

This is an interview between Berek Rothenberg and Levi Smith, May 20th 1984.

Mr. Rothenberg, when and where were you born?

I was born in Poland. The city name Sandomierz. That's near the river Vistula.

How far is that from Warsaw?

It's far. And uh, I was born in 19...January the third in 1921. It was a nice historic town for the King Kazimierz. There was a synagogue—was a very big synagogue in this lotta historic thing, was uh, a, was a lot of towers and was a city, city hall called magistrat, and was a lot of Jewish or...organizations.

How many uh, how many people lived in the town?

About around eight hundred Jewish families.

And how many Gentile families?

Maybe three times as much.

Uh-huh. Um, what uh, what occupation were your parents?

My father was a shoemaker. My father was a shoemaker and I—when I finished school in 1938, I helped him to work with the—in the shoemaker—fixing shoes. And during the summer, my father used to, used to deal with orchards. So in the summertime he used to buy an orchard and we used to move out in the orchard and we lived all summer from, from the Shavuot holiday 'til the Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur holiday. In the fall we came home and before the holiday we moved back to the city.

You were uh, harvesting fruit?

Yeah, we were harvesting, I mean, we went to the farmer and we bought the orchard, not uh, we just did the fruits. And then we picked the fruits and we sold

the fruits and that, and that we made a living during the summertime. And during the wintertime my father used to fix shoes or somebody wants uh, order new shoes, so he, he make the order new shoes too. And I helped him to be—to help him to fix the shoes. Well, why I didn't like this trade because he couldn't make a good living from it—only still was a trade.

What schools did you go to?

I went to public school.

And were the Jews and the Gentiles...

Mixed.

...together in the school?

Right, right. Jews and Gentiles was, was together and we had uh, a cheder and we had five hours school. If I went to cheder in the morning I went in, in the afternoon in, in the public school. If I went uh, in the morning in the public school, I went to the, to the—if I went in the morning to the public school, I went to the cheder in the, I mean, the afternoon I went to the cheder.

What did you study in the cheder?

Oh we start uh, Alaph bet, and then davening and then we start chumesh and then we start bereshit. I didn't, I didn't go higher than chumesh Rashi.

So at what age did you stop going to the cheder?

Oh I stopped by age—to the bar mitzvah. By age thirteen I stopped. Oh the bar mitzvah was not such a huge like we have it here in the United States.

What was it like in Poland?

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In Poland was uh, Monday or Thursday we read the Torah. So we went in, in the shul. My father went in and, and I got aliyah. And then he passed out cigarettes to everybody and, and a shot of whiskey and a piece of lekach and everybody wished me lots of luck, and that was the whole bar mitzvah. It happened in the—in ???, only shul. Or we didn't make no, no parties at home. Maybe in the higher class—the richer people—maybe they made parties. I don't remember from having such huge parties like we have it here in the United States. And the youth—when we were young was lot of Zionist organization. We had Akiva, we had Hanoar Hatzioni, we had Maccabi, Maccabi club. We played soccer ball—here they call soccer ball, we called football. And we had the Betar, the Revisionists, and we have a lot of, and, and Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir.

Were you a, a member of any of them?

Yeah, I, I belong, I belonged to three organizations. I belonged to Akiva, I belonged to Maccabi, I belonged to the Betar.

What did you do in these organizations?

These organizations—something—we had a lot of knowledge about Palestine and they were talking about uh, Palestine, we. And we hachshara to go to, to—this time we had Palestine, everybody—the youth want to immigrate to Palestine, only it was very difficult because if we were—we got older we had to go for three years hachshara, then when England issued certificates, we could go on those certificates to, to Palestine. Only the war broked out in—that interrupt the whole thing.

Did you want to go to Palestine?

Yeah. Every young fellow, every Betar, every Hanoar Hatzioni, and from Akiva, from Maccabi, everybody—we were brought up so Zionist that everybody just hoped the day will come that we can go to Palestine, now what we call Israel.

Was it uh, what were the living conditions in Poland?

The living conditions we can say was very bad. Only we didn't know better, so was a normal living condition. For instance, working men like my father—shoemaker—we had two rooms. In the one room we fixed the shoes—it was the kitchen. On the other room was the, the bedrooms. And we, and we were...

How many people lived in your...

We were, we were five kids and my father and mother—we were seven.

And you all slept in the same room?

Same room. So we had two beds and we have two—we call it ??? to make—made from straw—bags from straw. In the nighttime we put it on the floor and, and two kids could sleep on like a mattress. And during the daytime we put it on top—on the, on the bed and the bed was filled high, that's all.

Did you own this home or were you renting?

No, we rented. We didn't own the home.

How was the home heated?

Home heated—coal—wood—coal. And it was heated in—mostly, a lot of people owned their homes, only they come from generation to generation. Like they inherited it from their grandparents, because if the son married, he stayed in the same house. If the daughter married, she stayed in the same house. But business people—so they moved out. Only by the uh, workmen like carpenters, tailors,

shoemakers—they were mostly third—not a third class—we called ourselves not for the high class people. For the working class people.

I want to ask you again about the, the Zionist organizations. Did you uh, practice uh, any military uh, in those organizations?

In the Betar there was the movement from, from Jabotinsky. We practiced, although we didn't have no—we practiced. We were more like a military movement. So we had brown uniforms, we had black ties and we sung uh, military songs mostly, and we always was dreaming that we're going to fight for our fatherland—for our, for our land. And that was a more a military movement.

In the other organization...

Did you have, have weapons in these organizations?

No, no, no, no, no, no. No, no kind of weapons. And just—just we—we were more military. They....

How old were you when you joined the Betar?

I, I was about thirteen years old. And I was in Betar and, and I was in the Maccabi, I played soccer ball. And uh, in Akiva I liked it because I had a lot of friends and neighbors and friends because—and we had all kind of meetings, all kind of lectures. And it was very interesting. We were poor but we were rich—in the other way we were very rich because you didn't see a boy or girl be on the street. Everybody was busy. Or we had a meeting come Monday night or we 'em Tuesday night. In the wintertime we went this, on this, on this lights. We—our town was a very hilly. We got—we had big hills. So we went down with the sleds and then we walked up and—the life as a young fellow was very interesting. Only

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we had troubles with the Gentiles. When we went to school they accused us that we killed Jesus Christ and they throwed stones on us and sticks. So everyday what we went to school or when we walked, walked out from the school we had always wars, always wars. There always—and it was—and Poland was very anti-Semitic, and especially our home town. We had eight churches and it was a very religious Catholic city. And so we always had to fight for existence. It was a soccer ball game, so they had the—they called themselves ??? that means young fellows before the army, and we the Maccabi. And we had a, a, a ball on Saturday or on Sunday, and if you lose—so they, they, they started booing us. If we won they start hitting us. So we didn't know what to do or—to lose the game or to won the game. We always were losers. Only they—we were raised and we went to school together and everything. Always they had told the, the last, 1938 to 1939 they always—they were going, “Watch out Hitler is coming on you, Hitler will come on you, Hitler will come on you.” Well, we didn't know too much about Hitler. Only they were threatening us. When came, when came up before the holiday—Christmastime—and the students from the universities, when they returned from Krakow—from Warsaw—and they used to wear all kinda caps—red caps with medicine or green caps—they used to wear such caps. They, right away when they came home for their vacation—for the Christmastime vacation—they stayed by the Jewish stores and they told the, the Gentiles not to go into shop by Jew or who shops by the Jews that they're pigs. And then the little, the little uh, merchant person what was standing outside, he had a, a table with a few things for sale,

they turned over those tables and they always—we, we always had to struggle.

Always was...

What year was that?

That was from 1937, '38. In 1938, when the war broke out between Poland and Czechoslovakia on the Olza in Cieszyn. So they blamed—they want to take it back from Czechoslovakia and they claimed it was a, a Polish territory, and some—a few Polish people got killed. So they mobilized all soldiers from 1938 I was a young boy, I was seventeen years old, they mobilized in our home town was, was stationed the army and they mobilized all the people, Jewish, I mean, all the Jewish people—younger and married, with—even with three, four children—they mobilized everybody, and they went to war. It didn't last too long; it lasted about two or three weeks. And still they were—they saying, they, the war when they were fighting Cieszyn on the Olza there was something from, from the Germans already starting to do it. So to fight, they organize. They, they drafted the Jews to fight and when they had a demonstration and when we said, "We go against Germany or against Lithuania when they—when Poland was fighting to, to—that Lithuania should belong to Poland," right away they started hollering against the Jews. Right away they, they broke the glass...the windows from the stores, from the storekeepers and, and we were Polish citizens and we supposed to fight with them hand by hand and to go against Lithuania and against Czechoslovakia and then when we had demonstrations in the street. So right away they said, "???" and right away they were against us and they were breaking the store windows and they're robbing, and, and that's all. That, that was the Polish people.

Were there uh, local police there?

Was maybe about a half a dozen local policemen. They're hidid themselves they shouldn't get beat up.

Did you have Gentile friends when you went to school?

Yes. We were living—in fact, I was living in a Gentile neighborhood. We had a few—about, about a half a dozen Jewish neighbors. Or mostly it was a Gentile, a Gentile neighbor on Jer...on uh, the street named ????. A big uh, writer—a Polish writer. And uh, and that was—on this street was a gymnasium. And in that—the time when students start going to the gymnasium it was, was impossible to cross the street because when they recognized that I'm Jewish—or they throwed snow—when it was wintertime snowballs—or they throwed stones or sticks on, on me.

How would they know that they you were Jewish?

They recognized. They knew it. I was dressed not uh, religious, because I was dressed a plain uh, a jacket, and pants, and the shoes. Or they recognized who is Jewish and who's not.

Did you know how long that your family lived in Poland?

My family lived uh, what I can go back about a hundred and twenty or a hundred and thirty years. My first great-grandfather, his name was Eddie Yudel Rothenberg and he was a, a merchant on the river Vistula. He used to sell wheat because our city was boundarying with Austria.

So you were in the south of Poland.

And, and we were Russia, and the other side of the river was Austria. And then my grandfather was born maybe in the, in uh, in the 1800's—in 1850, maybe 1860. So he was a merchant himself too. Then in 1905 he came to United States, my grandfather, to Detroit. And my father had brother—they came to United States. Only my grandfather was very religious and he wrote a letter to my father and he said not to come because United States is not as religious as uh, at home. So my father hold back and he didn't want—he didn't come. Or he had two brothers and a sister, what they came to United States and I have—I had a lot of living in Detroit from the Rothenberg family.

How many brothers and how sisters did you have?

I had four brothers and one sister. So my oldest brother, he was born 1917. He was a tailor.

What was his name?

Yudel, Eddie. In Jewish it was Yudel and here they, they translated to Eddie. Then I had—then I was, I was born in 1921 ???, so Berek. Then I had a sister Leah, then I had a brother ???, then I had another brother ??? Gedaliah, named after my grandfather.

And your, your mother's family, how long had they...

My, my mother's family—they lived a long time. Only they, they lived in another town called Ożarów. And not far—about, about twenty-seven or thirty kilometer from my hometown. And they, they lived—we all were from uh, from generations, generations from Poland.

Uh, what language did you speak in the house?

Yiddish. We speak Yiddish and Polish. Oh in the house we didn't—on the street we spoke Polish. On the house we—just Yiddish. And they, usually in Poland, from the working class we all use Yiddish language, even middle class. Or the high intelligence, like the—with the college or universities or something, they tried to assimilate themselves. So they started speaking Polish between themselves. Only mostly in Poland the Jewish people used the language Jewish. That was their mame'loshen.

How many synagogues were in your town?

Was lot of—was main synagogue the shul. Then was the bet ha midrash was connected. And then was lot of stiblach, that means uh, they, they belonged to rabbis. So they, was the—was a lot of rabbis and we had a lot of Chasidim what they belong to the rabbis. So every week almost—every few, few weeks a different rabbi came to town. So we—like my father was a Modzitzer Chasid. This...

Modzitzer?

Modzitzer. The Modzitzer Chasid was very famous for songs, and musics. He was very—and he was not far from my home, from ????. And then it was the—was a lot of, lot of rabbis—how many rabbis was in, in Poland. So they had Chasidim in our hometown. When they came was, was frailech. The city was, was in, in action.

What was it like?

I used to love it. I used to love it. When the rabbi came, he stayed by his host. Then after davening Friday night, we went home and we ate uh, we make—my

father make kiddush and we ate the supper and then we all returned to the bet ha midrash. And then the rabbi sat down a big long table and his Chasidim, his Chasidim was sitting around the table, then he make kiddush and it, he gives ??? That's uh, when he make hamotzi over the challa or he—piece of fish and ??? hand for hand. Like for instance if you sat on the end of the table, see they didn't serve you with a plate, or it went from hand to hand to hand to hand it come to you. And that was very nice. And then the rabbi start to—he give a nice shmues and it was very interesting and we spent almost the whole night Friday night just being in, in the bet ha midrash to listen to each week or each few weeks other rabbis came to town. It was a very religious town. We had a Gerer rabbi, we had a Modzitzer rabbi, we had a—I don't remember mention uh, we had our own rabbi too. He, he, he was living in Warsaw or he was a native from my hometown himself.

Did you ever travel to other cities to see the rebbe?

To me? No.

No.

If the rabbi, the Modzitzer rabbi, if he came to, to our town he had a sister-in-law in ??? and then he didn't go to bet ha midrash. He catered in his house because he invited so many, so many Chasidim to his sister-in-laws house and we spent the Friday night with the rabbi.

And what did you do on uh, Shabbos day?

Shabbos day was with—everybody had to go to shul. And after shul—so everybody had to go to shul. Only we...

The women too?

Naturally women, the men, the children, everybody. Uh, you didn't see not a one child on the street. If you saw a child on the street and some passed by or a relative or a neighbor, he was wondering, "Hey, what are you doing on the street?" So everybody know who you are, he knew who your father is and who your grandfather was. So, so it was no other place only to go to shul on Shabbos. Only when lately we like to go play football Saturday morning. So if the father didn't see us—saw everybody together in the shul, he came after us. And I can imagine, when he came up to us there was—if he be, if he be—we run away or we were hiding. Or when he returned to shul we were already there because there was a, a style in Europe that every uh, every family had a, a seat like a ??? we call a ???. And this seat went over from generation to generation. So we had to be on this seat. We had uh, we had two seats or three seats or four seats. The family had to be on this seat. Or sometime we changed those seats—not everybody could sit around. The seat was already from great, great grandfather. It was going over from generation to generation. So if somebody missed or he was sick or he was out of town or you went to play soccerball, or—we had a river Vistula—you want to ice skating on the frozen river, there was a—it was very, very unpleasant thing. And then, then if you went to cheder Saturday afternoon I had to go to the rabbi back to—in bet ha midrash and he heard, he—what I, what I learned the whole week, the Sidra and, I mean, the life was very interesting. There was another thing more interesting, that we had cholent. There was a, a delicacy uh, for Shabbos. So when the baker when he baked the challas, when he baked the bread and the

challas and everything, the oven was hot. So everybody took the cholent. So I was already selected to this job to carry the pot to the, to the baker. Was no name written—everybody had the same paper on top of this cracked pot and everybody had the same rope, a rope around on the cracked pot and we--and he put in maybe about a hundred pots in the oven. And after we went back—after davening when we returned home, every boy or girl who stopped in to this bakery to pick up the cholent, everybody recognized his pot. If somebody—sometimes we exchange, you know, we could make a mistake too. Only that was—the cholent was a tradition. Or it was potatoes or it was groats and kashe with bones, with meat, or potatoes with meat. It was a very interesting; the, the cholent was a tradition, a Jewish, a Jewish meal that uh, and uh, interesting is, it was not numbered—was, was no initialed and everybody recognized their pot. And the all pots almost looked alike.

