

Morris John Mandel Interview

The following is an interview with John Mandel at 28910 Monterey, Southfield, Michigan on May 26, 1981. The interviewer is Charlene Green.

You understand this interview will be used for educational purposes and public use.

Confidentiality on any part is permissible. I will be asking you questions on pre-war background, your life during the war, your liberation and your attitudes. Is this okay with you?

Fine.

Will you please state your name, where you were born and where you were during the war.

Do you want my present name or do you want the name as, uh...

Start with your present name...

My present name...

and then give me your past name.

My present name is Morris John Mandel.

And your past name?

And my, my name that uh, my past name was Gino Mandel.

Okay. Where were you born?

I was born in the city of Munkacs in Czechoslovakia.

And where were you during the war?

Um...

Just basically right now, we'll get into it in depth later on.

Well, uh, at first we were occupied uh, we were on the Hungarian occupation from 1938 until we were taken away to the concentration camp in uh, May 1944.

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Can you tell me, what was your father's occupation?

My father had a small uh, factory uh, he was uh, he had a wood turning uh, shop.

Approximately oh, eight—ten employees. And uh, basically that was his occupation.

What was the size of your family?

We were a family of uh, six children uh, and of course parents and, plus many immediate members uh, such as cousins, aunts, and uncles and grandparents. We, we were quite a sizeable family. And um, we s...we um, we survived um, my father, my brother, myself.

And uh, we also have uh, four cousins that uh, survived, that are living here in the states.

You lost four members of your immediate family?

Avi...Yes, I lost, I lost my mother uh, three brothers and a sister.

Can you describe your household? What was your family life like?

Um, we have a very, very close happy family. Uh, it was um, an Orthodox family and in Europe the, the place where we come from everybody was of the Orthodox uh, branch.

And uh, we were very close-knit. We uh, we all got our education. Um, I um, went to work when I was fourteen years old. I went to work first from—in, in my father's shop.

And later I went to work for my uncle who was, who had a dental laboratory and I became a dental technician.

And can you describe your family life?

Well again, it was a very, very happy family. We were uh, we were quite uh, considered in our particular community as of uh, oh, middle class. And uh, except with the depression and I mean, you know, of course the Great Depression was here in this

country, we, we also had a depression in Europe at which time we, we had to uh, go

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through some uh, pretty bad times, but other than that we were very comfortable.

Can you give me an idea of how large your community was?

Yes. Uh, the city itself was approximately 32,000 people and it, it was the largest uh, city in our particular uh, particular um, uh, province. And uh, it was the major market uh, area for, for the farmers. They would bring in all their produce and, and uh, half of the population uh, just about equaled what, half the population was Jewish.

Do you know how many synagogues there were in town?

Well we had three major rabbis. Uh, there was the uh, Munkacs Rabbi was very famous. There was a rabbi called the Belzer Rav and he had uh, he was originally from Poland, from, from Belzer and he had quite a following. And there was also a rabbi called uh, Spinker Rav, who was uh, also from Eastern Europe. Other than that there was um, there was a more conservative uh, element there that um, belonged to a um, shul, rather than, than a—what do you call it—it was, it was—they had, in other words they had a cantor where, where the other places would have people chanting the services, so it was, it was more modern. And also there was a element uh, the Zionist element who uh, which was a branch of the Mizrachi. And uh, they had, they had a congregation. And my father belonged to that uh, particular group.

Do you know how many schools were in the area?

Well, we had a number of schools. We had uh, public schools, we had um, Czech schools, we had Russian schools because our particular area was predominantly uh, of uh, Ukraine people. And uh, we also had a Hebrew uh, uh, school. Now when I say Hebrew school I don't mean the sense the way we understand it here. It was a Hebrew school the

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way they would teach it in Israel. It was actually a public school taught in the Hebrew language, rather—it was not a religious school. Can you, can you understand that?

Like a Yeshiva? Or, or...

No, no, it was not like a Yeshiva.

Like Akiva?

No, it was not like Akiva. It was just like any public high school except it was taught in the Hebrew language.

Oh, okay.

And uh, I went to school there.

It's like Hillel.

No.

No?

No, Hillel is Hebrew. Hi...Hillel is, is a uh, is a religious oriented school. This was—had nothing to do with religion.

Just that it...

This was, this was the same as having—going to public school in Israel.

Uh-huh, okay, all right. I've lost my place. Can you give me an idea of what a degree of assimilation in your community?

There was none. Uh, the uh, the Jewish kept to themselves. The Hungarians kept to themselves. There was also a German population. Everybody, everybody seemed to belong to their own particular group, ethnic group. And uh, there was no such thing as Jews assimilating with anybody else in our particular area. Not at that time.

Okay. Um, can you describe what a Friday night was like?

Well it was very uh, uh, completely according uh, the uh, Jewish laws. Uh, they would uh, uh, everybody would close up their shops, whatever they would do. And uh, it was a day of rest. The, the Sabbath was a day of rest. As a matter of fact, uh, there were a few people that uh, uh, tended to be a little bit more liberal and they were, they were trying to become uh, uh, more conservative rather than uh, Orthodox. But the Orthodox was so strong there, the Orthodox faction that um, they would shout them down. They, they, they just couldn't do it. I mean they were just, we were completely dominated by the Orthodox faction in our particular city.

Can you tell me how you celebrated the Shabbos?

Yes, we uh, my mother would light the candles and uh, my father and all the boys in the family would go to the services in the synagogue. We would come back after the services and there would be a beautiful Friday night meal that we would all partake. And it was done uh, the way the Orthodox would do it in this country. And then of course on the Saturday morning we would all go to services and we'd come back after the services and we would have our Sabbath meal, which was a very big meal in midday. And uh, after that we would uh, if it was a nice uh, summer day uh, we would uh, uh, there was a uh, um, a brewery on the edge of town and uh, occasionally my father would take uh, the older children and we would walk down to the brewery and he had an account there, and they would serve him some beer and um, have some peanuts. And o...o...either that or just take a nap in the afternoon. It was just a completely relaxing day. It was completely detached from anything that you would do during the week.

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Can you tell me what your family's political affiliations or ideas were?

Uh, my father was uh, had very strong feeling, very strong feelings for Israel and he was a member of the Mizrachi. He was a Zionist. And um, we belonged uh, the younger children, we belonged to the Benei Akiva, which was the youth arm—youth branch of the Mizrachi.

Um-hm. Did you have anything to do with the politics of the Czechs, the Czechoslovakian?

I don't believe so um, not that I can recall.

You said that you went to school until you were fourteen.

Yes.

Um, is that—was that the norm at the time?

Well uh, no uh, everybody had to go to school that, until the age of fourteen, at which time uh, you could leave school and go to, go to work or whatever. Uh, other children would continue on and go to uh, high school and to the university. I chose not to and I went to work for my father as I mentioned earlier and later on I went to work for my uncle and became a dental technician.

What grade would you say that you completed in school?

Eighth.

Eighth. Did you ever encounter anti-Semitism before the war?

Yes. Uh, at times it was quite uh, flagrant. Um, we were Jews. And uh, they wouldn't hesitate to call us dirty Jews. uh, particularly they, the, the um, there, there was a German element there. We—they were called Schwabs. Um, that was um, that was the ethnic um, name, Schwabs...

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Schwabs?

Yes. And uh, they were, they were very strongly anti-Semitic. And uh, we would uh, generally when we have, we would go into their neighborhoods or go uh, anywhere near them we'd always go in a group uh, so that if they would attack us we were able to take care of ourselves.

Can you describe your experiences during the war?

Well [pause] 19...our war started in actually in 1938 when uh, when the Germans occupied the Sudetenland. The Hungarians being their allies um, took over the uh, the Carpathian uh, part of Czechoslovakia and we became uh, we came under the Hungarian uh, rule. Life was pretty good uh, under the Hungarian at first. Uh, they, they didn't uh, they didn't bother us too much. Um, except in about approximately in 1941 or 1942 um, they started um. What they do? Anybody that was not a citizen, that was not born, that was not a um, uh, I don't know how many generations back, from that particular area they were questioned as to their citizenship. My grandfather—course this, this particular area where, where I come from was part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire and that took in uh, basically most of Poland uh, Hungary, Austria, Romania and all those, all those Central European countries. My grandfather originally wa...came from uh, from uh, Poland, from Lemberg, which was at that time part of the Austria-Hungarian empire and he married my grandmother. And uh, sometimes in the uh, eighteen hundreds I, I don't know, I don't know the, the year. And because of that fact uh, they did not consider us Hungarian citizens or Czechs citi...for that matter. We were, we were considered stateless people, perhaps Polish citizens. And uh, they gath...they, what they did was

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they, they, they gathered these people, whomever they could uh, find and they shipped them off to Poland. And that, that was during the time when the Germans were taking the Polish Jews and uh, taking them to the concentration camps, putting them into ghettos. We, we went in hiding at that time. And uh, my father having some good connections there eventually was able to secure a citizenship for us and then we came out of hiding and were able to resume our normal lives. But this, this uh, went on for a period of approximately oh, about four months.

That you were in hiding?

That we were in hiding.

Can you describe how you went into hiding?

We just uh, went with uh, different people we knew. We, we moved around from one place to another. And my father had some resources and he—we were able to—he was able to sustain us. And uh, fortunately it didn't last much longer than, than um, about three or four months, at which time we came back out of hiding and we resumed our normal lives.

The people you hid with, were they Jewish?

In most part yes. For the most part.

Is there anything that stands out in your memory while you were in hiding?

Yes uh, my brother uh, uh, my younger brother who now lives in Grand Rapids uh, he was uh, going to be bar mitzvah that year and because we went in hiding he could not become bar mitzvah. And to this day he's still not bar mitzvah.

Maybe seventy-three.

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Perhaps.

Um, [pause] do you remember what you thought when the war broke out?

Oh I thought it was a lot of fun. I remember the day when the Hungarian occupation forces came into our city and—on their, on their horses, they, they were riding, they were cavalry man and uh, a good part of them were riding bicycles. It was a very, when I think back of the way they looked them, it was a very peculiar looking army, but at that time it looked very impressive. And I was about uh, oh, eleven years old then. And I thought it was a lot of fun. Looking through uh, the eyes of an eleven-year-old. Of course later on it became a reality and we realized perhaps it wasn't so much fun after all.

Can you tell me how you heard about the war?

Which war?

1938.

Well 19...well we were part of it. They—that the uh, the Hungarians came and occupied us.

I mean, do you remember if it...

I, I remember, I remember uh, before, before they came, before they occupied us there was a general mobilization and uh, um, all the uh, eligible young men were—went into the service and we had several barracks you know, military um, uh, compounds in our city. It was an important city in that particular part of the country. As a matter of fact there was an old medieval castle there to a side and, and, and everybody went in there and everybody got a uniform and everybody got a gun and uh, they were going to put up a big resistance and then nothing happened. And that's how they got in, that's how I was

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introduced to World War II.

