

**Could you tell me your name please um, and if it was different when you were born tell me that and where you're from.**

My name is Szymon Binke. I was born...S-z-y-m-o-n Binke, which is Shimon in Polish uh, born in Łódź Poland, November 21, 1931.

**Um, can you tell me something about your family and life before the war, what you remember in Łódź?**

Well, I had a father and mother and I had a little sister. She was born in 1940, May. No, I'm sorry, 1939, May 20, 1939. She was born just before the war started. And a uh, good close family. I went, well when I turned about six years old I went to school. It was a private school. In the morning you had regular uh, school, in the afternoon it was uh, religious. It was uh, a parochial school, religious uh, uh, education. And I used to have lunch at my grandfather. He lived, oh, about a quarter of a mile from where my school was. They'd bring me a lunch to school. Because this was an all day deal. I went there like nine o'clock in the morning and I came home six o'clock at, at night.

**This is your, your paternal grandfather?**

My paternal, yes.

**And what abo...any other grandparents living in the city?**

Uh, yes. I had a, well, he was mar...he, he married, he remarried. My, my paternal grandmother died. I never knew her. And he remarried. He married a, a

*Szymon Binke Interview*

cousin of hers. And uh, to me she was my grandmother, I never knew any different. Later on as I got older, I found out that she was not my father's mother, but uh, my father acted to her like she would be his mother and all the, you know they had other kids together later on. There was no difference. There was, there was my father and a sister, the sister that lived across the street from us from the first uh, marriage. Then there are uh, how many, a sister and three brothers that were from the second marriage, but to me they were uncles and my father never made any uh, difference between, there was no uh, difference between his sister and the sister from the first marriage and the sister from the second marriage; they were all sisters to him or brothers.

**Now, so you had five aunts and uncles.**

On my father's side. Well, one was married, so I had more. I had two s...there were two sisters. One was married and there were, let's see, Sol, Harry, Larry and four, four uncles on that side and two aunts.

**And children? Did they, they had children?**

Uh, one of them. The one that lived, the oldest one my father, you know, from the first marriage, he had a, a daughter that was about a year younger than I am.

**And what about your mother's family?**

My mother's family was one brother, he's still alive, he's in Israel, Natanya, Israel. Then there was two sisters, Golda and uh, yeah.

**And what was her name, her maiden name?**

My mother's? Braitbart.

**And was she from Łódź as well?**

That's correct.

**So the whole family lived there.**

Yes. They owned a bakery in Łódź, the parents did.

**The extended family was aunts, uncles, grandparents, first cousins...**

That's right. Now see...

**How large would you say it was?**

Let's see, with cousins and, probably about twenty-five.

**And do you know, have any idea how many survived the war?**

We happened to be a lucky family. We survived on our, on my father's side five of us survived, six of us survived on my father's side and just one uncle on my mother's side. Because we were all the right age, except for me. I was too young to survive, but I told you that story before. After we get into it I'll probably have to repeat it again.

**Uh, did you see the family regularly? Well, you saw your grandfather.**

Oh yes, yes. Well, my father's family I used to see almost every day because I went to school there. And one of the kids would bring me lunch. Most of the time it was the uh, my Aunt Fanny. She's, she's here too. She's alive.

**And what, what were holidays like?**

We used to get together and meals and stuff.

**Was it, was it a religious family?**

[sigh] N...for today's times, yes. You know, we kept kosher and we went to Shul every Saturday. We didn't go every day, because my father was too busy. Saturday morning we went to Shul. And kosher there was no question about, you know, everybody that we knew, [laugh], you didn't have to be very religious to have a kosher home. Not overly...

**You didn't payes and all that.**

Pardon?

**You didn't payes and...**

My, my grandfather, yes, had a beard and wore a, did you ever see those little flat hats, black hat that we used to wear on a black uh, uh, uh, like a coat.

**Caftan?**

Well, they called it a Yibitze in Yiddish uh, but every, you know, every country has a different uh, name for, for certain things.

**So what would a Friday night be like, for example?**

Well, for, we didn't get together. Friday night was at our home. My father would sit at the table and say the, you know, have a regular Shabbas dinner with the Kiddush and the wine and...

**Zemirot?**

Pardon?

**You would sing the Zemirot?**

The Zemirof, yes, yes, yes.

**And uh, do you have fond memories of this, this connections with your family?**

**With your grandfather for example?**

Oh, of course. Well, well that's the only grandfather I had, because on the other side I am named after him. On my mother's, my mother's uh, father passed away before I was born. And, but I did have a grandmother on that side. And she, you know, they, they owned the bakery. And this uncle that's in Israel, he worked in the bakery. So they had the bakery to uh, you know, 'til the war started.

**What, what did your father do?**

My father had a uh, uh, feed store, you know uh, uh, animal feed, food and uh, grain. He, we lived on the outskirts of town and uh, the farmers used to stop before going into the city, so he'd buy off the grains from 'em and send it to an elevator and so, you know and uh, have it uh, ground up. Sell the flour to the uh, bakeries and uh, there is some, like the hulls of the uh, of the grain, you feed this to cattle and horses and sell it in our store.

**So he must have had dealings with Polish non-Jewish...**

Polish and Germans, yes. Mostly, yes, most of the dealings were with, except for the bakers. You know, the bakers that he sold the flour to, a lot of 'em were Jewish because that was in city, but the farmers were all uh, either, mostly Germans. A lot of Germans.

**Volksdeutsche.**

Volksdeutsche, yes.

**And what were the relations like between...**

Very good. Very good. They grew up together. My father used to go there when he was four or five years old. You know, that's, uh, that's why we got stuck in, in, in Poland, because uh, my father used to do business during the First World War and it was also the Germans that invaded uh, came into Poland. And he said, "Well, heh-heh, survived the First World War." Soldiers got killed, but he wasn't a soldier. He said, "It's the same Germans, they're not gonna bother anybody."

**So he must have had several Polish or, or German friends.**

Oh yes, a lot of them, yes.

**And do you remember any, any incidents of anti-Semitism?**

Just that one time I remember where uh, they had this party, there was uh, like a field and they used to have dances and parties and this one group had a party at night and I think we must have expected problems, because we never used to close the uh, shutters, you know, there used to be heavy wooden shutters on uh, on the windows, on the outside on hinges. And that night we, we did close the shutters and they were throwing rocks at 'em and I think they broke a window from I guess the vibration, no stones came through into the house.

**Do you remember when that was?**

Whew! God, it must have been '38 if I could remember. Otherwise I wouldn't have remembered it. Around '38 probably.

**And who, who was celebrating? Who was...**

This uh, they were a rea...real right-wing organization. They called themselves Narodowcy.

**Which means what?**

Narod is uh, is, is, is, is uh, like Volkswagen, you know, v, volk? That would be Narod in Polish.

**So like the people.**

People's Party or something, yeah.

**Um, tell me something about your, what you remember about your childhood. Did you have lots of friends? Did you play soccer? Did you...**

Yes, yes, yes. I had it all mostly Polish friends until I started to go school, but then in school they were all Jewish. Like I told you, it was a parochial Jewish school, but I only had the uh, they were friends, school friends. When I came home they weren't around. Unless I went to see my grandfather on a weekend or something, I'd uh, I might meet some of them.

**Now was this a function of the neighborhood you lived in? Were there lots of Jews around where you lived?**

No, not where we lived. We didn't have any Jews. We were the only...

**Can you show me where on a map?**

*Szymon Binke Interview*

Uh, I have to go, let's see, where's Brzezińska, Brzezińska, this map doesn't go far enough. This is the ghetto map, right?

**Right.**

Okay. Here is the, I had it when I spoke to you the last time. It must be around here, oh yeah. See, this is, right here, right where the ci... where the city ends, right past the Catholic cemetery. There is a Jewish cemetery on this side, in fact, our Shul was right over here and uh, then there is a Catholic cemetery. We lived past the Catholic cemetery right on a, on a border. Our house was uh, uh, Brzezińska one hundred and sev... number 171 and Szosa Brezińska number 1. In other words, ours was the, the, the, the last house of the city and the first house of... Sikava probably would be the next uh, but we still had, we still were in Łódź.

**And where was the, was there a Jewish neighborhood in Łódź?**

Well yeah. The Jewish neighborhood is this, the Baluty.

**Baluty.**

Yeah.

**Can we see another, on the other map?**

On this one? Well, go back to Brzezińska, right around here probably. Oh here, right here, Balut, yeah, right here. They have it. Well, this is the ghetto, but this was the Jewish area, yeah, Baluty.

**So that's, was that a significant walk to get to the Jewish neighborhood?**



From our house?

**Yeah.**

We took uh, uh, the uh, streetcar. In fact, the streetcar only went up to here, to the uh, Catholic cemetery. I still had to walk about a kilometer or something.

What does it say, show here? A thousand meter, yeah. Well, no, probably half a kilometer.

**So you had all these non-Jewish friends...**

Yes...

**Um, and...**

but I was young. I was only, when the war broke out I was only seven years old.

**And you don't remember any, any anti-Semitic incidents with...**

Against me? No, not, not from the kids, no.

**Did you like school?**

Yes.

**Um, both parts of it?**

[laugh] It was a little too long, but [laugh] we, we had no choice. There was no uh, you knew you had to go and that was it.

**So would you characterize your life before the war as uh, what, middle class?**

Very, yeah, probably upper-middle class, yeah. Because uh, going to that school cost quite a bit of money in those days, so I'd have to be in the upper

class. Usually you'd go to a public school in the morning and go to cheder in the afternoon three, four hours. But to have to go to one school and get both educations was quite costly.

**Do you remember the name of the school?**

Litvin. The, the, the, the person that owned it had uh, he was the Rabbi and had two sons. They taught you the uh, uh, they were educated in, in, in both Hebrew and Polish, you know, they and then I think they had a lady that was a teacher. But apparently it was uh, uh, uh, with, you know, it was uh, it was accepted by the city because uh, you could finish school there and go on to a high education.

**I, I think, I may have asked you. It wasn't a Katzenelson school, was it?**

**Katzenelson?**

No.

**It was also a parochial school in Łódź. So it was the Litvin school.**

Litvin, yeah. It was uh, right on Brzezińska and Kościelna. It's right probably around here. Here, it was, it was I think number 3 Brzezińska, number 5 Brzezińska someth... number 3, I believe and it starts, number 1 starts at, at, at the, at this here and goes on in higher numbers. Ours was 171. Now see in Łódź the numbers don't jump like they do here. They jump just two. You have the odd side and the even side. But like you'll have 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 on one side and you have 1, 3, 5, 7 on the other side.

**Would you take a streetcar every morning?**

Sure. Oh yeah.

**By yourself?**

Yeah.

**At age six.**

Mm-hmm.

**It was safe.**

Oh yeah. Nobody even thought about, uh...

