorium. They were saying they came from Buna to Birkenau, forty trucks loaded with, with the Jewish people from the, from Buna camp to Birkenau to be gassed. Probably—I assume they couldn't work anymore. They couldn't use them for work anymore. So that's got me into my mind that they needed people to replace those forty, that's why the selection of us. They selected us to go to Buna. And after we marched from Birkenau to Buna it was about ei...eight kilometer, from one camp. But if something was to get out of Birkenau, their crematoriums, was something. I don't know, it was, anyway it wasn't working a long time to get out again but something to get away from it. Cause I, I was picked to go to work. And I was sent to, went to Buna, came to Buna in Buna was my brother, what was left, remember I told you in, in Ostrowiec he was separated?

Mm-hm.

He was in Buna. After, after a year and a half I saw—we met each other again. And Buna was—in Buna was barracks, like, it was, but, Buna was a camp but they took you in with guarded SS. But they took you out to work to the factory. You had to march out from the, from the camp to the factory, march out with the SS guarding you. And I was assigned to Kommand...Kommando Zwölf. Okay the Kapo was a J...in, in, in Buna there was a lot of Germans. German Gentile, Germans. Not only Jewish, Germans, were criminals. Like they had a red triangle on that uniform and green triangle. The green were they murderers. For killing somebody in Germany they were sent to be and the red one was like...

Communist.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

Communist, sent to that camp. I, I was assigned to a Kapo with a green, green badge. And what happened, I was, the Kommando was in the bar...the Kommando, every Kommando had a number, I had—because when the commander marched out they a...and they, they told the SS from the, from the, going out from the barracks going to factory, Kommando Zwölf. Not, the Kapo had to say to SS, “Kommando Zwölf, Abteilung...”how many people, so they counted us, getting out going to the factory. So that Kapo was uh, was our Kapo. And uh, and one time he, he said, “Who needs,” he needed, he had probably his socks were so worn out with holes and he said, “Who can knit socks?” So I was—I don’t know, in school I was very handy, so I work...we learned how to knit. I said, “Yes I can do it.” And I and I took the socks and he let, so he didn’t take me out of order. You see he had power, he could do something because he was the Kapo. That green eh uh, Kapo, with the green insignia. So he took me and had and he had a little, I don’t know you call it, a little hatke, you know what a hatke is? A little building, a little small room and he stayed there and he sleep there. He didn’t sleep with us, they had. He could do everything, like food because he had, was a German and he could organize himself. And he—and they call that Pipel, he need somebody to help and do some work for him. And when he told me about, he asked about the knitting his socks and I said, “Yes I can do.” I knitted socks. So he took me out of work and, and told me to stay there and clean the inside and help and cook. So I would—it was a little bit better and I had more food too because he was eating where he left off. And one time he came back from work and that Kapo got sick, like. I couldn’t recognize the same guy. He

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came in and was screaming help. “Raus, raus!” to me, I should get out of his little place where he was staying and he and I wa...and I was and I was ??? I got sick a temperature, a temperature at time, I remember, high temperature and he sent me out in wintertime and then suddenly done. He knew I did some work for him, but tried to, he was so happy I was making his socks, he went out and he got me the hardest work to carry long woods, long, those, those woods uh, from the wood, from tar ??? you know and make the wood?

Mm-hm.

I had to carry that and he watched me, I, how I’m doing it. And I was so sick I got, af...after that I had temperature, I told you before, they took me out to work in that heavy, carrying on the heavy locks. So he took me—it was, I was so sick I had the next, next day he had to, they had to take me to KB, which mean Krankenbau. In Buna, being Kr...to be going, put in like a little hospital, it’s a little hospital in the Krankenbau was means, it means that you can’t work. You gonna be killed. I don’t know what happened, in, in, I wa...in the Krankenbau there was steps going up where to sl...lay down and I was, I had temperature too at that time. And I went up, I—it’s time to get up in a second on the top of the row to lay down, I fell down completely. Uh, from the temperature, from the heat, well, the temperature I had— was so sick, I must eh, I, I just passed out. I fell down and I was on the ground laying, I was out. I wa...it was just, yeah, I didn’t know, they, I didn’t know if I was existing, if I’m living because I passed out and I was laying. Anyway there was a Hungarian Jewish doctors in that KB, Krankenbau, they revived me. But after I revived, I was bandaged—I was hit—I

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fell down I hit myself. So I stay in the Krankenbau a few days. And they let me out. And then after that—I don't know, something, by luck, I was assigned not back to that guy, to that murderer, that Kapo, his name was Otto Kapo ??? Kommando Zwölf. I was assigned to a Schlosserkommando which is just like a easy thing to do, after I was getting out. And that was like, that was the last few months in Bl...in being in, in, being in...

in Buna.

in Buna. That was my work. That's lighter work.

Buna was the factory and you lived in Monowitz?

Buna was the factory a little—but outside of B...Monowitz. But Buna-Monowitz was the factory. In the, in the la...in lager, where we stayed, in evening we had to march going back to the lager in the morning and going to the factory. And, uh.

So the lager was, was Monowitz...

Uh?

and Buna was the name?

I think that Buna-Mono...Buna was called Buna-Monowitz...

Buna-Monowitz.

all together. But the lager was a little bit away, about a few kilometer we marched out.

Did you ever see anyone at Buna um, what were the latrines like at Buna? There are a lot of stories about horror, horrors that took place in the latrine. Anyone ever assaulted in the middle of the night?

In Buna?

Yeah.

In Buna was terrible. First we didn't, we did...fed us with little bit a soup, piece of ration—bread.

But if you went to the morning to the latrine, did you ever find anyone dead or beaten in the latrines at night?

In Buna?

Yeah.

I mean there was a lot of, we saw, people was killed like you know, they fell down you couldn't walk there, it was terrible—we just—we knew what's going on. But you tried to, the—you only sit and try to stay on, stay on.

Yeah. Forgive me for asking you this...

Yeah.

but was there any sexual...

contact?

overtures between this Kapo, say and you or between?

Oh, be...between the Kapo?

Any overtures?

The Kapo was, he went out to the, from the out, from the camp too to the factory see, that. So they had contact with other people—civilians.

Uh-huh.

They had contact with. So they had, could have sex.

So there, I mean were no sexual attacks that you know of in the camps.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

There was, yeah, there was uh, in Birkenau. Between women and, and the Kapos. They had taken out the women, 'cause there was, yeah.

But only the Kapos.

K...Kapos, because you didn't think about sex because you—what...whatever feature you, you could...couldn't stay on your feet.

What kind of work did you do after that at uh, was there, was there other work...

Ok, in Buna, yeah,

you said there was...

excuse me, in Buna when I, they assigned me just long before I got that Kapo that I told you, I had to sign up to unload from trains. They put in the sewer, big cement, cement around, you know, the cement for to put in the ground for sewers. That, that was a sign up. And it was—I was, you know, a small and, and young and this was big one like this room. And we unloaded, we had to roll it down, you know, not to break, otherwise you break it you'd be killed. So we, I don't know it was a few, when we figured out how to put piece of wood on, little by little get it down. But this was heavy.

And did they feed—did they give you extra rations for that kind of work?

No, same rations.

Same rations for everybody.

Yeah.

When you—at night in the barracks, what did you think about at night?

At night in bar...you were thinking about if we could not wake up would be the best thing.

If you had died.

If you died it would be just natural death. Because you're not gonna, the power we saw in the German power, nobody would believe that anybody gonna come out of it. This is the end of it. So what are you going to live, another few, another few months? We wished that we'd go to lay down on that, that wo...the barrack on the wood, shouldn't get up.

Were there suicides?

Eh, no, I don't know, at—unless, unless.

Not anybody throw themselves on the wires?

Yes, in Au...in Birkenau, going back to Birkenau, I've seen people throwing themselves to, as soon you got to the electrical wiring in the fence you ex...eh, electrocuted, instant. Oh if, if they saw you going to they would kill you before you get electrocuted, from the guards.

Did you ever think in, in your, on your boars at night, about your family, about your home?

Oh yeah, all the, never got out of my mind, always think of my family.

Did you think they were alive? Any hope that they were alive? Just your brother?

Yeah and my brother was—as I say, I remember I met him in Buna that.

What kind of a reunion was that?

Oh, you know something about—he had—he was a tailor already. He was older than me, he was a tailor and he and he worked already for the Kapos, for the German Kapos—I mean the German Kapos—when Kapos—with the uniforms too.

Mm-hm.

See, I told you they were politically or murders in there and there were Germans Kapos, so he worked for one of the Kapos, made him those head special for them, a tailor and sewing with the hand. And they made him a little bit like a little coat from the uniform, they had uniform like we, but they had a coat, like a little thin coat on. So he worked for one of the Kapos and one and I worked on a Kapos and he knew he—the Kapo knew he was my brother. And I was working in that—it was, pushing those co...those little, little wagons you put out, you were loading on the wagons. And I don't know, he suddenly came to me with one of the shovel, hit me right on my head—I was bleeding. And I said, “Son of a...,” he knew my brother, is my brother and my brother worked for him. So what happened my brother worked for him and he got some more rations. The German Kapos got more food. So if somebody did some work with him they would give some piece of bread. So my brother shared with me whatever, you know, he got.

So he hit you.

So—but I was ??? and I came back at night, in evening, but, would you believe that he hit me so hard I was bleeding. And you worked for—he knows he work with me, he knew it was my brother, so there was no feeling between at all.

H...how did you—when did you first see him, at?

I went—you know some friends, when we came I told you when we came from Birkenau to Buna, some friends from my hometown came to my brother and they told him they saw, they saw me. So he arri...he came to the barracks when I he....

He found you.

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I was assigned—he found me, yeah.

So what it was like when he found you?

It was like, like in the movies, like you can't believe it that you found somebody from the sky came down. But he was all crying, crying because he knew what happened to my family.

How long were you at Buna?

In Buna, I—it must have been already in, in, I still have to think—remember back. We were uh, about, I don't know, maybe about three quarter of a year there. And...

So we're now into...

Yeah, now, then we...

1944.

yeah and then it was sometime, we, we knew, had a feeling the Ger...the Russians going to close into Auschwitz at Buna. They bombed—it was bombed from—by the Russians in the factory. Bom...bombard...it was bombarded by the Russians in the factory, Buna.

With artillery guns.

From the planes.

Airplanes?

Airplanes coming in. So we, we knew that—at least we had—see, we know—had a good feeling when we saw they're going to suffer, we, they, it was getting close. But how are you getting out of there we don't know. [pause] So eh, so we know, then uh, few, after the bombardment, a few weeks or a few mon...a month, a

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couple months, they started liquidating Buna in Monowitz, because the Russians were closing, closing up on them. So they, so they took us out of getting liquidating in Buna. They took us to Gleiwitz. Gleiwitz, I looked on the map and it was just close to Buna. I don't know but we—in—what happened to me, I don't know what happened. That morn...that morning we, they liquidated Buna to, to march us all to Gleiwitz, my eyes closed up and I couldn't, couldn't see. Suddenly closed up, the lids from my eyes closed up and I couldn't see where I'm going, like a blind man. I don't know what happened to me. But my brother and another boy from, from my hometown was in, in Buna when—while they, they, I was hold by hands and...

They...

marching at, all night.

they marched you to Gleiwitz.

Yeah, all night we marched—was marching into Gleiwitz. And I—we walked and walked, walked, it, it was snow, cold. And came into Gleiwitz, in the morning my eyes opened up. It was already daylight from—they walked all night long. My eyes opened up and I could see again. And then when I could see I saw again what happened. Gleiwitz was like a place, a gathering together, all from other camps around into Gleiwitz. To waiting for—to, probably they waited for trains to load us away from the, Poland. So went to—at the barrack, there was barrack a lot of people. And I, and I opened the, by the door you're walking in and I saw something happened terrible. When you, was so many in that barrack, when you get in they would go on top of you. There was no way to—there was no room to

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stay there. So I got out fast with my brother. I said if you go in through that trap, on the top of you because there's so many pe...you know, like people inside the barrack. So we stayed, went to the toilet, stayed in the toil...It was just a little bit away from the cold weather outside. And I was there, I, I, I think we stayed a few—and they get it all, they came so many, all the camps around whatever it was they put them into Gleiwitz. In middle of the night they had the trains ready, to have, have wagon trains. And they came in, it was the SS ca...came in the barracks and scream, “Raus, raus, raus, raus!” Just in the daylight and, and my brother was hit be...one of the guns in the back, he was bleeding. He got hit. And they put us in the open train, opening. But it's, they filled us up like herring in that because they, when there's more people to get into the trains. And we—as the train started going out from Gleiwitz, they took out the—this was the, two—two and a half weeks on the train, without food, to explain...

Towards Germany...

without drinks. The only thing what we ate is snow that came down on us. And that train they put us so many people in that any, any person was in the middle was just—was finished. On top of the other. And all the time on the train I stayed at the edge of the train, holding on, on the edge. And that was at night and day like this. After traveling for a few place...a few hours, they suddenly stop because SS prob...it was on top SS, gua...with machine guns. And they stopped probably they had to go down and change guards, I don't know. And then suddenly on the sta...one of the station they opened up the, opened up the train and they throw bread from the top down on the ground. You can imagine what happened, what I

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saw. I was in the back, when I told you the back holding on. The front, behind me they were out, going out grabbing the bread. As soon they grabbed the bread, it went a lot of out, grabbing the bread, the ma...eh, hits from the guns of the SS, killed them right on the spot. There was a play for them, to, they knew we were hungry, we didn't, we weren't fed for, for a few days. They thought the people are not, you know you're hungry, you run out to get a piece of bread. And the machi...you hear "drrr", machine gun, all of them finished. So we knew what they're playing around. And they don't want to feed you, they want to starve you to death. Finally this, this trip went through—in Gleiwitz it took us, like going to, in, Gleiwitz is not far if you go up north, northwest and you in Germany, through train. But probably it was bombarded aboard, they took us to Czechoslovakia, from Czechoslovakia to Germany ????. One time in the morning when the train going by and I saw a big bridge on top, people going to work. Eh, the people they ??? people in Czechoslovakia at that time. And they probably had lunches with them, going to work in the morning, they throw their apples and chocolate and bread on top of us. And they were throwing us to get—they knew exactly what inside is, what the people that—us—from the camps transporting. So they throw the, whatever they took for them, with themselves the lunches for them, they throw it into us to feed us, to give us the food. And as soon they throw that food and the ne...and the Germans saw that they were hitting, shoot...uh, kill...uh, shooting, hitting them to the bridge, they shouldn't do that. And then it came on the top of us, a piece of bread, apple or a chocolate. That were the chocolate people. And from that we traveled throughout Nordhausen. We arrived in

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Nordhausen, we looked black. Faces were black. And I said to my brother, “You know, this...” [pause] it, it was all bread, so it’s so dark, that, that felt terrible that. I couldn’t see human being looked like. But still I said, “You know Sol, if we went through that we’re going to survive.” [long pause] Okay, in Nordhausen, the barracks were not like barracks in Blizyn or, or in Birkenau. The barracks were soldier. The bricks built, like buildings. And we had a little, more like, I don’t know they, I don’t know how they treat us that time, I, they would just give us a little bit more like a bed, not a bed, but it looked better than Birkenau, it was a piece of, of wood laying. And the feeding was a little better too. I thought maybe they got the, the, they starting getting a better feeling, I mean the, when they treat us a little bit better. But no, it was just, at that time, I don’t know, maybe they saw the way we looked or something, they give, they gave us a little bit better, be....And then in, in Nordhausen we didn’t know and we, what, what kind of work was going to be there. They took us, in tho...those called Dora- Nordhausen. That was the big barr...buildings and barracks, probably built for the soldiers and they used it for us. And they took us in a little train again, traveling to where. The guards to—on the ground, coming in and I...