How did your family respond?

Not in any particular way um, um. We hoped that things would get better and perhaps we were even happy about the change. Uh, not that uh, life wasn't all that uh, uh, uh, the government of Czechoslovakia, the Czech government itself was quite democratic. And um, we uh, but of course we went through, probably because we went through during the depression under the Czech regime it might have seemed to my parents that uh, perhaps under the Hungarian regime things would be a little better. And for awhile it was. When they came in the, the economy was quite prosperous and I remember that my father's shop was doing real well. And uh, things were coming along real well, but then of course later on things turned against us. As they started passing all these different laws uh, and restrictions upon the Jewish population.

Can you describe the nuisance laws?

Well it, it started out uh, rather, the way I remember it, it, it started out rather um, in a very, on a very low key, uh. At first uh, there were certain occupations that you couldn't go into. There certain uh, restrictions on, on licenses, uh. Then it, it kept mushrooming. And they, they kept adding on as uh, more and more restrictions until the final, at, at, at the end where they finally gathered us and put us into a ghetto where—which was just before they took us away to concentration camp.

How did your Gentile neighbors treat you and react to you at that point?

They were not very kind in most part. There were all, all, there were some exceptions.

There were some—as a matter of fact, before we were taken away uh, in 1944, um, some

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of them uh, there was particular one neighbor who offered to take some of our uh, some of my younger brothers and my sister and hide them. But we had actually no idea as to what was going on. We—it's, it's really amazing because in 1942 uh, we received a postcard, a Red Cross postcard from Auschwitz, from an uncle who was taken to Auschwitz from Antwerp, Belgium. He originally was from our city but migrated to Belgium and then was taken to the concentration camp from there. And he just uh, sent us a postcard as to how well things are going for him uh, and, and uh, he's not being mistreated, he's in a uh, camp. And um, he asked for a package and we sent him a package through the Red Cross. Which of course as, as it turned out later when, when we arrived into Auschwitz, I met him there. Of course he never got the package. But uh, it was just kind of thing that they did uh, uh, a kind of subterfuge. And you know, where, where they, they were hiding things from us. And, and I'm sure that there were some people in our city that knew what was going on. But we never did. So, even to the point that when uh, the, some of our neighbors offered to hide some of our, some of my brothers and sister uh, my parents refused because uh, they wanted the family together.

[long pause] I don't know where to go back on this one. Um, [pause] when you were required to wear the Star of David, what were your feelings?

I was uh, I was a youngster then. Was what, about fifteen—sixteen years old. And uh, I didn't like the idea of course, and uh, yeah, I realized that it made us a second class citizen at that point. And there were, there were some feelings about it definitely. But I did not realize the seriousness of it. And so I wore it uh, we wore a yellow band. And uh,

I just didn't think much of it at the time. Not...

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Did it...

not at first uh. Later on, later on it became uh, um, as they kept adding on different rules and adding on different burdens, it became quite obvious that, that it, it, it was meant definitely as, as uh, they lowered our, our, our esteem, they, they took away our liberties. And um, they were, we, we were forbidden to go to parks and you, you just couldn't continue to do the, the normal things that you were used to doing. And slowly, slowly they kept narrowing the uh, our liberties. Before long of course we were in a ghetto. And then of course that was before the uh, the end.

Was there a curfew put on you?

Yes, there was a curfew. I don't remember the exact time. I know it started at sometime in the morning and it um, culminated sometimes in the evening, but I, I don't remember the uh, the hours.

Do you know how and when the ghetto was formed, that you went to?

Yes, as the uh, as the uh, Russian front moved closer to us. Uh, you have to realize that the Hungarians were allies of the Germans. And uh, the uh, Germans pretty much let the Hungarian government do with its population as it pleased. There really were, they—we were not occupied by the Germans.

Mm-hm.

Until uh, uh, the uh, war zone moved closer. And as, as the uh, as the front moved out to the Polish-Hung...at that time Polish-Hungarian border, the Russians stopped their offensive. There was quite—it's quite mountainous there, and they, they were on a, on a secure front line there. And uh, at that time uh, if I remember correctly uh, Horthy, he

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was the uh, he was the leader of Hungary at the time, he was uh, sort of a benevolent dictator. And uh, he tried to uh, I, I don't remember the exact time, but at one point there he tried to make a deal with the allies. And at that point the Germans came and, and pretty much took over the country. And that's when we uh, we were really beginning to feel uh, all the pressures. They uh, everything changed at that point. And at first uh, we were uh, they moved us in into certain areas of the city, and everybody that lived out of that area had to move into this particular area. And then one night uh, one—early morning rather than night um, without any warning, they descended upon us. And everybody had to get out of the house. They let us take whatever we could carry. You know, they, they gave us that false security that everything's going to be all right. You can take all the food you want, you can take your money with you, you can take your jewelry with you or whatever, whatever uh, whatever is important to you, your family albums and things like that. And they uh, herd us into this uh, um, brick factory. There was a brick factory outside of the city where the railroad's siding. Now that was the key, we didn't know it at the point, at that time. But the reason they took us there was because there was a railroad siding there. And it also was fenced in. And they herded us in there, and uh, it took them about uh, and of course they brought in all the Jews from the provinces from all around the city. And they did this over a period of time. As they were taking trains away they made more room and they brought in more people. It took 'em approximately oh, a couple weeks to move us out of there. And there would be one or two trains leaving daily. And uh, they would, they would uh, um, that's where we experienced our first beatings and uh, we—up until that point we, we were quite

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fortunate. We were really quite, much better off than most uh, most of the Eastern European Jews. But at that point everything changed. And uh, we—at this point we became truly the dirty Jew. And they started beating us and mishandling us and they made us do manual things that was completely useless just to keep us occupied, I suppose. And uh, they would uh, uh, just herd us. They, they, they told us that they're going to take us into the interior of Hungary, a, a, a, a place called the Horto Baj which is the Hungarian prairie, there's a section of Hungary that, that's very similar to, to the prairie in this country. And they told us that we're going to be confined there in a labor camp and the families are going to stay together. And as a matter of fact everybody was very anxious to get on that train to get out of this particular place because we, we were extremely overcrowded. There were no sanitary facilities, hardly any. And uh, the food was very bad because uh, there really wasn't anything organized. It was a very temporary kind of a thing. So everybody was very anxious to get on the train as soon as possible, get out of there and get to this permanent place where we're going to be taken care of. We had no idea that they're going to take us to Auschwitz, to Birkenau and then to Auschwitz.

So the ghetto that you're describing was, was that the spot that they were narrowing the Jews down to...

Yes.

or was that more that, where you would say the brick factory?

At first, at, at first the ghetto consisted of this particular part of the city where all the Jews had to live. And the final ghetto was this particular brick factory from where they

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transported us to uh, the concentration camp.

How long were you there in that brick factory?

Approximately a week—ten days, something like that.

And the other ghetto?

Um. I really don't remember, prob...probably maybe a couple months, maybe six weeks.

It wasn't very long period of time.

Uh-hm do you remember what, when you were in the ghetto what life was like? In the larger ghetto I'd say, rather than the brick factory.

Well, we were able to continue pretty much uh, as we did before except in a much more confined uh, area. And uh, of course uh, it was much more difficult to make a livelihood. We more or less had to exist on what you had. There was a lot of barter going on just to keep things going. And uh, we didn't have uh, we didn't have the availability perhaps of as much food as we had before. But uh, we made do.

Were there any schools in the ghetto?

No. We weren't in the ghetto long enough for that. A...actually, well I was out of school by that time. And uh, as a matter of fact uh, at that point uh, uh, no, the children no longer were attending school.

Were there any religious practices in the ghetto?

Yes, they continued the same as before. They were uh, if, if uh, if uh, there was no synagogue available in the immediate area, you just make a uh, service in somebody's house. But the religious practices continued. The—those were not banned. I'm sorry. I hope I'm not blocking you.

No, just that one time, I think, no big... Do you know if there was any smuggling into the ghetto of food or anything else?

Um, yes. Uh, as a matter of fact uh, when, when we finally um, were herded into the uh, brick factory, we weren't prepared to stay there for any period of time and whatever food we took along was soon gone. And uh, so we lived—the general population of the city would come around there with, with food and they sold it to us at some absolutely exorbitant prices. And people would give away their wedding bands or whatever currency they had, they would buy food for it. And mostly that's how we sustained ourselves.

Was there any resistance in either of the ghettos?

There was no reason to. Nobody uh, nobody felt that there that uh, as a matter of fact we thought as soon as that, we're going to be taken away from that particular ghetto things are going to get much better. So there was no reason for any resistance. Not with the information we had.

You wouldn't know the size of either area or the amount of people that were in it, would you, in order to give a...?

Well uh, our population in the city as I said, was uh, we had about sixteen—we had roughly a little over 16,000 Jews. And approximately I would say in the surrounding area probably at least that much or maybe a little more. So I would say probably we had maybe anywhere from thirty to 40,000 people that went through that particular brick yard in two weeks.

[pause] Do you remember the date that you were moved to the brick yard?

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No, but uh, today, as a matter of fact, today I had Yahrzeit uh, and we arrived to Birkenau two days before Shevuoth. And my father, Aluf hashalom, may he rest in peace, he uh, uh, uh, decided that that was the same day that they took uh, my mother, three brothers and sister to the gas chambers and he designated that day for himself, and my brother and myself, as this day as, as the Yahrzeit for my mother and three brothers and sister, so. Uh, I don't remember the uh, the uh, Greco-Roman calendar day, but in the Hebrew calendar it would be four days uh, in Sivan, which is two days before Shevuoth.

[pause] Can you tell me about um, being put onto um, the um, cattle car?

Yes. That, that's a—that's something that's very vivid in my mind. We were jammed in there to total capacity. We could uh, there was no room to sit down or move around. We were—we had old people. We had uh, babies and every age. Some of those people were sick, some were healthy. And we, we couldn't move around, there was—we couldn't uh, we couldn't um, uh, relieve ourselves. We were in those cars for [pause] it seemed like eternity but I think it was a couple days. And uh, we had a lot of problems there. People relieved themselves right where they were. And we, we slept standing up. We did get some water, we had some water in there and we passed that around and uh, it was not a very pleasant journey.

Was there anybody who took over the lead in order to decide how much water people should get? How was that decided?

There wasn't really uh, any room. I, I think we have enough water there, whenever anybody needed some he was able to get it. And, and um, they did if—they did give us water when—the train would stop at certain places, because there was a lot of traffic,

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there was a lot of military traffic. We, we saw, we always uh, uh, if, if you were close enough there, there were, these were actually um, freight cars, okay. And they had some windows, what they were barred, and you could see out through those windows, and we could see these military uh, trains going by there with heavy equipment with troops and so forth. And every now and then they would put us on a siding and let these trains go through. And uh, once in awhile when we stopped like that they would give us water. But that's the only thing they would give us.

They didn't give you a bucket for your, to relieve yourself in?