**And, and when the war began, do you remember where you were, where your family was? Was there any warning ahead of time?**

Well, there were uh, we heard, uh they were fighting and we heard uh, uh, artillery. And we went into the, well like I told you my father knew a lot of uh, farmers, so we went into a, to a village in there and stayed with a farmer overnight and the whole thing, you know. We took a day or two and they were in, so after that uh, we came back home.

**So when you, when you came back to Łódź, it was, it was essentially over? The fighting part.**

Yeah. It only took two or three days.

**But you heard the bombs.**

They didn't bomb. We heard the artillery.

**And when you came...**

They didn't bomb Łódź...

**When you came back was...**

Maybe one or two bombs dropped on Łódź but nothing...

**And when you came back, was everything the same?**

For awhile. Not very long.

**What, what started to change?**

They started to catch people to work and this and that and then uh, they started to put us into the, this area. And we moved in with my father's uh, family.

**In the ghetto you mean.**

In the ghetto, yeah.

**The Baluty district.**

Pardon?

**In the Baluty?**

Baluty, yes.

**Do you remember what, what went on in your home during this period before the ghetto? Were people worried?**

Sure.

**You said that at one point your father had the opportunity to leave.**

Yes, before, just before the war broke out. See, my mother was born in the United States, I believe either New York or New Jersey. My grandfather was called in the army. When a Jewish person was called in the Polish Army, it was like a life sentence, because they, you'd wind up in prison, in jail and uh, jail

*Szymon Binke Interview*

time didn't count as time served, so you have to make up the time. So twenty, thirty years you will get for that, at least that much time so everybody tried to get out of it. The only way you could get out of it is pay, to pay somebody and, and I guess he did get a fixer to fix that he stays out of the service. And uh, apparently it, he couldn't do it fast enough, so he told him to leave the country until, until he got this thing straightened out. So that's the time my grandfather came to the United States and my mother was born here. Then after it was fixed they went back and he reopened the bakery. So uh, bef...well see I, I know from what my father told me, my father and mother told me, that the uh, U.S. Consulate wrote a letter to my mother, naturally and uh, it said that it wasn't safe to stay in Europe for American citizens, to go back home, to go back to America. And my father had a good business and he, he, he knew what the Germans were like in the First World War and he said he's gonna stick it out.

**So that, you think that was just before the war then.**

Right. Yes. Probably '39, maybe a month or two before the war. Probably.

**And was there every any discussion about that decision in your house?**

Yes, well apparently there was, because that's how I found out about it. I didn't know it at the time but later on I found out about it.

**When, when were you moved into the ghetto and how did you find out you had to move?**

There were uh, they, they put on, they put out uh, announcements. You know,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

not in the paper naturally. They had announcements on, on the walls, "All Jews have to go into this and this area by May," I think May the first of 1940. Well, May the first of 1940 the ghetto was closed up. By then everybody had to be in already, so it must have started before that.

**So do you remember the day you left your house?**

That would be tough. No. I do remember uh, my father, they were loading up a, a, a big wagon, horse-drawn wagon, with all our furniture and sending it out to uh, to one of the farmers in uh, in uh, in a village to, for safekeeping, because we knew where we moved in, we won't have any room for that furniture, because we wound up twelve of us in one room [pause] where my grandfather used to live or my grandfather's family.

**So what did you take with you?**

Clothes.

**Just clothing.**

Yeah. None of the furniture. None.

**And did you ever see the furniture again?**

No.

**So you, you moved into the, you walked I assume to the, to the ghetto?**

Probably.

**And you moved into, was somebody already living there?**

Yeah. My, my, my grandfather's family.

**So you moved into the same...**

Same...

**apartment...**

apartment, yeah. It was apartment. It's a one room. And like I told you, there were, there were uh, let's see four of us and three of my, you know the aunt that lived across the street from us, that's seven and five their family. By then my grandfather was dead already. My grandfather passed away January the eleventh, 1939.

**A natural...**

Natural death, yeah, cancer.

**Uh, so you, your little sister who was roughly a year old...**

A year, less than a year old, yeah.

**Your parents.**

Oh yeah, she was a year, almost a year, yeah.

**Aunts and uncles?**

Well, my aunt and uncle that lived across the street from us. You know, my father's sister, the oldest one and her daughter and her husband. We all moved into my grandparents' home.

**And what was it like?**

Crowded. [laugh] People slept on the floor, we used to sleep you know two on this side and two on that side, so their feet were facing your face and your feet

were facing their face. But, you know, made the best of it. At least we were together.

**And was there running water? Was...**

No, not running water. There was no running water in Balut. We didn't have any running water when we lived out here. You have to carry water. In fact, they, you know one of those uh, wells that you pump water? Uh, ours was always broken, so we had to go across the street, which was probably about 300-400 yards, carry two buckets and bring it in. And outhouses.

**Outhouses.**

Yeah. There was no plumbing, no uh, sewer system.

**Uh, now was there any disease because of all this?**

Yes, a lot of disease.

**What sorts?**

Typhus. A lot of typhus, yeah. But the worst, well, later on the worst one was uh, your uh, lungs, what is it? Uh, TB. From lack of uh, nourishment.

**What kinds of rations did you have when you were in the ghetto?**

Probably, well, it depends. You know, at first it wasn't too bad. But then it, as it, as it uh, progressed it got worse with the food. The food situation was terrible after about two years.

**And how did you get food?**

Rations. If you worked, you got, you got uh, some kind of card and you had to



go and get your bread and I think like uh, maybe 200 grams of bread at first.

Butter and stuff was nonexistent. Some maybe uh, uh, ten grams of margarine for a week.

**Meat?**

No, wait. Meat? At first we did get some horse meat. But uh, like maybe two, three ounces a week.

**Could, show me where you, where you, where your um, here you were, were living, where your apartment was.**

In the ghetto?

**In the ghetto.**

Uh, let's see if I can find it. I did find it, I think. Didn't I find it once before?

Let's see. Brzezińska, Franciszkańska, Łagiewnicka, Pieprzowa, right here.

Pieprzowa and Młynarska, right here. See, this is Młynarska and this is

Pieprzowa. Right this corner...this corner was the, the, the apartment building.

My grandfather also had a, a, a feed store in that corner downstairs and he lived behind the store. So...

**And where would you go to get rations?**

I don't remember.

**But you had, did you have to go someplace else?**

Sure, sure, oh yeah.

**And stand in line?**

Yeah.

**How would...**

Then when you worked during the day you'd get uh, uh, uh, some soup, you know like at lunchtime.

**And you, did you work?**

Of course. I worked the first, my first job was in a, in a metal factory, Metalabteilung Zwei [Metalworks Two]. I can't remember where it was. My second job was Altschuhlager. That means "old, uh, uh, warehouse of old shoes." Now I know where they came from. At the time we were too stupid, like I told you. We didn't know where those old shoes came from. They came from Majdanek or Treblinka or Auschwitz. They came back and they took 'em apart and uh, we, we, we manufactured the shoes. For the army I guess, who knows where they went. But uh, that was my second job. And that was on uh, Brzezińska, right, right [sigh], probably right around here, just right by the fence, the end of the ghetto. And the other side, like I, I told you once before, the, while I was working there, there were some people they had in buildings for maybe a month or so and we didn't know, we couldn't talk to 'em or anything. We used to see 'em from the other side of the fence. And later on they just disappeared and people are saying they were gypsies. But they just stayed there about a month or so and then they were gone.

**Do you know when that was, roughly?**

When?

**What year that was?**

Probably around '43, maybe '43, '44, '43 probably, yes.

**What do you think happened?**

[laugh] Now I know what happened. At the time I didn't. They all, I wound up in the same camp after them. Because when I came into Auschwitz, they sent us to the Zigeunerlager, which means the gypsy camp.

**But there were no gypsies there.**

No, no. Just...

**What had happened to them?**

[laugh] They were uh, exterminated.

**Um...**

I never met any in, in the other camps either. Never, never saw any gypsies. I think that's as far as they went is to, to Auschwitz and that was it.

**You were eight years old in the ghetto.**

Well first, yes.

**How were you assigned such work?**

Well, you either worked or uh, you had a chance of being picked up and sent out.

**Did you see people being picked up on the street?**

Oh yeah.

**Well, how did, what did that look like?**

They, they, they ask you for a work uh, uh, you know we had a like a, like an ID card from the place that you worked. And if you didn't have it there was a chance of gettin' thrown on a truck, no, well, not truck, wagon and uh, you weren't seen again.

**And who would ask?**

Pardon?

**Who was doing the asking?**

German soldiers or Jewish police, with, with the German soldiers, yeah. We used to call the Sperre.

**Which means...**

I don't know. They did, that was uh, going on maybe two or three times a week. They'd come in with, they needed bodies, so older people or kids or...

**Did you do any other work in the ghetto?**

Like what?

**Well, you had these two jobs and then any sort of freelancing?**

Oh yeah, [laugh], at first I was selling uh, saccharine and candy. We had a, a friend of my father's was a candy maker before the war, so you know at the beginning there was a little sugar and he started, he was making candies, so I'd be peddling his candy right in the corner of uh, uh, not far from home. Let's see, let me find Brzezińska and, oh boy. Again I lost it. Let's see. Brzezińska,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

Franciszkańska, right around here, which was real close, yeah. Oh no. Wait a minute. Right here. Młynarska and, right here, in this corner. See we lived here. It was only a block away. So...

**So how did that work? Did you, did you buy the candy from him?**

Right.

**And then you would sell it for...**

Yeah. A little profit.

**And did people buy?**

Sure. That was just the first year or so maybe, not even a year, but then things got, deteriorated.

**What kinds of images do you have about the ghetto when you think about it?**

**What, what comes to mind? What did it look like? What...**

Dreary. Crowded at first, because at first uh, we started out with 150,000 Jews in this little area. But then you have plenty of room after, after a while. They kept bringing in people from all the suburbs. They brought 'em in from Czechoslovakia, they brought 'em in from Vienna, Austria, they brought 'em in from Germany and I think when, in 1944, I think we were down to about 30,000 or something, I don't even know. When the last...

**What would a typical walk through the, the streets be like?**

[laugh] We didn't do too much walking. You know, we didn't go for Spazier [stroll], like for a, for a walk. You just went to work and came home and...

**Well, what would that be like? What, what time did you go to work?**

Probably eight o'clock in the morning.

**So you worked in the days and not on night shift.**

Uh, no. Uh, the first job I worked night shift. I started out the night shift. That's right. Uh, that uh, metal uh, factory. I worked on a lathe. But the controls are supposed to be waist high. Well, to me they were up here, so I found a box I could stand on where I could, because the, the numbers on the controls, you have to look down on 'em. Well, I wasn't tall enough. So when I stood up uh, on a box I could see the numbers on the...

**How did they assign an eight year-old to work on a lathe?**

Well, I was lucky. I was big, you know. I was, how did they assign, [laugh] either, you either, like I told you, you either work or you had a chance of uh, gettin' caught and sent away.

