NORBERT WOLLHEIM INTERVIEW

Norbert Wollheim: My name is Norbert Wollheim. I was born in Berlin, April, 1913. I grew up in the area of the Alexanderplatz; Graubachstrasse to be exact was the street where we were living most of the time when I grew up. I went to the Ground School first, then to the Jahnrealschule, after that to the Friedrich Ebert Oberrealschule. And after I had my Abitur, I went to the University of Berlin to study law and economics.

Q: So why don't we just go back to your early times. So you grew up near Alexanderplatz. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about your parents. Where did your father come from? What did he do?

NW: My father came from the Posen area. He, after having been a conscript into the Prussian army, made a decision to come to Berlin and enter the commercial field. He was a salesman. My mother was already born in Berlin but also her parents had come from the Posen area of Prussia which had become German after the division of Poland.

Q: So when did your father move to Berlin?

NW: After he finished his military service. I think it was in 1903, or 1904.

Q: And then he was self employed or was he working for a larger company?

NW: No, he was for a certain time, he was a salesman for

a department store and then a few years before the war he had his own store.

Q: Which department store?

NW: It was, didn't exist for a long time, Yondorf was the name of it which was later consolidated into the Hermann Tietz department store group.

Q: And the store he ran, where did he have it in the last few years?

NW: It was to be exact near Andreastrasse. I have a very faint memory but I know, still remember when my mother who took over when my father was called in World War I, she took over but war conditions made it impossible to continue.

Q: And you had some brothers and sisters.

NW: I had a sister who was older than I am. My sister was born in 1910.

Q: And your parents, you said they moved to Berlin, but their history had been one of orthodox Jews, or was it a more liberal kind of household? What was their attitude as Jews living in Germany?

NW: Well, my father had a very solid Jewish education. He came out of a very conservative home, I would say almost orthodox home. And the moment he joined the army certainly he gave up certain things which were expected of a Jewish boy to follow. So this I think he didn't do anymore but he always was a Conservative Jew. He had a deep knowledge of Jewish history, of Jewish rituals. As a matter of fact, during World War I, when he was serving in France or in Russia with the Army, he was helping the chaplains to organize high holiday services

and so on because he knew a lot about it and was also our home, our Jewish life at home was influenced by the fact that he knew, and we kept the traditional values: the Friday evenings, the high holidays, the Passovers, and so on.

Q: And you ate kosher or not?

NW: Actually my mother gave up the kosher home during World War I when things became very tough and kosher food was difficult to get. And after the war we never reestablished a kosher home but, for instance, we kept away from certain things like pork and so and so. It was if you like a conservative home, a non kosher conservative home.

Q: Which synagogue did your father attend?

NW: In our area there was a conservative, almost orthodox synagogue. It was very near to the headquarters of the police famous, what we call the Alex, and that was Kaiserstrasse, was a whole complex of Jewish institutions. There was also a very well known school, it was first a school for girls, later it was a coeducated school. And I was Bar Mitzvaed there in 1926. That was in Kaiserstrasse, it doesn't exist anymore. Not a stone is left of it.

Q: When was that destroyed?

NW: It was partly destroyed in that pogrom night of 1938, and the rest was done by the bombs in World War II.

Q: Now in the street where you lived in the neighborhood, was that a particularly Jewish neighborhood, or was it a mixed neighborhood?

NW: I don't know what you call a Jewish neighborhood. It

was not exclusively Jewish but it was very strongly Jewish I would say. We lived together, Jews and Non-Jews lived together. You know you never had that feeling that you are living, even when you have a predominance of Jews, that you were living in a ghetto. Because Jewish and German life had somehow consolidated, at least in Berlin, to that extent that they lived in the same houses, they tolerated each other. Certain of them, let us say had unfriendly feelings about Jews but others had more friendly feelings. But it was accepted--we accepted each other as human beings, on the same level or different level, but there were no self-elected ghettos. This didn't exist.

Q: Your parents had Jewish friends as well as non-Jewish friends?

NW: My father had, I remember that when he came home from the war, he had some old friends he had met in the army. He served in the medical corp by the way. And these he kept contact with. But the major social contact was, I think, with Jewish friends and Jewish relatives. We had a big family.

Q: You had a large family in Berlin?

NW: Berlin and outside, because you know both of the families of my father and my mother were both eight children in these families. So there was a big family of brothers and sisters and cousins and so on.

Q: And again, their families you would describe as conservative but not Orthodox Jews? You saw each other regularly?

NW: Well, there were all kinds of lifestyles. There were also, some of them had married non-Jews. Some of them remained very strict. For example, I had an aunt who had not moved out, Clara was her name, she remained in Ostrova, that was

the place my father had come from. Ostrova had become Polish after World War I. She had remained there, and she was a very --I visited her once in 1935, I think it was. She had a strictly kosher house where there was still adherence to the orthodoxy. But most of the others by moving out and living in Berlin had given up certain things, but I think all of them observed the high holidays and major holidays.