There might have been a bucket in there, but I—there was no way to get to it. There was just too many people in the car. Uh, not everybody survived the trip. Some people, when we got out of the train, some people were no longer alive. And, uh...

Did you find out while the train was moving that they were dead?

There was nobody dead next to me. And uh, I found out about it when we got off the train.

That was the first time you found out about it.

That was the first time I found out about it.

What was your feeling while you were on that train?

I was scared. I, I didn't know what was happening. Uh, at, at this point it became obvious that we weren't going where they told us they were going to take us. And, and nobody really knew exactly what was happening. And we were getting very worried and very scared, it didn't look good. Uh, the way they, they treated us, as soon as we got on that train, they, they sealed that car and we got out of that particular brick yard so the other

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people couldn't see what was happening, the treatment immediately became different. I mean, they, they no longer cared uh, uh, how they treated us. It was, it became quite obvious that, that uh, whatever's going to happen to us, it's not going to be something that uh, is going to be pleasant.

Did they give you any food on the train?

No. I mean, every—most of us had some food and, and whoever didn't have some food we just shared it. And so—we were only on that particular train uh, the car for a couple of days, so we had enough food to get us through those two days. [telephone rings]

Did anything outstanding happen in the box car?

I think any—everything that happened there was, was out of the ordinary. I really...Uh, nothing, nothing there was normal. Everything was abnormal.

Can you give me any examples?

Well uh, it's the first time I ever slept standing up. Uh, uh, first time I ever had somebody sleep on my shoulder and uh, me sleeping on somebody else's shoulder. Um, the body odor became unbearable. And all the secretion and everything else that uh, after. It didn't take very long for that. And the air in there was extremely foul and [pause] Nothing, as I said before, nothing, nothing in there was normal.

Was there straw on the ground?

I don't remember. I didn't get to see the ground. We were too close together. We did have enough room to turn around, but that, that was about it.

But standing up only.

But uh, if, if somebody, if there was some older people there, we did make a little room

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for them to sit down. But uh, there wasn't that much room. I mean, you could only make an exception to a very small child or an older person. We did do that. But um, that's about as much as you could do.

Do you have any idea how many people were in the car?

No.

You said you knew at that point you weren't going where you were supposed to be going.

Did you have any idea where you were going to be going?

No. No, we—I, I realized that uh, we couldn't possibly—first of all, it, it shouldn't have taken that long to get there. And then uh, pretty soon we, we saw uh, some people have traveled and they've known that uh, that the direction we were going in, we, we realized we're going to Poland. And so, of course, we knew we weren't going where they told us we're going to go.

When the doors to the train opened, what do you recall of the sights and sounds that confronted you?

Well, the first thing we saw there were some German troopers with uh, dogs uh, German shepherds on leashes. And there were some prisoners in their prison garb, striped uniform. And they, they were cracking whips and telling us in German "Mach schnell," which means move, let's get on with it. And uh, we got off the train um, of course uh, there were some people that couldn't get off the train. And then they started separating us.

[interruption in interview]

Then they began to separate us. At once uh, as we found out later, the ones that they

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deemed uh, uh, strong enough for labor went on one side. If I recall we went uh, we went on the left side of the track. And the other people, the uh, older people, the mothers for the young children and the young children and the sick, they all went on the right side. To give you an idea how ignorant we were of the fact as to what's going on, we found—we, we still had some food left. My father had uh, secured a little food and we still had some food left. And we found that my mother and my uh, two youngest brothers and uh, my si...my sister was the youngest were separated from us without any food. And so uh, uh, we had no idea how long we're going to be separated. So my father um, uh, uh, my young...uh, the—I am—I was the oldest of the family. And uh, my brother David who lives in Grand Rapids he was the second. And then uh, the third brother, his name would have been Sander, he was a third, he happened to be right next to my father and so my father took some—a part of the food out of this little uh, knapsack that he had and he told him to take that over to mom and come right back. Of course, once you got over on the other side there was no way to come back. Uh, this is how ignorant we were of the fact as to what was going on. And as, as a matter of fact, all these years uh, after we came to this country, my father left uh, lived with this horrible um, thing on his mind that he sent one of his children to his death. Of course he sent him over there to take some food to some of my brothers and sister and mom, and of course he couldn't come back, so. And it, it was—he, he lived with a terrible burden. Uh, he came, when we come over to this country uh, he married a, a very wonderful lady and uh, she would tell us that many times at night he would, he would wake up uh, calling my brother's name. Uh, he would just wake up in a cold sweat dreaming about that. That's just with him always.

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[pause] Do you know what your thoughts were when the selection was going on?

Uh, what do you mean by selection?

To go to the right or to go to the left.

Uh, nothing particular, we just uh, thought that—I had no idea what they were doing.

[pause] Can you describe your daily rout...can you describe your daily routine in the uh, concentration camp?

Well, I'll start from beginning and I'll try to go through the whole routine.

Which camp were you at, by the way?

Uh, we arrived at Birkenau.

Okay.

And uh, after we were separated, my father and my brother and I uh, were taken with the rest of the people to this uh, to these barracks for assignment. And they had these flat bunks. They were about—stacked about four, I think it was four, one on top of the other. And uh, the way we slept there was uh, one, you would have a head facing out, and then the next guy's head would be in and then the next guy's head would be out. In other words you would be foot to head. We were, we were stacked like you would stack perhaps wood. And that's how we slept. Uh, and this didn't last very long. We were there for approximately um, five, six, seven days, something like that. I, I—strange that I don't remember the exact number of days. Um, we were given, each one of us were given a kind of a dish uh, and, and a spoon. Of course, all of our clothes were taken away from us and uh, and they gave us our prison uniforms. And, and they would give us a soup once a day, which was basically made up at that time of dried vegetables. And I remember how

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horrible it tasted. I was still at that time, I was still uh, um, not used to eating that kind of thing. So, I mean, I was, I was always used to eating wholesome food and at first I couldn't eat it. And uh, as I was walking through the camp ground there, during the day we were able to walk out inside the compound—I found this piece of cake that had mold on it and I kind of picked the mold off and I ate it. And then the next morning they took us over to the uh, to the main compound in Auschwitz for reassignment to the different camps. And uh, I took very sick. I must have gotten ptomaine poisoning. And they took me to the hospital. While I was in the hospital they assigned my father to a satellite camp and they assigned my brother to a different satellite camp of Auschwitz. And uh, I remember there were, there were some sick people there and there was, there was this uh, doctor—I wish I knew his name—he came by and he saw me there and he looked at me and he said, “What are you...” he, he, he, he was full of rage. You know, he looked at me, he says, “What are you doing here?” And I didn't understand why a doctor would speak to me like that and I told him I was sick. He says, “You get out of here.” He says, “Don't you know that Mengele uh, uh, uh stops by here and, and, and uh, selects people for his experiments?” And he got me out of there. And I must have been a very fortunate person because uh, I would, I would not be sitting here right now talking to you. And I had missed. At that point uh, I was, I, he immediately transferred me out of the hospital into the barracks, main barracks and I was uh, assigned to a work group and I remained at the main Auschwitz camp from May until uh, January 1945 at which time the uh, Russian uh, uh, armies uh, were advancing towards uh, towards Austria. And at that point we were um, sent on a forced march. And, and our destination turned out to be Mauthausen.

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Uh, at first we, we walked through the winter snows. It was uh, um, five abreast. We walked five abreast and anybody that uh, could not keep up with this march was shot on the spot. Uh, there was no such thing as uh, I'm tired or anything like that. We would walk like that, we would actually sleep and walk and follow the column without reali...without knowing that we're doing it. We were, we were, we were like zombies. And eventually we reached the railhead at which point they put us into these open uh, uh, cattle cars and they transported us the rest of the way to Mauthausen in the uh, January cold. When we got to—we didn't stay very long at Mauthausen. We—they uh, reassigned us to uh, different camps. I was assigned to a camp uh, uh, by the name of Melk. M.e.l.k. And that also was an Austr...Mauthausen by the way is in Austria, so was Melk. And uh, we stayed at Melk for approximately—let's see, this was January—approximately probably about uh, two and a half, three months. And uh, the uh, work we did there were in coal mines. By this time our conditions were quite bad. We were really run down. And then the Russian armies were advancing again and again we found ourselves marching to the next camp, which eventually turned out to be Ebensee. That also is in uh, in Austria. That was my uh, final and last camp where I was liberated. Uh, at Ebensee we no longer did any work. I, I—we were there approximately for about four weeks and we were um, approximately everyday, the, the population of that camp was approximately 18,000 people—18,000 prisoners. And uh, everyday there would be a new transport of people coming in there, transport of people. Uh, they numbered in the hundreds. And it seemed like every night when they took the head count there were 18,000 people. And they didn't kill anybody, people just died. And they, we were all con...we just uh, uh, became

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skeletons. Walking skeletons. There are some very horrid stories that I experienced at that particular camp. Uh, we found ourselves intermingled with some Russian prisoners. These were uh, either, either from Russian civilians or Russian Army people. And one day um, we, we were—you couldn't find a blade of grass in the camp. We, we just ate it. I mean, we, we considered that um, salad uh, vegetables. Um, we uh, one day this—these two Russians walked in to our barrack and they had a piece of meat on, on a piece of paper and they were selling it. They wanted two cigarettes for it. Some people had cigarettes. And there was this guy, he bought that piece of meat for two cigarettes. And I felt terrible. I felt, I felt extremely down and that I, I didn't have the cigarettes to buy that piece of meat. I had no idea how I would have cooked it. But it, it was just something that I hadn't seen for a long time. Uh, the food that we would receive at that particular camp um, we had probably a company of maybe two—three hundred SS that guarded us. And whatever potatoes these people had for their meal that day, they would cook those peelings, those potato peelings and serve it to 18,000 people. And that was everything, that was the total food that you would get there. And uh, if you found uh, three, four, five peels of potato in your soup you considered that you had a good, thick soup. And—so you can imagine that when I saw that piece of meat uh, how badly I wanted it. Well, that—I, I, I was very saddened by the fact that I, that I wasn't able to procure that meat and I started walking out of the uh, barrack. And then when I walked out I found out where they got that meat. There was a body lying there and the only place that there was any meat left on a, on a, on these human skeletons was on the buttock. And they cut that piece off and they sold it for two cigarettes. Of course the person who bought it had no

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idea it was human flesh. But we were, we were reduced to that. And uh, by the time, we were there for about four weeks, by the time that these four weeks were up, I, I was down to nothing but skin and bone. And uh, I remember one day all the SS, all the guards disappeared from the camp. We didn't know what was happening. Next thing we knew we saw a, a jeep with soldiers pull up. And, of course, at that time we didn't recognize them but they were American soldiers. And they uh, they found us there. And uh, of course as soon as they, they opened up the gates. And, and, and, and they, the first thing they did was bring a couple of field kitchens in there. And they cooked a beautiful thick soup, uh, stew you know, with uh, meat and peas and uh, the usual, and potatoes, or whatever, carrots, whatever go into, goes into a stew. And uh, all the uh, all the uh, people that had strength would line up there and get uh, try to get some of that food. I was so weak that even though I started almost at the head of the line they kept pushing me back. And by the time I got up to the kitchen, all the food was gone. And again, that was the luck...that was the luckiest thing that uh, could have happened to me that particular time. Again my luck held out. Uh, most of the people that ate that food, it, they would put it in their mouth, it would go right through their intestines and come out because uh, we haven't had any food for, for quite awhile and, and uh, our system couldn't hold the food and it would kill 'em. They would, they would uh, walk around for awhile with a smile on their face, the next thing you'd see they would keel over. And my life was saved by the fact that I was too weak to get up there in line to get some food.