**And your father, did he work in the same place?**

Uh, my father, no. My father worked in uh, he, he was in with uh, from before the war he knew vegetables and this, so he worked in the, in the main place where they brought in the vegetables, which was probably, oh God, let's see, Pieprzowa, Młynarska, right, probably someplace around here there was a market. They called it Jonas Pilzer Platz. I don't know how they called it in Polish. Nobody, I tried to find out but nobody knew [laugh].

**That's German.**

Yeah, no. It was a Jew. It must have been uh, named after a Jew, Jonas, Jonah. And Pilzer could have been a, a nickname too. My uncle tells me he was the first one to, to put a stand with the fruits and vegetables there, so they named it after him. But I don't know.

**So your father had a different job in a different part of the ghetto.**

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And your uncles?**

Uh, let's see. Two of 'em worked in a saddle factory, you know with leather they were making, Sol and Larry, they worked in the leather uh, factory. Harry worked, he worked something with the, with the, with the streetcars. And my aunt, well, wait a minute. Then, then Sol and Larry went to the, to the straw factory. They made, in the straw factories they made shoes out of straw. They used to uh, uh, I guess for they, they needed it in Russia for the cold uh, weather in the front. And uh, what did my aunt do? She worked in a, in a, in a factory that they made clothes, tailoring.

**And your mother?**

My mother I don't think, I don't remember her going to work. Well, we had, she had to take care of the baby and try to keep hidden.

**So she stayed out of sight.**

Right.

**Walking back from work, would, would, would it be dark at night when you**

**would come back from your first job?**

Uh, in the morning. That, that was in the morning already, yeah, probably.

**So what would you pass on your way?**

Six, seven o'clock in the morning. Streets. I don't, I don't remember what street the factory was on. The first one I don't remember what street it was on. The second one I remember and that was on Brzezinska, 96, but the second, the first one I don't remember what street it was on.

**Would there be beggars standing on the streets? Would there be bodies anywhere?**

Yeah, bodies. Oh yeah. Beggars, there were no beggars. Nobody would give 'em anything. Bodies, yes. They used to uh, you know if somebody died they used to put 'em out in front of the uh, uh, building and uh, a wagon would drive by and pick up the bodies.

**So there's a, a kind of burial brigade.**

That's right.

**Um, what did you think about that?**

We were in shock. You didn't, you didn't think of what's gonna be a year from now, you just thought for today. If you had enough food for today, you were happy. There was never enough food. If you survive, you had enough to survive, that was it.

**Did, did anyone that you knew um, die in the building for example?**



Oh yeah. A lot of people died in the building. Of course.

**And did you help take them out?**

No. I was, I was little. I was only seven, eight years old.

**And you, you, you told me that your father had worked on another Kommando.**

That was at the, the, the, the dead people?

**Yes.**

That was in concentration camp.

**And what about the, was it the excrement Kommando that...**

Oh yeah. That was in this field. Yeah. He, my dad used to work in this uh, right here, this field. And they'd uh, they'd uh, uh, put the excrement as a, as a fertilizer.

**Human excrement.**

Human excrement, right. And uh, you know, they needed help to push, because sometimes it got uh, muddy or something, they got stuck and they didn't want all the uh, fertilizer to go in one spot because it would burn the uh, the ground. So he'd help 'em push it. And then one day I guess this uh, guard, right here. There was, there was a fence and they had guards every few hundred feet and I guess the guard, the, the wind was blowing his way and he didn't like the smell and he took a shot and killed one of the men pushing the uh, wagon.

**Your father told you about that.**

My father was there, yes, helping him push that wagon, yeah.

**What did he, what did he say about that? What happened to the body at that point? Did they just leave it there?**

Just I guess, well everybody, you know, when they start to shoot everybody runs. Then they came back and picked up the body and, uh.

**So at, at this point, age nine, ten, you're used to seeing piles of dead bodies in the street.**

Oh yeah. Dead body didn't mean a thing. A dead uh, animal on a road bothers me more now than a dead body did in those days.

**Was there lice?**

Can we stop for a minute?

**Sure.**

I have to go. I'll be right...Over here?

**Um, were there any other incidents like the one your father told you about that you remember?**

Well, I remember one time they emptied, there was a hospital. I don't remember what year that was. That must have been '42 or '43. And they took all the sick people on, on uh, wagons and uh, took them out. And some of them, they, like kids, they'd throw 'em out of the windows. Didn't even bring 'em down. So [laugh] they got killed when they hit the uh, wagon.

**Did you see that?**

No. I heard 'em tell it. I didn't see that. No, I, I, I'd be, I'd be far away from

them. Because I was a kid myself. I...

**This kind of violence on the street, did, did you witness any of it? People being shot or beaten?**

Oh yeah, beaten, yeah, a lot. Shot? No, I don't remember. Because it would have to be a German to shoot you. They, they were, they were the only ones that had weapons, [laugh] and when I saw one of them I, I'd be far away from there.

**And, and, and people being beaten, do you remember seeing...**

Yeah. Oh yeah, a lot. A lot.

**Was that random? Was it uh, focused?**

[pause] Yeah.

**Random. Tell me what it was like, if you can remember. Did you ever stand in line for the rations?**

For the food rations? No. For the, for the uh, uh, soup, yes.

**This is at work.**

Right.

**And what were the rations that you would get for the family?**

That was the food rations. You'd get a piece of uh, turnip, maybe uh, some potatoes. It was all on a scale, you know, but little pieces. You'd get uh, maybe uh, bread, like, well at first you'd probably get about uh, 200 grams, which was a nice slice. But later on as it went on it got smaller and smaller.

**Was your father able to supplement this with uh, when he worked in the, in the field?**

Some of it, yes. Yeah, yeah.

**With stale vegetables?**

That's right. [pause] And also when he worked in the uh, you know in the summertime he worked in the field. In the winter he worked in this uh, uh, vegetable warehouse, which we probably had it better than the average person because uh, always somethin' gets rotten, you know. Before they throw it away, why he'd uh, take it home.

**Would he have to sneak it out?**

Uh, I don't think so. No, he wouldn't, no, he wouldn't steal. He wouldn't take a chance on stealing, because he, it was a good job and he would uh, lose the job. So apparently it was uh, uh, it was okay with the higher ups to take something that was half rotten.

**Were, were people starving?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**And what was that like, to see people starving?**

Always saw people's swollen legs like, like balloons and once your leg, you saw 'em, whe...whe...when their legs started to swell up you knew they were ready to...they wouldn't last very long. You know, they were real skinny on their body but their legs would be very swollen from the knee uh, down. Oh,

the ankles I should say mostly, uh.

**Anyone in your family?**

[sigh] No. No.

**You said that there was no running water and the sanitary facilities were less than...**

Right.

**Sanitary. Um, so were there lice?**

In the ghetto, not too bad, no. I suppose there were some, but not, we didn't have too, we didn't have too much, no. We tried to, my mother was a real stickler for cleanliness and uh, I don't remember having any lice in the ghetto.

But plenty of 'em in the concentration camp.

**Uh, you said that the Germans had weapons, which means the Jewish police did not...**

No, no.

**have guns anymore.**

No, no, no.

**Do you remember any of the Jewish police or any of the Jews that worked for uh, the Judenrat there?**

I remember their names, some of 'em probably.

**Did you ever see Rumkowski?**

Yes. Yeah, Chaim Rumkowski, yeah.

**Tell me your feelings about Rumkowski.**

I, well at the time uh, well I was a kid. But now I think he tried to, to, to, to do, you know, he tried to uh, keep the ghetto going as long as he could.

**And what about the Jewish police who worked?**

Some of 'em were bad, others, you know, like, uh...

**You told me about a man named Targovnik?**

Targovnik, yes.

**Tell me that story now.**

He was a, he was a, well he was one of 'em. There were, there were plenty more. But I know him because uh, he told on my father and my uncle. He would uh, he worked for the Kripo, which was criminal, criminal police. And uh, they had a building inside the ghetto, it was fenced off and uh, he would uh, give 'em names of people that were uh, uh, semi-wealthy before the war and they figured they had hidden jewelry or money or whatever. And he'd give their names to the German criminal police and uh, they'd call 'em up and they'd take him in their room. There were four or five of 'em around, he'd, they'd put the person in the middle and start asking where the money is. If he wouldn't come out with it, they'd bea...beat him constantly for days and days.

**That happened to your father?**

Yes. My father was, twice or three times. Yeah.

**And he was beaten.**

Beaten, yes. Badly.

**Um, what happened when he came back home?**

He went back to his, to work.

**You didn't talk about this, that he...**

Oh yeah, we knew about it. I, in fact uh, we knew one of, we knew a driver, I think it was a driver that drove the horse and carriage that those guys used to go around and I'd, I'd take a, a, a sandwich or some food to my father once in a while, you know, whenever they'd allow me I'd ring the bell and hand it to, to, to somebody and hoping that my father would get it.

**This is while he was in jail.**

While he was in the, criminal po...yeah, inside there. And once in a while I'd uh, I'd walk by and see him work the field, because he knew how to uh, do farming and...

**And was there money? Did he give up money?**

[sigh] I, the first time I know he did. I don't know the other times. I don't remember. The first time, yeah. Because they took him back where we lived before the war and uh, I guess they had some, something buried. But he never, he never told me what or when. But I know he went back to where we lived before the war, so apparently he did uh, give up.

**And what happened to Targovnik?**

He came in, in the same transport we did, in, into Auschwitz and he was beaten

all night long. He was beaten to death.

**By whom?**

By the uh, people that worked the uh, bath house.

**Jews.**

Jews, yes. Oh well, not all of 'em of were Jews. Some of 'em were, they were all uh, uh, uh, prisoners. But uh, some of 'em might not have been Jews. There was some uh, non-Jews that were in concentration camps, there were political prisoners, there were criminals. The political prisoners had a, they had a triangle sewed onto their, the political was a red triangle, the criminal was a green triangle, ours supposedly was supposed to have been a yellow, but very few of us had it, you know, by the time we got in. Well, everybody knew what we were in for.

**So you think other Łódźers, people from Łódź, beat him, Targovnik?**

Not, not the people that came in on our transport. Maybe some of our people told those people who he was. And uh, I remember when we first, when they first undressed us, you know, you went into this building, it's a bath, they take all, everything away from you and you wind up naked and uh, he came out to my father, says, "Aaron, let's try and stay together," and my father just walked away from him, because he knew what he did to him uh, in the ghetto. And that's, then after that, that they started beating on him and in the morning he was dead, he was all black and blue, I mean from head to toe. Just kicked him and



beat him and with sticks and...

**So you saw him?**

Oh yeah. I saw him. I saw him being beaten to death. Yeah. Took hours. We were just laying down.

**Anything else about the ghetto, that, as it, as it got smaller? Did you, did you...**

The area didn't get smaller.

**But the number of people did.**

The number of people got smaller, yes.