V-2 rockets?

V-2. That’s the mountains, called the Hartz mountains and they were building the V-1 and V-2, I guess the—Britain—England. We didn’t know what’s happening. And with the machine with cement floors, putting them in machines. Actually at that time we didn’t know what they doing. But later on we found out it was V-1. But from that place they, they made the missile to hit uh, London. So I worked

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there in, in that factory in a...a long time. I, I and it was civilian, civilians, engineers from the German. They were, civilians, they were not eh, like ca...in camps, nothing to do with the camps. They were working with the machinery, putting together. And one...

Did you ever see Arthur Rudolph? Is that a familiar name?

Rudolph Hess?

No, Arthur Rudolph.

Art Rudolph? The one which had to do with the missiles?

Yeah.

No. No, I don't think I. He was in the high up of engineering. I don't think he would be close to us. So you only saw...

He was deported a little while ago.

Yeah, I know.

About five years ago.

Mm-hm. One time I was—a German civilian, he looked around, in the factory working with us. He took out a pie...he looked around there was nobody watching him. He took out a bread and he gave it to me. You know this time I see some feelings. [crys] And then after you, a month working there in that, in the fact...in the, in the underg...those mountains, underground eh, I don't know I must have gotten so that I couldn't work anymore. So they took us in, in a big, those of the barracks there, a building, that i...those building barrack, not wooden, those bricks barrack. And they put on—I remember there was a table on the, a big table, a civilian doctor sitting on, on the other side. And something was glowing, an

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instrument, I don't know what it was. And they had stripped it into what, they looked through and see how and I was assigned not to work anymore. That what's happened after a few months being in, N...Nordhausen.

They gave you x-rays, is that right?

It must have been x-rays. Because th...and they looked through, might be dark like a ??? you know...

Mm-hm.

they can see right away through, it's a machine with. And I was put away on the side not to go, not to go anymore to—on to work on the, on the, the mountains for the, building the V-1, V-2.

Were you worried about that?

Yeah. If—I knew, you knew it, if you don't, you're not able to wor...stay on your feet and do something, you'll be finished. So I was—my brother was still, still okay. I don't, I don't know how. Because I told you he was in Ostrowiec still. At the time was in Blizyn, he was in Ostrowiec and he could, he, he was, he was, had money and he had—buy some food. But I, sudden...to Blizyn and Birkenau and then Nordhausen and then going through two, three weeks on the train, that I think was, I, I was almost finished. So they didn't want me to go to, they wou...let me stay in Nordhaus...in Dora. Not anymore to the, going to the working. Because I was, I wasn't able to do work anymore. So I thought I'm ve...they didn't want to kill me either because they didn't, probably at the time they—any eh, I mean, using ammunition was a bit too, too much for them, they needed it. So they, they didn't kill because to, to—I'm not going to survive anyway. So.

Did they give you food?

Yeah, they give us a little food, whatever ration they gave you, yeah.

But even, even...

Yeah, yeah, they still give you.

when you...

Mm-hm. Yeah.

were sick they gave you.

Yeah, I was not working and still got, got that ration. But I didn't, they knew that I, I going to fall anyway whether they're going to use me for the work. I wasn't able to. So that was a few, after a few weeks like that in, I was laying, laying, laying and so—and then Americans came with the planes, bombarding Nordhausen. One—I'll never forget that. And even in the barr...the, the Americans didn't know there was, they didn't know this was barracks like con...camps. They thought it looked like soldier—building, big buildings. So there was evening, about four or five o'clock in the evening they throw the bombs and, and we—I and my brother run thr...I was in higher floor. It went through. It was not—steps you couldn't walk through because the bomb came through, it, it slide through like a, because the steps was bricks, falling like, falling on top of the brick—of the steps. You slide through and we said we're finished, you know. And we walked out from the building and the whole kitchen corner was a kitchen building, the whole kitchen was burned to death. And lot of the guys were hit. So we went out and we came back, we're going back to whatever's left, we saw it

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was like burnt corpse, corpse, human be...the, the, from the camps cause the American hit the, the bomb. They hit that barrack, that building.

Your brother was with you.

Yeah, brother still with me.

Did he come to you in the hospital? When, when you were sick?

I was sick, e...even, he had to go to, going to work out with the other ones. I was in the...

But the two of you were in this building together?

Yeah, at the, at that time where the, where the bombs fell?

Yeah.

Yeah.

He came to you.

Yeah, because at nigh...even if they came and took him back from the work back to Dora, see in the, the buildings. So he stayed with me.

I see.

So, eh...

So the camp was destroyed?

It was still left, a few eh, a few, a few buildings and destroyed the lab and, and we, we just stayed, there's. I think that time was no feeding because everything was a chaos. The feeding, the one with the ration bread what we, we got. And next—ten o'clock in the morning again the bombs came and it was out—ten o'clock it looked like it was dark from the, they came so many planes, it was dark and we ra...dark, dark outside, I don't know, suddenly got dark. I don't know

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what, why it was so dark. And we ran, we went up. SS and the camp, concentration camps people, they just walked out from the camp because there were bombs coming down and down...that, building the barracks. And we were laying on, on the ro...on somewhere on a field. And next to me was an SS laying, sta...laying right next to me, from the guards. And I was healthy. I'm next—I'm even now with him, dead. And the bombs had coming down and he said and the one thing he said to me, he said, "Bye," that means we finished. The SS. The guardman next to me. He said bye because everything was falling, bombs from all over. And after the, the bombardment was quiet down, he looked around, a lot of people killed. Horses, soldiers. A lot of the killed SS. And we went—where we're going to go? He had on the uniform and no place to go. He got back into the camp. Got back to camp there was totally chaos after, was no building, there was no food, nothing. And they took still people of us, to take, took away from us. And I don't know. I think they took them to, to the woods to be killed. 'Cause we never seen them again. Some SS. And after awhile, it was getting—we heard the fighting going on at night, we hear that, you know, we hear that—those guns, ar...artillery guns hitting Nordhausen, getting close. Anyway, they left. Whatever the SS, they left and we were left uh, to, the ones that sick. Yeah, by the way, when there was the bombardment, I got a shrapnel into my side. And got close to my heart. So I was bleeding all over me. My brother was injured in the leg. He was hit right in the leg with one of the shrapnels. And he was not so bad and I was—I couldn't breathe because from the, from, from the shrapnel came in—went into my inside. And I went—was a lake next to the it, I went and I washed

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myself out. There was no SS. It was like chaos. There was no...nobody guards you anymore. And then after a day or two we were laying into a, like a opened, like a—it must have been like a stable.

Did anybody bandage you, did you, doctor, nothing?

Nothing. I just. The rea...I went, I saw la...a lake, so I went down and cleaned myself with the, that, the, the, that injured, eh place, to get the blood.

How did you stop the bleeding?

It stopped.

Just stopped.

Yeah, from cold water or something. It stopped. Nature I guess was healing.

But was the sh...shrapnel still in you?

Yeah.

It was inside.

Mm-hm. And, and my brother got, got so, he hit—he was hit at leg. Okay, so we knew that it's gonna, it's, it's. There no, nobody guarding you. But he was laying a few nights, we were sick, injured. We were laying in a—like a stable. And all injured people were laying there in that stable on the, on that hay or was that? Eh, and you could bare...I never forget that, the day, you know the noise when people die? They couldn't breathe. Like I was, like eh, like from injury, I couldn't breathe. I was—unbelievable. I just felt that this is finished. I—this thing, pains. And some of them came, Germans and they saw the one which we, which burned dead, they took him out to kill in the stable. And next morning I felt better. I don't know, the injury must have quieted down and I felt better. And I walked, walked

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out of that and I got—I was—got on a bunk, it was covered with crud. It was a bunk, it was wine and the, was, they had champagne, so the SS. I suddenly got—and I brought back for my brother a bottle of champagne. And then next day we, we got better and my and we went to a, away from the S...I said it's not—it would be not good to lay around because they're going to kill us up and we're gonna die. We went in, we went to that other old civilian house, a German house. First thing what I did, I found a place with uniforms with—I have a picture of it. Uniforms from ver...fliers, pilots, the insignia for pilots. So I throw my uniform away, but by the, in the and I dressed myself in civi...in that, that, in that, I stripped, stripped off the, from the uniform, from the Nazi fliers—pilots you know. So I, I wouldn't be like, like the one going, walking around. And I walked around outside and I saw tanks, American tanks coming up. I knew what Americans were 'cause I know, they were surrounding, it was getting so close. So I saw the American tanks there and went back to my brother. He was laying in that room, I say, "We are liberated. We're free." But I know he wouldn't be able to walk. Finally we saw Americans coming up. And uh, American uh, it was chaos all over. And we organized f...I organized food because my, body couldn't move and I organized, went out and got some food, food from places. And then eh, eh, next day, civili...the way—beside us, work in the camp they had civilians from France, from Poland from all over, working the fields. He was a doctor. And I said, "Do you know, my brother's laying there and, and he was, he's going, he's going to die. You have to help him." So the civilian, that French doctor he said, you know, first to me, "We gotta go organize for food." Getting food to feed us, you know. I

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went with him and very close was a—like a village. I went in, it was goose sitting on eggs. Unbelievable. So you see something you take the goose out. And we had, I don't know eh, put it underneath my blouse, what I'm wearing. Underneath to hold on to it.

The goose or the egg?

No, the eggs.

The eggs.

The goose is too big to—I wouldn't take the goose. So the eggs, we said we're going to have eggs at least. And then came out uh, German civilian from the farm. There was no Ameri...it was a chaos, no American, no Amer...we could have been killed because, what are you doing here? We said we got lost. So, he let us go. And I had eggs with me. He didn't notice that I was having—we got, eh. It was lucky, he could have killed, nobody would know. You know, you were on his farm.

But you were wearing your prisoner's uniform still.

Yes. I don't know, it might have been a civilian. Before I got changed, it must have been a civilian. But he, no, it, it was a thing and I had already. And uh, was machtest du? ??? We told him we were, we were lost. Los, los! And yeah, he probably guy—a civilian eh, German. Anyway, he let us go. And I came back to my barrack, took out the egg. Was blood in the eggs, because the goose was sitting on it, you know. The funny thing—I tell you this is funny, unbelievable. And then the Ger...that, that guy which went and we organized to get some food. He, he, I don't know, he's a doc...he was a doctor. He to...he, heated the water,

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hard boiled egg. He had—his wounds, my brother, was already green. If we would have been like a few days more he would have...

Gangrene?

Gangrene, yeah. He cleaned around, cleaned around. And then I eh, cleaned—at least he got that infection in—around, cleaned around where that and he had gas, I don't know—I mean those, to put around him, bandage, bandage around his leg. And I went out and I saw the Americans. Coming from all over, the, the soldiers. Then and my brother staying there about a day or night with me and we said, oh, we got food organized, we're going to stay there. And then the Americans come in, they ask so where somebody sick? So I told them my brother's laying, he couldn't walk. So they took him out on stretches and they put on a stretch... stretchers and take him out, to a, to a hospital. And the hospital was in Dora, the hospital, in Nordhausen. And I thought, if I going to stay there watching that place where I had the food, I don't know where he gonna be—how I gonna find him. So I, when I saw them putting him on, on like, like this military truck to take him to hospital, I left everything. But I got around so I should be with the patient. Jumped up on the—on that, on that soldier's truck and I went and they took, I got, Dora my brother. Came in the Dora, in the hospital, to check when they, you know, treated my brother's leg. And I told them that I was in...injured in the bombardment, so they took me. The Americans had x-rays or something like Roentgen, the German was there. They told me that I was very lucky. They saw it coming through next to the heart. That shocked me, when I was bombarded by the Americans. And it's still inside me.

Still inside of you?

Yeah.

They didn't take it, the didn't have to?

The lung. No, they, it said it's not necessary if you take it out. It's still in, in me.

But...

A souvenir.

Souvenir, yeah. And they told me that I was one of the lucky. So it's, next, next, went through right next to the heart.

So you're with the American Army now.

Yeah.

And they put you in a hospital?

Yeah, they—my brother was in a hospital in Dora.

Dora.

Yeah, yeah, what, what happened? Now, it's, it's remind myself when you were talking about hospitals. They saw we were, we were just like walking around like skeletons, you know, we couldn't do too much. So they took eh, all the sick, they made a tent out of a field, the Americans and they, they gave us the best medicine. And they, they treat us, the Americans treat us like brothers would find you. They were the, caring those sick people there. And I, I was in that hospital with my brother too that, it was like stretch...eh, using up those, where you're laying down in the army where they use it.

Stretchers?

Stretchers, yeah, laying in there and they came in by planes, all medicine to, to get us on the feet. I think we were in the hospital there at that time about a couple of weeks, until we got out. And felt better and better off. I saw it was already with the Army it was some civilian Americans. And some were Jewish. And they ask me, would you like to have one hear your story? I said, I don't want it, I have enough stories, I couldn't—didn't, wouldn't think about it. I want to uh, tell something off the record. I mean I ???

You want me to stop?

You went back to Poland? We should talk about how you went back to Poland.

Yeah, back to Poland.

You and your brother together?

Yeah.

Did you think anyone had survived?

We knew—we didn't think survived, but maybe, you know, I just think of my brother, that brother, which remember I told you about in the army eh, Polish army, fighting...