Trying to hear what that noise is.

And, of course, uh, that's when I was liberated. And that particular day happened to be

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May the 5th, 1945, and that was my birthday. May the 5th, 1945. Very nice birthday present.

You weren't kidding. Were you aware of what day it was before they liberated you?

No. But uh, uh, we uh, we found out later that that was May the 5th. I didn't know, actually I didn't know it was my birthday until approximately uh, maybe a week later when we actually, when we were getting, we're starting to regain some of our strength, we started asking different questions and that's when I found out that the date that we liberated on was May the 5th.

Do you know what people were called that were all but skin and bone?

They were called Musselmen.

Is that the pronunciation?

Yes.

Can I go back to the concentration camps?

Sure.

You were in a work camp at uh...[telephone rings] You were in Birkenau a very short time and then you went to Auschwitz.

Right, mm-hm.

In Auschwitz you were there at the main camp for most of the time, what was it again?

I was there from May until uh, sometimes in, a latter part of May until January.

Can you tell me what you did?

May the 17th seems to pop into my mind and I, I don't know whether that was the day we arrived in Auschwitz or whether that was the day we, we went to the, to the brick factory

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or we left for Auschwitz. But the seventeenth seems to be a, a figure that keeps popping back into my mind as we go along with the conversation.

Okay, if you happen to think of what it is at any point let me know.

Yeah, okay.

What kind of work did you do in Auschwitz?

I—at first I, I worked, I was assigned to a um, a rail, a rail yard, in German they called it a Magazin which means warehouse. And they had building supplies there, all kind of building supplies. And they would uh, they would bring in trainloads of brick uh, trainloads of uh, concrete uh, cement bags. When I say concrete I mean cement bag. Uh, steel reinforcements for the cement and uh, toilet seats and everything that has to do with building materials. This was a big uh, uh, uh, area that uh, they, they seemed to keep that as a uh, a warehouse. Some of it wa...some of, some of the materials were inside buildings and some of it were outside. And my first job there was uh, we were unloading brick off these uh, flat cars. And the way we unloaded the brick was, you, you didn't just go there and grab a couple bricks. They would throw you four bricks at a time and you were supposed to catch it and then throw it to the next guy. And heaven help you if you dropped one of those. They would pounce on you and they would beat you up and uh, and then you'd have to get back up there and, and go back there to work. Uh, if you recall earlier in the conversation I mentioned to you the fact that um, um, I had an uncle who sent a postcard to us in 1942, when I was taken to a concentration camp from Belgium. I met him at uh, at Auschwitz and he happened to be in the same um, same uh, work group.

And uh, of course he was a long time prisoner there and he knew the uh, his way around

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the rope so to speak, and he knew the proper people, and he was able, a...after awhile, to, to make it, make life a little easier for me. And, and he took me away from the unloading of the freight car—those, those were the worst jobs. I had uh, I was very fortunate. I was— I, I had many breaks in the concentration camp over this period of time and perhaps I wouldn't have had survived without it. And it was one of the fortunate and you had to have breaks. The people that survived were the ones that were fortunate and had breaks along the way. Otherwise it was just impossible. And uh, he eventually got me into a, a, a work group where we would sit uh, over these heavy steel—it, it looked like a rail uh, you know, in the kind of rails that a train would run on except they were much taller and wider. And we would have these sledge hammers and our job was to straighten out these steel ties that would go into the concrete. See they would get there all bent out of shape and we would straighten them out by hammering them. The noise in there was absolutely deafening. As a matter of fact, I lost a good part of my hearing there that uh, affects me to this day. But it was much easier. It was much, uh, and you, you, you weren't under the same kind of pressure. We didn't have uh, this, it, it was, it was a smaller group of people and we had a specific job. And uh, they didn't quite treat us as harshly as they did the, my poor brethren that were out there working unloading these freight trains. So I was very fortunate in that respect. And this lasted pretty much uh, over the period of time. As, as, as time went by uh, we had some air raids. We had some uh, uh, some of the Russian bombers would, would fly over there. And rather than bomb the uh, the crematoria. They actually, they bombed the uh, that this uh, particular area where, where all these materials were. They must have known that we were there, but I, I guess

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they—these were considered war supplies perhaps and they were trying to destroy them.

One of the bombs landed uh, very close to us and it didn't explode. So there again, I, I was lucky. I, I had a number of different occurrences where, where I, I was, I had perhaps more than my share of luck by surviving this ordeal.

Did you have any relationship with other prisoners? Question before that, did you ask your uncle what the reason was for um, sending you the post card?

He said—yes, as a matter of fact I did and he told me that at that particular time they handed out all the prisoners a post card uh, uh, several post card, and they were instructed to send to friends and relatives throughout Eastern Europe and they were told what to write. And I suppose this was part of their way of, of putting—giving people a false sense of security. But they uh, whatever it was, they succeeded. At least in our case they did.

Can you tell me about the sanitation conditions at the camp—at the concentration camp?

Well, we had uh, mainly, in, at the work place we had outhouses. One of the best job was to be somebody who took care of the outhouse. There was one man there. He, he probably had the easiest job in the whole, in the whole group. His job was to make sure that the outhouse was uh, uh, that nobody dirtied the outhouse. Uh, [laughs] it was really strange with, with all these things that, it was a very uh, strange paradox with the, with the Germans. Here they were trying to destroy all these people, but they were interested in sanitation.

Did you have a relationship with other prisoners?

Uh, I don't understand that question. What do you mean by that?

Other than your uncle did you have like um, other men, did you talk, did you have a

friendship?

Oh yes, oh sure, sure. We had, we had a, a camaraderie if, if you want to call it that. We uh, uh, we uh, we—as a matter of fact we um, we uh, even carved a chess set out of wood and we would play chess sometimes when, at the beginning when we still had our strength. But later on, of course, we couldn't do that anymore. But the beginning—we, we would try, we would try to keep things as normal as possible to what extent you could, but uh, there wasn't really too much opportunity for that.

What kind of food did they give you in the concentration camp for a meal?

In, in Auschwitz it wasn't uh, the beginning it wasn't really bad. It, it actually uh, at all times it was a planned starvation kind of a diet. Uh, uh, all people were—actually the, the way they, the way they uh, uh, were trying to run things was that everybody at one point would become too weak to continue and then they would just take them away and destroy them. They would have these selections. Uh, all of a sudden middle of the night they would uh, announce that everybody must get out from the barracks and we, we would line, we would uh, they would take us uh, not all people, all Jews, because there were also uh, also political prisoners there and some criminals. And uh, they would announce that all Jewish prisoners would have to come out and we would all uh, go to the bathhouse and we would, we would uh, undress. Of course, we would leave the barracks undressed okay and we would go out and they would take us to the bathhouse and you would have to go through a line there, and there would be uh, uh, a couple of the German sergeants and they would uh, and, and Dr. Mengele—and they would select the people that uh, they considered no longer fit to work. And those people, of course, were taken to

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Birkenau and th...and put through the uh, gas chambers. And they didn't necessarily take the weak ones. If, if, if they didn't like the way you walked through there of, of, of—sometimes they wouldn't even look uh, he would have, he would have a walking cane and he would hold it with uh, you know, with the uh, the wrong way. In other words that the handle would be, would be reaching out and as you walk by he would just hook you on the leg or the arm or some pull you over. And all they would do is just take your number and you go back to sleep with the rest of them. The next day, when we would line up to go to work they would call out these numbers and the numbers would have to step out and they were segregated and taken by truck uh, to the—to Birkenau and, and taken through the gas chambers. So, the food actually was, was uh, planned that way, that eventually you would get too weak to continue. Uh, basically we would uh, in the morning we would get uh, a, a warm tea, nothing else. A warm water, it would taste a little bit like tea. And at the work place, at noon, they would give us a soup. And most of the time it was dried vegetables. And in the evening you would get a portion of bread probably about uh, it would, it was that uh, dark German bread, most of the time it tasted like clay. And you would get a piece of that bread, about maybe two—three inches wide. It was square. And they would give you a cut of uh, of cold cut 'bout maybe an inch thick. And that was your meal for—that was all the food you would get all day. You'd never get any vegetables or fruits or anything like that. And—it, it, it stayed pretty constant like that in Auschwitz, and that was the best food we had. And as we—as the war continued on and as they took us to all these different camps, it progressively became worse until at the end, as I told you, we, we were getting uh, nothing but, but some water

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with a few potato rinds in it.

Can you tell me when you were uh, tattooed?

When we arrived. When we arrived uh, in Birkenau, when they separated us from the rest of the uh, family. They took us into this uh, huge hangar like building and we were ordered to take off all of our clothes and they took away everything. Next thing they did was they came over, they had these prisoners who did that, that was their job. They came over with, with uh, barber clippers and they would clip the hair off the body, wherever a person had hair. Uh, whenever a person grow, whether it was on the arms or the legs, or wherever. And uh, we all looked like zombies, we all looked alike. The next thing they did was uh, uh, we had to go through this line and uh, and they had, they had several lines and what they did was, they did it numerically. And uh, my number was—is, still is A9327 and my brother's number was A-9328 and my father's uh, number was A9329. We were numerically. I, I happened to be first in line as we went through that. So uh, and as we later found out, that uh, once you got tattooed that meant that for the time being you were, you were going to survive.

Did it hurt?

Not, not particularly. It was done the same way as you would do a tattoo. Uh, uh, it—you could feel a, a small sting, but uh, that was the smallest pain I had while I was in the camp. Uh, it's really uh, we were, we were uh, I was in Auschwitz, which was just a few kilometers from Birkenau and we could smell the stench of the burning flesh and we could see all that smoke coming up. And I, I was there probably a month or six weeks before I found out what that was, before the people uh, that were there longer told me

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what was actually going on there. Uh, they would um, we would get a bar of soap, we—in, in, in the barracks we had facilities. We had, we had uh, uh, a kind of a community sink where you could go in and wash up in the morning. And um, you had to shave. I mean that was one thing about the Germans, they insisted on, on hygiene. While they were destroying us, they insisted on hygiene. It was a very strange thing. At least in that camp they did.

Uh-huh.