**Now you said you started out with twelve people in one room.**

Right. Then we, then we found a room where just uh, our family lived in the room. Because the building started to get uh, empty. So we took another room.

**Did, did you have any idea where these people were disappearing to?**

Well, a lot of 'em died, a lot of 'em were being uh, uh, uh, displaced into, you know, they picked 'em up. We didn't know. No, we didn't know where they were going.

**You never heard of Auschwitz?**

No. We didn't hear of any of the camps. My uncle, the, the one that's in Israel, he went, oh way at the beginning probably, 1941 or '42 maybe, he went to a work camp to Czestochowa. And we heard from him maybe once or twice, wrote letters and then he, we didn't hear from him and uh, he wound up in Buchenwald and survived. But those people, they, well, they took him because

he was a baker. Apparently they needed a baker and they, they took people that had a trade.

**Do you remember what happened when they began to liquidate the ghetto?**

Oh, then they took everybody, whoever they could.

**How did that, that come about?**

Well [laugh], they came to a house and emptied it. To a building and they, they just emptied it, went room, room by room.

**The Germans did.**

Yes. German and Jewish police.

**Jews.**

Yeah.

**So where were you when they were...**

Well, a lot of times I was hiding in this field like I told you on this uh, where my father used to work, here. They had, they had corn growing. No, not corn. Rye. Rye is tall and I'd get in there and hide. Until, I don't remember, like I told you before, I don't remember where we were when we got caught. That whole day is a blank to me. I don't remember gettin' on the train. I remember being on the train from Łódź to uh, Birkenau, Auschwitz. But I don't remember gettin' caught or gettin' on the train. So I don't know where we were when we got caught.

**You knew enough to hide.**

Oh yeah!

**Rather than be taken...**

We must have been hidden someplace. But they, they, [laugh] they found us.

**So you, you suddenly find yourself on this, on the train.**

Right.

**It's a cattle car?**

Yes.

**And who was with you in the cattle car?**

My father, mother and my uncle.

**Was your sister still...**

Yes. Yeah, yeah, my sister, yes.

**So the, the whole family.**

That's right.

**And what was it like in the cattle car?**

Whew! Crowded.

**Anything else?**

No food, no water. Oh, wait a minute. They did give us, [laugh], they g...they gave us some, some bread I guess bef...as we got on the uh, on the train. And my uncle, the youngest, my father's youngest brother asked, he was hungry, he wants, there's bread, he wants to eat. So my aunt, the oldest sister, not the oldest, the second oldest, you know from the second mother, she says, "Wait 'til

we get there. Then we'll have lunch." Well, he, that's, that's, he never saw that loaf of bread and he still remembers it now, [laugh], that he didn't get to eat that slice of bread. Because...

**So they gave you the slice of bread and any water?**

No, I don't think so.

**Did it smell bad in the car?**

Oh yeah, yeah. Because it was crowded.

**There was no toilet there.**

No. You did the best you could.

**Was there talking, crying?**

Yeah. But we didn't, we didn't know where we were going. Like I told you uh, oh it must have been a month or so before all this, before this last uh, thing started. Uh, Biebow, he was the German head honcho of the ghetto and he held a speech right near our house on the corner of uh, Brzezińska and Młynarska there was a open field, there was a lot of people and he said, he pointed to his chest, "As my name is Biebow, nothing bad'll happen to you." Here the Russians are coming. We could hear the Russian artillery. I guess they were in uh, near uh, Warsaw and we could hear 'em at night. He says, "They are coming and they'll kill you because you are uh, uh, working for the German uh, uh, war machine. We'll give you jobs in the uh, in, in Germany. You'll be taken care of," blah-blah-blah and all this and you know we believed him. So a lot of

people even volunteered to, to, to uh, to go there.

**Was this the “not a hair, not a hair on your head...”**

That's it. Yeah. “Not a hair on your head will be touched.” Yes. “As my name is Biebow.” Hans Biebow, was it? Yeah.

**This is just before you went.**

Yeah. That was the last uh, just before the last uh, uh...

**Okay. Let's, let's pause here for just a moment.**

Okay. [pause]

**When you heard Hans Biebow's speech...**

Speech. Yes?

**What did you think?**

[laugh] I was a kid. I believed him. I guess everybody else did.

**Your father believed him too.**

Yeah, but we still didn't volunteer. We didn't go [laugh].

**You still hid.**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**Anything else about the train trip?**

About the train?

**Yeah.**

Uh, yeah. My father, what I can remember. That's when I started to come to I guess uh, my father, you know, a cattle car has small windows high up. A little,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

probably two windows on each side, just enough for air. It's not, there's no glass, it's just an opening. And my dad used to, was pointing to who owns this farm, you know, as we were driving out of Łódź. He knew some of the people that owned the land. And uh, that's all I can remember. Then the next day we were in uh, Birkenau.

**Now when the doors to the car opened, do you remember your first impressions?**

Pandemonium. Dogs and yelling and screaming, "Raus, raus, raus." [Hurry, hurry, hurry] Tried to take our luggage and stuff, a nechtiger tog, forget it. You know, [laugh] we were expecting, hey, we need all our stuff. We need our bread rations and all that. They lined us up and...

**So who drove you off the car? People came into the car and chased you out?**

No, no. They, you came out and they grabbed you and yeah [claps hands once].

**Who? Who? Germans?**

Oh no, no. Uh, prisoners. The Kommando they called it.

**Prisoners?**

Right. They called it the Kanada Kommando. I don't know why Kanada.

**What were you thinking at the time? Remember?**

Weren't thinking. Total shock.

**What happened next?**

The world, well, they lined us up, men separate and women separate. That's the last time I saw my mother and sister. And uh, you lined up in one, one line and

*Szymon Binke Interview*

kept, walked, walked up to a German officer and he was standing like this and pointing with his thumb this way or that way. When I came up, came up, he grabbed me by my right arm to feel if there was something there and he pointed to that side. We didn't know which, which was good and which was bad and after that we wound up in a, in a bath house all night long. And the next morning we were in the gypsy camp in Birkenau.

**Did you look back at your mother?**

Yes. We waved and tried to say goodbye. [pause]

**What, what did you think was going to happen?**

Like I told you, total shock. Didn't think of anything. But then after the war, well, she went with my aunt that had the other, that had my, that, her daughter that was a year younger than I am and the aunt that's here now, my father's youngest sister, they all went together. Well my father's youngest sister, she was single. She didn't have anybody. Those two had kids, my, my sister and the other one had her daughter that was about a year younger than I was, which was in '44. I was thirteen, she was probably twelve. So I guess some of the people that worked, they came up and told them, "You better give up the kids or you're gonna die." And they said, "It's all right. We'll, we'll hang onto the, to our children." [pause] And uh, so my, this aunt, my father's younger sister wanted to go with them, but they grabbed her by the hair and threw her. By the time she came to, they were gone already. [long pause]

**Now you were with your father still.**

Right.

**Holding onto each other? Holding hands?**

You couldn't hold on. You, you, you were together, yeah. Tried to be close as...

**And your uncles as well.**

The uncles, yeah, there was also another uncle. Her, you know my father's oldest sister's husband was also with us. Now...

**Three uncles. There were five of you?**

[sigh] More. More. There was Moishe, Sol, Larry and Harry. Four uncles.

**There were six of you.**

Right. But we went out of Birkenau five of us. He didn't, see, [sniffs], when [clears throat], then after, I'll come to that story why he didn't get out of that. When, when, when they took us into camp after the bath and all this they gave us new, this uh, striped clothing and everything, they put us into a camp and they put them in one block, put me and a block means a building, they put me in a different building, in the youth building. And uh, one morning I wake up and I used to always hang out. I would be here for the, for the head count and, and uh, and uh, and they had three or four head counts every day and we knew what time they are gonna be, so I'd come back to be counted and then I'd go and be with them, which was just like across the road. So uh, one morning I get up and I go to the, to their building and there's nobody there. I ask questions,



*Szymon Binke Interview*

nobody knows what happened. So I started to, it was a very big camp, I started to walk around and I see a fenced off area and a bunch of people on the other side of the fence. So somehow I jumped the fence and got in there and I started to ask what building they were from and uh, it was the same building that, I think it was Block 10 they called it and some of 'em were from that building. So I started to look and sure enough I found them. And uh, so my dad was shocked to see me. "How'd you get here?" and I says, "Well, I couldn't find you there, so I came here." He says, "No, you better go back to, to your uh, building," because uh, during the night, they, they took them the night before in the evening they took 'em on that field. I guess they went through a medical doctor supposedly, looked at 'em and gave 'em, took their names and birth date and so on. And uh, you know, they put 'em in that fenced off area. And he says, "You, you didn't go through that. You won't be able to go with us." I says, "I can't go back, because I missed already one or two head counts. I'll get killed. So I'll take my chances here." So then uh, probably towards around early afternoon they start calling names and as they called your name you had to give your birth date and you run across a field maybe 200 feet. And you lined, they lined up over there. So they were calling names. Naturally they're not gonna call my name uh, because I wasn't on there. Well after they had about two thousand people on the other field, they called a name and the person probably died during the night or something and nobody answered and I started to yell,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

but I didn't know his uh, birth date, so I made out like I'm saying something, but then I started to run. And they started to chase me because I couldn't give 'em the uh, uh, birth date. By the time, well, I got there first and there were two thousand people over there and I got lost. How are they gonna find me? Everybody's dressed the same way and so that's how I got out of uh, Birkenau. And then after the war I met somebody that told me the building I was in, about two or three days after we left they took all the kids out of there and don't know what happened to 'em. Well, now we know what happened to 'em.

**It was the Kinderblock?**

Right.

**What do you suppose happened at the next Appell at the Kinderblock?**

That's a good question. They had to come up with a body.

**For you?**

Right. Oh, that's why. See, they, they started calling a, you know, by the alphabet, a, b, c, you know. Our name is Binke, so naturally we're called one of the first ones. My uncle, the one that didn't survive, that my father's oldest sister's husband, his name was Wolf, W-o-l-f. So he'd be at the end of the line. They needed three thousand people, so probably they uh, picked uh, thirty-five hundred or four thousand because there's always some, they figure some will die during the night. And maybe there was more than just me that did what I did. I don't know. And he got, he didn't come with us. Otherwise he would have

been with us.

**Did you think you were doing the right thing?**

I knew if I went back, I'm dead. Here I had a chance. So, I knew I'd be doing the wrong thing if I went back.

**So at, at that point...**

Right. See, they didn't care. As long as they have a, a body to count. Whether they, it's dead or alive, they didn't care. I saw peop...I saw, in, in Birkenau I saw the Blockäl...Blockälste kill somebody because he wanted his extra ration, he wanted his bread. It was always, every morning there were bodies also layin' out in front of the, when they, when they head count they counted us and they counted one, two, three whatever. That was part of the...[sigh]

**Let's go back to Birkenau then. How long were you there?**

Oh, if I, I can't remember. Probably not even two weeks, maybe ten, twelve days.