Let me ask a religious question. Was it okay to carry the cholent from the bakery home on Shabbos?

Yes, on Shabbos, yes, yes.

What uh, what did your mother do?

My mother was a housewife. She had plenty to do—she was two rooms. Only with—then with my sister was already a girl, about ten years old. So I remember this, this—the, the bedroom like we call here, it was a wooden floor with red, with red paste, pasted the floor—nobody could go in during the day to this room. And uh, my mother worked in the kitchen. I mean, she, she had to do—Monday was the worst day of my life because my mother had to wash clothes—not like in the

United States you take and put it in the washing machine. Only we had to bring out a ???, it was a big tub—a wooden thing. And I had to go bring water. It was about two miles to go to bring the water. I had the shou...on the, on the shoulder to carry with two chains, two pails, because I was the second one from my brother. And then I couldn't send my sister for the, to bring the water, so I was elected already. And when came Monday, I, I said to God, "Why is Monday?" Because when my mother, my mother had to wash it, she had to boil it, she had to rinse it, and again rinse it. And it—so it was—she had—need maybe about twenty pails of water or maybe more. And in the winter time the, the—it was like—it was not a—with a handle—it was knocked out a hole and we had to throw in the pail and to pull out with a rope to put out the water. So when the ice was frozen we had to knock it out a hole and then take the pail and throw it in and pull out by, by the rope to the, the pails of water. So I had to bring again and go again and again and again.

Did your family have a car or a horse?

No, no. We didn't have even a bicycle.

What did you do on Sundays when you were young?

Uh Sundays that—Sunday every time was this. So we went to, to Maccabi. Maccabi had a nice local and we played ping pong. And uh, was libraries. We could, we could go in the library and we could read a Jewish book. And there was always something, always something. There was a Jewish play from the, some organization, from the Hanoar Hatzioni, from, from the Maccabi or from the Betar. And usually—and it was, I mean, when we were young I didn't enjoy too

much of my youth because uh, when 1939 the war broked out, I was eighteen years old so I didn't enjoy too much. I got caught between. So that was—the city itself was such a nice city that was just—was places to go. Was a beautiful park, very—and some day usually a orchestra or from the army or some—from the firemans or from somebody—some volunteers. They came to the park, they sat on the benches and they played beautiful music and uh, and the people sit and listen to the music or we walked around. Or if uh, not, we didn't have so much take this, this anti-Semite to, to chase us or to fight with us, we could spend Sunday with the, with the, with the Gentiles. Or if somebody stood up because—they had young fellows by us, we named him “???” the ???—the young fellows they used to make uh, they, they were drafted—they were wearing uniforms or they had shovels. And they were working all week and put the—between the—by the water, they put the dirt so the water would not overflowing.

A dike.

Dike. They used to work all week in this, in this place. And Saturday they got paid a couple zlotys and they thought that they—they went to town and they got so wild that we, we saw ‘em coming so we had to hide it. Only lately so we went—one could chase about ten boys. Or lately one fellow when he turned around, he could chase ten of them. So we had uh, serious fight with them and we won a lot of fights. I had a—my father had a friend—he just died in Toronto—his name was Yukel. And he used to—by trade he used to ride a horse and buggy. He used to have a horse from the railroad station and to the merchandise. And he was a very strong man. If he see—saw them coming, he turned around and he pulled

out a something—a piece of wood or something what he could catch in his hands and just the hats were flying. If they saw him coming—so instead they chasing us, he—we chased them. Oh we had always something exciting going on.

Uh...

‘Til—Jewish people usually we were not known for fighters. We always were busy with lectures or we came to ba’al darshan and he was uh, preaching bet ha midrash a—ba’al darshan.

What’s that?

A lectur... a ba’al darshan is like—he was not a missionary. Or he came uh, sometimes he, he collect for, for orphans or he collect for some Yeshivas, he collect for some other institution—for Jewish institution or for Keren Kayemet L’Israel for—to buy the land in Israel—in Palestine, you know. And we always had something. And we always—it was not a, it was not a bored day. If somebody want to, to—if somebody like this, the collect... this collective life to come together, you could always find—after work or you—if we went to school we had homework or we, we had to go to, to cheder and then, then—always something. Or if somebody want to play, to play games, like, we could play in domino or we could play shokh. You know, with ???, they call it here bingo.

Shokh is chess.

Shokh is chess, yes. And we always, we always were—we not, we not spend—we didn’t spent too much on the street like was, was very—we were mostly located in the organizations. We had so many organizations and the—was not—we always were—the same girl or the same boy could belong maybe to three

organizations. Oh you belong to Hanoar Hatzioni, no you belong to Maccabi or you belong to, to the Betar. And we always got some—we always met uh, together and always lectures in—or people from other town. Some town we had very educated people—their name was ???—he was a very educated person and he always got something to, to lecture. And I used to love to, to listen to the— about the Jewish history or I used to love about the Zionist Movement or about Dr. Herzl. I always was interested about Jabotins... I always interested to hear about the Zionist things. I was brought up mostly Zionist. I...

What occupation were you going to do uh, if the war hadn't come?

The, the war would not have come we were hoping to go to United States because my father had two brothers, and a sister, and I had a lot of cousins and uncles. Only the difficulty—way it was that uh, I had a brother what he went in the army in 1939.

In Poland?

In Poland. And uh, and he went in 1938, in 1937 we, we were writing letters to our relatives and my mother had a sister in Montreal, in Canada. We wrote letters and begged them how—maybe they can save him, maybe they can bring him over to United States. Or the quota was so used out to come to United States, it was very difficult what we had to go maybe through Cuba or maybe through, through different, other ways. Or direct from Poland was very hard. Or the time was so short—he was draft from the army, and he, he came out from the army. He, he didn't serve too long in the army because the war broked out and the war—the, the army didn't last too long either. So he went in, and I think he spent maybe

about three months in the army and then, then he came home. And, and he couldn't make it to United States. He was a very handsome—we all were—not that you had to be a tailor or had to be a shoemaker—we could, we could do something. I mean, the thing is the immigration was so difficult, even after the war when I was liberated and I stayed in Italy. And I registered in the American embassy to come to United States and I had five affidavits from a cousin from New York and from relatives here. They sent me affidavits and they all guaranteed from my everything, and still when I came—went to Naples to the American consul to find out when can I come to United States they said the Polish quota is so used out, that who knows how long I have to wait. Or thanks to President Truman—what we celebrate today his honored birthday—thanks to President Truman he allowed the, the—I don't know, five hundred thousand displaced person to come to United States, I was from the first one to come to the United States from the displaced person 1949. If not President Truman we not allowed to displaced person I would have to stay and wait 'til today to come to United States. The Polish quota was used up. The best quotas was the Russian quota, the German quota. Now the German quota—those quotas was not used. So a lot of us after we got liberated we want to come to United States—they said they were born in Germany and they lived in Poland or they were born in Hungary and they lived in Poland or they were born in, in Russia and they lived in Poland. And this was—they were the first to come to United States.

Let's go back to 1939. Uh, can you describe the events that uh, led up to the war in your town?

Fine. They came in—it was 1939 when they came into—to our hometown—that was about the 15th of September. The war was already about two weeks. And when they marched in, it was very—I remember I saw them where they standing on those Jeeps with those machine guns pointing up and down—our city was up the hill. And the first one was ???—he was shot the first one while he was interested—he was the—he was so—to see those Germans marching in and he was hiding behind a big door looking out—looking in—looking out and they shot through the door and they killed him. It was a big—the first—he was—got killed. His name was ???.

How old was he?

Oh he was, he was in his thirties.

Why did they shoot him?

Uh, because they were—maybe, they, they themselves were afraid—the Germans—because he was uh, looking down, looking out the side door, looking in and looking out how they driving by and they saw somebody, so they shot him. Then it was very, very—we lived by a river, so the Polish army went over the bridges, they set on the other side town, and this side town and there were big fights through this river Vistula. And finally the, the Germans chased the Pole, Pole over, then the Pole chased the Germans over, and then the Germans finally captured them and they blowed out those bridges. We had a one bridge where the train went by and one bridge where the horse and buggies and civilian what we could walk to this bridge and it was blowed up. So when they came in—so right away they, they present, so right away they organize a Judenrat.

What's that?

A Judenrat is like a Jewish council and it took ten best uh, people—like a doctor or a lawyer or a businessman or it—they made them responsible if something would happen, or a German would get killed or something—those ten people are responsible for, for those people. And then the, the, this Judenrat elected a president and uh, and we were right away, when the—when they established themselves, there was some shooting going on and a few got killed accidentally. And then they dragged—took us on the street—they grabbed us on the street, took us to work. So I remember they grabbed me to work to clean up the river because the, the bridge was bombed, so we had to pull out the dead horses, we had to pull out the dead people and the dead cows and that was very—it was rotten because the posts—it was standing from the bridge and when the water still so the, the horse was reeling around like a tire around. I remember I had to cut a horse in half, I had to sit on the horse and take a hatchet, cut it through the half and tied up the rope on the legs and drown him and pull him out from the water. And they—that was the first when they, they came. Then they claimed that a German officer got killed with—the Jews killed the German officer and it took us the whole city—mostly men and boys, and, and married men—they, they ??? and they took us. And we marched Polish soldiers they captured the prisoners and us civilian, and we marched about forty-five kilometer. Dusty roads, it was hot. I remember that was in September before the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur holiday. The dust in the roads was not paved and we walked to this place and then they, they—we, we had to march and who couldn't catch up with the—with this marching,

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they had the, the bayonets on their, on the rifles and they, and they poked us and we came into one place by half way called ????. Over there they manufacture sugar. And we stayed over there and right away I opposed—officers spoke fluently German and he came out and we hollered “Water, water, water.” It wa...but we marched, we—on the, on the—on marching, we’re out of water. So the farmers run out with pails of water, they were shooting on those farmers. They didn’t let them reach to us with the water. So finally when we came on the place—so he—they promised us when we reach the place when we get water, we get water. And they didn’t give us no water. So one—his name was uh, a young fellow, a nice fellow. He stood up, he said, “I want water.” And he was shot. His name will come to me. He was shot. And they said, “We can’t help him with nothing.” He was bleed...he was bleeding all night to death and we couldn’t help him—we couldn’t put out even a piece of rag on him to stop the blood—the, the bleeding. Finally in the morning we had—oh, I’ll always remember his name. Finally in the morning we had to get up and to come to this destiny in the place called Zochcin that had about ten, fifteen—one city was Opatow and from Opatow we had to reach to this place Zochcin. When we came to this Zochcin, over there they—we stayed—there was a big huge farm and we stayed over there over a week. And the—lotta got killed over there. Then they—we had to take off the hats and burn—make a, a fire, and dancing around this fire. It was like a dead, a dead dance or something. And at nighttime they used to take out young fellows digging holes and then morning they shot the people and they throw them in the

holes. It was—that was something scary. And I was a young fellow—I was eighteen years old. It was very scary.

How did they, how did they get you?

Just from the street.

They just found you?

From the street, from the—they walk in from the, from the houses. So happened that uh, and they—and then they—it was an order. If—my brother was hiding in the basement by a relative. So it was an order if we don't come out on the—on this marked place, called some—a marked place by the, by the city hall—and in ten minutes later they will go in and house by house, basement by basement they will search. And who they going to find hidden, they going to kill it on the spot. So people where they were hiding—they all came out from the hiding places and everybody—they didn't take my father, or they took me with my brother, and we marched to this place to Zochcin.

Just the Jews?

Jew, just the Jews. Only the front was the soldiers—the prisoner—soldiers—was, was Jewish, Jewish prisoners, it was uh, Gentiles. They marched first and we had to follow them.

What about your younger brothers?

They were too young to be taken to this first march.

And the, the women they left alone?

The women they left alone by the first, by the first march. And we came over there and we stayed over a week. Before the holidays—before the Rosh Hashanah

holiday they released us. Somebody, somebody said that the, the archbishop from our hometown was of German descent and the Jewish people went to this archbishop—the fathers, the mothers went to him and he had something to do with it that they released us for the holidays.

And so uh, then you went home.

Yeah, we went home. So we—I remember that there was a, a highway about forty-five miles or forty mi...kilometer and the highway was from both side. The fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers came from this side and we came from this side and all the, the merging was on, on the highway. The whole highway was full of people. The, the, the simcha was so excited we were, you know, because they didn't know what they going to do with us. They—rumors was that they going to shoot us out and they going to send us off to Germany. They going to do all kind of thing. But finally we got release. But we got released. So, it was starting, start the trouble.

Were you, were you marched out there by the, the German army or by the Gestapo?

I think it was by the army. We didn't—we saw German soldiers and we couldn't tell. Later on we knew who the SS were, who the Wehrmacht was and who the SD was. On the beginning Germans, Germans they all wore the uniform, they all were mean and uh, just the look on them uh, you, you got scared. You couldn't walk on the sidewalk. You had to get off from the sidewalk, you had to take off your hat for each German. It's no difference or he was a Gestapo or he was a Wehrmacht. Now they making differences—oh the Wehrmacht was better than

the Gestapo. They all were alike. To me uh, when he was a German—when he was wearing the uniform, he, he fill out the, the, the command like, like everybody else.

So uh, uh, what happened next in your town?

Then in next in our, in our town, so it happened that uh, that right away start uh, his name was Gudel Edelman and he organized a, a, a work, I mean, he was the organizer like on an employment office. He went to the Germans—to the Gestapo, and he told ‘em, “Look, how many people you need? You need five hundred people, don’t grab the shoemaker with the tailor with the carpenter with the—when he have to make a living. Just come to me, give me an order for five hundred people, I will give it to you.” So he took a—made a list for all Jewish men from uh, ten—twelve years to sixty-five. And when they told him, “We need three...four hundred people,” so they—he went and he had already helpers and he sent out the, the names and he came up to you and he says, “Look, you have to go to work tomorrow...”

[interruption in interview]

“...if you have somebody to send in my place I would appreciate it, or I pay you. How much cost it, twenty zlotys or something?” And, and etc. And then, so what happened? They had to—they, they, they so many people to work already, plus they had—if they, if they saw girls or they saw a man on the street, they grabbed him anyway. I remember I was already working. Let’s say I had to work two days a week or three days a week. My father was a shoemaker, my brother was a tailor, and I was working with my, with my father. So sometimes my father went to this

Edelman, he said, "Listen. My son will work for me for, for, for him and for his brother. He will work five days a week, you got a place for him?" So he found a place or I went in the army and shined the shoes when they came back from the, from the—when they out for exercise, when they went out. When they came back I grabbed their shoes and shining. Or I had to clean the toilets, or you had to clean the bathrooms. Uh, those kind of works. So still they were not satisfied with that—what he delivered those people. Plus that—they went and they—we're the one that drove by with the truck. When they saw some young people uh, on the street, they grab you. You always were on—you couldn't, you couldn't walk out. If you went out for—to buy a bread or something so if you just, you cross the street. Then they organized Jewish police. And the Jewish policemen they supposed to, they supposed to work on the, on the Jewish side or they help—if they got a order they, they took the order from the Germans too.