Yeah.

the war with Germans. He survived and he never seen it. Who, maybe when, we couldn't think about maybe we'll go back and we'll find him. We came back eh, we went on the tr...it was trains going through Poland on the tra...you know, going through Ger.... We went on the trains in Germany going to Poland. We saw a lot of the—Leipzig and Dresden was like finished. All the buildings were like skeletons.

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We sa...we felt good about it. They should have the taste what we went through. And then we came Poland and we, we, we were—I was with my brother where they're loading, on the train going to Poland on the coals. You know coal—on the coal they use them to make the train go, the locomotive. So all was dark, we came my hometown. In hometown we found some, from my hometown, some survivors. We made a committee and they helped us, food, something, dress, getting, you know, clothes.

Was the Joint there?

Yeah, it was probably organized by the American Jewish people. But the, the people worked is the people were, were survivors.

Mm-hm.

And uh, I went to my, the town, it was the same thing, was the war. It looked like same thing. And I went to one of the, go...eh, going back something to tell you about something. When the war broke out. Can I go there?

Sure, sure.

When the war broke out and I told you we lived in a—Gentiles what owned the buil...the building, the apartment we lived in Gentiles owned. They were very anti-Semitic. And one of the guys, the son of the landlord. My, my brother went to the—was called in back into the army, before the war broke out and he was called, the son of the landlord. He got drunk one—before he went away and he wanted to, he said, “I’m going to take care of the Jews before I leave.” So he wanted to k...and he—I was with my brothers, my father and mother in the, in the room. We hear the noise of that. He went and he took a big knife, he wanted to

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kill us. We had that fear already, if he comes in. And that happened just the war broke out, he's going to army. He was still—on his mind he didn't want to go away until he finished the Jews. And he, he lived in that house. He was the landlord's son. So he was kept, not going in, there was two sisters holding him by the arms, not allowing him to get into my—but we hear the noise, "I'm going, I'm going to kill the Jew." He knew where, if he comes in we wouldn't, we wouldn't have let us kill ourselves, we would have fought, fought him back. And after the war—that's one incident, I'm just tell you about it—after war, we came back. That son of the landlord was alive and walking on the street. And I talked to my brother, I said, "Look at that, he's alive." My brother, we don't know where going, he went to army. He, that son of a gun, he wanted to kill Jews, he's alive and he came back to Poland and he's walking on the street. And brother said, "You know what he wanted to do to us, we should have done to him. We should have killed him now." I said to myself—to my brother, "What are you talking? You want to get out of Poland? You'll never—if you do that, what would you accomplish? You would never, you would, you would have to be in, put in jail." So we leave—left him alone. We didn't say nothing to him. But we saw him in the back working on the street, he was working.

You didn't go back to the house?

Yeah, we went to one of the landlords, landlord. We went and talked to her. But we stayed awhile because we felt very insecure.

Were, were there people already living in your house?

There was no eh, we—I didn't want to go to my house.

You didn't go.

I went to the landlord in the front, but I didn't want to go in. And we stayed awhile and was going—it was terrible that the Jews, the survivors in Poland to be killed on the street from the—called AK, Armiakrajowa

Krajowa.

So I went...

Home army, right?

Yeah, there was uh, very anti-Semitic army, what's, after the Polish—the Poland, eh.

In Ostrowiec, they were killing?

All over in Poland in Ostrowiec too. There was a pogrom in Kielce.

In Kielce. Did you hear about it?

I heard about it. And they were killed, about forty people were killed and I hear the Russian tanks came, otherwise there would have more people killed.

Forty-six.

Yeah. In Kielce and in some other places too, in the big cities. So I went to Warsaw. I went to Warsaw on the kibbutz. We organized a kibbutz. In the train I was going to Warsaw, I was lucky because when I, when I hid when somebody, AK stop in the station to go in with the guns and they see some Jewish people, they would have taken them out and killed them right there. Can you imagine? You're coming home to your own country where you were born and you'd be afraid and people were killing you because you are Jew. [crys] Nobody can imagine this. [pause] And I arrived...

You were with your brother though, right? The two of you together?

Yeah, we came to Warsaw and we.

Now did you think about Palestine?

And I said, if we survive this kind of ??? and there was something going on about Israel, I wanna be, I wanna go—going to be—join the kibbutz. And we joined the kibbutz when we were in Warsaw. In Warsaw we worked in the ghetto. There was, yeah, after the, there was the, there was the Warsaw ghetto was all, it was liquidated, there was no buildings, everything bricks and bricks and bricks. Miles and miles where the—Warsaw was big. And the build...and we, in, in the, but where it was the ghetto they bombed, as, you know, what happened where they, the rest, the people were fighting the Germans.

Mm-hm.

So they flushed ??? in the bunkers and the rest they bombarded. So after the war we came back to Warsaw, we work...we worked in the, to clean the, those bricks. While we cleaned the bricks, somebody came back to the kibbutz and told us, there's some Torahs hidden in the ghetto. They knew exactly where it was. Actually it wasn't a Torahs, it was monies, whatever. It was a bakery, I remember it was a bakery. So we found a lot of money. And then we worked a few months in Warsaw, but we had, we organized to go to Israel, go all the way.

Was there black marketeering in Warsaw?

Yeah, there was black market, there was.

Did the money help?

But I was in kibbutz. You see in kibbutz it mean that you're in kibbutz that means, especially kibbutz I belong was you not supposed to have any money. Everything was like combined in a group.

So you were planning to go to Palestine?

I was planning to go to Palestine with my brother. And we stayed uh, stayed in Warsaw. Organized, yeah, Warsaw kibbutz was organized under Zuckerman. I don't know if you heard about it.

Mm-hm.

He was, he was—he worked—he was in the army, the Polish army as another Jew, as a Gentile, he was the captain, it was the biggest anti-Semitic army. They didn't know he was Jewish. He helped the Jewish people underground in the ghetto. That's where they had the guns organized they were fighting. He was the head of, he was try...getting them the help—guns. So he, after the war he organized Warsaw ghetto—Kibbutz Lohamei ha-getta'ot.

In Israel.

It was in Warsaw. He was the head, organized, he was, he was, 'cause he was a captain in the Polish army during the war, so he. Then after the war ended, he was in Warsaw, it was—he the one organized whatever survivors left to get in and he must have been a Zionist in the beginning, that's why he organized the kibbutz and he came in the evening to us and talked about. So we're in Warsaw and then, how we going to get out from Poland? That's another question. So to get out from Poland they made us that we are Greeks. Nobody to speak a word Polish. And we

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walked like whole group of boys, probably the American Joint made us papers that we are Greek.

Wait a minute, you didn't speak Polish?

Yeah, we spoke Polish, but to get out of Poland to go in to Germany.

I see.

So they had made like papers that we are Greek. And at the time were so many people in different countries say they're Greek wind-up in camps after the liberation in Poland so they allow us to go through. So we went through the borders in Poland, and went to Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia we came, we had to go through underground because we're not supposed to—not legal going to the borders, then to eh, to Germany.

Where in Germany?

Munich. Landsberg, around Munich. Landsberg am Lech. That was where Hitler was...

Yeah.

Oh this camp was...

There was a camp there?

Yeah, it was a big building camps and a lot of from old survivors were there.

A Displaced Persons camp.

Displaced Persons camp yes.

That's where you were?

UNRRA. You heard about UNRRA?

United Nations.

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United, yeah and they helped—they, get to the, get—send us, get us stand up by our feet. But I was in kibbutz there. And kibbutz was eh, I was there a few months in kibbutz, organizing the kibbutz. And they, they, they asked who volunteered to go back to the border, which I was going to Czechoslovakia coming to Germany to kibbutz, to get people, bring them from one place to the other, from Czechoslovakia to Germany. They were came from Poland they came all over. And I, I volunteered in the kibbutz to go back and worked in, on the border, it's called Beriha. And eh, there was, walking through the woods and be...and there was a place was named Selb, there was on German side on the border. And I think it was Aš. It was the other side, Czechoslovakia. ??? Aš. And that, we were living in, we were in a, that group organized for that volunteer for that border, we were in, in the Czechoslovakian side. And every—in the middle of the night, we had to go about three o'clock, we organized the people that want to go through. And I—it was a group going, a long group, one was in front and I was in back and going through the woods and we're going to—in—going to the border to Germany—border. And came in the morning German border—the train, waiting for the train to take them where they're going in land. So the train came in and I jumped on the train in front and it was taking German people were waiting to go in on the train. And I said, I said in German, “Keine nicht eintreten bis unsere Leuten alle sind in.” Don't go in on the train until our people are in. They knew our people were Jewish people. They were afra...the Germans were afraid at that time, after the war. They listened—until our people were sitting down, then they came in. So they and they were going, I had a good feeling you know, you know, that I tell

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them that you go—our people has to go in first and you going to go behind them when you have room. Anyway they—our people went back through the, on the lan...land in Germany. I went back to Czechoslovakia with a few boys begging for. One night we got trouble, going to the border to Czechoslovakian saw eh, the, the guards, the Czechoslovakian guards saw us and they, they—shooting in the sky. So shoot— stopped the whole transport. And they took us from the border back to the military there. Military unit, the Czechoslovakian. They say smelinar. Smelinar mean that people black market, you know trying to move back and forth that borders. You know one recognized me from seeing me around that place and he said, “You are the leader from the—and he hit me right in the face. But that—and then all the people had to take out dollars and everything what they had. There was a lot of. We were, we were organized not to make any black market, we organized people going to, going to border because they going to Israel, because I was volunteering for this job. But there was a lot of people going with the group that had black market, going back and forth. So they had, they had to take everything out, leaving there that uh, that—at that guard point. And they let them go. But they, they didn’t do any harm to us. But I was hit because he said you must be one of the leaders—taking. And we coming back, then after a few months staying there work...working deep snow to boots at winter time, I got sick, in kibbutz. And then they, they sent some other two boys from the kibbutz after they—to relieve us, we went back. So I was sick in that place, sick at the kibbutz. And then we started getting close at Aliya Bet. So the—they were coming at night— even they woke us up, we have to go, leave the kibbutz. And we’re going

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to Ita...Italy, to going load on the ship, going to Palestine. There was no Israel at that time yet.

No, right.

So I—they put, they put me on the, in the one which volunteered. I was doing something for the kibbutz, they put me on first to go on that, first people to go from the group to go to Israel. So I said, “Listen, I’ve got my brother here,” and my brother had already had, he was married already in kibbutz, “and I want to be together. We’re the only two.”

He was married in the kibbutz?

Yeah, he married in Landsberg in the kibbutz. They made a wedding for him.

Somebody he met there?

Yeah, they met in kibbutz, in Warsaw and they went to Landsberg. After that they went back to Germany, so they got—they were married in the kibbutz. And then when uh, where as I told you that we were ready to be—go to Italy and to go to the, the Aliya Bet. So they put me on the first on the list and the uh, the and then I said, “No, I’m not going to go alone, I want my brother and sister will be with me. So the other group from the kibbutz scream, “Ok, Joe fine!” I like—I can go, but I did some work, yeah, I’m a Halutz. But not my brother because he wasn’t, he wasn’t doing sort eh, you know, he was in kibbutz, but he wasn’t Halutz and he shouldn’t go. They want to go, they put on the list instead of. So I said, “If my brother’s not going, I’m not going either.” That’s the way I stayed on. And I was eh, I was sick a very—a few weeks in Germany, very sick. And the kibbutz got

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away from Ger...Landsberg and they went, no? And my brother got out of kibbutz and then he emigrated to the United State.

And now.

So I was—still wanted to go to Israel.

But you were still in Germany.

In Germany.

You were—how were you sick?

I was very sick. I was sick from the bor...bor...where the border is the sickness came back to me.

It wasn't typhus again?

It was worse than that.

Oh, ok.

I got—felt better after awhile. I eh, went eh, in that, to—what, I was still young, I was eighteen years old there. And what are you going to do with? There was something they show—they were, you can eh, for uh, rehabilitation eh, you can learn a profession. So there's letter or radio. I went to radio electronics. And my brother was a tailor working at eh, Landsberg uh, just for himself and then he went—they tell him, told them that he needed, there's a—the Americans were taking people into United States. So he emigrated to United State 1950. And I was still staying in Germany, going to that school at, that school, that radio school. And eh, I wanted still go to Israel, but then I said if I go to Israel and he was going to America, who knows if we're going to see each other. So after awhile I felt

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better and, and we went to school and learned the radio. I came—I was—I went to United States.

Did you and your brother discuss going to Israel or to the United States?

From United States?

Did you talk to him before he, he made the decision to come?

No, he made the decision to come he knew that going to Israel at that time, it was, it was, country just starting and fighting with every. If I were to be maybe sent with group I would have been maybe on the front fighting there. So that's actually. But uh, maybe I was lucky not to go. Who knows. So my brother. He told my sister...in...law, my brother, he said see it's not eh, we're not—we would have gone with you if the other group wouldn't say anything, you would have been, who knows. He said, who knows if you would have been living or what. Because mostly the groups went right away to...

To fight.

to fighting.

Can we stop here for a second...

This is part two of an interview with Joseph Gringlas at his home in Farmington, Michigan. Uh, part two is continued on January 22, 1993. The interviewer is still Sidney Bolkosky.

I'm, let's, let's um, go back a little bit before the war and see if I can um, ask you a few questions about...

Yes.

some of what you already told me. The language that you spoke at home.

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We spoke eh, mostly Jewish around.

You spoke Yiddish.

Yiddish. And that was the problem for me was a kid to go to start school. Is— Polish wasn't good because we spoke all the time as a child and at the p...parents, Jewish—Yiddish, so that, that when I went to school it was a problem for us. And, and you know I remember exactly when the, the teacher were—was uh, mad, he was anti-Semitic too. And he said you eat our bread and you don't speak right Polish.

So you learned Polish in school.

Yeah, I learned Polish at school. But the start was very hard because of that.

So you must have had a Yiddish accent in your Polish.

It uh, it was li....not the accent, Polish accent like a...

Like a...

like Polish eh, speak. So—but then, then later on I, I was better, you know and eh, then starting to getting a hold of more—the, the, the way to speak it. And got to know the, in eh, teachers. They—you know, you could see they were speaking out about. Like he, like I said, you eat our bread and you don't speak...

Mm-hm.

the right eh, Polish. But I—it se...seems to me something was kind of like of, to me, teacher. You know there was always, doing something, anything she want—and one time I never forget that, it was the director of the school and he, his, his birthday was in Pesach. And I was picked the one Jew from the class to go with a group to like address him as for, wish him happy birthday for that director of the

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school. And it stayed on my, my mind that even there was a lot of anti-Semitic going on, the teacher to me was kind of like, liked, liked eh, to, to tell me what to do, and to help out, things what to help out in class and like picking me out for that—going to the director. There was something struck me, something like that. So I kinda feel kinda close to the teacher at that time.