**And what was the barracks like that you were in?**

Well, it was a floor uh, a cement floor. In the middle was a, a, looked like a feed trough. I think they might have had horses or something. It was raised up in the middle uh, uh and it went the length of the, of the building and we were sleeping on the, naturally on the floor. And not only sleeping on the floor, you had to curl up like in a fetal position and the next one was right into you and the one in front of you was, so you could not turn. If you turned uh, I don't, it was a

*Szymon Binke Interview*

long building, probably fifty, sixty people would have to turn the same, at the same time. So once you got in that position, that was it for the night. You couldn't stretch out because you were touching the guy's head and the guy was touching your head with his, with his uh, like sardines, you know? Only sardines, they stretch out, we were cramped in. And I don't think uh, they did it because there was a shortage of space. I'm sure there was plenty of, that camp was so big. They just did it to make it miserable. And then [laugh], they used to, they used to, they used to keep us out like for the head count. After the head count we'd have to be in a crouched position, sit...sittin' like this, crouching down, for a half hour, an hour, just for the heck of it. I don't know what kind of exercise that was, but I guess the Blockälste, you know the leader, the, the, the, the, the leader of the, the building felt like we should be sittin' like this. He made us. Not sitting, crouching and have your hands in front of you.

**Blockälteste was a prisoner.**

Yes. Yeah.

**Jewish prisoner?**

Not always. Most of 'em were uh, uh, Christians, political or, or, but there were Jews, Jewish Blockältesters also. Like in the other camps, most of the uh, Blockältesters were Jewish, you know in, in Dachau camps and Kaufering uh...

**Is this is where you encountered lice? You said in the camps you encountered...**

Yes. Not in Auschwitz, because we'd just gone through the uh, bath and

everything. Once we got out of Birkenau that's, yeah.

**And do you have any, any images, general images of Birkenau? I mean the smoke, the smells, anything...**

I don't remember that. I don't remember anything like that. Like I told you, afraid to look. You just uh, walked around like a, like a, like a rat. It was, there was stones being thrown. I remember that. You had to be careful. You have to watch. But somebody told me here recently, he was in Auschwitz, he got called on a, you know, Auschwitz and Birkenau are two different camps. He got taken to Auschwitz. Now there was one Polish guy that was training for, for, for what do you call, the, the not the discus, the...

**Shot-put?**

Shot-put, yeah. He was training for shot-put, so he was throwing stones. If he hit somebody, it's okay too.

**In Birkenau.**

Yeah. I didn't know. I, in fact, Eli, no, you don't know Eli Koritz. Uh, he told me. You know we were talking about it, I says and I told him, he was there about the same time I was, but he was, he volunteered for a, to go, he said he was a bricklayer or something and they took him out and they put him to Auschwitz and he told me that there was one guy training for, for, for shot-put and he was throwing stones. I don't know how true it is, but I know there was stones flyin' all over the place. I mean big ones, not, not little...

**And do, do you remember seeing anybody get hit by those things?**

Oh yeah.

**And when you did those exercises...**

There was no exercise. Just crouch down with your hands in front of you.

**Did, did everybody manage to do that for an hour?**

Oh no! You couldn't stand that long.

**And what happened...**

You'd fall over, he'd come up and kick him and beat him and something like that you know. It was part of their uh, uh, enjoyment, I guess.

**So when you realized that your father and your uncles were getting out...**

I didn't want to be stuck alone. And probably that's why we survived uh, uh, because we were together. You know, you could always, one of us would always find something and we'd uh, share it.

**Was this a general rule? Did everybody help everybody else in Birkenau?**

It's hard to say. No, that, that's not in Birkenau. In Birkenau, forget it. We didn't do anything in Birkenau. I mean once we got out of Birkenau we started to go to work, you'd find something, uh maybe a one of us would uh, work in a field for a farmer, bring home some potatoes or some vegetables or something like that and we'd share it or some...

**Even, even in the ghetto, from the ghetto through the camps...**

Yes?

**Did people as a rule share and help each other out?**

Families, yeah, made probably yes, yeah. But strangers? No. No. Like if I met you, you and I had a loaf of bread and you were starving to death, forget it. We were like animals. In fact uh, in Lager Vier, four, in, in, in Birk...in uh, Kaufering we were there in the wintertime and I guess the ground was too frozen. They couldn't bury their dead, so they'd pile 'em up in the corner of the camp, pile, just pile up bodies. And we'd go around looking for uh, some, if a body had a jacket or a pair of shoes, he doesn't need it. [pause] You know, if his shoes were better than yours, you'd take 'em.

**Let's go back to uh, there are three thousand of you now on this field.**

Right.

**And then what?**

Well, then they loaded us in, in uh, in cattle cars. Again naturally there, there was no passenger cars. Every time we went, it was cattle cars. And uh, they took us uh, into Germany I think. That was a tough trip. It was hot, no water uh, God, it probably took about three days. And uh, every time we rode over uh, uh, uh, on a bridge there was a uh, river or a lake or something, we're hoping the bridge would cave in and we'd drown. At least you would get some water. Because it's bad. You don't, food you can go without for quite a while. Water you can't. Very tough.

**People die in the car?**

Yes. A lot of people die in the car. From, thirst I guess. Dehydration.

**Do you remember what that was like, having bodies around you?**

[sigh] Nothing. Just tried to stay away from 'em because of the smell. But later on I was, well, that's another story at the end. I'll tell you that one.

**All right. Three days on the train...**

I think it took about three days.

**And where did you wind up?**

We wound up in Kaufering. We came in...

**And when the doors opened there?**

Huh?

**When the doors opened there, what was it like it? Was it...**

They took us off the, not like Auschwitz. No, it was, well, [laugh] it wasn't good, but it wasn't as bad. We alrea...maybe we knew what to expect, or I, I knew what to expect already, so I wasn't too shocked. And we walked probably for an hour at night. Got into that Camp 7 and uh, we laid down. It's uh, you probably, were you in Dachau? Okay. You saw one of those barracks, how they were. The, the, the roof, then you had two uh, two uh, uh, one on each side uh, uh, shelves like and a ditch dug out through the middle? That's where you were walking, in the middle and those two shelves was where you were sleeping. Well, when I got in there, it was pitch dark. I didn't know. We were so tired, walking for a long time. So I just laid down. All of a sudden people start



stepping all over me, 'til I found out I'm supposed to uh, sleep on the shelf.

And there we weren't very long. Several days and we got moved to Lager 4.

Then we started to go out on work uh, details.

**You walked to Lager 4 also?**

Yes, yes, yes, yes. That was in, it was all in Kaufering.

**And what was the work like?**

Well, we worked, the two big ones was Moll, which was uh, uh, construction firm and Holtzman. Holtzman is still a big construction firm in uh, Germany, in Munich. In fact they're on the German stock exchange. And we were building some kind of underground factories. Uh, I was carrying cement, bags of cement.

**You were thirteen years old?**

Yeah.

**And you were carrying that?**

Uh, that was in forty, '45. Yeah. I wasn't even thir...yeah, I was thirteen, yeah.

**And you were carrying bags of cement?**

Right.

**Hundred pound bags, fifty pound?**

Uh, fifty kilos. Yeah, a hundred pounds, 102, something like that.

**Uh, I presume that you had gotten food already at this point.**

Oh yeah, yeah, there we, food. That's, [laugh] we'd get a, a soup. Let's see, what

*Szymon Binke Interview*

the heck, when did we get fed? I think after we came home. Yeah. We would get soup after, after you came home. You stood in line in the kitchen. And I guess we got some bread, which you had, you'd, you'd save for during the day. But the soup was watery, you know, maybe a few vegetables here and there. No, no meat or... Sunday was a good soup. They gave us like a, a, it was like uh, noodles with, with uh, milk and watery milk and it was sweet, a little sweet. That was a, that was a real good soup, yeah. Not too many noodles though, but it was sweet you know, we're hungry for sweet.

**Once, once you got to Kaufering or even on the train or even in Birkenau, did, did you and your father ever talk about what might have happened to your mother and your sister?**

We talked about 'em, but uh, we didn't expect uh, we still didn't know what happened to them.

**So did you think that they might be alive?**

Yeah.

**Even in, even when you were in these camps?**

Later on we heard that people coming, you know, from the older uh, uh, prisoners they knew more about it, they knew what was happening in Birkenau then.

**No, no one at Birkenau said anything like...**

Not to us. But my aunt, well which I met after the war, she says they told my,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

my mother and her sister and her sister-in-law, you know to, “give up the kids” or they are gonna get killed. So apparently somebody told them.

**But no one said they were going through the chimney or anything like that to you?**

Not, not to my knowledge, no.

**When you began to think that they might have been killed, what, what kinds of things went through your head?**

[laugh] What kind of things. What can you do? I was angry, bitter. In fact, I uh, after the war for the first few months I was uh, uh, very aggressive, very animalistic. [pause]

**How?**

Towards Germans.

**Violently you mean?**

Violent, yes.

**This was around Seeshaupt?**

After Seeshaupt probably, yeah. In Seeshaupt I wasn't very long, because my father got sick. I think he had typhus. And we wound up in the hospital in Bad Tölz, t-o-l-t-z, which probably was right around there. Oh there we met one person that was shot in the mouth, in his throat or something because they were gonna take us into the Tyrol mountains. They had ditches dug already, line us up and kill us and bury us. Well, he was one of the people that arrived and he, I guess they shot him and, but didn't kill him and he was found after the war still

*Szymon Binke Interview*

alive. I, he, I don't know if he was Jewish or not, I can't remember. But I remember him being there. He was shot someplace in the throat.

**So when you were in Bad Tölz you...**

I was in, in, in, in hospital. Because my father was sick.

**Your encounter, you encountered Germans there?**

Yeah, yeah. All the doctors and yes, nurses were German.

**And you and you were violent towards them?**

[sigh] I don't think not yet, then. Not yet. After I got out of there. In Feldafing.

**All right, let's go back before we get, get to that. You were in camps. You went to Camp 7 and then Camp 4.**

Four, then three.

**Then three.**

Three we were just maybe two weeks or so. I don't know why, but maybe that camp Landshut. See, they took us, we, we know we were going to Landshut, 500 of us. It was a brand new camp. Maybe it wasn't ready yet. So we were in, in Lager 3, in Camp Number 3.

**What was, what were some of the worst things you remember about the Kaufering camps?**

Dead bodies in the wintertime piled up. Hundreds of 'em. I mean not, not just, I mean high up. Just throw 'em up, because they didn't want to take up too much space.

**Mountains of bodies.**

Yes. Mountains of bodies. Yeah.

**Lice yet?**

Yes.

**You were talking about lice there?**

Yes, yes, yes. Lager 4, yes. Lots of lice.