How did the people uh, feel about this uh, this Jewish uh, employment agent?

Jewish employment agent helped a little bit and then became a business—then it became a business.

What did he do before the war?

He was, I think, a paper write...uh, a newspaper writer. His name was Edelman. So, then, then it became a business. For instance, like I mentioned, if you need five hundred people he sent out a thousand names. Two, three hundred people came, paid in, the five hundred people came to work and he got two, three hundred people to pay in. Well, right away it start to become a business.

Did they uh, did they pay the workers?

No, no, no. For instance, if you—for instance, the Germans want five hundred people for tomorrow. He went and he had his helpers and he sent a thousand names. The five hundred people came to, you know, they came voluntary to work. Well, the other five hundred uh, they paid—they didn't—we didn't know he sent out a thousand names. And the other five hundred or four hundred people came and, and they paid to this Edelman to put a person on his place. Only if he had already the five hundred people and the four hundred people paid in—there was, there was clear money. Oh he need always the money. Because if somebody was in the—I will say it happened to me that I realize he need the money. Because thank God that what we survived is because you could bribe the Germans. I mean, a German was easy to bribe. Or you bribed with him with a diamond ring or you bribed him with a watch, or you bribed him with good food, or you bribed him with a cognac, with good drinks or with cigarettes. Or you could bribe him with a good boots—they liked good leather boots, or with a fur coat. That was the, that was the—I happened to be there—I, I was almost to be shot and this Edelman saved our lives.

What happened?

What happened. Happened that when I was—had five days to work steady for him, so he took about thirty, thirty-five dollars and we were assigned to one soldier and he came and he picked us up with the truck and from the city to the railroad station—was about six or eight kilometer—and he took us over to the railroad station. We um, had unloaded coal from the boxcars. And then from the army they used to come to this railroad station with requisitions, and we used to

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give to this—to the, to the soldiers the coal. We loaded—we load up their trucks with coal. Only it was cold in the winter and we need—coal you couldn't buy. Everything was rationed. Uh, how much coal we could get per week or per month and how much bread ??? So we tried to ask the soldier—he was a very nice fellow—we asked him if it's possible we can take some coal. He said, if it's impossible, he will go and ask the officer and that he will go ask. He never asked. And we went and we tried. And we were, we were saw with him that even if we took it he couldn't—he didn't say nothing because he alrea...we were already working with him a couple weeks, he didn't give us—he didn't have no hate for us at all. So we went and we start taking home big piece of coal, like a monument. And when we took off the burner, say, for instance, me—I had a family like my father and mother and sisters and brother—sister and brothers. I took home this piece of coal. Well some people went and start selling the coal and start to become a little market in the neighborhood. So right away they start to smell it out from where that comes. And it was some went and they squealed to the high official that those people where they unloading the boxcars' coal, they, they stealing the coal and they selling in the, in the Je...it was not a ghetto, and this town was not a ghetto—it was like Jewish uh, the Jewish people usually lived mostly together. So it happened that uh, that uh, this officer went to surprise us. He sent out the Gendarme and when we went back from work, they stopped our truck and they search our truck and we have coal. So the soldier found it out that today the, the officer is going to send out the lieutenant or the colonel who, who—he was is going to send out the Gendarme and he's going to stop us on the

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road and, and see if we have coal. And we didn't take no coal at all. And when the Gendarme with the motorcycle—they stopped us and they told us to get off from the truck. And we got off from the truck and they went in the truck and they didn't find not a drop of coal because we didn't take it. So the squealer—the musul like we say in Jewish—he was a, he—he didn't tell the truth. So anyway, if you steal—if you get away once or twice or you gotta be caught. And we got caught. When we got caught they put us, they put us in a little jail—in a city jail. And then they mar...they put us out in, in five in a lane with the rifles and bayonet and they took us—we had a big jail. And then we marched down to the jail. And the mothers and the fathers were standing crying, “Oh who knows what's going to happen to our children.” And we marched down to the jail. And they start interrogating us. So we made up one slogan, that uh, we asked the guard for a piece of coal and he refused. Or one time he said he will ask the officer if we can take home a piece of coal and the patience went out—we didn't have no more patience to, to wait 'til he will give us the answer—it was too cold, and we took it without, without his okay. And because we didn't want involved him—the soldier—because right away it was a threat they're going to send him away to the Russian front. So we, we tried to pro...like protect him. So, so this Gudel Edelman, he went to this officer—to this SS-man who he knows is going to interrogate us and he bribed him. I already give him some fur coat, he give him some boots, he give him some uh, diamonds. And he made a one sentence for us, one sentence. He say, “If you do it again, then you're going to be shot.” And put us on the truck, and send us back to the work, to the same job, only with a

different guard or we couldn't touch this time. Not because we couldn't touch—we could bribe this guard or, or talk him into it too, only the thing it was that, that we were afraid already. If we would get second time it was no excuse, not by the Germans. So we were luckily, we got off the first time.

What were the uh, High Holy Days like in 1939?

Nineteen thirty-nine was normal. The high holidays we conduct normal. Nineteen forty was, we conduct normal. Was in 194...in 1941, I was home. We had uh, already I think, it was already separately, we had to—I think still we went to the—no, I don't think so—we went to—in '41 to—forty we went to synagogue—'41 I don't remember we went to synagogue. We had already to not to groups or any big groups.

Were you still active uh, 1939, 1940 with uh, the Betar?

No, no, no, no. Everything was dissolved. We—because we already—some ran away because Russia saved a lot of Jews. A lot of from our hometown went over, because we had the Vistula, and then we had another river called the Bug. And the Russians came to the Bug, to the Somme, it was another river, Somme. And a lot of boys and girls went over to the—on the Russian side because they saw that uh, we didn't—the first year or two we didn't talk about crematoriums, about gassing—we didn't, we didn't think about those kind of things. Maybe they will take us out to labor camps—we will, we will have to labor and our parents still remember the World War I, there was no gas chambers, there was no—or maybe they will take us for laboring or for—concentration camps was not so much talked

like about labor camp. Then we heard there's a Majdanek and then is a Treblinka, then we have found out there's an Auschwitz.

When did you find out about...

That was—that already in 1941 we were already talking about. Then they said they're building concentration camps in Germany, Dachau, in Auschwitz, in Buchenwald, in those—but when that start coming out and we—still we couldn't believe it they will take fathers and mothers and, and children. All right, I'm eighteen years old, I'm able to go to work. My brother was twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. We think, does we—we're going what we're going to suffer. Or that, only if they start hitting, beating, shooting without question, without nothing, without, uh, everyday, everyday, everyday on the run, on the run. I, I volunteered—when I volunteered I worked on the roads for a company called Straßenbahngesellschaft Ümler from Stuttgart. So I used to work on the roads. I used to put the asphalt on the roads. So we were a group and we used to went away for weeks.

When did that start?

That started 1940.

And did you get paid for doing that?

Yes. Just uh, not too, not for too long they paid us. Not for too long. Right away they cut off the pay. They give us, they give us uh, soup and we slept by the farmers and we left the house—we left the homes and uh, for the weekend we returned for clothes uh, for changing clothes and uh, only we were thinking it's not going to be like, like uh, like loss.

Did you volunteer to do that work?

No, I volun...I didn't volun...I volunteered because I covered the family. So I asked Edelman if he could give me a steady job. So that was a steady job to go over there. So I work on the roads and uh, put the asphalt down and uh, then in the wintertime we used to uh, heat the, the boxcars—the tanks, and we used to—the, the, the asphalt—the tar we used to melt it like liquidy. Then we used to have a—build barrels—big wooden barrels and we used to pour it in the asphalt in those barrels. And then the springtime the barrels got uh, how to say it—they, they, they....

Expanded.

It expanded the asphalt start running out. It was—I tell you, the tar was a terrible thing. We used to get drowned in it. We had to pick up by pails and when we walked in with our feet we couldn't pull out our feet from there. Anyway, I'm telling because of the free country I'm just telling uh, how it was that stupid, not thinking uh, how the—just they had labor, free labor. So we were doing things that—I remember in 1939 in the, in the winter was the ice was frozen—I'm jumping from one place to the other one. The ice was frozen and they didn't, and they didn't want it—the ice where they build up the bridge—they didn't want the ice. So we had to go out with the soldiers—they used to knock out holes and we used to dynamite those ice. I remember one time right across that when I was standing on a piece of ice and I, and I had to wait 'til he came over and he picked me up. He came with this uh, I don't know how to say—with a, with a little boat and, and he picked us up. And we were standing on ice and we used to go out uh,

from the, from the land to, to the middle, middle in the river. And then we used to bore holes and then we—on the end of the board we used to light it up a—and we used to put it in and load up and here we standing on a piece—a chunk of ice.

They, they came and they, they rescued us.

Did you know how to swim?

No, no swim—we know how to swim. On the wintertime they going in ice water.

So uh, how long did you work for his road crew?

For the Ümler, I used to work uh, from oh, about a year and a half or more.

About a year, a year and a half. Then I worked the, the other odd jobs and the cleaning the—by the army, and then by the coal.

You returned to your hometown?

Yeah, yeah. And then finally in 1942 they came in—they broke into the house—it was already like a ghetto—a Jewish policeman with the Germans—and I had a paper to show that I'm working for Ümler. Nothing helped and they took us to the jail. It was a big place or whatever. And they took all the young fellows—mostly young people. And they put us in the boxcars and they shipped me out to ammunition factory.

Did they take your brothers?

No, they didn't. My brother he hided. My brother and—my, my two brothers, they hided. And I was thinking that I'm working for this company and they're not going to touch me. Only they said, for this replace...for this—for him we replace other people. And they took me away in 1942 to Skarżysko.

Did they take your father?

No, didn't take the—my father was shipped out a month, or a month or six weeks later—my father, my mother and my sisters, my two brothers—they shipped them out I think to Auschwitz. Because we had a guy from the Judenrat, he—and he used to come, bring us mail or something. And, and they would—last time he came—he says no more because all gone—they all—the city's clear. They shipped everybody away.

And that was the last time you saw your father?

I did...I saw the last time in, in June, June of '42. And I didn't see them no more. So, and then my brother get uh, they took my brother to another uh, labor camp—in ammunition factory too. And I found out that my brother's alive—my oldest brother. And we contact each other through a Polack. He used to go from one place to the other one by mail. I give him a little letter and he—and then they shipped out my brother to Auschwitz. From Auschwitz some place else and I lost him. If he would survive—he was four years older than me—he would contact my uncles—my uncle Nancy in Detroit, and the whole family. Or he didn't contact nobody so I knew it. And from Skarzysko I worked over there—ammunition factory to '43—around little later than '43. And then they shipped me out to Buchenwald.

This was uh, all of the Jews working in this ammunition factory...

Yeah.

...they shipped to Buchenwald?

Buchenwald.

What did they tell you uh, you were going to be doing there?

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Nothing, they didn't say nothing. The, the—we were like—this time we were already—in this Skarżysko, we're talking about Auschwitz so many Jews got killed and in Bergen-Belson so many Jews got killed. Nobody mention about Skarżysko. In Skarżysko—swallowed hundred of thousands of Jews. There was uh, three camps, A, B, C. It was A—I was working in making those shells for, for the—for canons. I was working very hard. Who is a survivor from Skarżysko and he finds out—hears that I work for the Granaten across from the bathhouse. When you walk back over there the fire was just like hell. Hell is—must be not as hot. And the fires we used to melt—not melt—we used to heated the steel and we used to shape the steel and we used to roll it in hot sand. The sand was boiling and people used to walk in, in the sand. If they didn't have no rags on the, on the shoes, on the—or we didn't have no shoes. If we had no shoes we had to put on some rags. If there's some sand got in, into the feet right away blisters and people were falling left and right. Where I was working I used to shoot in those shells in the wall and everyday they brought in people and they fell. The—every shell weighed fifty-five kilo. And two and a half pound a kilo, you can make it how many pounds that is. And when they picked it up and they couldn't put it in and they fell with the, with the shell, so many people died. And then in, in uh, in the, the camp C in Skarżysko, they used to pour it in the ???, the total, the, the, the, the powerful thing. People walked around yellow. Everybody was yellow and it was, was indescribable. Just people were dying left and right. We, we were dying from three ways. We were dying from work, we were dying from hunger, we were dying from the, from the ??? from the Ukrainian what were uh, were, were

watching us—the guards. And we were dying from the foremans—what they were all half uh, Polacks, Volksdeutsch or they were Ukrainian or they were Polacks and, and, and we were dying. And on top of that, if we, we came home—so we were dying from the Jewish policemen too sometimes.

Let's, go, go into more detail of this. Uh, you said people were dying of starvation...

Starvation and beating too.

...what did, what did they give you to eat?

They give us—in the morning we got up we didn't get nothing. Maybe black coffee. Then uh, if, if I worked in daytime so they brought the soup in the, in the—to the factory. So what was the—I remember it was liquidy. It was, it was uh, uh, they took the, the—some potatoes with starch and they used to make a soup with the starch and the starch got—the starch falls down and water, and the water was liquid. Sometime they had beets—pickled beets. Uh, it was no meat, it was no, no potatoes or noodles or something, they forget about it. This was a liquidy soup. And then we came home, so it was a loaf of bread for thir...twelve or thirteen people. And if you think that a diamond cracker cracks diamonds exactly to the—only he, he doesn't crack as good as the guy what was cutting this bread. He was cutting to the precision. And everybody wanted two ends. So how many, how many ends of bread it's got. So he—so we divided like in a room. First we lived in Ekonomia—in a building called Ekonomia. And Ekonomia had little cages like when you saw in, in *The Holocaust* they showed you people little cages. We couldn't sit, we couldn't stand. Or you had to lay on your stomach or you could lay on your back. And everybody want to look around on the floor

what's going on, and there was maybe about twelve, thirteen, fourteen uh, high. And everybody liked it around higher, higher, higher. And we were looking around down. So the person what they received the soup and he was a heavy smoker and he want to smoke, so he used to go around and selling the soup. So when the soup got cold, so was an expression ??? zup ??? lefl shtekn. The spoon still sticks in the soup, so thick the soup got. It was just potato starch, you know. So he sold the soup for a cigarette, or maybe for half a cigarette. Well this guy died. Or a piece of bread—and so he want a cigarette, so he didn't, he didn't eat. So he sold his piece of bread for a cigarette. And uh, ho...so the Ekonomia was so dirty, filthy. Where you slept one night you, you didn't sleep the other night. And when we were laying on this—in this cages and looking down. And if you had to go with the water, excuse me, and uh, when you're hungry, you cold you have to run. So when we came down and we had to stay in the line by the door and he only send out five at a time or three at a time to the toilet. Well 'til I made it to the door I already uh, made it in the pants, so I returned back and, and I couldn't find my place—somebody already lays on my place so I had to find another place. And even if I had a few rags—a shirt or a pants or something—sometime I couldn't find it. I set uh, laid it down—I figured I, I will return to the same place. I never returned to the same place.

How many days a week did you work?