But you never spoke Polish at home. When you came.

Polish no, mostly Jewish.

Tell me about your mother. What was she like?

She was wonderful, wonderful woman. [laughs] You know things you remember, little things like that. In summer, when I went to cheder, you know and she brought me food and drink and you know like, like, like it would be now. It still sticks in my mind that she was wonderful for the children, to take care of the kids. And, and I was the youngest one, it was cheder and she brought eggs because it was quite a few hours. And cheder she brought between lunch, she brought me food. So this—those things you don't forget. Sweet, wonderful woman. Uh, and that time, you know, parent, my mother used to work hard at time, not like now. Washing and everything was very hard. You had to—even water you had to carry in, you know, from the market. Especially, wasn't, it was, life was not, it was not so easy. But they did it and they didn't mind anything, they did it with love.

Do you remember anything else about her?

Beg your pardon?

Anything else about her?

Yeah, I remember she was a beautiful woman too. Dark hair. Beautiful dark hair. And the main, the main thing was like that, like a mother was a, how she made us feel very, very, very good at—in a family together and the food especially was a very good cook too. And I always feel the taste of it eh, the way that the food was wonderful. And uh, and for special holidays and comes a holiday it really takes me down because the eh, Friday night the preparing everything, the challahs and the lighting the candles and you know the holidays it was wonderful. It was like, it felt like, it was looking forward to see that holiday coming. And she made it and the parents made the family exciting to be together.

She ran the household.

She ran the household, yeah.

You said last week you told me she baked challahs on...

Yeah, yeah and, and uh.

on Shabbos. What else did she do?

Aside that she helped out—we had uh, my father was uh, selling shoes in, in market in Ostrowiec and, and we, the shoes were brought, my father brought it from Warsaw, capital. And, and then, it was—that was twice a week, it was market. So my mother helped out too in selling the shoes. And I was a little boy, I, I was interested too. When I came home from school before I went to cheder, I helped out eh, helped out father.

Do you have any other particular memories of any? She—you said she brought you food. You remember that clearly, she would bring you food at cheder. Anything else that you remember? Specific events? Sticks in your mind.

Sticks in my mind I was a kid in, in, in summertime. I, I was sitting in the front of where I was born. And sitting in the summertime I remember I was sitting, she was covering, I was, she was cuddle, she was cuddling me, I was the youngest little child. And we looked out and the sky was red because of the factory in Ostrowiec and suddenly I could see the sky from that, that. And I was sitting with them coming and looking outside. And this eh, I'll never forget it, you know.

What about your father?

My father, my father was a good looking man and eh, he was, he was in business and eh, I was very close to my father because always going to shul on Saturdays. I would go with him and eh, and I was, I was always thinking oh, when I was—every night, would something happen to him I wouldn't be able to exist. I was very close to him. Like eh, like in summertime in vacation was from school I went with my father every year to Warsaw and helped out. And I was very interested in that business. "See," he said to me, "now you going to be in business." 'Cause I was interested in it. And very close. And, and to me, when I was taken away from—I was young, about fourteen years, fifteen years, it tore my—it was like life is, I, it's finished, just, because I had so much love for my parents. And it was, I was taken away from them. That did a lot to me.

W...w...was he the disciplinarian in the house?

He was very, he was the disciplinarian in the house. I eh, usually never—I don't know, never come across that was hitting me, but one time I was hit—I remember, what did I did? I went, I loved very much, I told you, soccer playing. I went to soccer and forget to come home to eat. And I came home, that was it. He, now he was very disciplinarian. You got to do what he tell you to do. But I loved, I loved him 'cause he was very nice, nice man.

Your mother, did she worry a lot?

Yeah, my, my mother was the worry type, right. She's—you know.

What would she worry about?

What would she worry about?

Yeah. [long pause] I mean, you said it was difficult to walk home from school.

Yeah eh, from school was always difficult home because we were hit with stones. And, and, and then and then not enough, from cheder I went home and with the cheder it was right in the market. It was a lot of Jewish people living there. But the church was right in the corner from the market, down, going to the house called ????. It was on Sunday special, I remember and that time Sunday I went for home from the back—my—it was, I got hit mostly that time. Because it's—because when they came out from church that, I don't know, that, in, in Poland in a church, the anti-Semitism came out from the church mostly. Because that's where the youngest generation were, they were told in the church how the Jews are—you should be against the Jews or something like that. So I was, it was uh, a lot of times I got hit, just going home, from the mar...or cheder, going home.

And did your mother worry about that?

Yeah, she was always worried about it, that—you know. That, worried that eh, be afraid of not being safe and, and what's happened here. We just uh, very bad feeling. But uh, still we had our home, our family. We, we got used even though you get used to that. That's the life is. You feel like that that's the whole world is living like that.

Any, any specific moments that you remember with your father, as with the one time with your mother?

Yeah, I remember father—I was, as I said, I was very close and, and uh, and, and my brothers were, I told you, he was not fanatically but he was religious, my father and the younger one, like eh, my brother and me were still going on with the, taking ca...Saturdays and everything. And other, older brothers were just trying to show away from that uh, you know, keeping Shabbos and that, so they was, was—had bad feeling about it too.

Were there arguments?

There was arguments, sure. Arguments worse.

They were more modern.

Yeah, I mean, it wasn't, like. But eh, uh.

You said one uncle was very Orthodox.

Yeah, one uh, my brother's uh, my father's brother—uncle was eh, Orthodox. And every Saturday aft...you know in cheder you, every week you, you learn a different sed...seder. So we—and he was, I mean I came there in the afternoon then—I had to do the whole seder there, everything.

Right.

Yeah and he listened to me and eh, I was, I was very use...good, the school, cheder too. Every uh, Sunday that, when he started the seder I took a few—an hour going through seder and I, I knew already, you know. And uh, and my rabbi used to come to this—to that, to my father when we had this business and said that I'm doing very well in, in cheder. So there was a good feeling that I was doing alright.

You said that his, his beard was shaved.

Yeah, his beard wasn't shaved, it was a short beard.

But your, your uncle, you said...

Oh, my uncle, yeah, my uncle was, my uncle.

And then they shaved the beard.

Yeah, my uncle had a long beard. Grey beard. And uh, when the Germans came in uh, during the war and they caught him on the street and they cut ha...cut off the beard. And after he got very sick about it and he died.

Do you remember seeing him without his beard? Did you see him after that?

I don't—no, I don't remember seeing him. He lived away from us. I don't know.

But I remember always, but I knew what was going on, we heard about it.

And you said you knew your mother's mother.

Yeah, my mother's, my grandmother.

Do you have any recollections of your grandmother?

Oh, she was very sick at that time. And she was living with another aunt, with my mother's sister. And they were—they had a big house and she lived with them. At that time I remember she was very sick.

Did you ever talk to her, do you remember what she?

Uh, not much because she was so old, quite old and sick.

And that was the only grandparent you knew.

Mm-hm.

Um, let me take you ahead a little bit now. You remember, you said it was on a Saturday night, you went back to the factory in Ostrowiec—to Hochofen and you knew that you weren't going to see your family again. What happened before you left? Did you talk to them?

Yeah, that evening that we had a, had a feeling in the house that that's what's going to come. Sunday morning they're gonna take all the Jews out and gonna send them away and I was working at night shift going. So I knew that uh, that was terrible, there was a terrible feeling. I looked at my parents and then I left.

And I had a, exact...I had a feeling that that's it. I won't be able to see anymore.

Did you say anything?

Yeah, we talk about it, but we cou...we couldn't help each other, couldn't do anything about it. That's the first thing—your, your father sees that I'm going away, he's not going to see me and I know eh, I know I'm not going to see him anymore and you can't do anything about it. [pause] It was a uh, like a feeling, a,

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a scary feeling's coming like, you know, you'd be surrounded and you'd be sent away.

So there was no goodbye then. Was it?

No, there was no goodbye or anything. No, not like this. Just, just looking in their, between, look on your faces between your parents, you could se...feel it, that, you know, I went out ??? to the factory.

Um, did you, you were with your brother in the factory though.

Yeah, the—as I told you, my brother was in day shift and after the, the Aussiedlung what you call it, sending away the people, he was on the list. He was there, so they took him. I, I didn't see him 'til next day in the evening, Sunday evening.

And did he tell you what happened?

Yeah, he told me that, he told me what happened that uh, they were sent away. And a lot of people, it was tumult you know in the market a lot of older Jews came out. And they got them out and, and surrounded with Ukrainian with the guns. And uh, and I, I and I was start...when I saw him in the evening I start crying. It was, it must have been a few hours 'til I, I could get myself to quiet down, because I knew what, what happened.

And your brother Yakov? He disappeared?

Yeah, the—my brother, so, he was during the war the soldier went to the war. He, we, we had a lot of friends coming from my hometown that he saw him that uh, the war was over, the fighting was over and we, we counted the days coming, he never came back.

Did you think that you were going to find him after the war?

I, I had a—I would say the percentage of thinking somebody would find him was very slim. But I thought about him more than about other ones because he was eh, life after the fight in, with the Germans. But maybe he got, because a lot of Jewish people went to Russia too. So that's something I hope. Maybe, maybe he saved himself. But never heard from him.

You never found out what happened.

Never. I—we sent uh, during the war even. I—after—when was it, I mean I sent, we sent to Red Cross to find out about him. Didn't get any—nothing.

Any other last recollections of your family life, w...up to the time that you were all separated?

Recollection. Eh, uh, my other brother, he was a tailor, Schloimo. And he uh, mostly I remember for, for Pesach special, he made suits. So, you know and so we just, it was a good feeling that my brother's making a suit for myself, you know and. I always liked to be dressed up nice and. That made me feel that it would be good, that I made a spec...like good at make a special order or something. And, and we and I remember eh, my, my, my, my father, I remember he was dressed up always very neat and my—when, when we used to go out my older, Mendel, my oldest brother they looked like brothers. My father kept himself very young like— young looking. And that we talking about the other, the tailor, even got married before the war. And uh, and he was sent out when they sent all the Jews away. He was sent away because he was working still, he still buy, somebody tailoring. So he—like I did, when I was young, I was trying to get work in like a factory, there

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was something holding on or something then the Germans wouldn't send me regular away. But my older brother... which the Germans, like, like you said, those were used for Germans what made in like ammunition or metal or something they—just what they need. And that my other brother they worked like tailor or any other things. They were taken right away at the Umsiedeln.

Same time...

Same time, yeah.

as your parents.

But I told you about, about my par... I mean after the Aussiedlung was over and my, eh and we were in the factory and then this—we couldn't stay in the factory, there was no place to stay. So they give us uh, like a street we staying and when we came there, a few days after we went there, I would hear that somebody saw my father, my sis... my d... uh, sister, my mother was hiding. They didn't go out they—that Sunday which all the Jews supposed to go out. But they went, sent away, after the few days they were sent away, so I didn't see them. Somebody told me they, a few hours before we came to that street in that little ghetto where they made for the people working on the factory, that somebody saw them. They were sent away.

So they were among the last to go?

Yeah, they, they, they—it was like they were hidden about a few days, about three or four days.

You think they hid in their house? Is that what...

Probably. But uh, didn't have no chance there to go out.

Now let me jump ahead.

Ok.

You, you were put on a train to Auschwitz.

From, from Blizyn.

From Blizyn...

Yeah.

to Auschwitz.

Birkenau.

Um, and you, you said you traveled h...h...hours on the train, in the box car.

Yeah.

And then and you arrived in Birkenau in the day time.

Mm-hm, yeah, it was daytime.

When, when they opened the doors to the box car, do you remember what you thought or what you felt, what it, what it was like to you—suddenly, the doors are open, what did you see? What, what feelings did you have?

The feeling was that, that that's, that's it. You know, we had the feeling that we are going. Altogether feeling, that this is the end, that's the end of our, of our road.

But what was it like when the light came in? I mean it must have been dark in the car.

Yeah, the car was dark but there was some little opening, you know.

And then suddenly the doors open.

Yeah, that would be it.

What did you hear, what did you see?

A lot of noise. A lot of noise. Eh, German, you know, “Raus, raus, raus!” to get out of because you’re packed and it’s hard to get up and you—there’s no room to get out. And with and with uh, with the dogs, you know.

What, what were your first impressions of the...

Impression was, the impression was that uh, that’s, that’s the end of it. That’s the impression because we saw what was going on with SS standing and, and, and a lot of us as we selecting to go on one side or on the other side. So we knew that, we know that there’s something going on with gas chambers.

Did you see the chimneys?

Chimneys, big chimneys.

What did you think the chimneys were about?

Chimneys uh, was uh, we knew that they were burning the corpse.

Was this?

Yeah, the smell was terrible. And at night, at night in the evening we saw mostly red sky from, from the smoke on the red—burning flesh.

You weren’t with your brother at Birkenau? Not in the arrival.

No, no, in, in, in Birkenau I was not, my brother was in Buna, remember I told you.

Buna. So you arrived alone.

Yeah, I arrived alone at—in Blizyn.

Were you with any, was, did you have a friend, someone from...

My hometown? There were some few, yeah.

Did you talk to each other on the platform? Were there lots of people?

Yeah eh, the people on the eh, from the, from the, in the train, I mean that what we, we, cattle train like, called that, it uh, we talking about that, we knew, but whether, it was, we talking about—there was no talk about there's going to be out of it. We talked about another day or so and you'll be gone, you know. There was no talk about, about, of life. It was mostly of death.

Were there prisoners in uniforms on the platform? Do you remember seeing any?

Yeah, there were prisoners already, yeah, for helping out, for the—'cause they're helping other people pushing them where to, different directions, they helped out.

You didn't talk to any of them.

No, we didn't uh, didn't talk to them. But eh, no, in eh, eh, we from Blizyn, you see, we came already, men, so, there was. But other trains came with kids, children. It was terrible. Separating, taking the kids out of mothers' arms. Anyway—torn, torn away like, like it would be like a piece of bread. But at the time when we came we just were men from Blizyn.

While you were in Birkenau, did you, were other, do you remember seeing other trains arrive?

Yeah. I was uh, I don't know, one day I found myself working with the—unloading some big stones from a, from a truck, I don't remember exactly and I saw a train coming in. But a train which come in—came in and I heard it's from Czechoslovakia, that train looked like a passenger train. It didn't look like a train like I went, came in. 'Cause there so, like a passenger train. And they were not cooped like we were. This what I know, this was a long train and they were

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dressed like, probably they knew they going away, taken away, so they got themselves dressed the best what they had. Ah. Was children and family, lot of other, a lot of people were on the train, but it was mostly mixed, children and sisters and brothers, the whole families. They came from Czechoslovakia there. I saw that. And I knew exactly where they going.