**How did you cope with that?**

Just swiped 'em off, scraped 'em off, tried to, tried to, you know we'd undress and try to pick 'em off our clothes every evening. It was a daily routine. But the next day you had 'em again, so, because they were all over.

**Was there disease there?**

Yes. Typhus. A lot of typhus. In fact, in Mühldorf, I had I think it was typhus. I must, I must have had a light case, because uh, I went to work, well my father saw the shape I was, I could hardly walk. He tried to drag me to the, there were, there was a hospital you know. So I kept postponing it, "No, I don't wanna go," and "I wanna stay with you," and this and that. Finally one evening, oh, by that time my uncle, his oldest brother got, also got sick and he wound up in the hospital. Well, one evening he finally says, "Sol is there, you'll be with Sol" instead of, you know, "until you get well." Okay. So I agreed and [laugh] by the time we got there, I see the guy closes the door. He says, "Come back tomorrow." Okay. So I was happy I didn't have to go. That night they took him

away. They took him to, back to, to Kaufering. He survived, but uh, we thought for sure he was dead. Because by then, Kaufering Lager 4 was the Krankenlager, the, the, the...

**Sick camp.**

Sick camp, yeah.

**So did you go to the next day?**

No. No, no, no. Not, that the thing is, you see, [laugh] he didn't want me to go now.

**What was the work like in Landshut?**

In Landshut we worked on the, on a airport. They had a, they had an airport, it must have been a military airport. We, we did uh, roads like, you know, poured cement and stuff like that.

**And were, were you working for the government?**

No, [laugh], I don't know who I worked for.

**Was it Operation Todt?**

Todt? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Every, every camp we were, the Operation Todt was our uh, they were the uh, the uh, construction people.

**And were they wearing uniforms?**

Yeah. Yellow uniform.

**What was, what were the supervisors like? Did they treat people reasonably well, or did they...**

Some of the Todt people weren't bad. They weren't like the SS. Some of 'em were bad, others weren't. Once in a while they'd throw a...

**Um, could you tell me again the, who you worked for at Landshut?**

In Landshut we worked in the, in the, for a, at, at, at the airport or uh, fixing roads and sidewalks and like cement work. Cold, winter...

**And, and this was, this was the organization...**

Todt were always our, every, every camp I was in, Todt was the uh, they were the construction supervisors.

**And what, what were those supervisors like? Were they like the SS?**

No, no, no, no, no. They were, some of 'em were okay. Just made sure you worked, that's all, but they were more human.

**And would they occasionally give you something to eat...**

Yes, once in a while, yeah. If you caught a good one, yeah, he'd slip you something, a slice of bread or something like that, cigarette butt.

**Um, and how long were you at Landshut?**

Oh, probably about three months, maybe four months.

**And what were the conditions in that camp like?**

Tough. It was in the middle of the winter. Uh, the food wasn't good, very, very tight food. We had a bad uh, Lagerführer. Lagerführer is the German, the head man, the head SS man that's in charge of the camp. See, all the Ältester were prisoners, the Führers were all Germans. Uh, he was bad. In fact at one time

*Szymon Binke Interview*

there was a rumor that the German people in Landshut wanted to take over, just to feed us. They wanted to feed the camp and the SS wouldn't go for it. And at first when we got there they'd come up to the fence and threw some, some food once in a while. But the SS got wind of it and they wouldn't allow 'em to do it.

**These were German civilians.**

German civilians, yes. Then my father, may he rest in peace, he was on a, on a work detail that were burying the dead. And they used to go out at night, because we had to go, they had to go through the town. They, they, they, they pushed a pushcart with uh, dead bodies and I guess the SS didn't want to see, they didn't want the uh, civilian population to see us, so they used to do it at night. And after a while I guess some of the people found, found out what route the, they took and they'd find uh, pieces of food layin' on, in the street.

**You had said your father worked on this Kommando and there was...**

And he'd also say Kaddish.

**For the dead bodies.**

For the dead, yes. Yeah. In fact they, the, the, that was some of the uh, uh, German guards allowed him to say Kaddish. Yeah. They called him "The Rabbi."

**So before he would bury them he would say Kaddish?**

Yeah.



**Were, were you in the same barracks with your father at this time?**

Yeah, there yes.

**And did this affect him in some way?**

Oh, sure. He tell us about it, yeah. Yeah, but this, this Totenkommando didn't go out every day. He had another job. Whenever they had enough bodies to load up a, they'd, they'd uh, go out maybe two, three times a week, you know, at night. But that, that only took two or three hours, so he had to go to work anyway for a, you know, on the different uh, with us.

**So would he get extra rations for this?**

Nah.

**Just did it to do?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Any, any particular events at Landshut that stand out?**

[sigh] It was very cold, very tough winter. The uh, we had the uh, one, one building was a washroom, you know, the pipe with some hoses where you could wash your hands and face. And, and it froze up. We couldn't wash. We used to go out in the, in the snow, deep, deep snow, we used to have snow and wash in snow in the morning. Bad. Conditions were very bad there. But uh, because it was winter. The winter was tough. In the barracks was okay because uh, we had a lot of people in, in the barracks so, you know, body heat. I don't remember if, I can't remember any heating uh, I don't think we had any

he...heating units in the...

**What were the sleeping conditions like there?**

Well uh, uh, you know, on straw and, and, and uh, uh, cots.

**Wooden?**

Wooden. Yeah, yeah.

**Not on the floor like in Kaufering?**

No, no, no. There we had already cots, yeah. But not like they, they show it now in, in uh, in Dachau. We didn't have those. We had shelves like. We put some straw on it and...

**Blankets?**

Yeah. Yeah...

**And lice?**

...each had a blanket, yeah.

**But there were lice.**

Yeah. That too. Plenty. More lice than blanket. [laugh] I guess that maybe kept you warm too.

**Uh, and from Landshut where?**

Uh, Mühldorf. Yeah, that was my last one.

**Also by train, or did you walk?**

I think by train.

**Do you remember that train trip?**

*Szymon Binke Interview*

It was a short, I, that, I can't remember that. If, if it was by train it was very short.

**What was Mühldorf like?**

Like any other camp. But there already, well, my father wound up working, we got lucky. My father wound up working, see in, in, in Europe they store potatoes for the winter in Kopsel [container] they call it. They bury 'em and they cover 'em with, with uh, uh, straw and uh, and uh, uh, dirt, to, to keep 'em from freezing. And in the winter they open it up and then, then and take out as much as they need and then they cover it up again. Well, my father wound up on a work detail doing that and I wound up on a work detail working for a, for a, a, some kind of a church, a Catholic church. There was a bunch o' nuns in it. Did uh, maintenance work, you know, cleaning and, and there the nuns were very good to us. That's when I got sick. That's when I was sick. I was lucky I was there, otherwise they wouldn't have let me work. They'd probably uh, stick me in a hospital or do something. But they were good. They used to give me water and stuff like that, you know and they'd, they'd help us with a little food now and then too.

**So was it a church in Mühldorf?**

Yes, must have been in Mühldorf, yeah. It was like a, they had a hospital there too, you know. It was like a cloister they call it.

**Do you remember any, did they ever talk to you, any of the nuns?**

*Szymon Binke Interview*

Probably would talk to me. They'd, they'd call me and she'd tie the piece o' bread and throw it at me or tell me what to do. But they never, you know, never talked uh, any personal, no, no conversations. They were afraid too, because uh, I guess they were afraid for the uh, German guards. Yeah, that was a small work detail. Probably maybe fifteen of us.

**And you had typhus, you think?**

Yeah. That's when I got sick. I believe, it was never diagnosed, now, but I believe I had typhus because I was burning up, very weak, I couldn't get enough water in me. I, I drank 'til I, 'til I could feel it here, but I was still thirsty. And uh, about two weeks, I don't know, it went away and I was okay.

**So they saved your life?**

Yes, yes, yes, yes. That's the time that uh, my father dragged me to this uh, hospital because my uncle was there and when we got there uh, closed the door and said, "Come back tomorrow."

**That means, so you were, you were still with your father and...**

I was with my father all the time.

**And the other uncles, except for one...**

They were gone. They were, two of 'em, two of 'em stayed in, in Lager 4, in Camp Number 4. The oldest came with us to Landshut and Mühldorf. He got sick in Mühldorf and was, wound up in the hospital and was sent back to Lager uh, Camp Number 4, back to Kaufering. Because by then it was a, a sick camp,

*Szymon Binke Interview*

a hospital camp, whatever you want to call it. I guess they stored 'em there.

Not that they gave 'em any medical uh, uh, attention. It's just, it was a storage place. See, like I told you before, in Germany they didn't have any gas chambers, so they couldn't uh, mass uh, couldn't do any mass executions unless uh, shooting and they didn't do it in Kaufering. They just let 'em die.

**And the other uncle had stayed in Birkenau.**

Those, no, no, those, which one? Th...both, yeah. We don't know what happened to him.

**But he didn't survive.**

No.

**And in, in Mühldorf did you, did you encounter Wehrmacht as well?**

The last few weeks I think. We had some, we, we started gettin' some old, older uh, guards and I believe they were from the Wehrmacht. They weren't, in fact, [laugh], one day I'm going on that uh, command, on that work detail and we, we took a chance, you know, because the guard seemed halfway decent. Instead of taking a long way, it was about a seven kilometer uh, walk to work and back, so we took a shortcut going through a farmer's uh, yard, [laugh] and there's this doghouse and a big dog in front of it chewing on a bone. Well, one of us, I can't remember it was me or somebody, somebody scared the dog away and stole the bone from him. The dog ran away from him.

**And ate the bone.**

And ate the bone, yes.

**And do you think people were still behaving like the animals, the way you said before? You said...**

When?

**When you were in, in Mühldorf.**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**Nobody watched out for anybody except for family.**

No, no. Family, yes. Well, our family was close. Well, we, there's, in Mühldorf there were only three of us, Sol, my, my oldest uncle now that survived, my father and I.

**And do you know what kind of things they were working on in Mühldorf?**

Also underground uh, factories. If you didn't have a, a, a work detail like we had, you, you were carrying uh, cement or mixing cement or you know.

**And what were the conditions like there?**

Same as everywhere else. There we had a, I remember we had a, a coal-fired uh, stove in the middle of the barracks and were heated. I remember that.

Because we used to steal a potato once in a while and we used to bake it or cook it in, in that. So I remember we had fire in those.

**Was that a delicacy?**

Oh! Anything was a delicacy. Anything you could consume was a delicacy.

You didn't go for luxurious things. Anything you could uh, put in your mouth

was uh, uh, prolonged your life uh, for the next uh, day or so.