Six days. On Sunday was worse. Sunday we changed the shift. So we had to go from seven to twelve, I think, or to two and then to go in twelve, mid...uh, midnight shift to, to seven in the morning. And Sunday changed the shift. And

the, the hours what we were in—at home, we had to do the cleaning. So then they built up a new, a new camp with barracks and with rooms, with the, with the bunk beds. So then was uh, was, was a little easy living. So four people—two on top and two on the bottom. It was maybe about fifteen, twenty bunk beds—about forty in a, in a, in a room. So then was, was a little different. We knew each other, we could trust each other. It was a little different. All in—who—the first one when we came to Skarżysko, uh, the, the ??? and, and this uh, and, who lived in the Ekonomia—if somebody survived very difficult. And the Jewish policeman walked around over there and they hit you over, over nothing. Over nothing. We had one—I will mention—was Krzepicki and the other one was Tepperman. They were two murderers. I'm ashamed to say this. But what I went through this—only they were two murderers. I don't know if they're alive. They, they were, they were from Radom.

Did people talk about trying to escape from here?

Yes, they were talking about escaping—where they got to escape. There was no—I had a fellow—he lives now in Montreal—his name is Yudel Teitelbaum. And he said to me, “Berek, let's run away.” The hair was cut off. The clothes—we were wearing our civilian clothes—clothes was torn, dirty, filthy. And the Polacks were walking around and looking for a Jew like we're looking out for Messiah should come. If they found a, a Jew—so they right away they turn you into the police or to the Gendarmes or the Germans and they received a carton of cigarettes or a liter of kerosene or a pound of sugar—so they walked around looking for a Jew. And it was wires—about three, four electric wires. Go make

through, through those wires. It was dark. Only the way to escape was between—to go to work between the camp and the factory was about two, three miles. You could escape this way if somebody would wait with something to, to pick you up. Or the otherwise, to go through those wires. People made it. It was very hard. And if they caught ‘em on the other side, they brought ‘em back and they shot ‘em.

Was there just uh, Jewish men in this camp?

In Skarzysko was only Jewish men. Was Polacks too, only they came in to work, because that’s ammunition factory before the war, and they were working over there before the war. They were the, the uh, the, the foremans, they were the mechanics, you know. They came in during the morning and they went in the evening. They went home in evening. Only, which shift they work, so—or they were—they, they could go home. They got paid. That was their regular job. And this Teitelbaum—what I mentioned what is in Montreal—he managed to escape. Or he went in, because he comes from a village not far from my hometown, and he went in and he knew a girl what he went with her to school. And she hide him in the, in the stall with the, with the cows and the—about two, three years. Finally, when he—and the—her parents didn’t know it. If the parents would knew it that he’s hidden over there—because if he would get caught, she would get shot and her whole family.

She was Jewish or Gentile?

No, Gentile. Polack. So then after the war he married her and she converted to Judaism. They got two girls, they’re living in Montreal. And when I go to Canada, Montreal, we are like two brothers. We, we see each other, we hug each other.

And we always talk about—we never forget what we went through together. Only he didn't—he said, "No, I'm not going to stay here. You want to go with me?" I said, "You got where to go. Where I will go?" She will accept him, or where I could go?

Did the uh, uh, the people in the camp talk about uh, revolting against the guards?

Was, was uh, about revolting was very difficult to talk about. First of all, if a person is hungry, he's only looking how he could find something to eat. Or from revolting, it was very—we didn't think of that. Uh, maybe some other people was commandos. Commandos that means like brick layers, carpenters, plumbers. They used to go out, in and out. So maybe they could think about to do something. Or those what they—we—what we work inside the factory—we, we were searched coming in, we were searched going out because we used to make bullets to, to, to, to, to rifles. We used to do all kind of ammunition, it was ammunition factory. We always were searched and that. So, about revolting I don't, I don't know. I remember one time that marching in from the, from the factory to the, to the camp so was a group partisan or something, they put in two guys in our group to go in the camp. And maybe those guys want to organize and maybe cut the wires or something. Or somebody found it out there's two strangers in the camp. They were searching and searching and searching, and they found 'em. They found those two, they took 'em out on the, on the truck, took 'em and they shot 'em. Until they shot 'em, what, what they went through the interrogation, irri...uh, how do you say irrigation, interrogation. And then, what they went through. So one time I heard about only—mostly we were occupied

with the next day—how to, how to catch a extra piece of bread, how to get a little extra soup. Who you know it and what you know it, and that's all to do it.

You must have been losing a lot of weight.

I weighed this—I got a picture that's after the war—I weighed about forty, forty kilo.

That's about a hundred.

About, about ninety pounds.

Ninety pounds. How much do you weigh now?

Now I weigh two hundred. That's after the war, 1945. Maybe about three, four weeks after the war.

What uh, what kind of a shirt are you wearing in this?

That's uh, the stripe, strip—what you work in, in Buchenwald in the concentration camp—we're wearing stripes. In Skarzysko was a labor camp, we could wear our civilian clothes.

Why do you carry this picture with you?

That's a memory, that's, that's the only thing what is left. How can I forget? I give it to my children. Everybody's got it. I, I made copies and everybody's got a picture like this. That's all.

These are unhappy memories aren't they?

In a way unhappy memories. In another way if God give me that I lived through this and if I can tell you what I went through—I'm not telling you even now one percent. The days—everyday what I went through in Skarzysko was, was in...indescribable. I mean, you can't, you can't—the, the, the jobs what I was

working is if I start to tell you if I was working in this, in this—in, in Granaten uh, with, with this, with those—I—first I had to stay by a machine where they used to break square pieces of steel—fifty-five kilo a piece—and I used to grab ‘em like, like, like bricks and stack ‘em up in, in bricks. Then, I used...

By yourself.

By myself, just grab ‘em.

A hundred and twenty pounds.

Grab ‘em. They, they came out—that was, was a—the big long steel came and that guy was starting—he’s in, in New York, Yumen Fogel—he used to stay with a torch and he used to burn the four corners and they—it measured out. And then when they pulled it in—it was a big—call it in Polish ???—that means bricks. A big machine with two knives—triangle knives what the one was pressured with water, and one with, with power, with air. And I got it with a handle and when this piece of steel was taken down close to the knives and then when he pulled the handle and this pressure, the water with air brought this piece and it came out through a, through a chute and I had to grab it and stick it up. Grab it and stick it up. All day I had to stay and, and, and, and grab ‘em—fifty-five kilo a piece. And then they took it a or—hm—and then they put it in the oven. Then when the machine had to be repaired or something, sometime they take—took me to the oven, and when they put it in—this pieces still through this side um, went through fire—when came out was burning shells. So I had a big tong hanging on a chain and I had to grab this thing and it had uh, like a half a moon and I had to scrape it off this, this—the skin—this brick. And then that was in a—it went in, in a press.

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From four edges became eight edges. And that pressed on eight, then make a little hole, then went through another position. And that went through and got as long—maybe about, about fifteen, twenty inches long and then uh, not to tell you the procedures what we—what I went through. And I worked on every one. They, they put me on every one to work it. I was young—I tried, I didn't give up the hope. I was hoping that some days that uh, maybe the war will come to a end or—I, I always went to people—I always give hope to people. I told 'em that uh, everything's got a beginning and it got a end. So I remember, I used to work with a rabbi. He was from ???, the ??? rebbe. He used to carry those bottles of air for this guy with this welding. So he u...and he didn't have—should have a style how to roll this bottle. So he used to pull it. And uh, when I was eighteen, nineteen or twenty years old, and the rabbi was forty-five—already an old man—he was pulling—me and another fellow ???, we used to run out and we used to help the rabbi out, because we had respect for him—he's a rabbi and he's an older man too. We tried to help him out. And he always blessed us. He says, "God will help, you will see it. You will survive." I uh, I believe that uh, that his blessing maybe helped. I tried, I always tried. I'd never give it up. And I could die a lot of times. And I remember I worked in this Skarzysko, I worked by a press uh, sawing machine what was sawing big trees. In those trees they made, they made dyes for the, for the presses. And I had a sawing—I used, but my job was to just to set up and to watch the oil and the water be running. And it would cool off the saw so it don't get hot. And I figured that will take maybe two hours or an hour an a half. I supposed to tell the foreman that I'm going to the toilet. And I didn't tell the

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foreman, I figured I will be back. I went into the toilet and the toilet you got the all gossip, you know, how much uh, the bread—the value of the bread, you know, how much uh, where the war is, where the Americans stay, how the Russians stays. The whole politic and everything went on in, in this toilet. And I forgot to return so quick and this saw cut through this piece of steel and somebody had to reverse it. And nobody at—reverse it and the pressure was so—and this saw—this, this box busted. It was maybe over there about twenty, thirty barrels of oil. The, the whole plant was with oil. And they came, and the one—the fellow came—he's in Israel now—he says, “Berek, you're dead.” I said, “What happened?” He said, “Your machine—” my machine was the name the ???—“??? busted.” Oh my gosh, like my father and mother would die. So I run in and I saw the machine busted. So already the Germans with the, with the, with the red band with the swastikas—there were maybe a dozen—they were standing in the oil over the knuckles and the boots. And they say, “Where were you?” I say, “I was in the toilet.” “How long?” I say, “About two minutes, five minutes.” “They—we staying already about ten minutes and you were not here.” I said “Uh, maybe it took—I didn't have no watch,” I said. Or I couldn't answer either. I just uh, said what they asked me. “You, you saboteur, you bust the machine.” I say, “I don't know what saboteur is, I'm not a saboteur.” “Yeah, you're a saboteur, you bust, you bust the machine.” So the man in the foreman was a Polack—his name was ??? I remember the name. So he couldn't stand it. They, he knew what's going to happen, he took a, a board and he hit me over the head and over the back so I shouldn't stay in front of them, because more I stayed, more they, they were ready

to grab the gun and just give me the bullet. And they—and he just took a board and when he hit me I run away, so I didn't face those Germans. And then they give a order to two guards, "Take him and shoot him." Right away they took me out and they start marching me to shoot me. And then Jewish fellow—he was a welder—he said he can weld this together and can fix the machine—it will be like new. And I was already a few feet away and they hollered, "Bring this dog back. Bring ???." So they walked me back and I, and I came and, and in between then they put me to another job and they fixed this machine and they brought me back. I said, "I don't want to work on this machine." They said, "Why?" I said, "Because I don't want to be responsible. Uh, I'd rather work on a plain work, not this." "You gotta work." So I work and then they give me another piece of steel and it had a, a—some hard piece in it, and the teeth got caught in this piece and the, the saw busted again. "Oh my gosh," I said, "now what's going to happen?" So finally they came—the engineers came and they saw and I was there, and so they thought it was not my fault, it was the fault in this piece of steel and they finally they liquidate this, this machine and they put me to another job. So I'm telling you—so I had such a—I had faith in me and I, I, I, I had hope that uh, I was in so, so many times. Then I was sick on the typhus and they put me in the hospital.

This was uh....

In Skarżysko, everything's Skarżysko.

Yeah, yeah.

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And they put me top on the—was the same thing and they put me on top. And then I didn't eat. I had a high temperature and, you know, and then in the typhus—the, the time changes and I had a nurse—I don't know what, and she—a, a Jewish girl—and she used to, and she used to ask me, “Are you want to eat? I said, “No, no” and I was sleeping over. And the truck came and they start pulling from the, from the bottom people out and they took 'em to the, the C, C camp and over there they buried them over there in the C camp. We didn't have no crematorium. And they buried them over there. And everyday full trucks and I was laying on—thank God I was laying high and finally I was feeling good and I said to her, “I would like to have some.” And she give me the soup, and the soup what they brought it in to this hospital, they couldn't take it out. It had to be or spilled out or eat it up. So I don't know how many quarts I was eating. And then I came to myself a little bit. Then doctors came and I said to the nurse—I knew it's dangerous to stay in this barrack—I said to the nurse, “I would love to go home—I mean to go to the camp.” So, okay. So the doctors were sitting. So like we have a, a ??? from God—I'm telling you the honest truth where the doctor was sitting and he was sitting by a table and he had a little bell and he told me to march through. And just from laying from the weakness and the filth what I had on me and everything so—and, and the temperatures. So I marched through one time and they told me to march back. And I marched back and then they said, “Okay, can be released.” When he can be released so I walked out so another guy, another guy. So we had to walk maybe about three or four miles to a bed house. So everybody wants to hold on to the other—we were so weak we couldn't walk. So

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we were laying on each other and just holding and we made it to the bathhouse. When we came to the bathhouse we took off our clothes. And the hot water was just washing us through and they, they took our clothes, they put it in a kettle, you know, and they steam it out because it was lice and everything—dirty, filthy. And they give us back the clothes and then we came back and they give us a *schonung*—that means we can stay in the camp for recovery for three, four days. In second day they call us out—all what we are in, in, in the barracks and they go and they go, put us on a truck and, and to kill us. So when I saw this—so the night, the night uh, shift was standing and lining up by the gate and that was not far from the gate and I was coming and they call—they didn't call you by the name, they call you by the number. This, this number should go on the truck. So I didn't go. So I figured to myself—I talk to myself—I figured if they want me, let 'em come and pick me up. Why should I—what are they going to do. So the guy next to me—and he saw the number on me—he says, “That means you.” I said, “They don't mean you if they will call you so do what you want.” And I didn't, I didn't move. Finally when I stayed and stayed and stayed and I saw the line going through the closed the gate and I, and I had the, the group was going to work, you know, and I went with them out and marched in to the factory. When I came to the factory and I hid over there where they—where I used to work, then I told the foreman—he was a nice Polack—and I told him, “Look, so and so happened, so and so happened.” He said, “No, I'm going to keep you. Don't worry.” He brought me some food and I stayed in hidden by this—on the oven and I was warming up and I stayed over there. Then how long can I stay over there? So I

stayed about two days, and then I had to report the, the command...the commandant from the, from the camp was a Jewish named Albirt. Very nice man, very nice man. And...

What do you mean the commandant?

The commandant, you see, the, the guy what was charge over the camp.

Was a Jew?

Was, was Jew, and was a—he was a Jew and he was a German. One was—the German was Kuhnemann. Uh, he had a help with a, with a dog. And uh, and, you know, they had a Jewish man Albirt—he was in charge over the camp and they had a whole uh, police station with Jewish policemen. And in, in—I notified uh, one from my hometown, I said, “Go into Albirt and ask him what should I do.” Because I heard that you can have confidence with this Albirt. And he walked into this Albirt and told him, “Look, I got a, a fellow from my hometown and he’s, and he’s hiding out in the factory.” And he looks in my name and take—pulls out he paper and I’m shot already—I’m dead.

They shot the people on the truck?

They took ‘em away and they shot and they killed ‘em. He said, “This guy is dead.” He said, “No, this guy’s alive.” So he give me another number and he said, “Bring him over, I want to see him.” I returned to the camp and I walked over to Albirt. And he say, “If you could do this...” He said, “You gotta know the number and nobody knows you.” And, and I, and I stayed in the camp. So why I bring this out, because I want to live. Some people didn’t want to live. Because if they saw somebody’s dead already, he say, “He’s already over and I have to go

through this.” So I say “No, he’s dead, he doesn’t have no hope.” Tomorrow happens a miracle—if, if the war is over he doesn’t have no chance. Or in—me as a living, or if I will be—how long I got the bones, I will have the, the meat on me. And then I always said to everybody, it was a Jewish expression, “???”