Did you watch for awhile? Did you watch the selection taking place?

Eh, no, we—there was a third away from the train come in, I was away when I worked, but I knew the train going by and I saw the people through the windows, it was a big. But it's terribl...a funny thing that they were put on a—like passenger train. And it struck me something, they made them feel like they're going somewhere, going to work.

And you were tattooed?

Yeah uh, eh, after awhile there being there in Birkenau, we, we, we, we, in Appell and we came out a big field. There was thousands, thousands of us and there were, somebody go, went through with a pen. And you give him the arm and I was tattooed.

What was that like?

My number was B2247. I still have it on my arm.

What was that like, being tattooed?

In a way I understood they got to you that uh, you're not going to be sent away because they're going to keep you at work.

You thought that...

Yeah. Otherwise, the people were sent to the selec...uh, the select...send them to the gas chamber. They didn't give them a uniform, they didn't give them no—the tattooing, because they—the people what they're going to keep for awhile they gave them a uniform out, with the stripes. And then the tattooing—had a feeling that for awhile we, we, for awhile we are safe. But not for long, but for awhile...

Did it hurt?

because they use us as a slave labor.

Did the tattoo hurt?

No, it didn't hurt.

It didn't.

No. They stick a pin in the skin.

So you had been through showers.

Yeah.

Deloused.

Yeah, Mm-hm, yeah that, yeah.

Then they gave you uniforms. Then you were in this field and they tattooed you.

Yes.

And then to a barracks.

Then to—back to the barracks. And whatever things to do work. But that's—there wasn't much, working there, like a factory, it wasn't there. The only thing there was, when we were sent to Buna, that, then there was work to do.

What was the barracks like?

The barracks was uh, long barracks. They were put togeth...it was like, between, it was like from wood made out to sleep, to lay down on that barracks. And, and you couldn't—you had to be so close to each other, there was not much room to stretch out. It was like laying next to each other, so.

More than one on each.

It was two levels, you know, one on top of the other one.

Did you sleep next to somebody else?

Yeah, I, I remember one time, it was at night and I don't know, you couldn't sleep because you were hungry. You couldn't sleep. So the SS came in. It was—they didn't put the light on. So he had a flashlight and next to me he was pulling by the legs out of the—from the—from that—where he was laying and pulled him down. And I saw him, him taken out of the barracks. Picked up—like a s...each one, so I was next to him. Who—how, how close can you get? He pulled him out of my—of the line, next to me.

Why did he pull him out?

Pulled him out to take him to the crema...crematoria.

To the crematoria.

Yeah.

Just...

Just like that.

Just like that.

Yeah. Dis...distract me and I never forget.

Um, you, you became a pupil of the Kapo.

Yeah. Mm-hm, pupil, that's right.

This was at Buna?

In Buna.

And...

Kapo.

One of the things you didn't tell me is a story about a letter that, um...

Yeah.

you.

How do you know about it?

I read your son's.

Anyway. There was, there was going on a little ???, you know, because the G...eh, the German Kapos had connection in the Buna, in the factory, with civilians. And I carried out a letter. If I would have been caught.....there was, they caught some people of those going back to that Buna factory, from the factory back to the. The barracks was not the factory—you had to march away from a few kilometer.

Okay, which, which barracks? Was this in Auschwitz?

This was in Buna.

From Buna to...

From the factory to—back to the...

to the...

to barracks.

To the fact...

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There was the camp, the marching...

the Buna camp.

Yeah, Mm-hm.

Ok, Monowitz camp.

Mm-hm. I carried a letter and I, I, you know—why did I carry the letter is because that Kapo gave me food. I got uh, it was on the red wing, it's for politic, you know.

So he was a communist really.

Yeah and uh, he gave me some food and he told me—asked me if I can do that. I did it. That was foolish. I could have been killed—hanged.

Were others caught? Did you see them?

Yeah. There's some caught and hanged.

Um, what would have happened if you'd refused? What would he have to done to you?

You know, you were so hungry, if anybody could, tried to give you some food, you don't think it's gonna—what's going to happen to you because you're hungry. So.

You did tell me that what you used to think about sometimes was that it would be better not to wake up in the morning.

Yeah, that eh, in Birkenau it was, you always said oh, hope that you don't wake up would be—this would be wonderful. That we—even though you know what's happening to you, just fade out. But, didn't happen.

At age—you were sixteen when you were in, in Birkenau?

In, in Birkenau? I was about, yeah, fifteen, sixteen.

Um, you had already seen lots of people hung—shot?

Mm-hm.

Beaten?

Yeah. I was working, I think it was in Buna. Some boys, somebody came out, Kapo, with a shovel, over their heads. It's like—killed them with instant.

When that happened, what, what did you do? I mean did you look? Did you ignore it?

No eh, you had to work. If they came in, maybe somebody didn't work at that moment, you just would do it.

And you saw it.

Yeah, I saw it right next, not far from me.

And you just, and you just kept on working.

You just kept, you kept working, nervous, when you saw what happened, you thought maybe it's going be next—you. But it did, most of the time you saw when they came in, you saw somebody at the time not doing the work what he's supposed to do. That was it.

I get the feeling that, that now, that bothers you. That you did that.

Oh sure.

Can you tell me why?

Why? I guess uh, I guess going through a hell like this, you can't get out of it. It's impossible to be like healed that you should forget everything, you should. You,

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like you can start—okay, we came to this country, we—wonderful country, we feel good concept, but something missing. Something missing. You have no, you have no family and you went through hell. You, you, your nervous system is, is not the way it should be. Everything you think bothers you—everything you hear something going wrong it bothers you. It's, I think that's from that...

From that experience.

experience.

One other thing that I noticed in your, in your son's essay that you, you didn't tell me too much about, was the arrival at Gleiwitz and the story about you...

Latrine.

you and your brother went to the latrines.

Yeah, I, I think I told you about it.

But tell me more about it. What was it like there?

At eh, in Gleiwitz eh, the, after that night from, that's from Blizyn I think. It was coming from

From Blizyn to Birkenau...

Birkenau.

Birkenau to Buna.

Yeah, yeah, when, when the Birkenau was liquidated and they, they, they want to accumulate all the people from all camps around. Not just was—Birkenau was someplace else. And that, there was barracks in that Gleiwitz. And, and we opened up the barrack to get in and we saw you'll get in, you'll never get out,

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because one was stamping on top of the other one. So I went and I stayed in latrine.

What...

Lat...uh, in the bathroom.

What was it like in there?

Oh, it was terrible. It was all that urine in it and everything, it was terrible. And you stand in, just like close to the front to get some fresh air. It was, I, I think I must have stayed there all night long like this, because you couldn't get in the barracks—there was—people were stamping one on top of the other.

So you were standing in the urine and excrement and all of that.

That's right. And the, and the next morning, I was, I don't know how long we been in Gleiwitz, a couple days maybe or something and uh, next morning they were out very early in the morning, about six o'clock, they came in with, with the guns, SS. There were soldiers too. Any time they needed to, so many people to take care, they had soldiers with them.

Wehrmacht?

The SS.

Wehrmacht soldiers.

Wehrmacht.

Yeah.

Yeah. And they were running with the guns and I told you my brother got hit from the back with the gun, he was bleeding. And we—they were loading us on

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those half train, which took, we went to Nordhausen, two, two weeks that I told you about it.

What did it feel like? You came out of the latrine, you were standing in this...

Yeah.

human refuse.

Mm-hm.

And you didn't take a shower, you didn't bathe.

No.

What must, what was it like?

It—at that time that they didn't, before, when they were still, when I was in camp, they give you a soap to clean, there was something you could do, clean yourself.

But that time in Gleiwitz was, it was a chaos. So it was—no, no cleanliness at all.

Uh, not—so you left the latrine in Gleiwitz and then right to the train.

Yeah, the train. Order us to the train. The train was half-trains, I told you and I told you quite about it.

The story about throwing the food down.

Yeah, Mm-hm.

I—last time we finished um, you had already gone back to Ostrowiec?

Mm-hm.

Then to Warsaw?

Yeah, after the war.

After the war. And wound up in Landsberg.

Yeah, after got we back, yeah, I was—Landsberg in Germany.

And tell me about, this was a Displaced Persons camp.

Yeah, Landsberg was a lot of eh, like big brick barracks, brick buildings. There was and there was the UNRRA called. They supplied food.

From the American military?

American military, yeah.

What was it like in, in Landsberg? It was a camp.

It was a camp, yeah. But at least you could get out of it! You could walk down the street eh, you know and you wanted, you went to other camps to find out maybe you going to find somebody you know from your hometown at Landsberg. We stayed there quite a long time, in Landsberg. 'Til we got out.

And you were...

I was in kibbutz that time.

You were with your brother?

Yeah.

And your brother was now married.

My brother got married in, in Landsberg in kibbutz.

What, what, what was, what was the wedding like?

Oh, the wedding was really unbelievable. You know uh, they—the boys and girls went to the villages, brought flowers for the wedding and they, they had special food prepared, for the evening food. And eh, my, my sister [in...law?] had an uncle still living after the war. And that uncle, I eh, talked to him, he was in Blizyn in the, working in the, Blizyn in the, in the furniture and boxes—so I met him there. And uh, the wedding was a lot of people and a lot of songs and very, it

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was a happy occasion, to see that after war, what we went through with somebody, my brother got married and. Very, good feeling about it.

Was there more?

A lot of more what?

I mean what, just, just the wedding, what. Was it altogether happy?

Yeah, it was a happy occasion. It was uh, it was a happy occasion and still you felt. [phone ringing]

It was a happy occasion.

It was a happy occasion, dancing, you know.

But...

Yeah, for us.

you were saying, but still what?

But still it was that you had a feeling that we don't have our family to share with it. But uh, and another, in another way I said—I felt—listen I was a lucky one to survive with a brother because some families there was none left. So it was very close, my brother.

You've had lots of happy occasions since.

After the war?

Yeah. I mean you had.

I wouldn't say happy occasions, you know, but there were some nice occasions.

But I mean since then you've had children, your children are married, you've had.

Oh, you mean after coming to United States? Yeah.

Uh, are they also the same? They're happy, still there's something not altogether.

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You mean now? Being with the family? We are very happy.

When you go—when you went to—when you're at a wedding, when you were at your daughter's wedding.

Yeah.

Um.

I was very happy.

You were very happy.

I felt.

As you should have been. But what, does anything come back, the way it did for the other wedding, I mean?

Yeah, always the wedding I was happy in, in a certain, my way, I said my parents didn't live to see that. But like, you know, like uh, a grandchild, getting married.

It was always in my mind back of that. You, you can't, you can't forget it, you, that you have had somebody, you're not al...you had, you were some other family and you don't have them with you, when you need—when you need them. When you want there to be a. So it's always in mind about it. Even when you are happy, but still back on, it brings you back there.

Um, let's go back to Landsberg. I keep jumping around, my fault. Um, how long were you in Landsberg?

A few years.

A few years?

Yeah, Mm-hm.

And what did you do, day to day? Were you working?

What we did uh, I have to get back—my memory back. We worked the kibbutz and we drove to get—pick up bread eh, for the, for the kitchen to—you know there's a lot of people in kibbutz. It was like, things to do, you know.

You were still with the Beriha, is it?

Yeah, it was eh, I was a volunteer to go to Beriha. That was going to Czechoslovakian border and bringing whatever children from Russia, of all the other countries, Poland they came, take them over to the bor...border to Germany from Czechoslovakia.

This is while you were in Landsberg still.

Yeah, this is from. No, from Landsberg I was sent to the, to Czechoslovakian border.

Oh, I see. Well let's go back to Landsberg.

Yeah.

So on a day to day basis you would bring in supplies for the camp.

Supplies, supplies for the camp, yeah.

Um, would you go out into, into Landsberg, into the town?

Oh yes, we went to town, went to movies, we, we...we went uh, to see how everything is.

What was it like being in Germany?

[slight pause] Eh, felt how to be in Germany, no we didn't felt good to be in Germany. But it, it, it didn't feel good that we were in Germany and see the, our, our—the people what uh, were, were, were, killing us and were not, wanted to

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destroy us and then we were after liberation, to be with them. But we thought this, we're gonna get out, we're not going to stay. After a few years we're going to emigrate to Israel or to United States, so.

Did you talk to Germans?

Yeah, we talked to them. Some of them were nice, but mostly they, we'd talked to them, they were, they'd tell you that they didn't see the things. ????. They wanted to show that uh, they didn't know what's going on. But we know they knew what's going on.

You said—in your son's essay, you said that you had met an American soldier who was of German...

Yeah.

ancestry.

There was—this—that's first uh, I mean American, for that first one that I, after the liberation and he said to me, I didn't know, yeah, I saw—I knew he was American soldier. He said, "I, my parents are from Germany, I came up from German Saxon..."

Is that what he said?

But I'm ashamed to be, I'm telling you, I, I came—but I'm ashamed about it, when I see what, what, what's going on in the, in that country."

You had no plans to stay in Germany then?

No, no plans at all.

Did anyone?

Beg your pardon?

Did anyone that you knew?

Yeah, there some uh, not I knew, but I heard of some people staying in, open up business. Like they're still there, you know.

Mm-hm.

I couldn't believe it myself. Who would want to stay in a country what suffered, people were suffering so much. I can't still—I can't grab eh, that, that somebody would want to open a business or do—make a normal life to be in a country like this. It doesn't—it turns me off completely.

Or Poland either.

Beg your pardon.

Or Poland either. Who uh, would want to go back to Poland?

Yeah eh, in Poland. Poland was not—mostly people in Poland after the war is, is old people, older people, they're sick people. But in Germany it's a different story. I don't think the, the Jewish will open up business in Poland there's no way. But in Germany the life is a little bit, the economy is better and some Jews staying on and making a life of it there. But eh, the way now, what ha...happened, recently about that you can see that the Germans didn't learn the lesson. They still— a lot of them. Still, it'll take a long time, many, many generations to clear what they did.

Um, you were in Landsberg a few years, with your brother. You were both.

Mm-hm.

Did you decide you were going to stay together and not...

Yeah.

separate.

Yeah it's—we, yeah, I told you about we were supposed to go uh, away to Italy, on, on the Aliyah?

Uh-huh.

I told you about it. Do you want me to repeat it?

Yes.