And uh, uh, they give us this bar of soap and on the soap was stamped uh, three, three letters, RIF. And, of course, I didn't know what it was until somebody told me that stood for Rhein Yiddishers Fat. It meant pure Jewish fat. What they did was they made soap off the uh, o...as, as they were burning the bodies, as they were cremating them uh, fat would run off and they would make soap out of that. And they gave it to us. And I might have used soap that was made uh, my own flesh and blood [pause] and I didn't know.

Did you ever see the opposite sex?

One time I saw the opposite sex in Auschwitz. There was a uh, uh, a woman's camp right next to the men's camp and for some reason they brought in a company of women to work at the uh, uh, uh, these were also prisoners—at the same um, uh, warehouse by the track, by the railroad track there where, where I was working. They must have needed some extra help because that was the only time we saw them. But uh, we did not—we, we never had any opportunity to socialize or anything like that. We just—but that one day we worked with them.

Do you know if there was homosexual um, actions anywhere around?

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I would im...I, I, I would imagine now uh, uh, uh, I would imagine that there must have been some, but I was never aware of it.

Were you ever assigned special duties?

Uh, when I went to um, my fourth camp which was uh, Melk, when I got there they assigned us to these barracks—strictly by chance—and I got assigned to this barrack, at, at the uh, barrack leader was a old German criminal. He, he had the, we all carried a badge. You either had a star which meant you were Jew and the uh, the political prisoners had a different kind of insignia and the criminals had different kind, so we always knew who was in for what. And uh, this particular old German, he was a criminal. And uh, he was the, the, the uh, uh, Blockleiter which meant he was the, he was in charge of this barrack. And he happened to be the same man that uh, was in charge of the barrack at a time when I was first assigned to Auschwitz, before I went into the hospital. And uh, so I, I just, as a chance he was known as a very cruel man. As a chance I went up to him and I, and I kind of greeted him and I, I told him how glad I was to see him and he looked at me stupefied. And I said, “Oh, I, I guess you don’t remember me but I was in your barrack,” I happened to remember the number of the barrack, “I was in your barrack in Auschwitz.” “Oh,” he says, “yeah,” he says, “you’ll be my, my Stubendienst.” which meant that I was his uh, his uh, helper in the barracks and for a short time I did that before I was assigned to the uh, to the uh, um, coal mine.

And then you worked in the coal mine?

Yes.

Can you describe it?

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We, we brought coal out. We, we pushed those little wheel, wheely things out. [laughs]

We brought coal out.

Lots of work experience.

Yeah.

Let's see, where was I? Do you, do you remember any form of active resistance that you could identify as resistance?

The only time that uh, there was uh, uh, some kind of a form of resistance was the very last uh, day or two in the concentration camp in uh, in Ebensee. Um, Ebensee is located in the Austrian Alps and they—the Germans uh, the reason they had this camp there was because they were carving into the mountain there uh, uh, some uh, factory, some uh, facilities where they had heavy machinery. And the way I—the way I remember it was that they were going to build their V-2 bombs there you know, those rockets. And they never were able to quite finish that facility. But uh, I—we were told this later that they had wired those caves in a, just before uh, we were going to be liberated they were going to herd us in there and uh, they were going to just detonate the whole thing on, on us and destroy us in those, in those caves. And there was—I don't know how, but there's, there were some people that, that managed to get a hold of some weapons. And uh, they were—they brought us out into the center of the field and they were going to march us out, and, and march us over into these uh, facilities. And uh, I guess the, the, the people uh, that had these weapons stopped them. So again, I was lucky.

Did you have a weapon?

No.

Do you remember the roll calls?

Yes.

Could you describe them for me, a typical one?

They would blow their whistle and they, they call them Appell.

Appell, yes, that's what it's called.

Call them Appell. And uh, they would uh, line us up and uh, they called the uh, they called our numbers and you had to answer. Basically that was the roll call. Sometimes they would leave us stand out there, particularly if the weather was bad. They would leave us stand out there for a considerable time. For no reason. Other times they would just call the roll and then march us off to work. One day when we—they would always count us as we were going through the gate, and, and always count us as we were walking back into the gate. We were, we were cattle. Nobody had a name, we only had numbers. And we were just one of ten or one of a hundred or whatever.

Were there showers?

Yes, there was one bathhouse. Uh, in the barracks we had, we had a sink, you could wash up in the sink. But there was a bathhouse. And um, you uh, I think—I was in Auschwitz about seven months and I remember being there maybe twice when I went to bathe. They took us actually there to bathe. And the only—the, the other times that I went through there was when they had the selections. But to actually go bathing I went there twice in seven months.

[pause] Did you receive any assistance from Jews or non-Jews?

I received assistance from my uncle where he helped me get that uh, better job. Um, I

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helped myself one time. I worked uh, I worked at this particular place there where we're straightening out these things. And, and uh, one day, we were, we were right next, right next to, as I said, to these railroad tracks and there was this barbed wire fence between the railroad tracks and where we were working. And this big train with flat cars pulled in there full of potatoes and there was all this beautiful food. And I took a pail and I climbed over this fence to get uh, some of those potatoes. And all of a sudden I took a look and there comes this German on a bicycle. Now the only place he could ride was on the side of the track you know, because the way he was sitting there. And he's pedaling as fast as he can with his pistol in his hand and I knew I was—if he catches me I—that was it. I was, I didn't leave the potatoes, I grabbed my pail and I climbed over the fence and he, while shooting at me. Of course he was bouncing along and he was too far and he couldn't hit me. And I somehow managed to escape with a pail potatoes. So that was the only time I had some extra food. Some of it I ate raw and some of it I managed to cook.

Did you share any?

Oh sure. We, we would do that. Uh, we, uh...At that point. Later on, no. When, when, when food got much scarcer uh, we became, we became uh, more animal-like. We were completely dehumanized. But at that point it wasn't that bad yet. At that point we, we were, we were still not too far uh, from, from having arrived there. We were you know, we still, we still were almost civilized. And if you had some little extra we would share it.

Can you describe the guards, Kapos, or the Kapos' punishment?

Kapos, yeah.

Kapos?

Morris John Mandel Interview

Kapo. Kapo. Uh, the emphasis on the “a.”

Okay.

Uh, well, they were generally just beatings for sometimes for no reason, sometimes just Kapos have to show that they, that they were uh, um, doing their job. And sometimes when the guard—when uh, particular. They were, they were not so much for the guards, but there were some of the uh, a couple of sergeants and a couple of officers that were more or less in charge in the area. When they would be around, they would uh, for their benefit, they would sometimes uh, beat up on people. And uh, they, you didn't need uh, too many reasons to, to uh, beat up on somebody. Anything would do.

[interruption in interview]

Was there illness in the camp?

Well uh, the thing, there two things that probably were most prevalent were uh, there was a lot of diarrhea. And there were people, particularly people that have been there for any length of time, would get a lot of water in their legs. Uh, you could uh, they, they would show you. They would press on the flesh and, and the flesh would just stay pressed uh, particularly on the legs. Matter of fact, my uncle had that and uh, that was probably the main reason he didn't survive. I, I didn't march with him, I was in the same uh, building here he, where he lived at that time. And never made it through the first march. And he probably couldn't take the, the march because uh, his legs were very bad. They were just all swelled uh, swollen up with water. That was a very big problem there. And, of course, there were probably a lot of uh, different kind of things that happen in the population.

Mm-m.

Morris John Mandel Interview

But uh, those are the two things that uh, I seem to recall that were quite prevalent.

Do you recall the psychological state of others and yourself?

Well, I was pretty young at the time and uh, I suppose uh, I was seventeen when I went in, eighteen when I was liberated. And uh, I was really uh, hoping that someday I'll survive this thing. Uh, m...my biggest, my biggest thing, my uh, was always uh, trying to survive. I was always trying to find some extra food. One time I remember that uh, is, this was not in Auschwitz, this was in uh, in Melk. They had a, a pigsty near the guardhouse and they would throw the slop into the—for the pigs. And uh, I would always go by there, look for an opportunity to get in there and get some of that food. I was hungry. And once I had an opportunity—I got in there and I took some bread that was all soaked and, and I took it away from the pigs and I ate it. Um, I was—you became concerned with one thing only. At, at first things were not too bad. As I told you at first, we even found time to make a chess set and play chess. But as, as time went on things became progressively worse. And uh, and, and final point was that you were only thinking of one thing and that was how am I going to survive. At that point uh, there was only one person that, that you were concerned about.

Were there medical experiments?

Well, from what I know now, yes, but I was never exposed to any and I never knew of any at the time. But uh, luckily I got out of that hospital or I would have known of it first hand.

Mm-hm. Were you able to keep track of time?

Time didn't mean anything. It was totally meaningless. Um, we would know uh, in, in, in

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Auschwitz we would know when, when uh, the days because we wouldn't work on Sunday. We would work six days. So we would always know when, when uh, we would always look forward to Sunday. But later on, particularly in the last camp, we no longer worked. Uh, we were, we were too weak. We were just left there, they, they were just leaving us alone because we were dying. And at that point time, I lost track of time at that point. I had no idea what day it was and I didn't care what day it was.

Do you recall any religious activity?

Yes, I do. At beginning there were some people that still practiced and, and would pray by memory. And uh, as a matter of fact, when we first got there you know, uh, it was, it was a couple days before Shevuoth.

Mm-hm.

And at that time uh, uh, we uh, all of us you know, more or less made a religious service when, when nobody was watching. But as time went on we didn't bother with it anymore.

When they were bombing, did you have anything at that point?

When they were what?

You said at one point that they were bombing Auschwitz.

Yeah.

Did you have any prayers or see anybody praying at that point?

I didn't.

That's what I'm asking you.

No, I didn't.

Okay. Was there any cultural activity?

Morris John Mandel Interview

None.

Did you receive any special punishment?

I got beaten up a couple of times. But uh, I was more fortunate than others. I managed to stay out of the way. I, I've always looked out, I always tried to be as far away from the Kapo or the, or the Germans. Wherever they went I always went the opposite direction. And I managed to uh, stay out of their way most of the time.

Did you witness any special punishment?

Yes, I saw some hangings. There were, there were a few people that escaped. And uh, they were always caught. Nobody ever escaped, as far as I know, from Auschwitz. At least not while I was there. And what they would do is they would bring 'em out there and publicly hang 'em. And every—they would bring out everybody, they had a big square there. And uh, they would line up everybody and you had to stand there while they hung and they would, you had to watch 'em, and they would leave 'em hang there for... They... Whatever. Um, special punishment. [pause] I've seen many people beaten up uh, where they were unconscious. Where they dragged them away and I saw a lot of cruelty. I saw a lot of cruelty from the Kapos and I saw a lot of cruelty from the Germans.

[pause] Were there any differences between—okay, here comes another one I'm going to mispronounce—the Wehrmacht guards and the SS?

Wehrmacht.

Wehrmacht.