What does that mean?

If you got the bones, so you will have the flesh on the bones. Or if they guy is dead, he’s dead. So that what I bring it up for instance when I caught the typhus—I’m going back and forth—so I had maybe, I don’t know what temperature goes in Europe but it goes in the nineties—I had so much temperatures that I went to work with the temperature because I knew if, if I have to go in hospital I will be dead. So one morning they’re calling up so we had to have a roll call in front of the barrack and they saw that somebody is missing so they Jewish boys, what we called the Red Cross, and they walked in and they looking who’s stays and they found me laying in, in bed and they said “What’s wrong with you? Here people standing here waiting for you! What’s wrong with you, why can’t you get up?” and I said “I’m sick, I got high temperature.” So they, they lifted me and brought me out and just for counting and then the people went to work...

[interruption in interview]

You said that another major cause of death in this uh, Skarżysko...

Skarżysko

...was because of the uh, Ukrainian and the...

Ukrainian and the Jewish policemen. They, they caused a lot of things because when they—where they kill a man or the other guy came to make a selection—

and when he notified the Jewish police that he's arriving—because the Jewish policeman guard—they were guard, they were in charge inside in the camp. Was two kinds of Jewish policemen. Was one policemen where they were guard, where they were in charge in the camp, and one Jewish policeman was charged with each department where they walked out to work. I had a policeman—his name was Yosel, and he was in charge of us—the group. Uh, we were uh, seventy or eighty, a hundred, where we were working in the Granaten in this department.

How were people selected to be Jewish police?

They, they bought the jobs. They paid for these jobs. They went and then they try—like, from his town one became in the head ranks, like Krzepicki—Tupperma—he was from Radom and this boy uh, some rich boy came and he paid him, let's say, two thousand, three thousand zlotys and to become a policeman. So he thought that if we will be liquidated and those policemen will survive, and that...that's what they, they thought that uh, and they were ready to sacrifice even his own brother. When he was a policeman, he didn't know his own brother even. So, so he—they bought those jobs. And, and they thought that something—that, that Hitler or the Germans or the Nazis will liquidate every Jew on, on—of them, they will be the sele...they will survive. So it was only by my, my knowledge Krzepicki and Tepperman they were the worst—worse than the Nazis. So there's—they came selec...for selection, we—was a quota—we had to go out...outside. Everybody had to stay in the line—mostly was on Sunday. And they looked us over—we didn't know what to do—they didn't give us no soap to wash, they didn't give us no towel to, to wipe us off. And we tried a, a piece of

rag to put on and make a shawl and to look good. And they which didn't look so good, sick or something, or didn't like the, the, the look, they mark down the number, right away they send him away to the ????. Was three, three—a A, B, C. They sent him to the C and over there they dig the holes and the—every Sunday—every Saturday they, they were shooting and, and killing the people over there.

Did you hear the gunshots?

No, that was way out, way—they took away by trucks. They kept me one time—they, they grabbed me. And I had to go over there digging, digging holes. And they sent me back and the next day the holes were filled up already with the bodies. So happened one, one coincidence by me that I worked the night shift and I had to go to the bathroom. And when this Kuhnemann, this—the other one—the Germans they arrived—they'd give a order to the Jewish police that they should announce it that every person what is in camps where he's walking he should stay—he should stop. So right away he grabbed a, a horn or a loudspeaker and announced it, "Achtung! Achtung! Alle bleibt stehen." And we all we were had to stay right where the Jewish policeman had spread around all over the camp and right away who they grabbed it that you had to stay, you had to stay. And I know what's going to happen to me, and I didn't, I—my mind worked—I didn't, I didn't want—and so happened I—Tepperman got a hold of me. So it came to my mind that I used to play a game—one, two, three when I turned around uh, when I hit uh, and I turned around, and when somebody move I sent him to the wall to, to count to one to three and I went in, in the line. So I tried to sneak away from this

Tepperman and I run into a toilet and I dropped my pants and I was sitting over there. And he knew that he's got so many people holding—like six or eight of us—and he saw somebody's missing and he went after me. And he came into the toilet and found me sitting with the pants down and he start hollering, screaming at me and hitting me in the face and all over. He said, "You runned away from—you, you run away from me." I said, "So what I run away? I want to—I tried to save my life. I run away." I knew what's going to happen. They—take a look how I look, you know where I work, I work by the Granaten, I work so hard. I work all night, and, and I'm not washed and I'm not clothes—I don't got no clothes on me. And my shirt—it was a blue shirt—I remember it was white from the salt where—from perspiring what I was working it's so hot like in hell in the heat. And so he said, "You run away from me." And he start kicking me and kicking me in my rectum. And I told him, "Why are you hitting me?" He said, "You run away from me and you run away." So finally they walked away and I, and I didn't go—I didn't join the group and I turned back to my back and I laid on to, on the bed bleeding from my rectum. I told the, the other guys—they were feeling so sorry for me—what happened to me. And I said, "What can I do?" And I, I hope to God that he had a bad end. This Tepperman, Tepperman and Krzepicki. One time Krzepicki—he expressed himself—if he had to lose one little thing, he's willing us ten—to sacrifice ten thousand of us. They were worse than the Nazis.

How old were they?

They were in their thirties. About thirty-five. They came from Radom.

Did uh, did the inmates in the camp ever try to talk to him and say, “What are you doing?”

No, you couldn't come even close. Even people from the same town what they coming from their town, they even couldn't come close.

They know their family.

Yeah, they knew their family and they were ni...from uh, they came up from nice family, nice family people. So, anyway, another time...

[interruption in interview]

How long did you stay uh, at Skarżysko?

Skarżysko I stayed from 1942 to 1944. When the Russian start to come close already, they shipped us out to Buchenwald.

The Germans did.

Naturally. They put us in the box cars.

Did you know where you were going?

No, we didn't know it. When we arrived at Buchenwald I remember like today, it was horrible. Iron ga...a iron—the, the gate was an iron gate with electric wires and a, a white bear was standing inside in a cage.

A white bear?

Bear. A live white bear in a cage.

A polar bear?

Yeah.

Like in the circus?

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Yeah, it was a bear. And then we marched all over to the bathhouse. And then they count and then happened—never will forget that we were lined up five—we were standing in the line, and it was over there a German Kapo and he was a communist. So he was in Buchenwald in concentration camp. He was a German—not a Jewish—he was German. And he came over to us—to the group—and he says, “Who are those policemen?” So we told him they are Jewish. He said, “They are Jews and they washing—the Germans washing their hands clean with—they got Jews what they’re doing their dirty work.” He went over to those police and he slapped them in his face. He say, “You are Jews. Stay going and you with the, with the rest of the Jewish people.” And they came over to us and they say, “You remember we were good to you in Skarżysko, we were good to you.” And we couldn’t say nothing. I didn’t, I didn’t even want to make a conversation with—just, just, just they were by themselves. When we came into this—to this—was it the gas chamber? We walked in, they shaved us and they, and they pour, and they pour on us some, some, some water with ??? and then we went to the doctors and the doctor looked us over. We couldn’t have ????. And then they give us the striped clothes and we came out on the other side. We couldn’t recognize on each other. Or I don’t know everybody came out or not, I don’t know. Just little groups came out on the other side. Then they took us the barrack, the—all barrack, the—all buildings was taken and they didn’t got no place else where to take us. So we went to a big tent and we stayed in this tent for several days. And this Kapo came over and he had already names from doctors, from the policemen, from the, from the—from this uh, we call ‘em ??? that the

???, the, the, like uh, male nurses—what they always—what they harmed us.

They got those names from the bad guys and what they did with them—I think he took care of them.

Tell about the uh, traveling on the train from uh, Skarżysko to...

To Buchenwald.

How many days were you on the train?

I think we were about two days.

And uh, describe what the trip was like.

The trip—we were packed like, like cows—like, like pigs, we were packed in the box cars. They didn't give us no food. And they—when we came uh, some place we stopped, they, they handed us some bread. We didn't get no drinks, we couldn't walk off on the—from the box car. The trip was about two-day trip to this, to the—there we went uh, we were in Buchenwald, and then in Buchenwald—so there was rumors if nobody's going—nobody—no factory needs us, so they were going to liquidate us or something. So we were carrying—every day we went to work and uh, they—where the stones and we...

Quarry.

Quarry. And we used to carry big stones everyday. We made about two, three trips. It was maybe about five, six miles. Pick up a stone on the shoulder, carrying like, like uh, the Jewish people used to do it in Egypt in the, in the—by the pyramids.

Were you thinking of that when you were doing this?

Yeah, naturally. And, and it happened in uh, was on the road, was a house and the Germans used to say, “Here is your Jewish Prime Minister Blum. Leon Blum is, is, is this building.” So Leon Blum was over there too in a, in a separated, in a separated house. He was, he was imprisoned over there.

This was the premiere of France.

France.

Was it true?

Yeah. Leon Blum was over there. We didn’t see him. But they pointed to us, “Here your, your Jewish prime minister friend Leon Blum is in this building.” So we always—so you see, “Blum is here.” We didn’t see him. So we carried the stone. So we were lucky there was a, a Panzerfaust house, uh, that’s another ammunition factory. And it was gypsies girls work—a camp of gypsy women. So they took the gypsy women out from this camp and they—and we—they said that we have experience to work in ammunition factory and they took us over there and we replaced those gypsy women. And we worked in this uh, the camp name was Schlieben. And we worked in this camp and we made the Panzerfaust.

What’s that?

Panzerfaust is a big hat with a long pipe and the soldier could carry five or six of them. And he used to go out on the road and he used to blow up tanks for them. And I used to, and I used to make him—I used to take—it’s a metal hat with a little neck and filled up, and I used to fill ‘em in with ??? cream. It was a poison thing. It’s still—it’s thirty-nine years after, forty years after, and I’m still—when I take a shower I still got in my scalp. I still got this, this, this taste in my mouth

comes in—the taste when I take a shower—this bitter taste in my mouth from the stink so many years after.

Was it a uh, a poisonous...

A powder. It was a powder. Naturally it was poison. And we used to boil that—make it liquidy. And we used to pour it in, in, in those hats, and, and, and then fill it up and it got hard like a stone. And then I used to bore that out—make holes. The neck—I used to bore it out those holes. So I used to have a boring machine and I used to take those hats and each neck I used to bored it out. And then the pipes was like cinders. This—the pipe had a little thing what uh, would light up this hat and the hat blowed up against the tank and the, the tank blowed up. We used to work on those Panzerfaust.

Were the living conditions the same in Buchenwald as they were in Skarżysko?

No uh, the living, uh, the—we were sleeping on the floor—on the ground in, in Buchenwald because we didn't have no barrack—they didn't have no place for us. So we slept—we, we were over there over a week. About, about—almost about two weeks. Then when they transferred us to the other camp—so then we went in, in barracks and we had the bunk beds and we stayed uh, we—the, the condition, in, in German—the living condition in the, in the camp was better than, than in Skarżysko. In—and over there every night—so and from there, I stayed 'til April '45. It was, it was terrible. I mean, the condition—I mean with the food, with the—and again with the, with—they, they accused us that sometimes we made a, we made a thing—we didn't, we didn't add those, those cinders and they accused us that we are saboteurs. They hanged a lot, a lot of people of us. They

shoot a lot of people of us because they, they, they—when they shipped it out on the front and the soldier want to use it, always something was missing. So they accused us.

Did you, did you have discussions with the other uh, uh, prisoners about sabotage, about...

No, no, nobody—maybe it was a group internal what they were doing, or they—I never came to contact talking the—about saboteur, we never, we never. Or maybe it was some groups what they were maybe smarter than I was. Maybe they were doing—I don't remember. Only I remember that they, they were accusing us because we had to put on our serial number uh, by each shift what we manufactured. And when they shipped it out and they knew if they don't have the, the cinder—the cinder was like a box of matches and just sealed in with a little scotch tap—and when they want—ready to go to shoot and they didn't got those, those things to, to, to, to, to light it up. They, they just had uh, nothing. They just had it in the hand—they couldn't use it. So right away they accuse us that we, we tried to saboteur. So they always, they—so they were shooting and hanging a few times. And then uh, it was, was rough, I mean. And from Schlieben—they put us on box cars and we were about eight or nine days and we were shipped into Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt in Austria?

In Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia.

Yeah. And was no, was—looks like nobody won't accept us. There was no place to go. And when one time it was bombed—the, the, the factory was bombed. I was—I got hurt. It was blowed up. It was—all things was, was in the factory—everything was flammable. And I remember was, was, when we want to run out, the guard was standing, and they say, “The Germans, you can go, you can go.” And we said, “Take a look.” It's lightning and all of a sudden blowing. So finally they run with us and we run out and we run to a forest and we came to a village. I was—my, my head was glass—all my head was, and my face was cut here. So right away farmers came out—the Germans—it was on Germany territory. They took me in, they washed me around, they washed my head and they put bandages all over my head.

Did they know you were a Jew?

They knew that we're Jewish, we're prisoners. And they took us in and they washed us up, and they put bandages—they made me bandage on my head and they put a bandage over my, my face. Just what I had open is the nose and my mouth. I was bandaged. Then the Gendarme or the SS came for us and they picked us up and they brought us back to the camp. And then they were reading out the names and they said that who's missing, who's killed, who's missing, who's—and we stayed and they readed. And then they said those what they are hurt they will, will take you to the hospital to Buchenwald, because we belong to Buchenwald. They take us to Buchenwald and, and they will cure us and they will bring us back. So I knew the Germans already—so then right away trucks came and they took those sick people. And I was standing on the end. If it will be room

I will go on the truck. There will be not room, I stay here. And they filled up—fill up. Finally I was the last one. I went up on the truck too. So a officer—a corporal or a sergeant—looks at me, and I was built stocky. I was not skinny born, I was stocky. He says to me, “You’re not hurt.” I said, “Officer, take a look at my head, take a look at my face, take a look...” He said, “You’re not hurt. You go to the hospital, you’re not hurt.” I said, “What do you mean I’m not hurt? Take a look.” And he grabbed me, pulled off all bandages from the head. So I had a little, you know, uh, from the, from the, from the glass. And then on the face. And he went—he said, “You’re not hurt.” And he kicked me off from the truck and I fell out back on the ground. Then the trucks take over. Where they went—they went about two, three miles and they shot ‘em all. They shot ‘em all and they didn’t even take ‘em to the hospital. Mazel. Luck.

So how long were you in Theresienstadt?

In Theresienstadt I was over there about four weeks.

This is famous because this is where....