And uh, it was a couple years we stayed in Germany, in Landsberg. And then finally it was—I think it was 1947 because uh, the, Israel became a nation in 1948, right? So in '47, the—it was called Aliya Bet and they would send peoples going out of Landsberg going to Italy and then to a ship, ships, ill...illegal ships, to uh, eh, to Israel, to Palestine at that time. And I was called at the first because I was in Beriha I was called, the first one. So I said I'm not going to go by myself, I want my brother. And my brother went ahead. There was a man, there was a sister—had a sister and she—so the other one, my brother was not a Halutz. And the other, other Halutz was screaming, no, no, they're not, they're not going to go on the, on that trip because they're not so—first you have to choose the Halutzim. You know, volunteers.

Pioneers.

Pioneers. So, so they put, took him away, out of the li...of the, the list to go, my brother and sister-in-law and they put other ones on there. I said, "Without them, I'm not going either." That's the way I stayed on. And they, after a few years they emigrated. There was an opening to go to United States. And my sister, my

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brother, my brother and sister were—went to, to United States. And I stayed on for, I went, I continued my education, radio electronics in Germany.

You were still in Germany.

Yeah.

But you had, then you planned to come to the United States to be with.

Yeah, I planned to, but I.

Where and where did they come, your brother?

My brother came to—in Portland Oregon. It's funny, it's uh, and I supposed to go to Portland, Oregon too. But I had uncles and my mother's brothers, I told you three brothers living in Detroit. So uh, awhile I was, it was a year in Portland, Oregon. And the situation when he came this country, it was kind of—it was, you know, working was not—jobs getting. So, a cousin was living in, in Landsberg and told him to, to come down to Detroit. I mean, a, a cousin living in Detroit and called him—he called him to come down—to move to Detroit,

From Portland.

It would be better life. 'Cause he has a factory, for people more getting a chance to work and...

How did he go...

getting a job.

How did he go to Portland then, what?

How did he go to Portland? Eh, people were, you know, coming to United State. Each, each, coming, each, I mean, I mean, person was eh, was supposed to go a certain place. They didn't put all the people in one place in United States. They

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sent them to Detroit, to New York, to Portland. See he was, but they, they, I guess they.

Did he need an affidavit from somebody?

Yeah, oh, he came—went through the embassy and everything. Yeah, not, but they, he was su...supposed to go to De...to Portland Oregon. And it was, I don't know how they did it. So and so, when I was supposed to go a year later, I was supposed to go to Portland, Oregon too. But meanwhile, I didn't know, I thought he was still in Portland, Oregon. But when I came to Detroit eh, Detroit, to uh, when I came to New York, when I came to United States, they stopped me going to Portland because there was a telegram, my brother sent telegram they—that I should be sent to Detroit instead of to Portland to Portland, Oregon because he was already at that time, he moved to Detroit.

Whe...when your brother left Landsberg, was that difficult?

It was difficult for me, yeah, it was.

When you said goodbye...

I told you, at that time I was, I didn't know if I'd be able to see him too, you know. You never know what's going to happen, see. But he was older, he was married and I guess he wanted to make another life already came to United States.

Must have been difficult for him too.

Hm?

Must have been difficult for him too.

Yeah.

'Cause you were, you had determined not to be separated.

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Yeah. Mm-hm, but.

So then there was another reunion in Detroit.

In, in Detroit, yeah.

What did you do that one year in Landsberg? Uh, you went to school...

I went to school.

got an education.

Electronics, you know.

Uh, but you were all alone.

Yeah, I was alone. And then I was sent uh, went to a different camp though. I was in Essling in Stuttgart. That was a, that was a, like a rehabilitation called center and I learned radio electronics. And then I—we—sent to Passau, around border with Austria. Went there, a year there. All electronics, working there.

Was this through the Army?

Eh, no, this was ORT school.

ORT.

Yeah, ORT. Those are the—those were the school that, that supplied everything for education for electronics. And we had uh, I mean the engineers was Germans. They told kinda stories, how during the war how they were told they win the war they're gonna, everyone's gonna have villages and living like kings.

Did you exchange stories with them?

Yeah, we exchanged.

Did you tell them where you were?

Ah, they knew exactly.

They did.

They did.

You didn't make friends with them? Or did you make.

Not eh, just speaking to them, but not

You were with other Jews. Were you with other Jews?

Yeah. There were other boys.

Uh, so you had friends there.

Yeah, Mm-hm.

And then you decided you, you word came to come to Portland to the United States.

Yes. But uh, at the time my brother left I think I still, my mind was to go. I wanted to go to Israel. But then when he decided to go to United States I say, if I want to—I'll go to Israel and never see him. 'Cause I, my heart was to go to Israel. But then I felt—I got only one, only one left, my family. That's, that's why I decided after awhile, join him, United States.

So you came to New York, got the telegram?

Yeah, they got, it's called a u...a, for new American organization. We're Jewish. Hadassah. Hadassah.

Mm-hm.

And they had telegram already, they should stop me, not going to Portland Oregon. And they put me on a train to go to Detroit.

At this point you were, how old? Nineteen, twenty?

Let's see, twenty something, twenty. That was in 1951. But, 1951. Twenty-four, twenty-three.

So 1951, so you would have been in Germany for, close to five years.

Yeah, Mm-hm.

So you came to Detroit and when—and you arrived by train from Detroit. Was it hard to ride on trains?

Was it hard to ride on train?

Aft...I mean after your experience.

On the trains? No, I knew this is another life. This—it wasn't. I, I—the feeling was still I'm alone, you know, funny feeling. But I knew I'm gonna see my brother. And uh, the strange, new with. Before yeah, before eh, I know, before eh, coming to United States in the same school I took uh, radio, radio electronics, I took English too. So it was a little bit easier for me when I came to this country. I could speak the language a little bit, then couldn't get lost.

So at this point you could speak English, German...

German, a little German.

Yiddish.

Yiddish.

Polish.

Polish, yeah.

Hebrew?

Hebrew, yes some Hebrew.

Do you still speak all these languages?

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Eh, not, not fluently. I would say if I, I would say eh, going to learn a language, I wouldn't be hard, like He...Hebrew, because I got the, the basic, I knew a lot of things in it. But if you put me through, I could learn fast.

When you were in the kibbutz did they teach you Hebrew?

Yeah, it was mostly Hebrew.

Tell me what happened when you got to Detroit. You arrived at the train station.

I'm trying to draw it, I was eh, in the [pause] social service.

Jewish Social Service.

Social Service.

Yeah.

Got me a room to stay. They paid for it.

Did your brother meet you at the train station?

Yeah, the brother and my aunt who came down.

So there was another, another reunion with your brother.

Yeah, Mm-hm. And uh, I was just, nice—sometimes like raincoat that and they thought and my aunt, the family thought I coming down, who knows who was coming down from Europe. Of course being German after war, you knew it, said life was, was starting to get normalized so and we came down and in Detroit. It was a reunion but then what happened—we saw my family, it was uh, my family, my mother's family, my mother's brothers, yeah and uncles were here and they all talking, talking. Telling the whole story. And it's, it, it was terrible, telling the, whole thing what we went through.

Did they want to hear it?

Yea...some, they want to hear, but eh, ah, it's a lot of things. It's hard to talk about, the family wasn't.

They didn't want to hear too much, is that. Did you want to tell them the story?

Yes and no. I—it felt that somebody wants to hear you, what happened, went through. It's, it, I wanted—yeah I was, at the beginning, you know, not uh, going through all of it, but just telling how we eh, to go, how we went through was the worst. But I don't, I think it, it didn't go through. It d...it's, they thought that this couldn't be possible to be like that. Im...impossible.

What kind of reactions did you get—if you'd started to tell them a story—what, what—how did they react to you? Not just the family, but anybody in the United States when you first arrived here?

Well mostly was the, telling the story you didn't tell the people what—were, we told, usually people like want to know from other, like the fami...or other people wanted to know, you told them the story. They were, some were very good listen. And they were sorry what happened but, what can you do?

So you did talk about it.

Yes. And at the beginning, when I came, but not. Just because, eh. Not because, I—when they ask you what, they were, some people were eager to hear, listen. But went on, how did you survive because it's, nobody could feel that you could survive something like that.

Did it make you feel better to talk about it?

It was—yes and no, you know. It's—I don't know, terrible, it was feeling that, after awhile telling that's, what ki...what happened to you, what—how you would have want to telling the stories about yourself. It wasn't bad. In a way feeling, it's coming out a little of yourself, telling that but—a mixed feeling.

Mixed feeling. So you stopped talking about it.

Yeah, stopping. After awhile we stopped talking and I went, I went to work.

Did you talk to your brother about it?

Oh always.

Did you exchange—you exchanged...

Yeah, Mm-hm. Yeah, I was, this, with this, with my brother, I mean we came to family and the family, we talked about it.

And when you came to Detroit, so you—Jewish Family Service helped...

Helped out, they...

The Jewish Vocational Service. Did they get you a job?

Yeah, Vocational Service uh, about a job getting.

So where did you work?

I worked in neighbors' called Rosenfeld Electronics. Eh, they sold appliance and I was, I was still not telling eh, mostly It was radio in Germany so we came starting television, so we just like a beginning.

Mm.

And I worked eh, going on antennas, the ropes for putting on.

And w...were the agencies helpful, I mean...

Yeah and then he had to go, like social service go every, every few weeks just discussing how things progressing.

For a counseling.

Yeah, Mm-hm.

Do you remember the counselor's name? Do you remember the name of the counselor?

Name, name, I can't eh, those. I'm very bad at names and, uh.

A woman?

I remember her name.

A man or a woman?

Women, mostly women, women, yeah.

Not just this one person, several different people.

There's a young, this was a young uh, girl. She was work in the office that, from the Jewish Social Service. And then after awhile there was an older woman and she was, you know, she was going through how you—how we doing with, helping out, whatever. We need a lot of help coming to this country. Especially we didn't have any financial things and I—that was a wonderful thing that somebody took care of those people.

Did any of them ever ask you—what—you didn't talk to Mrs. Foyer did you, a woman named Foyer?

Mrs. Foyer, yeah I know, Ms. Foyer we eh, we always went with me to, I mean that was later on, we...

Later.

good ??? operation.

Right.

Ms. Foyer took a lot of...

Did any of those counselors talk to you about your experiences? Did they want to hear about that? The Jewish Family Service people. The, um...

Not much.

They didn't want to know.

Not--they didn't want, they probably hate reading about it, but in that, but, eh.

But they wanted to know what was going on now...

Yeah.

and how you were coping.

Yeah, how you progressing, to getting to your life, normal life.

So how did you meet people here? Did they help? Did you meet other Jews?

Eh, met, but I mean eh, mostly with the family, uh. It was good feeling because my brother was here. It felt like, you know, you go in the house, you felt something like, it remind you of your home, you know, you had somebody from your home. That was a good feeling.

Did you live in the same house?

Not—no. I lived in a different—I had my own, different room. A boarding—that what—was social service.

They found an apartment,

Yes.

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a room.

On Elmhurst I remember it was.

Um, near the Jewish Community Center.

Mm-hm. Yeah, the Jewish Community Center was at that time on Woodward.

Woodward and Lester?

Right, not far from Elmhurst.

Yeah, not too far. But we took buses. We went always by bus, we want to go some place.

Mm-hm. Then what?

Then what? After, after working in, in, in television, helping, I learning about television work, antennas, out on the roof, putting on and eh. So I saved myself some money and got my first car. 1953. It was a Chevrolet. It was a good feeling. It was, that you co...eh, got some few dollars, accumulate. And I got in and, and I—you and bought a car. And uh, before that I learn in a high school. I went to high school at, in eh, continuing English, learning and also taking eh, to learn how to drive a car. If, I remember the first time. I was really nervous ??? in high school. I went to uh, Cass Tech.

Oh.

Yeah and there was eh, I took some classes about driving. And they took me right away on the car on a busy street. It was funny.

So you finished high school here.

Yeah, I finished, I went to eh, eh, in English. Continuing night school in uh, electronics in Cass Tech.

And when did you meet your wife?

Um, that was 195...end of '56. I was uh, staying, I was eating, you know, usually mostly go eat delicatessen store. It was on Dexter I think it was. Went uh, Lefkov...Lefkovksy I think's the name, I don't know if it's the right name. And it was summertime. I went out—it was trees around and just standing around shade, just looking around. And I knew eh, my wife's family, I knew and because a friend of Louis Kane lived on Montray and, and, and my wife's aunt lived next to him.

Ok, Louis Kane is also...

Louis Kane, Mm-hm.

is a friend—a survivor friend.

Yeah, uh-huh.

He was in Dora also.

Yeah, he was in, yeah, Dora.

Did you know him in Dora?

We didn't know, no. Just meet him here—started talking.

Met him here and started talking, I see.

So and I used to go to Louie, was great, as a friend, to the—going out and movies and some places. So I used to come in their house and, and my wife's aunt live in next door neighbor. And I was—I told you at the restaurant there, I was standing outside. And this, my wife's aunt with her going through, walk, walking through the street. And, and I say hi to her and, and cause I knew her and she didn't listen to me. My—really eh, my wife. And she was young, much younger than me and I

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said, I mentioned, I said, “You going to be alone, then I’ll ask you for a date.”

But then I had my aunt—her aunt saying, try to go, should call her up and. So that’s where we starting. We went out and we went dancing and fall in love. And we started a family, we got married.

And two children.

We had two children. Larry, my son and Marcy, my daughter. And uh, we give— tried to give them best education.

Now who—which is older?

Eh, Marcy’s older. Two and half years older.

Ok, when Marcy was born, what went through your mind when she was born?

Was born—she was in, born in December, it was very winter, it was eh, it was snow outside and I took off the day from work. It was a wonderful feeling that I get that we have a daughter. It was, that—nobody could think that we could be alive and, and make a family. Thi...this is, it’s just like a dream. We never, we never thought it’s going to come true. But it came true and we had a family, starting a family where my daughter was first child born. And after two and a half years, we had, we had a son, Larry. And they’re two wonderful children.

Same feelings with Larry, I’m sure...

Yeah.

when he was born.

Larry was special, another thing a boy! It was a bris, you know.

And, and at the bris. W...w...um, you had a bris. Were there a lot of friends?

A lot of, yeah.

Relatives?

Relatives. My wife has got a big family you know eh, a lot of, you know, survived by hiding in Czechoslovakia. But eh, my family's mostly the brother and the cousins, you know.

And did—when you came here did you make friends with, with mainly survivors?

Yeah, I make close friends with uh, Louis Kane, he was a close friend.

And others?

And Louis Kane got married I was the best man at his wedding. So we would, yeah, we get—made some friends.

So at your wedding and at the bris and uh, were there lots of survivors?

Yeah, a lot of survivors. That's the only thing you can—you could invite people, is the survivors and.