Yeah, that was, that was the regular army and the SS were the volunteers. Yes, in the main uh, there was a big difference. Though, but uh, one of the uh, sergeants, he was a

Morris John Mandel Interview

Wehrmacht and I, I can't remember his name. He was a very famous sergeant as a matter of fact. And he was Wehrmacht. He was uh, I believe that the people that uh, they uh, had for, for those kind of duties uh, they had to be basically sadistic. They must have uh, picked 'em uh, very carefully, because they seemed to enjoy what they were doing. They would go out of their way to, to inflict cruelties on people. But just walking by. And... Uh, basically I would say that the uh, most of the people around us were SS. Once in awhile we would see some Wehrmacht, but most of the people were SS.

Did you see any difference in the way that they treated you?

[pause] Um, I don't think any of them were very pleasant, but, uh... Probably not.

On the march that you took—you were on a couple of them, weren't you?

Yes.

All right, well, you can answer it according to each one. Um, they gave you any food or water?

When we would start out they would give us a loaf of bread um, for five people. In other words, you got one loaf of bread for a line of five people. And we were supposed to divide that for whatever length that march took. We had no idea how long it's going to take. As far as water was concerned, it was plenty snow. Uh, we just uh, uh, every once in awhile we would stop because the Germans would get tired. The one that, the guards that were walking us, when they, when they got tired they would stop and then we would stop. And then we had a chance to grab some snow. And uh, actually we didn't have that much to eat so we weren't all that thirsty. Um, it was uh, interesting uh, we were going through this uh, uh, this was on our second march, when we were in uh, in Austria. We

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were going through a village and uh, some of the people would see us. We were going through this village and all of a sudden they saw all this, these wretches, I guess uh, wrecks if you, whatever—we, we must have really looked terrible. And so when they saw us coming through there, they ran into the house. And they, they were civilians. And they came out with some water, with some tea, with some bread and they tried to give it to us and, of course, the guards wouldn't let 'em. And they started shooting in the air and driving 'em off. But there were some people that tried to help us when we walked through the village.

It's about time they helped you. [pause] A question keeps popping up and it keeps leaving. I—it'll come back, I guess. Oh, I know. You had said before that if you couldn't march they would shoot you. Do you know what happened to the people who were left on the track dead?

I have no idea. But uh, as we walked through there, there were some column that walked before us. There were frozen bodies that were lying there that had to be there for awhile. So, I don't know what happened eventually, but I would imagine that they didn't care too much because uh, uh, the uh, the Russians was—were right behind us. Uh, I don't think they were worried about picking up the bodies or anything like that. That's my personal opinion.

Mm. How did you survive?

As I told you, I, I managed to go through this thing here and when I, when I finally survived I was just a walking skeleton. And this all happened in one year's time.

How large were you when you went into the concentration camp?

Morris John Mandel Interview

How large?

Size-wise, just to give me an idea, you're talking...

I don't know.

Weight-wise is what I meant.

I don't know.

Hard question. [laughs]

[laughs] I don't know.

Okay. It was just, when you keep...

I don't know.

you talk about how thin you got, I was curious, the other day.

Yeah.

Mm, okay.

I don't know. I was a healthy, I was a healthy seventeen year old. I really don't know how much I weighed. [Wife: "Show her the picture, how thin you were when you came out of the camp."] Yeah.

Okay, we'll look at that later. Why do you think you survived?

I had a will to survive. I fought all the way. I never gave up. Even when I was to the point where I could hardly move. I never survi... I never gave up uh, I wanted to survive. At that point we were, we were beginning to hear rumors that, that uh, well, we knew that we, we were, a coup...several times we were marched off so obviously the Germans were losing. And uh, somewhere along the line we, we heard um, we heard about the invasion, you know, about the uh, uh, the landings in Normandy uh, and so forth. Of course...

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And, and so we, we knew that eventually if we, if we live long enough we're going to survive uh. When, when was the Normandy landing? I don't remember. Uh, that must have happened before. Though, and, and, of course, we knew that the Russians were moving out, that the Russians were close to us when they took us away, when they took us originally to the camp. And then twice we had to evacuate the concentration camp, so we knew the reason why. And so we just kept fighting, hoping to survive. Uh, that last camp was—I, I, I found a piece of coal one day on the, on the ground, plain coal. And, of course uh, we knew that the Germans made margarine out of coal. And so I decided, they can get margarine out of it so can I. And I ate the piece of coal. Of course I got constipated. [laughs]

[laughs] ???.

Whatever there was to constipate. That's what I got out of it. I don't know, maybe I got some, maybe I got some uh, margarine out of it. But I ate a piece of coal. Um, people would—we had a lot of pine trees in that, in that camp. And people would scrape the pine tree that the uh, fuzz of the tree and take a piece of paper and roll and make a cigarette out of it and smoke it. And there was, it looked like tobacco, so it must have been tobacco. Uh, you absolutely couldn't find a blade of grass on that camp. Uh, we just grazed it. Anything we could get a hold of, it didn't make any difference what it was. We were hungry.

I would imagine. Were you were aware that they had blown up the crematories in um, Auschwitz?

I was never, I was never aware of that. Uh... Maybe I was. Yep, there were rumors about

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that, that, that they blew up the crematoria. Yes, I recall it now. Yes. But you see we were not in the same camp. The crematoria was in Birkenau and we were in Auschwitz. And even though there was only a few kilometers apart, it was a different, it, it could have been uh, Mars.

Mm. It was a distance. Did you help each other on the march?

Well, we held on to each other uh, arm in arm you know, we locked arms. And we walked like that because uh, uh, we knew the consequences if you don't continue walking. And as I told you before we, we slept. And as perhaps as we slept and walked, maybe one of us was awake all the time and guided the rest of us. I wasn't aware of it. But I know that while I walked I slept. And if, if you had to uh, uh, urinate, you just, as you walked along you just urinate. You didn't dare stop because if you stop they shot you. Uh, sometimes we did stop and then you could do it. But if you had to do it while you were walking. We were so weak, you, I mean, if you had to go, you had to go. You couldn't hold back.

Mm-hm.

And uh, it was...

[pause] On to the liberation.

Pardon me?

On to the liberation.

Okay

Ebensee? You were in Ebensee when you were liberated?

Yeah, Ebensee. Um, let's see. It should be spelled out here. Here.

Alright. Okay, that's the same way I found it, okay.

See that was a, that was a satellite camp of Mauthausen. Ebensee. Both Melk and Ebensee were satellite camps of Mauthausen.

Hm. Does that mean that they were in the same area, like um, within a kilometer or two?

Uh, well, just like Auschwitz had many satellite camps. You know, there were certain camps that were the main camps and then there were the satellite camps that uh, that actually were under the command of the main camp. And there were, there were, there was Auschwitz, there was Mauthausen, there was Bergen-Belsen. Those were the main camps.

Mm-hm.

And then there were many satellite camps.

Were they in the same area of the...?

Yes, generally they would be in the same geographical area.

Okay. You were liberated by the Americans.

Yes.

Were there any friends or family with you?

No. Uh, there is one man that lives here in, in town that uh, I—he lives in Oak Park, that was liberated with me. Uh, he's the only one that I know from that particular camp.

What did you do after you were liberated?

At first uh, gained my strength back. They, they more or less uh, brought us back on, practically on baby food. Once they, once the uh, occupation force, the American Army realized what happened to the people that ate the regular food, they realized that they had

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to give us special consideration. And perhaps, they must have had, perhaps they had the experience of other camps that they had liberated and, you have to realize that the first people that came in contact with us were not medical people, these were just average GIs. And they were just trying to do what they felt was the right thing to do and of course, it turned out it wasn't. But when the medical people came in, of course uh, I remember a number of ambulances pulled in almost immediately after that fiasco and uh, they gave us uh, some very light foods uh, some light uh, uh, cereals and different things like that. And they brought us slowly—they nursed us back. And it, it didn't take all that long before we were able to take uh, regularly cooking and... And then, and then uh, we were there for a short period of time. Uh, I was, this is when uh, I must have been released uh, was liberated on the 5th and this uh, this particular document is dated the 28th. And I, I'm not sure whether that was the day when I left the camp or almost immediately uh, thereafter. So uh, according to this here I was there for about three weeks after we were liberated.

Mm-hm.

And uh, with this document I was able to go back to my original home. Uh, this was um, uh, uh, I could cross any border at that time with this, get on any, any public transportation with this particular document. Uh, it was free transportation. And they were uh, at different places the uh, the J.O.I.N.T., the American J.O.I.N.T. Committee, and the—I think basically it was the J.O.I.N.T. Committee—they had, they had places where, where you could go and lodge and you could go and have a meal. And they gave you some clothing and uh, generally assisted you to get back home where you came originally. And uh, when I got back home uh, I, I had heard that my father and my

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brother had survived. Uh, my brother escaped and uh, through that escape he was able to save my father who was really left for dead. And uh, I found out uh, that they, they had gone back home, so I of course, I headed back home. And when I got back to my home, I found that the, that the area was occupied by the Russians. It was no longer Czechoslovakia, it was, it was, that part was uh, uh, actually today it belong—it's part of the Russian Ukraine. Uh, this was part of the uh, one of the Yalta or Potsdam agreements that uh, Roosevelt made with Stalin. And uh, when I found that uh, I, I found my father there. My brother had gone looking for me. So we had crossed paths. And I found my father there. And when I saw that the Russians were there, I didn't want to have anything to do with that and I immediately—I stayed only there a couple days and I left. I went to Praha, which is the capital city of Czechoslovakia. And eventually found my way back to Germany and my father and my brother came there and eventually we migrated to the coun...to the United States.

Can you read me what this document says?

Well...

Now come the glasses. [laughs]

It gives my name. And it says uh, uh, Mandel, Gino.

Where does this appear?

Ausweisen. That, this is—you have it both in German and in English. You see, you have Ausweisen in German and certification in, in uh, English and then Herr means Mr.

Oh, uh-huh.

And uh, and ??? means born. And e... everything that you see here actually is translated

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in both German and English. This gives me—this gives you my home address before they—it was taken away. Oh this—here we go, that’s why I remember the seventeenth.

What does this say?

That means I was, I was uh, incarcerated from the 17th of May, 1944.

Oh that’s what the seventeenth.

That’s what the seventeenth is for.

What does this word mean? Word, word, von?

From. That, that means incarcerated from.

Okay And this means to?

Uh, yes. May 5th 1945. That was my birthday. [telephone rings]

A national.

Concen... uh, that means, in, in Nationalization Konzentration Lagen gefangen. That means I was, I was a uh, I was a uh, gefangen means uh, um, interned. I was captured. Gefangen. And this, of course, is all obliterated. And that here, freiheit gesetz, that means I was freed.

Uh-huh.

And, and they didn’t put this date in here. Then here we have Ebensee 28 of May, 194... ‘45.

It says here that it was liberated from the concentration camp...

Yeah, this is...

at Mauthausen.

All right, Mauthausen, as I, as I mentioned...