For the butterfly. They, they, the Theresienstadt was the mischling. Over there was a lot of Jews were their four generation was converted. So was Yugoslavians, Serbian, Germans, Hungarians, and Czechs. They, they walked around. They looked like a city. We were in a camp. And over there was Kaserne. Kaserne is big building—historic buildings with the, the army from the World War I or—so it was Hindenburg Kaserne, Magdaburg Kaserne. So they took the people what we killed with the boxcars. We couldn’t uh, walk over, we’re—they didn’t give us no food, no nothing. We were traveling for, maybe for eight day. And uh, miracle

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we made it because in every station what we stopped they want to deliver to us the bread, they want to deliver the food. Only they bombed the, the, the railroad station so they had to run away with us. The people would have walked—a lot of marched in—a lot of was—that was the last month of the end of the war was, was more people uh, killed then, then in, in during the time. People marched and the boxcar people die. I never forget when we're sitting, we—on the railroads and we look out from the, from the little uh, spar... little tracks—the box car and we saw the other railroad. We were hungry but people over there—we saw rudabegas and we told the guard, “How about if you let us out and grab a few rudabegas?” We didn't eat for so many days. So he said, “All right.” And we took a blanket and who could walk—not everybody could walk—I was laying, sitting. When you sit in, in the boxcar for so many days, you can't even straight, straight your feet out—you couldn't get up. And they went down and they picked up dozens of rudabegas and they brought it in to the boxcar. So the guard was a nice fellow, he said, “Don't eat it with the peels, peel it off.” We didn't have even knives to peel it. So we peeled off and we ate a piece of rudabega—everybody get a pie... got a piece of rudabega. Then we ate the peels because we had, we had to—was we didn't know for how many days. So now if I see the rudabega it reminds me the story what, what I went through. This rudabega saved my life, going—when we came to Theresienstadt. We were—we had lice, we were dirty, filthy. And they had—and in, in the first boxcars what they came—the first people what they came, they filled up those kasern... those uh, big army unit—and the people the typhus got. You know that? And the dysentery and people start vomiting and sick,

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you know they—I was lucky, I just came with the second group looks like. And we—they sent us to the bath house and we took—they give us a good hair cut and they give us a good hot bath and they give us civilian clothes and they put us in a new camp with brand new baths, with blankets, with, with—that was a life saver. And we stay—over there we didn't work. And they give us the food and we stayed over there about, about three weeks. And then they took off the German guard and then Czech guard came. And then I heard something the war comes to an end, and then they were running around. They said, "Everybody have to stay inside. You can't, you can't go out," and something. And outside was fighting—they already was fist fighting. The Germans with the, with the—and I think the Polish army came in over there. The Polish army and the Russian. And they liberated us. May the 8th. Two days ago, Tuesday. May the 8th in 1945 I got liberated. Then the Russian when they came in, they didn't—they were against camp. They don't want to make no camps. So right away they want to—he says, "You want to eat? Go in the kitchen, peel potatoes, you know, go in the bakery, bake bread." And then they brought in Germans—prisoners what they captured. They cleaned the toilets and everything. They—the—for us, they wanted to, to work in the kitchen or work in the bakery. So then they said, "Are you from Poland?" They send you back to Poland. "Are you from Hungary?" Send you back to Hungary. "Are you from Romania?" They send you back to Romania. Yugoslavia. They want—they didn't want no camps, they want to send us away. Then I was thinking to myself, "Why do I have to go to Poland? Who I got in Poland? I got nobody." So I tried to get out from the camp and I got out from the

camp and I went to Prague. And from Prague—I stayed in Prague and was the Red Cross. And trucks came every day—the Russian trucks and they picked us up by the line where we standing in for food, and they still took us to the railroad station and they want to ship us back. And then from Prague I run away to Pilsen.

How'd you get there?

By train. You know, we didn't need no nothing. We walked. Only what happened—I went to the Pilsen—so over there was the Americans. So I thought I can get over to the American side. So on the boundary—American and Russian boundary—right away they came up to the check and we had to show 'em uh, some papers and I didn't got no paper to show. They took us down from the, from the train and they sent us back to Prague. And finally I run away again and I went to Sudet...uh, Germany—that's uh, occupied by Czechoslovakia—that used to belong to German, calls Rosenberg, Rosenthal. And I went over there and then I went over to the American side. And I—through a forest, through a railroad uh, tunnel and I made it over to the American side.

You were all alone?

Alone, on my own. I went with a group to Pilsen or they, they went through and, and I had to go back because I didn't have no papers to, to show. Everybody did something. They didn't tell you, "Okay go to this office and make yourself a paper and that you are a Polish citizen or you are a Palestinian citizen or you are an English citizen or you..." or everybody did without uh, telling somebody else. So I didn't make it so they sent me back. So finally I went over to the American side and, and I was with the American soldiers and I was working the kitchen.

And I made cocoa in the garbage cans, you know, and I ba...helped them baking bread and I work in the me...in, in the kitchen—in the place where they're eating.

And then so was a rabbi over there and he was a captain or something.

An American?

Naturally. I was with the—and I went to this rabbi and he started asking me questions, “Where you from?” and how and everything—where I want to go. I say, “I want to go to Palestine.” He said “Okay,” he said, “Uh, you stay awhile and I got something.” So another group of Jewish people came to see this rabbi and this rabbi went and connect me with the other group—put us on a truck, and he drove us straight through to Linz. And we were in Linz, and then we got connected with the, with the Bri...with the Bri...uh, Bri...that the Israeli Army.

The uh, Jewish uh, Brigade?

Brigade. Uh, and they were—they mostly were like—they were the Brigade and they were, they were workers what they, they took—brought over the Jewish people to the Aliyah Bet already try to bring them over to, to Palestine. So they took me from Linz, I went to Salzburg. From Salzburg I went to Villach—that's in Austria. From Villach I went on a train and I came to Italy. And I stayed in Italy four years.

Where in Italy?

All over. In Rome, in Bari, Lecce, Napoli, Genoa. It's no—in Venice. Every where's a place in Italy I was.

Were you working there?

No, just I made myself a Red Cross passport. And you go in on the, on the train and you say you're, you're a refugee and, and you traveled from one end to the other one.

How did you eat? How did you sleep?

We got the Red Cross helped us. And then I was in the UNRRA—United Nation Refugee Relief Organization. And then I went to camp and uh, the first camp was in, in uh, Padua, and then Maria Di Leuca, and I was waiting to be shipped out to Palestine.

How were you treated by the Italian people?

Very good. Italian people very good. They didn't—very good. We lived in villas and we lived in Italy—I mean, they were treated. Then I got—I knew I had relatives in the United States so I start uh, to look for them and we found each other and that's when I came to the United States.

Uh, that was in 1949?

I came in '49.

To Detroit?

To Detroit.

And so uh, what did you do then? Who did you find here?

So I came here and I was working in a factory. And from '49 to '58. And in '58 I worked in another factory 'til '64—no—in 1950 I got married and I have three sons.

Your wife is from Europe?

My wife is from Europe but she was six months old when she came here. So she, she's like here born—she was six months old. Then I became a citizen—I mean, I got married and I got three sons. And now I have two sons married and I have three grandchildren. And I work now for Great Scott from '64 'til uh, 'til I hope 'til the retirement. And I'm hoping maybe this year or next year to retire.

And what uh, you work in a, in a food store.

Before?

No, now.

Now I'm working with Great Scott's of America in deli department.

Before I was working in meat department before I had heart surgery and uh, about eight years ago and the doctor told me not to do no lifting. So I went in the deli and I'm working behind the deli. Only that I just take out—I'm taking out just the top thing. I got the—I could tell you more things what happen in the camps and more, more things what we went through with the, with the, with the conditions.

Only I just brought out the...

The highlights.

The highlights.

Talk about uh, was there any practice of uh, uh, Jewish uh, religion in the camps when the holidays came?

Yes, yes.

What, what happened?

What happened. We didn't have no books and a lot of Jewish memorized the, the, the, the prayers. And uh, who were—we were in the barrack, I mean, in the—

who—at nights so you could pray in the daytime. I mean, not legally. Or we get a minyan in a room. And if somebody remembered the yahrzeit of his parents. We observed uh, ??? ma'ariv every holiday we observed. Only I mean not, not uh, ri,..not ritually—not uh, not openly. Or what I mentioned that I was with this rabbi in Skarżysko—so was a group of Jewish people what they used to go out—plumbers, carpenters—and, and they used to go out working on the outside. So they used to sneak in eggs, they used to sneak in wheat. So the rabbi didn't eat no traif. So he used to have a hard boiled egg, he used to have a potato. Those carpenters and the plumbers and they used to bring it in. Then they brought in wheat and he tried to dry it—the wheat on something. Then he took a bottle and tried to roll it—make it, make it like flour and he made the—and he tried to bake matzahs. And he had his follo...followers—they had a room with this rabbi and he tried to have the Seder. Only this—the guy what was in charge over the camp—his name was Kuhnemann—he was a Volksdeutsch—a half German, half Jew—I mean, a half German, half Polack. And he used to know the—more the Jewish things than—because he was in Łódź. He was from a Jewish town. So he came in and he destroyed—he beat the rabbi up and he destroyed the whole Seder and everything. The rabbi even had matzahs and he had wine and he had everything. Or he, he would tap him on the ??? those, they were his helpers. He came in with his big dog and he destroyed the whole thing. Because the, the Germans—the real German didn't know too much—so much about the Jewish things that uh, you know, an insider was worse than an outsider. This Kuhnemann was brought up with Jewish people in Łódź, so he knew everything.

When you were in the camps, did you hear about the resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto?

No. We didn't—I didn't hear. The only—I didn't hear. Only in, I think, in the, in the latest, latest—we didn't get no news. We didn't know no news. We were cut off from the world completely. We didn't get no news. So from the, from the Warsaw Ghetto I didn't know—I just found out after the war. It's a wonderful thing with the Warsaw Ghetto the, the heroes did for us. At least, at least we got a—we can, we can say that uh, that we got a honor. That they didn't go like, like sheeps—they were fighting for the, for the, for the Jewish cause—for everything. Uh, ????. Now I know more about the Warsaw Ghetto whether I knew it in, in the concentration—when I was in concentration camp I didn't have any idea what happened to us.

I notice, I don't see any...

Number...

...numbers anywhere.

No, those people that they were in Skarzysko—we didn't get no numbers. The numbers what they got is those were that went to Auschwitz, Birkenau—they got numbers. And then was uh, a concen...another concentration camp in Treblinka, and they used to have a K and a L. So they have a K and L—that the one group and the other group got numbers. Or we—what we were in Skarzysko and Buchenwald, we didn't have no numbers. Dachau we didn't have no numbers.

Were you in Dachau?

No.

No. Were there any uh, medical experiments going on in the, in the camps you were in?

I heard that there was some medical experiments. They want to, they want to—what you call it—the male—or what they want the sperm—what they want uh, I can't express in English. The male uh, what they want—what some people do now here, they going to the doctor and...

Vasectomy.

Vasectomies. So I heard about that or I didn't—and in the camp where I was, strictly labor camp. Maybe in Auschwitz or in the other, other concentration camps. Those camps where I was we didn't go through these kinds of things. Only if somebody was sick, was very ??? was very hard. If somebody was sick he was—you already marked for dead because the doctors didn't help us, didn't help us. They, they worked with the Germans. If somebody was sick, they sent us in for the sick building and from this building nobody came out. I myself was there when I got typhus. Luckily I got out. Not just me, a few more.

Do you get uh, uh, reparations, money from...

Yes.

...the German government?

Yes. Yes, I get.

Uh, how often do you think about uh, what happened to you?

How often? I think a lot at nights, I dream about. I—it's not—I dream about, I talk about, I think about. And when I have a picture—I'll show you from my...

This is a, a picture of your family.

My family. That's my mother, Malka. And that's my father, ????. And that's my brother, Yudel. That's my sister, Leah. And that's my brother ??? and that's my brother ????. And that's me.

How did you get this picture of your family?

They sent it to United—my father sent it to his brother and sister here in the United States. When I came here, I found a picture here and I copied. That's not, that's not the original picture. I made copies.

And this was taken in your home?

In '19...in, in the house. Even if you look good in—even—you'll see Piłsudski—the Polish, the Polish marshal here like on the wall.

Why do you have a picture of him? He wasn't a Jew.

No. Because usually, usually if you live in Poland and, not—it's only a picture. We still went to school, we learned about him.

You were good Poles.

I mean, a Jew is a, is a citizen in every country. Where he is, he's a good loyal citizen. Even if he's in Poland, he's a loyal citizen to Poland. If he's in American, he's a loyal citizen in American. If he's a German—he's Germany was German, his second was Jew. And then when they even the Germans remind him that he's Jewish, he still calls himself Jew—I mean German. And when he—I was with German Jews in, in Buchenwald and when I was with German Jews in the other concentration camps, boy they didn't want to give easy up that they're, they're Jewish.

Were they were prisoners in the camps?

Naturally they were prisoners.

And they kept separate from you?

No, it depends in—they would like to be separated. Only it depends on what kind of job he was and what kind of barrack he was, he was uh, connected. I mean, we slept in the same place. Only the—when we had the Gent...uh, not Jews, the Germans in our camp—concentration camp, they were, they were wearing triangles. So if he had a black triangle he was a saboteur. And when he was wearing a green uh, uh, triangle, he was a crook, he was a bandit. If he was wearing a red triangle he was a communist. So and uh, when I was in Buchenwald in, in 1945 uh, that was a, was a bad time and the Germans need every German to sent to the, to the Russian front, so they took them out from the jails and they put on the stripes and they charge inside and they all inside in the camp. They were charge in the camp. We had a Allied. LA1 and this lagerältester—a German. And we had LA2 a lagerältester. They were wearing bands or they were Kapos or they were in charge of the, of the warehouses or they were in charge of the kitchen. We had a lot of Germans was with us in the—so, go ahead. So then after the war—so we tried to forget. We never can forget this. Never. Nothing, not to forget and not to forgive. It's always going to be with me and it's always, I'm go...if I don't talk with you about that, I'm always thinking about and talking about it. Or if you go to a yizkor or even the High Holidays, or you go to Pesach, second day a little Pesach before yikzor or you go to Shavout the second day for yizkor. I observe the yizkor. Or we go to Warsaw Ghetto yizkor. I belong, belong to the workman's

circle. We had in April the 19th about the Warsaw Ghetto yizkor. So you're always reminded and you always uh, have it on my mind.

Do you uh, do you belong to a synagogue here?

I belong to uh, the men's club at Beth Abraham. Beth Abraham Moses, I belong to them. When I used to live in uh, on 7 Mile and Evergreen I used to belong to Beth Moses. Or they now, they merge with Beth Abraham, so I am with that.

Like law firms, they merged.

No, because now their synagogue can't exist by themselves. They have to merge.