What do you think the feeling was? I mean obviously people were very happy. But what kinds of, what kinds of things did people talk about at the, at the wedding, at the bris? I mean when, when you got married, did you remember your brother's wedding for example, in Landsberg?

Yeah, I remember, yeah, when I got married and—as I said, my wife's family were quite a big family. And uh, that wedding was a beautiful wedding with everything, the orchestra, with food—best food. It was a good feeling to, to live like a normal life like, to be in a country like United States. Uh, and talking to families in—it was a lot of fun.

L...I...let me start another track and then we'll come back to talking about your grandchildren, as, as well as your children. Um, your experiences, did they affect the way you lived your life afterwards? Day to day for example.

It was aff...I guess, It must affect them too. You know with Larry, I don't know if you heard about. Larry thought uh, in school he didn't want to bring, bring in some friends because he thought I, I don't speak the English quite well, so. And then he found out that why, what, what happened, that we, we weren't born in this country, we came from Europe. And then he found out little by little what we went through, you know.

Did you tell him? Well, obviously you told Larry.

Yeah it—sometimes talking with, especially when my brother came we started talking. They hear, you thought they don't hear, but they listen to, but they hear what's, what. So they got some, got a feeling what happened and probably.

Until Larry asked you about it...Until Larry asked you, when he was at the University of Michigan, about your experiences, had you ever sat down with either of the children?

Not, not eh, you mean, in general not much, but for just some—telling some stories we went through but, you know. 'Cause I didn't want them to, nothing to, happy things to tell them and I might cause them to be—feel bad about it, so. Just in general, not, not too long to sitting down and talk about it. But then later on, about uh, five years later, I guess they learn a lot from other people and that's going on—went on. Reading books. So he, one time he said, “Dad why don't you sit down and write, write about your story.”

Was it hard to talk about it? Is it hard to talk about it?

Is it hard to talk? It's hard to talk about it, yes, because it's, it's, it's not something, a story to tell which is very, how do you say, agono...pleasant, to talk about it, so. Especially talk to your own children. It, it's, it's not—it's very hard to tell.

Um, but you told him. You gave him.

Yeah.

And Marcy too.

Mm-hm.

You talked to her as well?

Yeah, sure.

Did she hear it from Larry?

She heard from Larry, of course.

Um, w...when—is there anything during, during the course of a normal day that might remind you of something that happened during the war, that you see? A train, a chimney.

Yeah. Oh sure. It, it reminds you a lot.

Like, like what for example?

When you, especially when you go to cemetery or other things when...

Mm-hm.

and when you—especially seeing a lot of, even when you wa...put on the television news and you see the crime going on. It just brings you back to people

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suffer—went through. You know, it brings all—it's, it's always with you, it's. I don't think it can ??? your heart.

So, I mean it obviously doesn't dominate your life, but it affects some of what.

It eh, it's good to be busy, you know. It's eh, good to be—keep your mind busy and. Because if you don't, most of the time if you have too much time it comes to you back. Could feel, some...even you're married and you have a family, still there's a loneliness and that you lost the—it's, you know, if they say life goes on, but, it goes on but this doesn't go away.

Did your children ever ask about grandparents, about their grandparents?

Yeah, they ask.

When they were young?

Mm-hm. Ask, yeah, but they notice that there's no—when they understood some that what happened to my family they knew what happened to their grandparents, they're gone.

But I mean when they were younger, did they ever ask you why we don't have grandparents, or?

I can't, I don't remember if they ask, I never hear them asking but they—later on they understood that what happened and got the knowledge what's went on, they understood what happened to their grandparents, their uh, grandparents. The, they, they went with friends from United, from school, like going special occasions that other families. They knew that they have grandparents and when, in our family they didn't see, they didn't have the grandparents from my family.

Or aunts or uncles.

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There were some uncles still alive and they came, so they saw them I'm sure. On my mother's side. Still cousins there in Detroit. But I don't know. There's a distance. It's uh, well it's—but I think it's uh, all, all bad occasions, that's all I see. There's—how I can explain, there's not a—it's not a cousin you sit down and talk about it, you tell, there's no feeling about.

Because they weren't there.

Hm?

Because they weren't there?

No, I'm talking about the cou...American cousins, which didn't know, going through that.

But they don't have any feeling for it.

I don't think so.

Because they weren't there, right?

And I think that the parents, some people, even strange people, strange people, which is not family, from other people went through and they and they helped a lot out, cause. You know, talking, it's not, it doesn't have to be a family to be, to be eh, close or get to feelings about it. Other people which are, some of—strange people who sometimes show that, that they're very sorry about it and they feel bad about it, what happened.

Why do you think they don't have any feelings for it?

Why? I don't know, it, it, it's a big long story. When I was a child I remember my brothers, my mother's brother eh, it was strange. I mean there was no closeness at all. So when I came to Detroit didn't—feeling wasn't so good, 'cause I was—

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remember. A lot of thi...I remember even going to school. We're going in, in Germany school, about electronics and there was from ORTs came people say, "Do you have anybody in the United States? Maybe should help to get— something." I don't think there was, no there was no answer back. So, I don't know, this. Certain families have no feelings, you know that. There's, so.

But people in general who don't respond sympathetically to the story, who don't want to hear about it or whatever...

Yeah.

whether they're family or not family, why do you think they don't want to hear about it? I mean it...

No, mostly, mostly wouldn't show that they don't want to hear about it. Mostly if they ask questions they want to...

If they ask, yeah.

hear about it.

Um, uh, I, I was struck last time we talked that you emphasized what the, what the value system under the Germans was. You either worked or you died. If you didn't work then you weren't worth, you weren't worthy of life somehow. Is that correct?

About the German people?

When you, when you lived, when the Germans came to Ostrowiec and then every, every subsequent...

Oh there was...

experience. If you didn't work, you were done. Right? For example when you were in the...

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Eh, before that—before, I mean right after uh, they came in, they took you to work to helping them cleaning the streets, snow eh, removal. For their own—for the military, something helping out. But they let you go. They, you can get—got back to home. They always took you. And they, they were always coming in looking for Jude. We had—sometimes we were hiding in closets. They were looking and some of the Poles gave up too, a lot of Jews. So those, but they took you to work that time was not, but you know that you're going to come back. And then later on we hear that they're taking groups away to labor camps. Before that big things, that big—sending to Auschwitz, they took to labor camps. Like in the wars, they took them to dig ditches. We knew it, but we knew that they didn't, never came back. So they were, terr...there the family lost ??? people. But then later on they starting to eh, taking all the Jews out and sending them to all the camps. That was the, they liquidated the Jewish people in Europe.

But you, but you seemed to know that as long as you could work, you had a...

Yeah.

chance to survive.

It eh, I felt that as long as you're working they're going to use you out. They, then you're going to stay—live awhile.

And you said that after the x-rays, when they...

Yeah.

didn't take you out to work anymore, you thought that was it.

That was it, yeah.

That, so that system of either you work or you're, or you're dead.

Yeah.

Do you think that you carried that with you after the war, that work—you said keeping busy was.

Yeah, keeping busy you forget about your, your problem. You put yourself in, your life. Like, I go—like taking class and, and painting, water colors. It, it keeps your mind busy, especially when you're retired, you know, you got so much time, you know.

But when you first came to the United States, did you feel like you had to work, work, work?

Yeah, oh yeah, I uh, you want to—first you want to go to work, you know you have to do something to make a living. So I went—like I learned a profession in electronics. So yeah, I wanted to work. It was—but still a lot of times, there was still depressions and uh, it was, it was not a smooth life.

Did you have nightmares?

Hm?

Do—did you have nightmares? Do you have nightmares?

Yes.

Still?

Oh yes.

What kinds of nightmares?

Oh just like, like the camp, like it was. But not often. Once in awhile. Probably when you talk a lot about it. Then it comes back.

I know. I know. [pause] Tell me about your grandchildren.

My grandchildren, I think this is, this is the best thing in life to have grandchildren. My daughter has two, two children. Boy who eh, Jake, after—he was named after my brother Yakov.

Yakov.

And Marcy and uh, and, and my granddaughter Sara.

Who's she named after?

I think she named uh, after my wife's ??? family. And they're wonderful kids. Uh, just not long ago I called—he's now about two and a half years old and I called him from here. He said, "Papa," called me Papa, "come home." There something got me. It's terrible that my daughter settled in Philadelphia. You know, they were in, in Washington first after they got married and then Philadelphia. And we are so distance. And Larry, he was in New York working for a company, they sent to London, it's farther out. So it—especially now when you're, when you're retired, so much time. I would like to live closer eventually. Because when I, when I go there visit them it, they, they give my—like life giving to you. And very smart and my and my Sa...in dau...Sara, granddaughter, is playing violin, picking up a modest profession. We just got a call now. There was uh, they're in, in the mountains in Vermont, skiing. And she, she's five, five ye...five and a half years old. She skis unbelievable already—five years.

Who, who is Marcy named after?

Marcy was named after Mir...my mother.

Miriam?

Miriam Lima.

Mm-hm.

Benita...

Larry?

Benita, she's got uh, Marcy Benita, second name. Benita. Benita is Vlema, from my, my mother's was Vlema. So that Benita, in English they use the "B"— Benita.

And Larry, who is he...

And Mar...and Larry is my, my father name. My father's Lazer, so my, my son is Larry's name, like my father, Larry. Larry's eh, Larry's was—been to school, he went to college. He went to Columbia. He's quite eh, he's quite a genius.

What does he do?

It—he works for, he joined a company with my son...in...law's, with eh, is working with a company for ??? and his friend, college friend, call, eh. They're dealing—you know, metal and, and oil, it's called, it's not eh, the name.

This is your son's...

Commodity.

Oh. This is your son-in-law.

Son-in-law, yeah. And he joined...

And his name is, what is his name?

Joel. Joel Greenberg. I want to tell you something about my son-in-law too.

Sure.

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After my daughter got married to him, he, he, he's graduated law from Columbia and he—and then he was eh, assigned to work and they moved to Washington, after they got married. And he was working the Justice Department. The Justice Department asked him why don't you work, they said this special, special eh, for the Nazis. So he was assigned to work in Justice Department, special eh, special for taking eh, checking on the Nazis, what they did when they emigrated to the United States as citizens, as uh, norm...people lived, nothing to do with the war.

Mm-hm.

And they and they were Nazis. So they uh, this, he was assigned to their group, checking out those people eh, for the Justice Department working. So this was big feeling. And sometimes he came to Detroit. He had to interview Nazis downtown. And I said, "Joel, let, let me interview them. I'll do the job better than you can do." It was a good feeling that he worked for that, that cause of that. And then eh, he was living in Washington, then he had some friends, some college friends, they had a business, Susque...Susquehanna in Philadelphia and they asked him to move to Philadelphia and join, join this, law...lawyer from this...

Susquehanna's in Binghamton.

Binghamton, yeah.

Binghamton, New York, Susquehanna River.

Yeah, so.

But what and what does Larry do?

Larry was, Larry joined too with the group. He worked in New York for commodities.

Is he also a lawyer? Is he a lawyer?

Yeah, no, no eh, no.

Joel's the lawyer.

Joel's the lawyer...

And Larry.

for the company. And eh, my, my bro...my, my son's, my son eh, joined the group eh, the company and worked in New York. So then now eh, not long ago they assigned him to, to London. I mean mostly working out monetary of the int...international, different money uh, the monetary, with the, connected with bank from—in Lon...London. And eh, he's quite a guy, eh. I remember when I came to New York was when he was went to school in Columbia. And he, doing a small place there, it was expen...very expensive. And it was all the books like a library. And he's reading about—a lot of the Holocaust books, you know, we had uh, so he got the knowledge for that. I guess because of me. [laughs]

Let me ask you just finally...

Yeah.

what you think all this has done to your life.

What it has done? Uh, get depressed a lot of times. Not recently, but most of the time getting, in the Holidays comes all, you know, like changing seasons. Get depressed. It's uh, it's a bad, it's a lonely feeling. Especially Holidays. Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, it comes, come back. It did uh, I think it did a lot in life. I don't think people going through to be like everything, nothing happened, they would be not human being. There feelings there is that we went through hell.

And is there anything you just wanted to add about it that—about telling the story?

Do you think it's important that you tell the story?

I guess right eh, now the way things are, we're getting old. It's very important. Because we are the last witnesses to the Holocaust. And if we're not going to tell the story it's going to fade out and it's going to disappear. And it's very important to tell and we've never forget about it. If we forget it then it might repeat. Hopefully that—but it looks like the world is so in wars now that it doesn't. People don't learn at all from war. We thought after last war this, this is going to be it. This is it. They'll—no war, all peace. I guess people in what's going on in Yugoslavia and, and killing people and this cleansing. It's, it's still in those, there's still a lot in this, in this world people which don't learn to live together with other people.

It's terrible.

It's terrible. It's—'cause I hope, hope so that someday ??? but so far it's going do ages and ages and never learn.

You think that's what people should learn from an examination of the Holocaust.

Studying your experience.

Yeah, the experience, that uh, you have to live with people. You can't—and you can't liquidate another gen...another even if they're different religious and they're not what you are, but you have to learn to live together. Otherwise you can destroy each other if, if you don't live together.

That's a good place to stop. Thank you.

Ok.

Joseph Gringlas Interview

The following is the conclusion of the interview with Joseph Gringlas uh, conducted on the morning of March 18th, also at his home. Um, the interviewer is still Sidney Bolkosky.

Um, I'd like you to talk to me a little bit about your trip back to Poland. When did you go?

Went uh, last year, in June. My wife's family arranged a trip to go Czechoslovakia and uh, at that time eh, my, my wife wanted me—I should go with them to, to Czechoslovakia. And I said then, then we had a meeting with the family, my family and then they opened up a map. I said my hometown was right there on the map. It hit me something and said if we go to Czechoslovakia, we go for a few days to Poland. And when we called my daughter and she was always interested in going to where I came from and also see the camp where I was in Auschwitz. So last June we went to—we landed in Amsterdam. In Amsterdam we went to Poland, and first thing we went in Warsaw. Eh, we came to Warsaw right away we checked in hotel. First thing what did went out, we didn't stay in hotel at all, went, went right away to look. There, where it was there, the ghetto, was the ghetto, which is already—everything is, not much to see. Just a monument only, yeah. They changed—they build up, everything was built up. But you, we could see what went on there. It was terrible. How and there's a short, they were—went to Umschlagplatz, a place. That's a place they surround from the ghetto and sent them to Auschwitz, from Warsaw ghetto. From there we went to my hometown. Went to the ??? hometown in Warsaw. From, from Warsaw we, we went to my

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hometown, Ostrowiec. And we came in, I, I couldn't recognize the town completely. So many years, fifty years almost. It was...