Morris John Mandel Interview

Right, was the...

to you was, was the main camp, and Ebensee was the satellite camp. And I was liberated in Ebensee, which is, was part of the Mauthausen uh, complex.

On the 28th of May?

May 1945.

Forty-five. And then what, this side is identification card?

Current number. Oh, this is my internee number, I guess this must have been my identification number. That's my family name, my given name uh, born in the city of Mukachevo, nationality, Czechoslovak. And uh, basically the same things as I told you earlier.

And who is this?

That was my signature.

Oh that's your signature.

Yes.

Okay.

It looks a d...a little different today.

Yeah. You dressed it up. Uh, did you ever go on to a Displaced Persons camp?

Yes. After I came back uh, from uh, from uh, my home town, we went back to Germany and we wound up in a Displaced Person camp near Munchen, and in uh, in Gabersee.

That's also in a, in... That's, that's in Germany or in Austria? Gabersee. No, that's

Germany. Gabersee That was uh, not too far from, from Munchen. And uh, we stayed

there, we got back there almost immediately and we stayed there, I think from... No, first

Morris John Mandel Interview

I went back to, to Czechoslovakia to, to Prague. And then we went to Germany sometimes in the spring of 1946. Early spring of, or maybe late winter or early spring, 1946. And uh, we uh, we got an affidavit from an aunt who lived at that time in Pennsylvania. And uh, we migrated to, we came to this country. We left Germany on uh, July the 15th. We uh, boarded our ship, *The Mariner Flasher*, which happened to be the second ship that uh, came here to this country uh, with, with refugees. And uh, we landed in New York on July the 25th, 1946.

Can I go back to the Displaced Persons camp? Can you describe it and your reaction to it?

Oh, I'm sorry! Maybe I'm making it too short.

No, you just aren't giving enough descriptions...

Yeah, all right.

for the, um...

Um, in the Displaced Person camp, of course, we were uh, controlled by the American authorities. This was uh, under American occupation at the time. We had uh, um, this must have been a military camp at one time. Uh, we were living in barracks. Uh, the uh, uh, we were beginning to live a normal uh, civilian life. People were getting married and uh, some people were getting pregnant. Life was beginning anew. And uh, actually uh, we just tried to uh, really uh, pick up our lives again. We uh, we started sport clubs. We played soccer, I played soccer there and uh, basically we really didn't have much to do. We just waiting, everybody was waiting to go someplace, to, to find a place to go to. Some of us uh, wanted to go to uh, uh, to the States. Some of us wanted to go to Israel.

And some wound, wound up in South America. And we, we got dispersed. Some went to

Morris John Mandel Interview

Canada. But everybody was there waiting to go someplace to start life anew. Um, basically that, that's all there was to the Displaced Persons camp.

What was your reaction to it?

I thought it was a big improvement to what I had before. Actually uh, it uh, it was uh, really not bad and under those circumstances it was really terrific.

Mm-hm.

It was a, a great change for the better. [Wife: How long were you there?] I was there probably uh, four months, five months, something like that. Some of the people that had to stay there longer, of course uh, uh, probably changed their opinions about the place, but I didn't have to stay there very long.

She had a good question. What made you decide to come to Detroit when you came to the United States?

Well uh, we uh, as, as I mentioned to you, we had an aunt who lived in Pennsylvania. She brought us out to this country. And we had some relations here in Detroit. And my father, of course uh, was a widower then. And uh, one of our cousins uh, uh, knew of this lady who she thought might be a good uh, wife for my father and he came to Detroit and met this lady, who is our mom, we love very dearly. And uh, he married her. And when he married her, we came to Detroit, my brother and I. And uh, my brother today lives in Grand Rapids and I live here in Southfield.

Do you know how old you were when you came or when the war ended or...

Yes, yes. I was, I was when, I was uh, eighteen years old when I was liberated...

So you were about nineteen when you came.

Morris John Mandel Interview

and nineteen when I came to this country.

Um, when did you get married?

[Wife: Which time?] Well, this is my second marriage. And my first marriage, well, I was twenty-nine years old, so that—let's do a little arithmetic.

That's ten years after you came.

Pardon me?

That's ten years after you came.

Yes, okay.

And where did you get married in uh, in Detroit?

I got married in uh, in Detroit, yes.

Did you have any children?

Yes, and, you met one of my daughters. I, I have two children from my first marriage. And my wife was married before. She has two children from her first marriage. And together we have four children.

Do they all live here?

Well they're, they're all grown up uh, uh. Two of them are married. Our oldest lives in California, she is uh, going to law school there. And uh, Stephen, who is uh, second. He uh, he's a graduate of uh, of Michigan State and he is now uh, doing graduate work at Harvard in the business school. And a third one Sherry, who's my oldest, she just uh, became a dietician. She just got her diploma a week ago. And Anita is just starting college, she is nineteen.

That's nice. Did you become a U.S. citizen?

Morris John Mandel Interview

Yes, I became a U.S. citizen after I—when uh, when the Korean conflict broke out I was uh, drafted and went into the U.S. Army and fought in Korea. And uh, I should have become a citizen before I went there, but uh, I did not become a citizen until after I came back.

And they took you in the army?

Oh yes, they'll take you in the army as—I had had my uh, my first papers in at that point.

Oh.

And uh, my intentions were—I was a legal immigrant...

Mm-hm.

who was going to become a citizen and I was uh, naturally eligible for the draft. And I was drafted. And, and I fought in the—in U.S. Infantry in Korea. Don't like to miss out on anything.

So far I haven't heard anything you've missed out on from the time you were born. What were your feelings and the initial impressions of the United States?

I loved it from the very first minute. Uh, they told us uh, what a wonderful—they told us in Europe what a wonderful country it is, that uh, all you gotta do is just walk down the main street and you can pick up money off the ground. And we did! We, we, we got to New York and my brother found a five dollar bill. So we knew it was true. [laughs]

[laughs]. A good omen. What problems did you encounter?

Um, at first I, of course, I didn't um, uh, have command of the language. It was very interesting when we first came to Detroit uh, we uh, enrolled—we lived around Dexter then—and so we enrolled at uh, at uh, Central High uh, to learn English.

Morris John Mandel Interview

When you say we, is it your brother and you you're talking?

My father, my brother, myself.

Oh okay.

And uh, uh, we would go twice a week. Tuesdays and Thursdays for two hours. And when we uh, when they interviewed us, when they uh, to accept us to these classes, they asked us some questions—I'm sure they were pertinent—and, of course, we didn't understand what they were talking to us. We couldn't speak any English. So every now and then we'd say yes and then we'd say no. And every now and then we'd get a funny glance from the interviewer. And, and we would go through a whole semester and in the first hour you would get a class of uh, of uh, arithmetic and the second hour would be English. And we couldn't understand why we had to have arithmetic to learn how to speak English. Well, we found out at the end of the semester, we all got a diploma, we just finished the eighth grade again. [laughs]

[laughs] You learned the language very well.

Yeah, thank you.

Do you recall any anti-Semitism?

Uh, here in this country?

Yes.

No. Uh, I encountered a lot of problems as a young man when I came here uh, socially.

Uh, I—we were only able to socialize among ourselves—I'm speaking of the newcomers.

Um, the uh, young uh, the, the, the girls uh, they would have noth... nothing to do with

us. Well, I, I really can't blame 'em because we couldn't, we couldn't communicate with

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them. We didn't have any transportation where they were used to go out with fellows who had a car or something like that and... So uh, it took a little while but eventually we overcame that.

How long have the two of you...married?

[Wife: Fifteen years. If there was no anti-Semitism why did you change your name? ???]

Say it loud enough so that you...

[Wife: Oh I didn't think you wanted me on the tape.]

Sure! Go ahead.

[Wife: I said, if there was no anti-Semitism why did you change your name?] Well, actually I don't think uh, well perhaps, [Wife: Oh yes it was.] Perhaps it had to do something with anti-Semitism. Uh, when I uh, first became a traveling salesman, which is my occupation, I worked for a uh, local wholesaler from Detroit. And I—he started me out by uh, calling on some accounts in the metropolitan area and I had—I, I didn't have any trouble. My name at that time, I had changed my name from Gino Mandel to Morris Mandel. Uh, and uh, as I went uh, uh, around and introduced myself and, I found that I was able to do business with the, with the people. But then uh, after, after about a month or so, six weeks later, my employer decided that I was ready to travel out in the state and he gave me a territory mostly in the northern part of Michigan. And I, I went away for a whole week and I came back with practically no business and I asked—and I enquired of him, I says—I, I, I told him I, I couldn't understand that. I had really not much trouble selling merchandise in the metropolitan area and I couldn't understand why I had all this trouble up north. And he told me that, his opinion was that it must have been my name.

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And uh, he said, “Maybe uh, you know, when you go there uh, even though they know you’re Jewish, when you throw it at ‘em and you say Morris, maybe that—they might find that offensive.” And so uh, I asked him, well, what the suggestion was. “Well,” he says, “you know, the most common name is John Doe.” And, and my name used to be Gino. I say, okay, well, why don’t I just add John to my name. And uh, I added that. That was before I became a citizen. So then when I uh, when I uh, finally got my final citizenship papers, I just uh, added on to Morris, I just put in John and that’s how I became Morris John Mandel. The interesting thing was that when I went back on my next trip and I started introducing myself as John Mandel I didn’t have much more success. It turned out that they didn’t care for Catholics any more than they liked Jews. [laughs].

[laughs] Um, let me see here. Did you talk about your experiences?

Um, at first. When I uh, when I first came to this country people would ask me about my experiences and I would uh, and I would see all these incredulous looks on the people’s faces when I would uh, try to recount some of my experiences. And, and it suddenly occurred to me you know, after awhile uh, my God uh, this—it really sounds so far fetched. It must seem so strange to some people that, that people would actually behave like that. They would, they would perpetrate those kind of things on another person that I, I thought to myself, my God you know, I, I, I can almost find that myself unbelievable. And how can I really expect some of these other people to, to really understand and believe what, what went on. And, and at, at that point, I stopped. [Wife: When they had the Nuremberg trials on television—we were not married, we were just going around together. And he came over and we were watching it. I don’t know if you remember the

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program, but it was very vivid in descriptions. And I was sitting on the couch and literally sobbing out loud. I mean, I was just shaking. And he was sitting next to me and he was completely unaffected. Absolutely, totally unaffected. And I said to him, “How can you sit there and watch this?” And he says to me, “This is a picture. I saw the real thing. This can’t hurt me.” Now many of his friends are not the same way. They cannot go and watch things like this. But that’s the way he reacted.] [pause] Everybody, everybody reacts to this differently. I know my brother, his reactions, his feelings are entirely different than mine. Uh, he uh, he can’t sit and look at things objectively. It, it, it, it’s just too vivid. Uh, things are just too vivid in his mind. I, I—perhaps uh, perhaps it’s right or I don’t know whether it’s good or bad, but I, I’m able to just detach myself from it and I really don’t let it uh, bother me. And yet certain things do affect me, uh. So. Everybody, I suppose, gets affected by it a little differently.