[interruption in interview]

I remember I was working in the, in the ammunition factory in Skarżysko. So the Ukrainian they wanted, let's not—so they, they, they divert you. They saw you're wearing nice boots, they want the—your boots or they want your coat, they came in to rob you. And it was not allowed or they did it on their own. I remember, I mentioned to you, I used to work at this machine at the ???, the, the—with the big sword, it was—they—those, those guards used to go in the toilet and grab some Jews and bring them behind this machine and search him and take away everything. So what they had? They had some money or they had uh, or they brought from outside a bread or they brought from outside a piece of salami because we had always connection something with the outside. How we got the connection with the outside—those people what they used to empty that—those toilets they used to pump this, this uh, from the toilets, and when they used to take out outside on the field. So outside they had already Polacks what they were watch—waiting for them. They sold 'em—used to sell 'em bread or, or cigarettes

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or something. And they used to put in this barrel—it was a barrel. And they had a double barrel or something and they—with a horse and they used to bring it in—selling. Always where Jewish are—they always some, some handle, some just have to go on. So happened that uh, that he was from my hometown—his name is ???—he should rest in peace, he died—and they caught him in the toilet and he had something. And they brought him over on the—to the machine. Under the machine was like a big wall. What did they used to—they used to beat him up and they take away the mo...the thing. So if we all are close to each other—only if you see your own fellow from your own hometown it bothered me a little bit. Because I, I was nobody. I only—they saw me, they saw me on this place working and I—and they—and I saw them coming in. It was not legal for them to do this. So when they brought him over I stopped in and I walked by the wall I said, “You leave this guy alone,” I said, “He’s from my home town.” And they didn’t touch him. And they took off. He said, uh, Chaim, his name was Chaim, he said to me, “Berek how could you do it?” I said, “I see ‘em bringing in everyday two, three people behind this wall. You know, I, I, I’m here just working, I’m like you and like everybody else. Only if I saw you bringing ba...bringing in it was hurting me.” One time it happened too I’m just bringing out the thing, which comes to my mind. It was on a Sunday, and I—and we lived in this—in Skarzysko in this barracks what I told you from Ekonomia—we went to this barrack and we tried to be together—the landsmen from the same home town together to be in barrack. And then this Sunday—so Krzepicki, with Tepperman, with other policemans—they run the—one grab a, a few hundred uh, fellows and

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to dig holes in the, the, in the C—in this, in this uh, camp C, C they dig holes. So, so, they, they were grabbing. So I was laying, uh, I worked all night Saturday night and Sunday. I was laying in, in bed. And he, he came over and...

[interruption in interview]

...they pulled off the—he—the, the policeman—they pulled off this blanket from, from me and they say, “You tried to hide it from us.” I said, “I’m sleeping, I don’t know what’s going on.” And they beat the heck out of me. My nose and my ears and my face and my eyes was—so one—he’s in Israel—??? from my hometown and he couldn’t stand it. He was standing behind the window and seeing how they beating me up. So he opened this—the door, he says, “Murderers,” he said, “Why are you beating this boy up? If you had to work—do a job like he does, you would not touched him.” And he said, “Who are you?” And he took off. So he tried to, to protect me, or to speak out. So when I came to work, the foreman come over he says, “What happened to you?” I said, “Nothing.” “No, you got to tell, something happened to you.” I said “Yes,” I said, “This policeman beat me up for no reason.” “Come on.” Took me into this—to the head man uh, he was from, from the—to the supervisor or something, or he was in a Nazi uniform. And he told him—he says—this foreman says to him, “This policemen—they beat this poor fellow up and he’s such a good worker, what he does.” So he says, “You bring him over and let him do it his work.” I said, “Now I’m in trouble.” What I did—I couldn’t hide my, my sores, my—and they went and they sent for this Tepperman. And I was sitting in the office—this foreman’s office, and he come and they bring, and, and—they didn’t have to bring

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him over, he, he just came himself. He got a order to come, he came. And he walks in and he sees me. And he gets colors in his face and all kind of things. And this officer comes out to him, he says, "You beat this fellow up?" "I don't remember." "You did it or not?" He said, "Yes." "Now you go do his work." And took him down to my department. And he looks at me, I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it." I said, "I don't know." I, I was afraid. I was more afraid of him than of them. I said, "I don't know, I didn't say nothing, I didn't squeal or they saw it—what you did to me." "You do his work." You think he did it? He couldn't do it even for a second. He got away. He, he turned so around. He's not going to dirty his hands and his boots and his uniform with that. And I used to have a wall with seventy holes, fire used to come out over my head and over my face. And I used to take this fifty-five kilo pieces shell and I used to hit it straight in the holes so the, the Polack was standing with a big glass—blue glass with a leather apron, with a leather helmet, you know, and he used to, and he used to pull out those, those uh, that had to burn the hat. And he used to heat it up, and when he pulled out, I had to, I had to replace it right away. And they were one hole next to the other one. And if you missed it when you knocked out the brick, you getted a bigger flame. And I had a—such a—because I was short, sometime the size got something to do with it, and I used to take it in my arm here and I used to shoot it in and he pulled out one, I shoot it in the other one, he pulled out one. And that, they were heating for ten, fifteen minutes, I—that's what I had to rest. But when he replaced it, I had to shoot it one next to another. When they used to bring in big guys, six feet tall, they fell with it, because they couldn't—they didn't have this—

you had to have the experience. And the fire with the fifty-five kilometer, that's uh, it's over a hundred pounds or more, hundred and ten.

That's as much as you weighed.

Yeah. And I, and I used to shoot it. And they said, "Why can't he do it, you do?" Oh, I stayed already six months on this job. And then, and then I had to—when they pull it out there was a press, and they had a big mouth and we had the squeegee on a little bottle like this. So we used to have a tong. We used to put it in and when you open this, this tong, that holds it. And we used to drag it on a railroad track and the railroad track had holes. And then it had a little tail in that fellow. And you couldn't—because that fire, you, you, you—when you get it, you had to run it, always on the run. And you had to hit it. And when that bounce back, it fell in. You had to have the, the, the, the experience. And the fellow, we had to set up about a dozen of them. It was hot. Like uh, we used to call the Hanukkah light. It was burning hot. You couldn't stay close. When you stay close, it close—it could catch fire or you drinking, I was drinking so much and the salt would start coming out into my shirt. I never shaved, I never took a haircut because I got burned up by that, by this fire all the time. So I remember this Tepperman—they want to put him to—on this job. I wish he would work at least a five minutes. So they—he was waiting by the gate. When I returned, he called me into this police station. He said, "What you said about me?" I said, "I didn't say nothing." He said, "Why they call me?" I said, "Uh, I don't know why they called you," I said, "because they saw what happened and I told them what happened—that uh, that you did it." "I'm sorry," he says, "I didn't mean it." I

said, “You remember my landsmen told you where I work. Why didn’t you stop?” That’s, that’s such a time I went through. I was lucky. A lot of people got beat up from the Germans. I never was called in. I never got a one ??? of my rear end. Never. I obey. I knew hitting was a very bad thing. If they start to hit you, then you were through. I tried—I was always on the time and I always try, try to be on time, try to do the job, try to obey. And I got beaten—I’m, I’m sorry to say—I got beaten more by Jewish policemen than I got beat by the Germans.

The Germans were—by this time you knew the difference between the different units. The people in uh, Skarżysko, they were Gestapo or they were the Wehrmacht?

They were, they were wearing uh, yellow—the, the green-yellow uniforms with the—maybe they were more engineers. More maybe—they were not SS troops. I think they were wearing red bands with the swastikas, you know. Or they were maybe engineers because ammunition you gotta have trades people, not just, just—and they, they—one time—I have to tell you this, I never will forget. It was a Jewish policeman and when we came to, to, to Buchenwald to Schlieben, he comes over to me he says, he says, “You look like you’re a nice fellow to me.” I said, “What do you see as so nice about me?” He says, ah, “You like to be friends with me?” I said, “Listen, naturally, you’re Jewish, I’m Jewish.” I said, “I mean, we bruders, naturally I’d like to be friends.” He said, “Okay, let’s be friends.” Because everybody didn’t, didn’t got nothing to do with him, you know, like uh, like uh, they—how do you say? So anyway, I say I’m going to be friends with him. “You know, I’m going to tell you something, I have headaches in the

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morning.” “So, what do you want?” He said, “Let’s be partners.” I said, “What kinda partner you want to be?” He said, “The slice of bread what we get tonight, let’s share both the slice of bread. And one slice of bread let’s save it for tomorrow morning.” “And what?” “And then tomorrow morning we’re going, we’re going to share the other slice of bread.” I said, “You know, one slice of bread is not enough, even for me. You want me to share this slice of bread?” So then I said, “Oh, I, I get headaches too in the morning.” I say, “Okay, we become partners.” Like we have a day from God—how long I’m going to live, I’ll never forget. He trust me this piece of bread. One piece of bread we ate it up, and one piece of bread we shared—no—one we ate it, and one he, he save, he saved. And if a million dollar you would, you would not—you would think twice if you could trust me than that slice of bread. Slice of bread was more than—and I was lying all night with this slice of bread under my head. I didn’t sleep all night because for, for two reasons. First of all—for one reason I was hungry and a piece of bread was under my head. And the second reason if somebody will find out that I have a slice of bread under my head, he will choke me to death and will steal this piece of bread. And I was lying all night and the night was so long that I was praying to God the bell should ring and the morning should come. Finally the morning came and I had a piece of bread and we—I opened up secretly and we shared this piece of bread. Here hundred of people walk around with the tongue out and here we two eating a piece of bread. “From where you got this piece of bread?” So I saw that they’re observing me and everything. So I said to him, “No more partnership. You know what I went through last night? I didn’t sleep all night. And I thought

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that I'm going be—somebody's going to choke me up and, and..." And if I will tell him this piece of bread got lost, he will kill me, he will kill me too. He will not believe it that, that somebody stole this piece of bread from me. So that was my partnership business.

[interruption in interview]

You know, when he was a policeman he could eat when he wanted. Or when he was already a prisoner like me, so he didn't get. So he got ahead and he was looking for somebody to be a partner, and everybody just walked away from him and didn't got nothing to do with him. Now another thing, I—when I came to Detroit I went to Central High night school. When I got to Central High night school, and here I see somebody beat somebody up. So you know you beat up—I was young, I'm talking about forty years ago almost. So I run out and see it—what happened—no—what I say, I'm not here forty years. I came '49. And I, I see it, he was a Jewish policeman. So he recognized me, I didn't recognize him. He recognized me. He says, "Berek, you remember I was a good policeman." I said—I say, "I don't remember you. I—how long you were a policeman—I don't care if you were good or bad," I said, "You were a policeman, you were no good." And then he found a guy what maybe hurt this guy or he, or he got—so he took revenge on him—he beat him up. Why? I, I didn't know it. I know he was a policeman in my camp. Or I don't know he was a good one or a bad one, I didn't, I didn't want to uh, like for instance I don't want false witness. I, I, I knew the guy that he was a, he was a policeman. Good or bad I don't know. So then he—this guy got leukemia and he was in the hospital. So he told his wife that I should

go into his room and I should forgive him. So his wife knows me—she's not, not far from my hometown, about thirty miles. So she comes over to me, she says, "Berek, I got one favor. Do me a favor." I said, "What, what should I do to you?" "Come over to Sinai Hospital, my husband is dying from leukemia and he wants you to forgive him." I said, "I got nothing to—he don't have nothing to forgive me and I got nothing to forgive." I said, "I remember he was a..." "No, no, no, he not going to die before you come over there." So I walked in this room. He was laying in, he said, "Berek, ??? forgive me." I said, "I, I remember you as a policeman, but I don't know if you were good or bad, I don't." Then he died so she, she said, "You did a good thing, you came over." So he got punished this way.

You remember when you were in cheder, did they uh, teach you about uh, traitors, traitors—Jews tattling on other Jews? Was there a discussion about that?

Oh, if you want—know in the Bible it happened. Oh, I forgot already. Yeah, I mean the Bible, you know. Oh not what the, the Jews sold Joe to Egypt, I'm not—I don't go in those kinds of thing. I mean uh, always in Jewish religion you'll find a lot of things, of course. I, I don't remember. There was those kind of things. It could be lot of uprisings like uh, like it was in the Warsaw Ghetto, could be almost in every ghetto. Only the thing is, one was afraid for the other one. We coul...we didn't have too much confidence. Now we're, we're, we're crying uh, B'nai Israel that we are brothers uh, brothers' keepers—we're brothers. Only, you know, we were in the camps, we were so selfish that everybody want, everybody—you know, when you know—when you in a, in such a condition—if

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you're hungry, you, you just get wild. You just, you just are, just selfish. You just looking for yourself. Sometimes even if you be—could take away the bike from your brother. Or sometimes—I got a one uh, one from, from my hometown. He's in Las Vegas uh, a car dealer that his father took his piece of bread away from his mouth and he give it to his son. The son survived and the father's dead. Now that time comparing a father with a son. Only even two brothers or something—if they, you know, if they—he could get this piece of bread from him or another spoon of soup from his brother, he would love to. Or he know that the brother needs this, this soup or he doesn't have an extra spoon of soup. Or becomes—a person becomes selfish. I will tell you, it happened to me the—with the selfishness. It happened that I had my brother in another camp and I was working with a Polack in Skarżysko, and uh, and I said to this Polack uh, so he asked me, “What town are you?” I said, “I am from Sandomierz in Salzburg.” “Oh,” he said, “I'm going over there Saturday by train, and I'm going to buy some wheat,” because my hometown was very known for wheat. It's a wonderful—I said, “We live by a Gentile family. Why don't you walk into this Gentile family, ask them if somebody survive from my family?” And he went into this uh, Gentile family, he says, “Is somebody from the Rothenberg survive?” She said, “Yes, one son is in the—in this and this camp, about two miles away—so near, near the Jewish cemetery.” So he went over there and he contact by the wire for my brother. My brother came over he says—so my brother says to this Polack, he says—the Polack says, “You know, I am with Berek in the, in the camp, I work with him. Only I can go out and in, he can't.” He said, “Oh good.” So he give him some

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money, he give him a letter, and he came, and he says to me, “Berek, you know what? I found your brother.” Oh my God. My brother alive—he’s alive, fine. He says, “He want you one thing, here’s a, here’s a letter.” And my brother wrote me a letter, “Berek, give—send me a list from every name from our home town is with you.” And so I took—I know who’s with me and I took the whole names from my hometown. And I give to this Polack—it was a, a righteous Polack. And he—every week and he went and the mail went like this, and he went and he knew where to meet my brother behind the wires over here. And then my brother contacted all people who had relatives or friends or neighbors or cousins or and they all—we were related because it was a small town. We’re all related or if—through marriage or through family—through blood, you know. And my brother connected with everything and, and he brought me a bunch of letters. And I will tell you I am a—not an honest, or I am a scared. If you search me, and if I have something on me, I, I’m very—so, so was one from my hometown—his name was Berek also, Teitelbaum. I said “Look, you know what?” I said, “Here’s the letters. You are working all the time days and I work one week night and one week day.” I introduced him to this Polack and, “You take over the mailing.” And he took over the mailing. Right away he made a business. If I want to send it to my brother a letter, I have to give him two dollars. If my brother sent me, let’s say a hundred dollars—zlotys, in Polish zlotys—so he already took five percent off, right away five percent. I give him the—just to help each other. Right away he made a business. That’s all. One time my brother was feeling that he’s going to be transferred out. So he give him five hundred zlotys to this Polack to give it to me.