**Were you thinking...**

My father had dysentery and a lot of people died from that in, in, in Mühldorf. And next to our camp was a Russian prisoner camp. They got some rations, they got some packages from the Red Cross. And I remember in, in, in Europe they used to tell you if you, if you have uh, uh, dysentery you, you eat uh, uh, co...cocoa. You know, cocoa from, you just eat it with water or something and you drink it you'll, it, it stops the dysentery. And I bought some cocoa for my father from a Russian prisoner. You know, we smuggled it across the, the fence. Because there the fences weren't uh, uh, there was no electricity in those fences. And uh, I can't remember what I gave him, probably gave him a piece of bread or some potatoes or something. He gave me a little package of this uh, and my father just ate it as a powder and it helped him. It stopped the dysentery.

**How did you find out that the Russians had cocoa?**

Uh, we, we found out that they were gettin', that they got that, they weren't gettin' it steady. They got this uh, Red Cross packages and they had either chocolate or cocoa or you know something that...

**That, that probably saved your father's life.**

Yeah. Yeah.

**And at Mühldorf were there more piles of bodies and was there...**

Uh, there already, they used to bury 'em, because I guess it, it wasn't uh, winter

anymore. It's already spring by then.

**But were there heavy casualties there?**

Yes, yes, yes.

**And how long were you at Mühldorf?**

'Til the end, 'til May uh, probably another three months, four months, or something like that.

**Were you con...thinking about survival at this point?**

We were always thinking about survival. You don't wanna die. You don't much care, let's put it that way, but, you, you try and do the best to survive. You'll steal, you'll rob, you'll do anything to and you don't want to go through the pain of starving to death. [pause]

**So a, a bullet would be better?**

Oh yeah, definitely. It's quick, probably painless. The bullet uh, travels faster than the sound, so you don't even hear it. If it hits you in the right spot you're dead before you know it.

**But starvation was...**

Yeah, that's tough.

**And what about news of the war. Did you hear any news of the war?**

Nah. Uh, well we knew it was close to the end, because they used to bomb the heck out the uh, uh, Mühldorf is a big uh, uh, railroad uh, uh, crossing. I guess it's a big, a lot of railroad cross there. And every day they used to come and



*Szymon Binke Interview*

bomb. And on the other side of our uh, you know, on one side there was this uh, uh, Russian prisoner-of-war camp and on the other side of the fence was a, a small air field. And the American planes used to, I guess, yeah, they must have been Americans, because they had the white uh, star. They used to come down, almost land on the wheels, run on the wheels and, and uh, machine-gun the uh, the uh, airplanes that was sittin' there. And then they took off again. So they didn't have any uh, once in a while you heard some uh, anti-aircraft uh, go off, but very seldom. In Mühldorf they used to come almost every day at noon. We used to love it, used to enjoy just watch 'em come, come around and they'd dive bomb.

**You weren't worried that they were going to bomb you?**

No. Nah. First of all the, the, the guards used to hide and we, we didn't have to work. We were free. Then when they, they bombed that uh, uh, uh, railroad crossing, so they had a lot of uh, loaded uh, some, some of the trains, well, there were, the trains were loaded. Some of them had food. Well, they, they took us to work and to repair the uh, the uh, uh, tracks. And we, we found a lot of food th...there from the, you know, from the bombed out uh, cars and stuff.

**Was food the central thing...**

That was *the* thing. Nothing else mattered. If you had a, if you were in the camp, you had a decent supply of food, you were in a good camp.

**So, and Mühldorf was a decent camp?**

We got lucky. I didn't have to go to work in the uh, uh, its underground factory. I worked uh, like I told you in this uh, cloister, in this uh, I think it was a hospital with, with it was like and it was taken care of by nuns. And my father was in this uh, potato uh, uh, detail, where they were digging up the potatoes from, you know, the stored, stored potatoes for the winter. So he'd come home with a f...couple potatoes, I'd ,uh, bring home something, you know and it wasn't, Mühldorf wasn't too bad for us. Because we got lucky to get a decent work detail.

**And what happened after Mühldorf?**

That was it. We got on the, then they put us on trains and God I don't know how many days we were on that train. A long time. But uh, we wound up in uh, Seeshaupt.

**Well, what was that train like?**

Terrible. Started out 150 of us in, in, in each car, standing up. You, you couldn't even take a deep breath, because one on top of the other. After about three days I think there were thirty-five of us left. We had plenty o' room to lay down. We put the dead bodies down and we sssss, laid down on 'em to have some cushioning. Not they were that soft, they were nothing but bones, but a lot of 'em got killed too through uh, from the uh, strafing. See, at one time we were stopped on the railroad, on the, on the train and on the other uh, track there was

*Szymon Binke Interview*

another train going the other way. Our car was face...was right next to their loco...locomotive. And what they tried to do is hit the locomotive, knock out the trains. And uh, I guess they were strafing the locomotive and a couple of stray bullets came into our car. I was standing up talking to a kid and when we heard them shooting we dropped down to the floor and after the plane went through I tried to wake him up. He caught a bullet in the back of his head. I think that might have been already in Seeshaupt, because we just kept going back and forth. We didn't go anywhere.

**What, what did you think when that happened?**

Nothing. And one, and then, about three days before we got uh, uh, liberated, somebody opened up the uh, the cars, the railroad cars and said, "You're free," so we started walking, [laugh] you know. About two hours later they hear, you hear shooting and yelling and screaming. Well, they rounded us back up, put us back on the train. A lot of people got killed then too. I g...then later we found out that the uh, Wehrmacht uh, capitulated and the uh, SS didn't, didn't uh, give up yet, so the SS came back and they rounded us up and...

**So this was May.**

Oh yeah. This, let's see. We, when did we get, May 5, May 5, so this must have been about May the second.

**So they put you back on the train where...**

Back on the train.

**Where were you this time?**

I don't think we uh, pardon?

**Where were you at this time? Do you know where?**

Someplace in a field. I found a, a, a field with some rhubarb and I ate that. It was good. It was nice and sour you know and filled you up. So, for about an hour. And then we got back on a train. But then we got some water already, you know, we, we were and I think by then we knew that things are gonna start to happen.

**When the train was going back and forth or was it even stopped, did you see any civilians anywhere?**

We couldn't, I was, I was too short to, to look out there anyway. You know, that, that, that window is way up high. I don't think we saw too many civilians. I know I saw, one time, I don't know how we got out of the train. I think they were strafing us and we got out of the train and when we came back, we saw uh, a German soldier, one of the guards got hit in the head and he was laying down bleeding, you know, his blood was running into the gutter. He got killed from the uh, uh, plane machine guns.

**Do you remember how you felt when you saw that?**

Good. [pause]

**So three days later what happened?**

Ssss...we were stopped and we saw the first, we saw a jeep. We saw a jeep

*Szymon Binke Interview*

come up with a white star and a black soldier. There was more, but this black soldier jumped out of the jeep and I grabbed him and I showed him, see, we couldn't get rid of the dead, so they had a coal car, an open car, high, high uh, uh, walls and they were puttin' all the dead bodies into there. And that car was almost full when I, he climbed up on the ladder and looked in there. And his eyes were like this. He, I guess he'd never seen so many dead bodies at one time. And said something, I didn't know what. I couldn't understand. But then we were free. We just went wherever we wanted to.

**Had you ever seen a black man before?**

No. That was the first black man I ever saw.

**What did you think was happening?**

Well we knew we were liberated.

**And where were you then?**

In Seeshaupt.

**This town of Seeshaupt, which is near Munich.**

Eeeeehhhh...yes, it's uh, yeah. Mm-hmm. Probably about forty-five, fifty kilometers from Munich.

**What did it mean to be free? I mean did you just leave the train and wander around?**

Yeah.

**Looking for food?**

Yeah.

**And did you find any?**

Uh, yes. We'd uh, see a chicken, we'd kill it, start a fire and, or whatever we found, you know. Uh, then the uh, American soldiers threw food at us. [laugh] They gave us cans, the C-rations? So we built a fire outside naturally and st... and tried to heat it up, but we didn't open it. You know they had those keys? You ever see those C-rations? The key is on it and you, you, you peel it off and you open it. Well, we, we didn't uh, open it. And they explode.

**Did anyone get sick from the food?**

Oh yeah. A lot of people died after the war, from overeating.

**And in your group?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Did you see them die?**

Sure. Well by then already they took 'em to hospitals and stuff. That was after the war already, yeah. A lot of 'em died.

**And did you encounter any Germans while you were wandering around?**

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**What happened then?**

They were afraid of us, because uh, we were wild, like I told you. We were like animals.

**Did you do anything?**

Personally, no. Some people did probably.

**Did you say anything to them?**

I don't know, I know, well I remember this one uh, that was probably the first or second day, walked into a bakery, an open bakery and see all this bread and cakes and I pointed and told her to give me one of those and she gave it to me and I just walked out. I guess she expected me to pay, but I don't think she did, because she knew what I, that I was, I didn't have any money.

**This is in Seeshaupt?**

Pardon?

**In Seeshaupt?**

In Seeshaupt, yeah.

**How long did you wander around?**

Well, it must have been a week or two maybe and then my father got sick and we wound up in a hospital in Bad Tölz.

**Your father got sick and you went to the American troops? Is that what happened?**

Probably. I can't remember how we wound up in Bad Tölz, yeah, must have been. Yeah, he had typhus after the war. Lucky.

**And did you stay with him in the hospital?**

Yes.

**For how long?**

[sigh] Time didn't...probably two, three weeks. And then we went to Feldafing, which was a DP camp.

**But when you were in Bad Tölz, did they give you food and clothes?**

Oh yeah, yeah. Food was no problem. After the war, if we didn't get it, we took it.

**How about clothing?**

Who cared about clothing? I guess we had something, I don't know. We didn't have the uh, we got rid of those right away.

**The striped uniforms.**

The striped uniforms, yeah.

**Okay. So what, what was in Feldafing?**

It was a big DP camp, Displaced Person camp.

**What, what had it been before?**

Oh, that was, that was a Hitler Youth camp.

**Did you know that?**

Well, sure. I, well, first we wa...we were in the barracks, but it was very crowded. Then one day uh, Eisenhower, General Eisenhower in those days, came to visit the camp and saw uh, our, how we live, so he held a speech for us and he went into a, to a building that we, that we used as a synagogue. So before he went in he took out, he took his gun and gave it to his uh, adjutant. He came, he walked in without, without his arms and he held a speech for us and



*Szymon Binke Interview*

said he, well, that he's gonna give us a little more uh, uh, uh, living facilities.

So they, he, they, they cleaned out several of the villas which are up on the hill and uh, they gave 'em to us and we moved into one of those and [laugh] I found in a basement there was a basement full of dishes. Everyone had the uh, the uh, sign of the uh, Hitler Youth, you know, NSDAP with the, uh...

**Swastika.**

Swastika and the round circle. Thousands and thousands of them. And we used them. We didn't wash dishes. Just used them and threw 'em out. [laugh]

**Did it bother you to eat off a Swastika?**

No.

**Um, were you supervised at all by the, in the DP camp?**

Yeah. Well, I started to go to school then.

**They set up a school.**

Yeah.