What affects you?

Well, as I told you uh, the end result of that particular episode when I watched uh, when I watched *The Holocaust*. Uh, I was able to sit through it and watch the whole thing and, and uh, I didn’t really—it didn’t really affect me until the, the, the very last episode where, where the survivor of the family bounded over that brick wall uh, whatever it was there and went on that soccer field and joined the boys that were going to Israel in a game of soccer. And, and to me that man that, that he’s ready to begin life anew. And, and I just, at that point I broke down and I, I just completely lost control. But up until then I was just sitting there watching the whole thing without—completely detached, just looking at it and, and uh, with interest.

You told me that you played soccer in the Displaced Persons camp.

Yes, I did.

Could that have reminded you of yourself?

Well, perhaps. Uh, I played soccer here too. Um, we, we formed a uh, uh, soccer team after we came over here. We, we fort...uh, we formed a uh, generally our social activities when we first came to this country were centered around the Jewish Center. At that time the Jewish Center was located on Woodward and Clermont.

I remember.

And uh, we, we formed a choir. And uh, we—there was a... The, the, no, the soccer team was in existence. A matter of fact, the coach of the soccer team that... Uh, there was a Jewish soccer team called the Maccabees at that time. He came down to the Jewish Center to recruit players for his team. And he found a number of us uh, uh, that joined the team. And I enjoyed that, that was something that I liked to do uh. So, maybe that had something to do with it, I don't know. Maybe I saw myself in that. That's very possible...

[interruption in interview]

I—are you running it?

Mm-hm.

Go ahead...

No go ahead, you were saying—say something.

Nothing, nothing.

You stopped talking about it right after the reaction initially, when you first came over. Did you ever talk about it afterwards, such as after when *The Holocaust* was on?

Well sometimes, when people will directly ask me, I, I don't mind talking about it. As a matter of fact I am glad to talk about it. I, I'm, I'm—I think this is something that should be kept uh, out in the open and people should be informed and perhaps it could be uh, avoided in the future from repeating itself.

When you talk about it now, what's the reaction you find on people?

Well, I was watching your face as I was recanting some of my, some of my experiences and I saw some of the same expressions in your face tonight as I have seen on some of the people that I've uh, talked about this before. And it still happens. People still find it very, very difficult. Maybe today they're more receptive to it uh, particularly somebody like you who more or less knows about it. But some other people just find it uh, very hard to believe.

I'm not supposed to show anything on my face. [laughs] You just...

[Wife: There's no way that anyone can sit and listen to something like that without] Well.

[Wife: having anything on their face.]

I—but I don't think that it's at your experiences as much as the upsetness that I have with the Germans. I don't want you to think that it's you in particular that's upsetting me.

It's—I guess that the whole thing could happen is...

Well, I don't like to, I don't, you know, when you say the Germans. I, I never like to generalize and, and, and, and say that everybody is that way because it's—nothing is ever a hundred percent. I mean, as I told you before, there were some people that, that were

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willing to come out and, and, and, and actually hand us some food on our march. There are exceptions to everything...

Mm-hm.

Um. [Wife: Are you saying] The people [you don't bear the Germans...] uh, the people that, uh... Pardon me? [Wife: Are you saying you don't bear the Germans any ill will?] I don't know what I bear. [Wife: You didn't take the money.] No, I wouldn't take the money. Uh, when they were, when they were uh, offering—the German government was offering money, [Wife: Reparations] the reparations um, most everybody that I know uh, got money from the Germans. I, I absolutely refuse to uh, take anything from them. I'm not willing to let the—well, these, these are my own personal feelings. I'm not saying...

???

I am not saying that it was wrong for people to take the money.

Mm-hm.

I won't condemn anybody for it. Uh, this, this was just something uh, my own personal self. I just couldn't uh, get myself to do it.

Did you work for Krupp?

For who?

Krupp, Krupp?

[Wife: Krupp Steel?]

No, in Germany.

No uh, if I did, I didn't know about it uh, um. [Wife: Isn't that the arms manufacturer?]

That was the arms manufacturer.

Mm-hm.

Not as far as I know.

Do you suffer any physical illness as a result of your experiences in the Holocaust?

Well, I have lost all my teeth. Uh, that is definitely connected to that because uh, we all suffered a tremendous vitamin C deficiency. And uh, I was uh, when I came out of the camp uh, my mouth was uh, full of uh, of uh, pyorrhea, which is a result of that. And they, they wanted to uh, extract my teeth uh, when I was twenty-one years old. When I went in I had no problems, of course. As a matter of fact, when, when I was in the Army... After I came back from Korea I worked in a dental lab. First I went to Korea, then I worked in a dental lab. And uh, uh, there was a very good uh, people there. So... very good dentist who uh, examined me and uh, they wanted to pull all my teeth then. And this was all a result of, of this, of this camp. And uh, we, eventually I lost them. But uh, uh, a...and also I do have a slight uh, hearing difficulty that is connected with, with uh, with, um... Of course I mentioned to you earlier uh, when, when we, when we were straightening those steel rods, there was a lot of uh, uh, banging and clanging and a lot of heav...uh, very, very loud noise.

Does the past ever interfere with your life today?

[pause] I really don't know.

Are there particular kinds of situations that occur that makes you remem...remember images while involved in a daily task or a special event such as a holiday celebration or a sad occasion?

Oh, from time to time I'll, I'll remember my uh, youth and, and the happy family and um,

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my mother in particular. And uh, I uh, seem to have really blocked out my past, whether it's consciously or subconsciously or for whatever reason. Uh, I know that my brother uh, many times when we get together with people from the old country and uh, sometimes with uh, from our own place that has happened. Uh, not many times, but a few times that it has happened. And they would start mentioning names, even people, friends, schoolmates that I went to school with. I really don't remember 'em. And he, he does remember 'em. And he's younger than I am. Uh, I just seem to have blocked it out of my mind.

Do you have nightmares?

No.

Did you ever have nightmares?

I don't think so. [pause] Not that I uh, nothing of any significance. I have, I, I have dreams.

Can you describe them?

Not really, I know I dream. When I wake up I don't remember 'em.

Are you more at ease with talking with survivors about it, with family, or with strangers?

It doesn't seem to matter to me.

Have you told your children?

Yes. Um, I uh, I've tried to tell them. Uh, I don't think I've ever really gone into too much detail with them. These—they don't seem to have much patience for it, at least at this particular point. I feel as they'll get, get older, they'll be more receptive to it. We have a monument erected at the uh, ??? for... Um, I have my family's uh, members'

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names inscribed and uh, we go out there annually. And I always have tried to take my children with me when I go there. Uh, just to keep them in touch with it.

What are your plans and hopes for your future? Oh wait. Hm.

I, I suppose the same thing as anybody would hope. Uh, uh, we're blessed with a wonderful family. We have some very fine children. I have a wonderful wife. I hope that I will... [Wife: Skip that part on the tape. [laughs]]

[laughs] Nah, we've got it!

Well, some uh, I guess uh, time's not too far off and it's, going to have start thinking about retirement. And hopefully we'll be able to retire comfortably and hope to have our health and, and... Basically uh, I don't want anything different than most uh, any other person would want for his family, for himself.

What does it mean to you to be a survivor?

I don't think that's any special honor. It's just something that happened. Um, I wish it didn't. It doesn't mean anything special to me.

Are you angry today?

[pause] I—not consciously.

What has America meant to you?

Oh, I, I appreciate America very much. I, uh... [Wife: He says Americans don't appreciate America.]

True.

That, that, that is uh, true. Americans unfortunately don't know—people born here don't realize what they have. Uh, I'm not trying to tell you that, that our country is perfect,

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because it certainly is not. But it's a lot better than anything else I've seen any place else.

So, I do appreciate very much.

What does Israel mean to you?

It means a great deal to me. I am a very strong supporter for Israel. Uh, it uh, certainly uh, is on parallel with, with the way I feel about America, definitely.

How has your experience influenced your religion?

I uh, am sorry to say, in my own case I became l...less religious that I was when I was younger. I uh, don't know why. Um, we are, of course, Conservative, uh. And uh, we have a paradox in our family. We have a little bit of everything in our family. We have uh, two of our daughters are Orthodox and uh, my wife and I are Conservative, and two of our other children probably are Reform. So we have a little bit of everything.

Good mixture. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Not really, uh. I, I, I wish that uh, I wouldn't have to sit here and, and uh, and recant this, this whole happening. But uh, unfortunately it did happen and uh, and since it did happen to me, I'm, I'm glad that I had this opportunity to share it with some other people and really don't—can't think of anything else I'd like to add to the...

Do you have any special hopes for your children's future?

Only that they be uh, happy and healthy. The rest will take care of itself.

I think this is a good place to end it.

[Addendum to interview]

Eh, something that just occurred to me now you know, talking about this whole thing.

Uh, I seem to recall, as I go along, I seem to recall so many episodes that happened to me

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in the concentration camp. As I go along that things seem to come back to my mind. Yet, my, in my younger days uh, I remembered the basic things in the family. But in, in, and, and I vaguely remember some faces of friends. But I really don't remember my, my, my life before then. It's, it's like if I shut it out or s... and I don't know why. You would think it would be just the opposite.

You're saying it should be that you forget the concentration camp...

Yes, and remember the...

and remember the family?

remember, remember my uh, that life before then. [Wife: But if you remember that life before then, then you have to remember your brothers and sisters.] I remember them very vividly. [Wife: But you don't think about them.] I do. Uh, they were very much in my mind today, uh... [Wife: But this was during]Yahrzeit, you know. Today is, it was my Yahrzeit. [Wife: I can't remember once in the fifteen years we're married that you have talked about your brothers and sisters as people. Only that you had brothers and you had a little sister. But never what they were like, never their personalities, never what they did.] Oh, I remember their personalities. [Wife: It's like you, something you just...] No, no. I, I remember, I remember their personalities, their, their, their peculiarities and everything quite, quite in uh, minutest detail. [Wife: But you don't talk about them. That's what I'm saying.] Um, they just, just never come up in conversation. Sometimes between my brother and myself we talk about them. We do, we, we'll talk about them, particularly uh, when their birthdays come up and things like that, we'll talk about them, uh.

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How old were they?

Uh, how old were they. Uh, my younger sister was—uh, she was the youngest—uh, let's see, I was, I was seventeen. My uh, the third one, he was fourteen.

That was Sander.

Yes. And then ???? he would have been, he would have been about twelve. He wasn't bar mitzvahed yet. And the youngest brother, he was the fifth in our family, he was about eight, eight or nine. And, and my sister was five. And... [Wife: Which one was the one that went with your mother that your father agonized over?] Sander. The third one. [Wife: That was Sander] Yeah, he was fourteen. Fourteen or fifteen, maybe fifteen.