Did you take a train to Ostrowiec?

No we went, we rented...

Rented.

Rented a car. We came in I, I was feeling so terrible. First I felt terrible that came back all my memories from Poland. And secondly, I couldn't rec...because, there was a cemetery. The whole cemetery was destroyed completely by the Polish government. The city employ...officials. And they cut the who...they left a, a little bit of space for the grave from the, the, from the graves, they took out that eh, what do you call it, those monuments...

Mm-hm.

from the Jewish people were buried there. And they left it on a space. The rest was made a park. So I—you looked in and stranger couldn't, I couldn't find where it was, where it was. And then suddenly we talked to some Polish guy and he said that there some from Jewish, from Jewish people from Israel came down there and they, they were fighting the government, wanted to completely destroy everything. Let us show there was a cemetery. The cemetery by the way is 300 years old. So—but they came from, from Israel to fight the gov...the officials from my Ost...from my town. And they, they allowed to leave a little, a few gra...a few of those monuments and eh, and eh, made a fence around. And there's a sign that this was a cem...eh, Jewish cemetery. It was original from nineteen—from 1600

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which is about over 300 years old. And then I was looking by the house I was born and took my daughter went up. So a woman came out.

You found the house.

Yeah, the place where I was born, but I couldn't find anybody I knew sometime in school, you know. So the woman came up and say, "This house I just bought it." I say, "I didn't come to—I just wanted to show my kids where I was born." She didn't even let me in, the woman. And then Marcy had the video camera, started taking pictures. She didn't even allow this either. It was a terrible feeling, the feeling that they didn't want you to be there. Didn't want you see what's happening. They're afraid, they, mean if you come there to see them that you're going to take it away from them.

Did you introduce yourself to her?

Yeah, I said, "I was born," in Polish I talked to her, "I was born in this home and I would like to show my daughter, came from United States I want to show them where I was lived—was born." She didn't even let us in. So eh, from there we went, so we stayed a few hours around there, I mean. And, and I wanted to find somebody which I know. It felt terrible that. And there was a few hours and we eh, was when we thought we going to go in the city, or we're going to find documents where the people used to live, but it was closed already, it was three o'clock, they closed. So we got out of there. Then I went—yeah, I went downtown. There's a area downtown, we went to a police station to find something. So I asked them where I was uh, Blizyn, in the camp Blizyn. He said, "Oh yeah, I know it's on way to Kielce." And he offered, he wants, offered with,

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he's got a car, he's going to take us. It was just from, he thought we were gonna, you know, wants to make some money. But we told him that we have, we have our own car, we rented. He said, in tell way to go on Kielce. So we went. Marcy wanted to go in that, where I was in Blizyn because I always told them what went on in that Blizyn camp. So went and find out that was the wrong way. The policeman from my hometown in the, in the mili...in the policeman told us way to go. On the Skarzysko way, which a different, more sou...away from that. It was too late. We left it alone, we didn't go to Blizyn. And from there we went to Krakow.

And that was it for your hometown.

From my hometown, yeah. And couldn't find anybody there because, you know.

Were there any Jews left in Ostrowiec?

There's no one left there's no one, there's not any Jews living there anymore.

Which was about 15,000 people in it, my hometown.

Did you go to Skarzysko?

No, it was too late to go because it was getting evening and we didn't want, you know. So we went to Krakow. In Krakow we checked in a hotel. And that was.

Yeah, it was Friday we arrived in Krakow. We checked in hotel and went to go see, there was a ghetto in Krakow. So in evening we took, we left the car, we're not going to look where it is. We took a cab.

Podgórze right?

Beg your pardon?

Podgórze? Isn't that where the ghetto was?

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No, those, I'm talking about Krak...going to Synagogue.

The neighborhood in Krakow was I think the Podgórze neighborhood, that's where the ghetto was.

Anyway, so we took a cab so we go faster. It was evening. We came in, almost finished the service in Krakow. They—I asked them, “What, what are you so rushing with the service which just finished?” Because they don't want to walk at night home because they're afraid they're going to get hurt. That's the life. Even, those are the few Jews left in Poland which are mostly sick people, old people. And they're even afraid to go out on the street at night. So in Krakow it would be, I think it was next, next morning we went to Auschwitz. Birkenau. Eh, arriving in Auschwitz. I, before I never seen the building. It was right in the, not far, it was three kilometer from Birkenau. That was the, going on the lag...administration from the SS and killings and, and the, and making all the plans. And there was and, and there was uh, in Auschwitz we saw the special room. I think it was number 17. And in front was a stone that the President from Israel came down, brought that stone from Israel for the people, the Jewish people that suffering in that place. And then we went—after now being Auschwitz a few, few hours there. Should have told you, and we saw a lot of cruel things what happened, went on in Auschwitz. They having those, all those people came. Different cases with name eh, from other cities. They told they're going to go back home, so know which belongs to which home. Hair and a lot of glasses and shaving things like that. It was very gruesome. It was terrible. Hanging cloth from the uniforms. And I said, “Marcy, see those clothes? If somebody got clothes like this that mean he was, he

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wasn't selected to die right away in the gas chamber. They were still working there, in Auschwitz." And my daughter—I, I mean, you could see that the very, very, the feeling of them, my kids was terrible, it's just. And then we went, we left Auschwitz—we went, we drove over to Birkenau, which is not far. You know, came to Birkenau, I said that's it. That's where I was there. Saw that building with a big opening, where the trains went through. And then we went all the, looked to see the barracks everything, the way it was. But the, the place where was the crematorium, was the Germans demolished it before they left. And I went around the back and I saw eh, something, a sign, there was uh, one of the leaders from the Nazis. The Polish pe...government found him after the war. They brought him back there, they hanged him there. Big leader from the SS. It was unbelievable to—things happen. After so many few years, it wasn't, happened right after the war, but they brought him back and they—that was executed him.

The Kommandant?

Kommandant, he's one of the leaders. And then from, from Auschwitz after a few hours there. And uh, we went up there, on top of that, there where they go when the trains went by like the guards made a special to look up, you know eh, a high bell that can look out and see what's going on. So I was with my children and my son-in-law and my wife. And, and we had, at the end I said something. I said, I said eh, "How wonderful the children had interested to come and go so far away and to and to see the whole thing what I went through." I said, "This should be the last time the Holocaust happened this world. And because there's a lot of things going on now that people didn't learn anything from this gruesome war, what

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happened, how people suffered. And we lost our six million of our Jewish people.” And we went back home.

When you were in Birkenau, when you went to visit Birkenau, did you go to specific places that you remembered in the camp?

Yeah uh, as, but we walk in Birkenau inside the big—that where the fence go by, is a wall and the wall is a plan from the, from, from all the plan, all from Birkenau the, where all the crematoriums and the barracks were. And I told my son-in-law, I said see this, I was in D. And it was right there where the section D was the barracks where I wa...I was staying.

It must have been hard to go back.

It was very hard. It was, it was very hard uh, I. Before I left going to that trip I went to my doctor and he said, “Are you crazy to go back there?” So I said, I said “My children are interested to go and want to see what went on there.” And then he gave me some, gave me some pills. In eh, in, in case I feel very. And I was, in my hometown I felt worse, I don’t know why, I felt wor...I was very, like, it, it’s just I couldn’t, I couldn’t get myself together. It was just unbelievable. And, and, and, and my—and then my daughter said, you’re going to take those pills you won’t be able to tell me anything. So I didn’t take it. And in Auschwitz I uh, I explained everything. I say I was there. It was terrible. It was unbelievable, that people going through that.

You told them specific stories about...

Specific stories what went on. And it was recorded on video camera, my son in law had. And he asked me, I told him about Mengele and how he picked me out

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to go to Buna where I met, again—that my brother there. So it's, it was, it was unbelievable story to be able to, to go through that. But it's, the good feeling was that I was alive and was with my children together there. See what went on.

Do you think there were other reasons that you went, besides your children wanting to go? Do you think you had to go back for some reason?

No, I didn't want—I. You know my, my daughter always wanted to go to Poland. Long time, many years ago. Even when she was in Vienna she told me that, she called me and said, “Dad I want to go and see where you came from.” But I never want to go back to Poland because I know what went on. Even after the, after the liberation. And some Jewish people went back to Poland, and there was a pogrom in Kielce and, and I think it was Krakow. So, how would you have feeling, people went through hell and losing families and they're trying to go back to a region where they was born and to find, maybe to find somebody or would come some alive, they kill them. What kind of people are those, to do things like that? It's unbelievable. So that's why I never liked—wanted to go back to Poland. But the time when my, my son-in-law arranged a trip to Czechoslovakia, so that made me. I—if I'm going to Czechoslovakia and it's so close to Poland I said I'm going to Poland, and my—and I called my daughter, she was very happy that I, I finally agreed to go to Poland and see what's went on.

Did it feel like something was, the book was closed somehow? That you went back and now it was.

Uh, it was closed? No, it never closed.

I mean was there a feeling you?

The memories are still going on, yeah.

So there was no resolution of...

No, no.

unfinished business.

No, there's not unfinished business, I went, uh. Still, in background there's what I lost and I'll never be able to get 'em back and—but the, the feelings, it's never going to go out, you know. It's going to always be there with me. Can, things like that doesn't go out of you. It's, stay with you.

Could you sleep when you were in Poland?

No. I was, I was eh, I, I was in Warsaw in hotel, I—before I went to my hometown, that night. I didn't sleep at all. And so I, we didn't sleep, so I said I'm going to do something, reading, or. So I went down in a desk, I wrote how the children are wonderful. How especially my son-in-law. We, the kids were left, the two children were left with the, his mother, with my son-in-law's mother, to stay. He, he wasn't supposed to come with us, but the last minute he arranged that he's going to Poland. So, so how I appreciated that, that take so much interest in that, to go with me and to see what, what happened.

What did your children say it was, when you came back?

They, when we came back it was at, when we—after we finished the trip in Poland I went to Czechoslovakia to meet, meet the family, rest of the family, we went to Czechoslovakia. So, on the, on the bus driving from one place to another one, so they had to like speaking that, with each oth...from the family, from ???

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speaking on how they went through about hiding in Czechoslovakia. And then everybody was starting to talk about it. And Marcy started telling about the trip from Poland telling them. She broke down, she just couldn't go—she was crying. She said, just ask my father, he's going to tell you stories.

Tell me about Marcy.

Marcy? Marcy is—as a kid in school, after the war we came to United States, lived in North Park. They, they found out in school that uh, she's got musical talent. So eh, she was only five, six years old. And uh, we found out that she was talent. And that time where we, you know, I was working and it was, we're not financial—we're not be able to do things. But we found out she has talent we gave her private lessons for a few years. Then when she graduated from high school she was, went to eh, music in Indiana. And before that in, she went, went after a few years taking private schools, she was playing with the youth, youth, International Youth Symphony orchestra from Canada. And she played in the symphony, in, in youth symphony, they had youth symphony in Detroit too. And after being in—she went to Indiana uh, Bloomington, Indiana for music, starting music. Then she was sent to—scholarship to Vienna for a year. In Vienna she was a year there and she came back and, and then at that time she was able to meet the ambassador from United States in Vienna. She—so she felt more like having somebody to come in to some place, so and she had good time while being there with that American ambassador. They gave her a lot of help, helping out those kids, where the. When she came back in, she went—she graduated, finished eh, university in Indiana, college. And she went to New York starting Columbia. It

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wasn't enough uh, finishing college, she went for master degree in Columbia.

And she was there a few years in Columbia, she graduated from Columbia.

But not in music.

Hm?

Not in music.

Not in music, no. In Columbia she went—taking for special children education, development, little. And she worked there for hospital for Spanish children, while being in Columbia. And then she graduated Columbia. And she met, got married in New York, which is my son-in-law now.

What's his name?

Joel Greenberg. And uh, they settled—after they got married they settled in Washington. My son-in-law was uh, finish uh, uh, law degree in school in New York. I don't know exactly the name of the school. And he was in Washington and he got a job to work with the Justice Department for, in the, for the investigating of the Nazis, what they did during the war.

The Office of Special...

Office of Special, Special Investigation. Which made me feel good that my son in law is working with this, investigating Nazis. And when, when he used to come visit to Detroit and when I used to—I went to work I took him downtown, my son in law, I said, "He's going to investigate," I said, "Let me investigate them, I would investigate them, I would know how to ask them." Eh, and living in Washington for a, for a year or two and they moved to Philadelphia, which my son in law eh, joined his friends at a company, Susquehanna it's called. And, and

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he joined with them. So they moved from Philadelphia to—moved from Washington to Philadelphia. And they live now in Philadelphia and they have two children. Very wonderful eh, they were, my daughter's really and my son, they really, really care about us very much.

I know.

They're wonderful children.

When your granddaughter was born—your first grandchild is Sara.

Yeah.

Who is she named after?

She is named after my wife's family. Sara Kiesler. Uh, because uh, yeah, when Jake was born they named him aft...after my own brother, that's my brother in that picture. His name was Yakov. So he was named, she uh, Jake was named after his name.

When your, when your granddaughter was born, what went through your mind?

Oh, my granddaughter was born it was a good feeling because I never, never imagine my life I will see, even, after the war, I—when we survived we couldn't imagine there were some Jewish girls at all left. 'Cause went on in, in there and when I, I was married and I had my daughter and son. And then when my daughter was married and had that grandchild, first gra...grandchild was born, I was really happy because never in my dreams I would dream that I would have a family and I made a life and have and have grandchildren. So it was, it was a wonderful feeling, that brought I build normalcy in life, to have continuation of our—from, from us.

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Did you think of anything in the past that was simultaneously painful and, and...

Yeah, it was painful that uh, there was, that my parents weren't at that occasion to see what eh, that, that we ??? to see what, what I had, went through and, and eh, have ch...family and children, grandchildren.

Anything you want to say, add to the, add to the tape that maybe you haven't said yet?

Anything to say, I?

Why, why well I'm interested in why you think it's important to...

Yeah.

important to talk about this.

Eh, important to talk about it because at that age where we are it's a lot of our people dying out. If we won't leave any witnesses, I mean like this taping or telling the story, they'll—that's going to be finishing. They'll, no...nobody in the world will know about it. But we have to bring it out what we went through that people will learn. But I guess people don't learn at all. Still going on wars and wars and killing. But that's only thing what we can do is just bring back, leave the memories what we went through. Otherwise we'll be wiped completely off. Least there will—there's a hope that education will give some of the people realize what could happen when you hate people, when you destroy people, like killing wars. But, that's what we hope, that, that people will learn something out of it.

Ok. Thank you very much.

Thank you.