**Did you go to Shul? I mean, did you, if you set up a synagogue, did you go with your father to...**

Uh, yeah, Saturday. Not, not as much as uh, before. You know, it's already went uh, didn't go every Saturday anymore.

**Had you lost faith?**

Uh, kind of.

**Your father too?**

Yes and no. Not, he wasn't as observant as he was before. He didn't keep kosher anymore. He'd go to Shul maybe just the holidays.

**Was there any davening that you remember in the camps?**

Yeah, sure.

**People prayed in the camps?**

Yeah.

**In Birkenau?**

Oh, oh, you mean in, in concentration camp?

**Yeah.**

No. Not that I know of. Oh I thought the camps after the war.

**After war. So in the DP camps there was.**

Yeah.

**Where did people get the, the, the, were there tallits in there?**

Where?

**In the...**

DP camp?

**Yeah.**

I don't remember. Well, you can daven without a tallit. You don't have to have a tallit to daven.

**Was there a Aron Kodesh?**

Ssssss. You think I can remember? I'm sure there was one.

**Someone must have gotten one.**

Yeah, yeah. Probably the uh, Joint or somebody brought in some.

**Earlier you said you, this is when you became really violent.**

Mm-hmm.

**In this sort three, three month period.**

Mm-hmm about, nah, not quite three, but maybe a month or two. We used to...

**You were angry.**

Yeah. Very angry. We used to uh, ride the train from Feldafing to Munich and throw people off the train if they weren't uh, one of us. You know, just, just looking for trouble. They wouldn't give a, they wouldn't give a lady a seat or something, grab 'em and throw 'em off.

**So when you went to Munich, were you looking for, for, for trouble too, as well?**

Probably. We just, we didn't even go, we didn't even get off the train. Just ride the train back and forth. But then uh, about two or three months later I then decided to go to school and went to Munich to learn a trade and, you know...

**Are you still angry?**

I guess not. Can't stay angry for the rest of your life.

**Was your father angry too?**

At first we were all angry, yes.

**At who? Just Germans in general?**

Yeah.

**Poles?**

More so.

**Everybody.**

Mm-hmm.

**After, after Feldafing, where did you wind up?**

We stayed in Feldafing 'til I came here.

**So you came right to the United States from there?**

Yes. Well, from Bremen, Bremerhaven, you know. From Feldafing we went to Bremen which is near Hamburg and caught a ship and came over here.

**Did you ever consider going back to Łódź ?**

Not until the last year or so. I'd like to see it one more time. I'd like to see Łódź, I'd like to go on back and see uh, Auschwitz, Birkenau.

**But after the war...**

No. Never had a desire to go back.

**Not even, you were certain that your mother had died?**

Oh yeah, we knew that, yeah. Because by then we, we found this aunt that went with them and she knew that uh, they went with the kids.

**Did you think about going to Israel?**

I, what, to live?

**To live, yes.**

No.

**You never...**

I did that one time, yes. I was already on a, on a, it must have been in '46 or '47 I was already on a truck to, to go. I told them I didn't have anybody, I was alone. 'Til somebody must have told my father. He came and dragged me off the truck.

**Was this the Haganah?**

Yes.

**Were they training you?**

Yeah.

**So this was a serious commitment?**

Yes, yes, yes, yes. Taught me how to use a gun and everything.

**All clandestinely?**

Mm-hmm.

**And your father wanted to come to the United States?**

At that time, no. He didn't want to go anywhere, yet. But he didn't want to go to Israel. Well, but he, he probably did want to go, come to the United States, because he had an aunt here. He knew he had an aunt. We never got in touch with her then, by then yet, but he knew she was here, my, my stepmother's sister, which was also a cousin.

**So when did you, when did you get to, to New York?**

1950. March, 1950.

**And until then you were in...**

Feldafing, Germany, yeah.

**Feldafing. What was it like living in a, in a DP camp all that time?**

It was all right. You had food. [laugh]

**How many in a room?**

We didn't care. In the, in the villa it wasn't bad. It was about maybe five, six of us in a room. We also had uh, uh, these bunkbeds.

**But there was indoor plumbing this time.**

Yeah, but not very long. It was too many people. It's always plugged up.

**But better than the ghetto.**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**Um, you came to New York and how long did you stay in New York?**

Three months.

**Were you planning to live there?**

Uh, maybe. But my uncle was here already, so I ca...I took a, a bus and came to Detroit. And we liked Detroit. We didn't like the hustle and bustle of New York. And I went back and we all moved here.

**And so you were eighteen at the time?**

That was 1950? Yes.

**You, you moved to Detroit.**

Mm-hmm.

**Um, was there any help offered from various agencies in Detroit?**

No. We didn't need any help in Detroit. We just got a job right away and...

**And you had learned English already.**

No.

**So...**

I learned English probably a little bit in New York, because I used to go, for, for a quarter you could go to a movie and see continuously different films. So I and you could stay there as long as you wanted. So I'd see two, three films, you know and uh, mostly cowboy movies. And I'd learn a little bit that I could converse. Oh, I also was going to school in Germany and I learned a little bit, so I could uh, converse a little. Not much.

**But when you came to this country you didn't go to school?**

Here? No.

**But you watched a lot of movies.**

[laugh]

**Do you remember any of the movies?**

Oh, cowboy movies mostly.

**Uh, you got a job in Detroit?**

Yes.

**Doing what?**

In a steel factory, a little factory on Clay and Oakland.

**And your father?**

My father got a job on East Eight Mile Road, also in a steel factory, R.C.

Mahon, doing structural steel.

**How did you get to work?**

Uh, bus.

**Both of you took buses.**

Sure.

**Where did you live?**

We lived on Pingree, 2450 Pingree, between uh, Linwood and LaSalle.

**So right in Detroit.**

Oh yeah.

**What happened next that, that you remember that sort of stands out in your mind?**

Well, my father got married in Germany, [smacks] and she had a daughter and my father adopted her. That's when we came over here, so she was also Binke.

Then, well, we lived on, on Pingree, then we moved on Tracey, which was in the northwest section. And uh, then I got married.

**How'd you meet your wife?**

Met her at a dance in the Shul on Wyoming and Curtis.

**You remember which Shul that was?**

Geez, I don't remember. It was a City of Hope Dance.



**Your wife's name?**

Celia. Celia Rae. Her maiden name is Nessel.

**Did you tell her about uh, your experiences in the war?**

At first I couldn't talk too much about it. But in time, you know, a little here and a little there, yes.

**Why couldn't you talk about it?**

I don't know. I guess I didn't want to talk about it.

**Did you and your father talk about it?**

Yeah.

**To each other?**

Yeah. With my uncles, yes. But I couldn't talk about it to somebody that didn't go through it.

**So did you meet other survivors here?**

Oh yeah.

**Same age?**

No. Most of them are older.

**But as a group, did you, when you got, when you'd get together as a group, would you talk about it with them?**

Yeah. We probably still do, if I get together with some of them, you know.

**Um, do you think anybody wanted to listen?**

I don't know. Didn't seem like it. Nobody asked us. All we were is the

greenhorns.

**What do you think about all this interest now in the...**

That's what's, that's what uh, surprises me. I guess, [laugh], we are the few left.

If, if, if, if we don't tell the story, it'll be forgotten.

**Did you see *Schindler's List*?**

Yes.

**What, what's your reaction to the movie, or the, the response to the movie?**

It was all right. The, that uh, Plásow was a good camp. They had a lot of food.

They were together with their families. You know, big deal, so he shot a few people.

**Um, do you think it's strange that, that survivors now are in such demand and...**

Yes. Like I, I told you that. All of a sudden we became celebrities. You should have, you should have uh, contacted me uh, twenty, twenty-five years ago. I would have remembered much more than I do now. A lot of it is forgotten.

**Would you have told me then?**

[sigh] If you were as gentle as you are now, I would have. [laugh] Probably.

**But nobody asked.**

No.

**Did you ever start to tell people and, and have them...**

No, no.

**How did they react to you?**

We didn't talk about it.

**You didn't talk about the war at all?**

No, they...

**Did anybody in the United States talk...**

Pardon?

**Did any Americans tell you what was...**

Oh yeah. They told us how tough it was when they came, after the First World War. We had it easy. Well, they had it tough. They probably didn't get as much help as some of us did.

**Did you respond to that?**

What can you respond?

**You could tell them about Auschwitz.**

No, no.

**Do you think, do you think, do you think any of us can understand this?**

Uh, to tell you the truth, if I was in your shoes, I wouldn't either. It's, you can't tell as much as it happened. I mean, there's no words to describe it. How can you kill somebody for, for nothing? And not only one person. Day in and day out, thousands and thousands of people. There was no reason for it. [brief pause] And it still happens nowadays. You have the same thing going on in Bosnia, Herzegovina, in, in uh, where is it there in South Africa, still kill uh, over religion.

**Do you think it was over religion?**

What else? They killed us because we're Jews.

**Did you talk to your children about this?**

[sigh] Not at first. After they, yeah, once they got a little older. They kept prying, you know, they, they kept asking.

**How many children do you have?**

Three.

**Tell me their names.**

Brian is the oldest. He's thirty-seven. I have a daughter, Sherry. She's thirty-four. And I have another son that's thirty-two and daughter and son live in Chicago. The oldest lives here.

**Did you tell them when they were younger about...**

No. They wouldn't understand it. Why would I tell 'em uh, atrocities like that when they are uh, five, six years old?

**So at what point did they start to ask questions?**

When they grew up, you know, after, after, after school. Started to go to college, they started hearing, "Hey Dad, you were in it. Why don't you tell us?" and...

**You said your daughter is reading...**

Yes, she's reading that...

***The Łódź Chronicle.***

Right.

**Um, so she must be very interested.**

Yeah.

**Do you talk about the book?**

Mm-hmm. She asks me questions, this and that. Some of the stuff that I've read uh, comes back to me, you know, that I'd forgotten.

**Um...**

Like that uh, incident with this uh, excrement uh, that's in the book. And that brought back memories when my father came home one evening and told us so and so got killed today because uh, the guard didn't like the smell of the uh, fertilizer, of the human waste.

**And that particular incident is in the book or the...**

Yes, I think, yes. That, that incident is, I think is in the book. And it gives the name of the person that got killed, I think.

**There is a photograph of the...**

Yes. I showed you the photograph of the uh, the wooden barrel on four wheels and...

**Why do you think you want to go back now?**

I don't know. Just to see it one more time before I die, I guess. Maybe say Kaddish for my mother and sister. [pause] I don't want to spend too much time there.

**Will you go with your family?**

No, I don't think so. I don't know. I don't know if I'm going. I, I never did want to go back. Just the last year or so I started to think about it.

**Well, is there anything you want to, to add to this? Something that you might have forgotten or that you think would be important to say?**

I don't know. I guess I'm happy to have a good family and good kids. And, leave something.

**Okay. Thank you.**

Thank you.