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So he knew it that he makes a business. So he didn't want to give him the five hundred zlotys to him. So he said to him, "You know, if something happened to Berek's brother. I have to see him in person, I have to tell him what happened." He said, "What happened?" So I tried to arrange it to, to meet this Polack. I said, "What happened to my brother?" He said, "Nothing happened," he said, "he has five hundred zlotys because uh, I know this, Teitelbaum will take a percentage of it." So I said, "Thank you, thank God nothing happened to my brother." And he made already a business. So honest to God, like we have a, a God from—that one day he received letters and he supposed to come to the camp to give the letters. So was—they searched by the gate, they took off the clothes to search everybody to the—to naked. So he came with a bunch of letters to me in the department where I used to work. He said, "Berek, I got a letter from your brother." "Oh," I said. He said, "No, take the bunch of letters with you and when we come home to the camp, you, you will get the letter." And I didn't know, you know, I'm just a plain fellow and I took the bunch of letters and I kept it in my pocket, or someplace under the shirt. And then we're finished working and we come out and my gosh, my eyes. People standing in the thousands and the Ukrainian they're searching to naked. If they will found the letters on me, that will be, be wonderful. Or who brought me the letters—I may have to give this Polack—and we're standing in the thousand, they taking off the clothes and they search you all over. The shoes and the—oh my gosh. And here we're staying tired twelve hours with black like, like the guy what's cleans the chimney—we were black. So our policeman was Yosel. So we said to Yosel, "Why don't you go over to the, to the guard and tell him that

we from the Granaten—the heavy, hard working people—we can't stay—we have to stay 'til midnight or maybe later than that and let us search us first.” And, and we go through. So this policeman was a nice fellow. I hope he's alive. So he went over to this guard, he says, “Look, I'm from the Granaten, you know me.” And he said, “I got a group from eighty, ninety people that they're dropping dead. Why don't you search 'em and I'll bring 'em over and search 'em over first.” He said, “Go ahead, bring 'em.” And we came over and they opened the gate, they even didn't touch us because so dirt—we were filthy. And we went through—we went to the camp. Then he comes running over. He said, “They found on you the letters?” I said, “No.” They took me—they, they took off my clothes from me. I said, “Yes.” He said, “You want to save your neck and you, you try to. Why you did it? Why didn't they burn it? Put a match, burn it up, dispose it.” “So you want to put me in—and what would happen if they would caught the letters on me?” He said, that what I tried to bring up was selfishness. He want to save his back. And he didn't care if I would get caught.

So if you received money from, uh...

Yeah, from my brother. You could buy yourself...

What could you do?

I didn't have no nothing from the money anyway. I was so naïve. One time they were searching through—it was very hard to hold money, it was very hard. So you didn't know where to hide it. So when you walked through the gate you had to hi...had to have the hand high. And if he didn't like you he could come and search you. And if you had the money you could buy extra piece of bread.

From who?

From another Jewish fellow, from this carpenter, or from this plumber. You could buy extra piece of bread. Or you could buy yourself a shirt or you could buy yourself a, a pair of shoes. Money wasn't very—only how you could handle. Another thing with money—was two brothers, Goldman was their name, and we lived in a barrack that we—you could trust each other. So when they, they were wearing boots and the pants they had it inside in the boots. And they had dollars—American dollars. And they had it in, in, in the pocket—they had a hole in the pocket. In case if they tell 'em to raise the hand. So the—this fell in and fell in, in the boots. And they were sleeping on top of the bunker. So looks like they drop in this with the rags wrapped up without. And we came in, in uh, in uh, the camp and we—I slept in. And he went and pulled off his boots and this package fell out and he didn't think about it. And I was laying on the—I was on the bottom bed, and I was laying—you know what a hungry person looks. The, the eyes—I got it all over and I saw on the floor something's laying. So I went and I walked over and I picked up and I went back on my bed. I unwrapped it—American dollars. Oh my gosh. Now, double scared. What I'm going to do with it? So anyway—and those brothers they're fighting. You had it, he had it, you had it, he had. He said, "Here." And they were fighting—they were almost killed themselves. And I'm laying in bed, like, I'm telling you the honest truth—not I'm trying like myself honest. I said, "What happened if one will kill the other one? It will be on my conscience." And even if I have the dollars, if I have to go through, through the gate twice, and to who I'm going sell the dollars? Polish money it was

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easy to exchange it. Where I have to exchange it, where I'm—it was a problem for me to have the dollars too. And I didn't ??? so I said "Ah!" I walked over to the brothers, "What are you fighting about? He said, "Don't mix in, you are, you are an outsider. We are two brothers, we're not going to hurt each other." I said, "What are you fighting about?" So he said, "Don't be." I said, "I want to know what you're fighting about." I say, "I know what you're fighting about." "What do you know?" I say, "I found it what you uh, fighting about." "You looked in, in it?" I said, "Yeah, I unwrapped it. I looked it in." Now they were mad because I looked in, in it—that I know they have dollars. And I gave 'em back. And this time, ev...even a son will not give back to a father, even a brother to—I, I didn't know what to do with it. So I give 'em back and then they were mad on me. They at least could say, "Okay, we, we award you with something. We give you a slice of bread or something we do something for you, what you, what you found it." And uh, so they, they said, "Are you..." they were mad at me because I looked in it what was in this package. I never forget. I, I was a very scared. If they come close to me, if I would have something not legal. I, I, I'd be lost my pants. Sometimes, at work I'm very conscientious. Let's say, if I have to charge you \$4.98 a pound, if I charge you \$5.00 a pound, I will look for you and take back the package and reweigh it. That's already in me. I—like we were—I was in Italy. People went to—over to state. People went over to the Austria and then they brought over this—or they, or they—and—or they had watches or they went with diamonds or they went with clothes or they went with that. I stayed in the kibbutz, I didn't move the place. I want to go to Israel, I want to go to Palestine. Or they

didn't want to send me because I was, you know, such a kibbutz what the kibbutz belong Irgun Tsvai Leumi. They were thinking that I will go and, and join Begin's uh, group.

This was in Italy?

In Italy.

You call it a kibbutz, it was a...

No, a kibbutz. We were on a real kibbutz like they have it in Israel. I was in kibbutz ???.

This was where in Italy?

In, in Maria Di Leuca.

It's, uh...

By the Mediterranean. By the Adriatic and Mediterranean uh, Sea.

And it was sponsored by the UNRRA?

It was—maybe it was sponsored by the UNRRA. I, I just went in because I was a Betar when I was a youth. And I, you know, I missed my youth life and I want to live it up. We had lectures over there. We had dances. We danced the hora. I used to stay on the roof uh, guarding the uh, Israeli flag, you know.

In which year?

In 1945, '46, '47, '48.

And uh, were you trained militarily there?

No, I, I—a fact—I took a trade, a trade over there to be a fisherman. So I used to go on the sea and I learned how to put nets and I used to catch fish, and I used to eat raw fish. We used to grab little—the, the little sardine—or the smelts, we used

to break off the head and we eat 'em raw. I saw it I start vomiting. Then I got used to it and I used to eat the raw fish and, and everything. I—we had a, a nice Jewish fellow—a Lithuanian from Lithua and he was a, a Navy man or something and he trained us to be fisherman. When we come over to Palestine, we will become fisherman. Well I never made it to shore.

It was difficult to get to Palestine.

It was for other organizations. From the other organizations they were under Ben Gurion so they have—they had aliyah.

Which organizations would those be?

Noar Hatzioni, Hashomer Hatzier, uh, Aguda it was—three Jews, ten organizations. And I happened to go in to, to Betar Kibbutz and they said that they are going to ????. And we talked about Joseph Trumpeldor, we talked about Hertzl. We talked about Jewish history. But I missed it. I was—I lived in this kibbutz and then—and I studied for this kibbutz and I studied for this kibbutz and that kibbutz, they never sent me. So that's when I got time to look around. Because I, I didn't—the truth, I didn't want to come to the United States, because I figured I lived through—only the family send me letters and they said, “You, you the only one survived from such a large family. Come, come, come.” So I came here. I was in Israel twice. Yeah, I would love to live in Israel.

Are you going to retire there?

No. They don't need me. They need young blood. They don't need the retirees.

Have you ever gone back to Poland?

No. For what? To see the graveyards or they will kill me? What the—after the war was the Kielce pogrom. I have from my hometown—and she lives in New York—they stabbed her, they cut her—they killed so many Jews after the war. I'd like to go to Poland? They killed her not far from my hometown. Nah. Never. If you give me a ticket with a plane just to go in to stop off for a half an hour and get off from the plane and come back, I will never want to go. I would never want to step on, on the Polish soil.

What do you think about the Solidarity movement?

The—I don't know. That's, that's to me—I don't know what he is. He's a union man or he's not a union. He's a union man and Reagan supports the union over there and he breaks the union here. I don't understand it. If he's—if Reagan is so interested in Polish should have a strong union, so why he breaks the union here? The, the, the, the, the pilots, and the, the, the controllers, and the—every union, he—now is such a law, the, the high Supreme Court passed it that you, you declare bankruptcy or you, or you go to ??? you can break the contract then hire the same people. What Cunningham did with ??? That's Cunningham. Now it's ???, so what they do. Here they're breaking the union, over there they're building the union. I don't know. Maybe I'm not smart enough.

[interruption in interview]

That, that—I, I understood that, that they will take us to work and we're going to work, only they were going to take my father and mother and, and little children and the five year old and four year old children put them in, in a box car and they send 'em to like, like sheep to the gas chambers. Nobody believed it. When it

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happened in Germany—all right they, they took away the, the properties from the, from the German Jews, they took away the rights they took away the citizenship from the German Jews and they sent them to labor camps. All right, that's labor camps, Labor—it's war. And they claiming that we, we, we—the Jews right away we are the, the, the—how to say—the guinea pig. We, right away, if something—what happened here. Uh, right away the Jews. In Germany the Jews were in high position, the Jews were bankers, Jews were professors, Jews were—take Archie Bunker here. He wants a good lawyer, he goes to Goldman or to Shulman or to, to Sullivan. The Jew is the good lawyer, the good doctor. And then something happens, right with the Jew. We are the guinea—same thing Poland. They want a good lawyer they went to a Jew. They want a good doctor, they went to a Jewish doctor or they went to Germany to look for a Jewish doctor or they went to Austria looking for a Jewish doctor. Poland didn't have enough doctors. They always—they, they think a, a lot about the Jews. When it comes to destroying, the Jew the first one. We bring the culture, we bring the music, we bring the, everything—the science, everything what you got in the world we—everything. When it comes to something, we are the first too. That's all. So you can't find no justice. I couldn't believe it myself, when I was liberated, that when I come home to Poland—when I will see a Pole or a Jew a, a landsman, a cousin, we would carry each other, we will—what, what we went through, that's a impossible—is a impossible. If you would come over to me, you will see Berek. I will see you in 1949 in, in America, I will think that you—something happened something. It was a impossible that such a might—such a strict army. How could the German

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army be destroyed? It was impossible. I remember when I was liberated in Czechoslovakia—in Prague—and when I came up on the road to ??? civilian with a machine gun, he said, “Where you going? Robbing uh, our Czechs.” “We’re hungry.” He said, “Lay down. Wait. You will see it.” And it didn’t take a half an hour. The whole German army came with no rifles—only we got an order to go home—Detroit to New York, and they marched without guards—didn’t have no guards—and we got up from the ground—we were hiding on the roads—we got up. And the—those stripes, when they saw us, it’s like Jewish T’chias HaMeisim we, we resurrected. We got up and they went down. And honest to God, they have a right—I couldn’t believe it that I could walk over to a German and, and touch him or grab him—his, his bread back or bread back or something. And right away we took off their bread back and we had a watch—they went after the jewelry. I just grabbed his bread back and I run to the camp and I open up and I saw a can of sardine a piece of butter and a piece of bread. I just helped myself and I put it on the pillow. I waited under the, under the straw back and I said, “I’m going again.” I run over again, they’re already gone. And when I come back those—to those people that couldn’t move, they moved over to my bed they got everything that I got. When I come back I didn’t get—I missed the Germans and I missed my food. You see, I was not satisfied with one time. Say, I want to ma...a...another turn. Then I start to eat. I got the diarrhea. People dying. Diarrhea it was going on from front—from the back. And I start to go. I went to the doctor, I said, “Doctor take a look at the diarrhea.” He said, “Go stop eating.” I said, “For so many years I didn’t eat, and you want me to stop eating now.” He said, “The only way you take

a bread and burn, and make charcoal and eat the charcoal.” I took a loaf of bread and took a wire, made a fire and I put this loaf of bread in the fire—burned for charcoal. I was eating the charcoal and my stomach stopped. And that’s—if you get diarrhea, go in the drugstore and just ask for charcoal powder. That will stop you right away.

Charcoal?

Charcoal, charcoal. They sell it in the drugstore. And I ate this charcoal and it stopped right away. I came to the United States, my aunt make me toast and she gives me burned bread, I say. “I, I don’t eat no burned bread.” ‘Til today I don’t eat no toast. And that’s, you see, that’s we went through. And, and people don’t forget. There’s a lot of people forgot already.

Did you tell your children what you told me?

I told them—they don’t, they don’t know. They don’t—they’re young. I mean uh, they, they watched *The Holocaust*—they see this. I tried to explain to them—I made a tape. I want to play it for you. I mean, it’s hard, I know. My children—maybe if they be more educated and they be more involved. Or they’re not so much involved, you know, and they’re not—they just high school graduate children. And I honestly got—last year we had a—in, in Washington—from the Holocaust. I went over there and I was looking, I—and looking, looking. Had my name date on—I was looking. I couldn’t find it. Finally I found one guy—only I know him when he got liberated. I didn’t look for the living one, I was looking for a dead one. Maybe, maybe from my hometown. Yeah, I stayed with a guy in the line to buy a coffee. He said, “Where are you from.” I said, “From Poland,

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Sandomierz.” He said, “You know, here’s one guy from Sandomierz” I said, “Where, where?” He showed me. I said, “I know him. He lives in New York. He’s got a wife and two children.” And he brought the wife and children, ??? Singer, I know her. Who survived, who’s alive we know from each other. Or I was looking the guy what I didn’t knew he survived I met him—I faced him. So those kind. Maybe my brother, maybe my sister, maybe a cousin, maybe some—I had so many cousins, so many relatives. Nobody, nobody. I’m lucky, I’m lucky that I found the family here in the United States. If I would not find in United States my family—I found my mother’s sister’s daughter in, in Israel, in Haifa so I go to her. We write to each other. We’re like sister and brother. Only good I found my relatives here. I know that I, I, I got uh, roots—that I got family. The same grandfather, the same great-grandfather. And my father, and the uncle—uncle just died. He was almost ninety years old, William Rothenberg. And we got a lot of Rothenberg’s, and uh, and we have a Rothenberg family club. And I, I am the, the whole uh, when the family comes together I entertain them because uh, we are better and then uh, we collect the money—they put in a quarter and they say the birthday or anniversary or graduation or confirmation, and I have a loud voice and I shout and, and everybody enjoys it. They stay in good money and everybody wants to put in. It doesn’t come from me. And then I collect the money and then give it to the treasurer. In the summertime we have a picnic. In the wintertime we have a Chanukah party for our children, for our grandchildren. We come together. Summertime we got a, a cousin uh, Larry ????. He’s got a

swimming pool, so we go out to Larry ??? swimming pool and we enjoy the whole family. You know Larry ???

???

???

No.

??? The lawyer, Mitch, you know him.

I know Mitch.

Now, that's what I was telling you about this father what I didn't let him beat him up. I met his father in, in Germany, Bremen. He was holding Mitch on, on his hand yeah, Mitch is my best friend here. If you see Mitch here—when they brought his father I said, “Oh no, you can't, you can't touch him.” I was at Mitch bar mitzvah, Mitch wedding and his sister's wedding.

How many uh, how many Jews did you say lived in your town before the war?

About eight hundred families.

How many do you think survived?

You can count 'em on the fingers. Uh, a great portion survived in Russia. They, they left Russia. They—or they now in Israel, they're in New York. And uh, from the concentration camps, I don't know if—they're in Toronto, in Montreal, in New York or two, three hundred that'd be the most.