Q: And how would you describe the status of the various members of your family within society? Would you say it was a solid middle class Jewish environment that you grew up in?

NW: It was middle class: lower middle class and middle class as we know it in our terms. One of my uncles had reached probably the level of upper middle class, but most of them I would say were operating on that level.

Q: You would say they felt German? They felt Jewish as well as German? They were comfortable in Germany? They were making a life for themselves in Germany, but they retained their Jewish identity?

NW: Definitely. Because don't forget, both of my grandparents had already been, call it, Germanized. Both of my grandfathers had served in the Prussian army. Which was a natural thing, it was not problematical. And therefore, the education was German, the daily language was German, and certainly we grew up within the German culture becuase this was what was offered to us. At the same time, we were aware of our Jewish heritage. And I must say, were proud of it and practised it. It was not for most of them even problematical. I remember then later in our lives, during the Youth Movement and so, that the question came up: what are we and where do we stand? Especially when anti-semitism became more rampant and certainly it was natural to ask the questions. But, in general, the existence of Jews in Germany was an existence of accepted

values.

Q: So they were loyal to Wilhelmine Germany? They fought in the War, and after the War, they proclaimed themselves for the Republic and remained middle of the road liberal-

NW: There was no other choice, or there was no alternative. Because, alright you had before World War I, you had the opponents of the Wilhelmenian era tending toward Social Democracy and things like that. Well, Jews in general always tended towards liberal causes, call it democratic causes. But that didn't mean that they were not loyal citizens of the Reich though they were opposed to many of the policies of Wilhelm II pursued at this time.

Q: And in your family too they were liberal, toward liberal democratic causes? Your father was a solid democrat?

NW: That is right. And especially after World War I when the Democratic party came into being, many Jews and also my parents felt attracted by their program and by their political ideas and ideals.

Q: When you first entered school, the Ground School, do you still remember the first day? Did you go to a particularly Jewish school? Did you have Jewish children that you'd grown up with to the age of four, five and six who were now going to school, who'd gone through the same--

NW: See it was not that easy because the year was 1919, and Germany was still in turmoil at this time. So, whether it was the day of the so-called Kapp Putsch, or the general strike, all this interrupted schooling very often. Or let us say in 1919 we were shifted around a lot because there was not enough fuel for the school available. It was a time of turmoil. I remember when I started school there were other Jewish kids

also with me, but it was not a question to congregate with one more than the other. I would say this was only something that came much later. Our main problem at this time was just to survive and to attain some kind of--I remember these kinds of discussions with my parents, to attain some sort of normalcy. Because life, economic or political life in Germany after World War I did not become normal immediately. Though I was very young at this time, I still remember the upheaval in thse days.

Q: 1919 or 1920?

NW: Sure and very soon after we had the inflation which made economical life miserable. And I remember we played the game: how much is the dollar worth because this was the dominating currency. You know, thousands into the hundred thousands into the millions into the trillions...life was rather complicated. And I say economical survival was one of the major goals in these days.

Q: And was your family hard hit? Can you remember ever suffering any hardships in terms of no food being suddenly at home, or not having enough clothes to go to school? In the winter there not being enough coal?

NW: I must say I still remember somehow at the end of World War I, food was scarce in the house, no doubt. Sugar was brown, the bread was awful and there were long lines, long bread lines because don't forget the blockade really had an impact on German economy, especially the year 1918. And things did not become normal immediately after that. So there was a shortage of things in the house, no doubt.

Q: But there was no distinction here between Jews who struggled or whether it was the whole of Berlin?

NW: This was a time when everybody was on his own to make ends meet.

NW: Can you remember early friends, childhood friends who you went to school with who you carried on into the youth movement later?

NW: Well, because of this constant change in schools, you know you struck up a friendship, then you lost the contact, so you established new contacts. There were certain people who I was more friendly with than others. There were people on my street with whom I congregated. Many people were non-Jewish. There was not, it was not problematic. We played together. Played football together, whatever it was. Especially in the street where I was living we had both because it was a mixed population.

Q: So you were Bar Mitzvaed when? I what year?

NW: 1926. May 1, 1926.

Q: And was it a very proud occasion for you?

NW: It was a very special occasion because in those days Bar Mitzvas were not celebrated as they are celebrated here in this country, where people don't know what to do first either to prove themselves socially or going out of their way to borrow money from the banks to meet the bill of the caterers. What you did in those days were that the family, it was a family gathering. Number one, you were aware of the fact that as far as a Jew was concerned, you became a member of the community in a very special way. And number two, it was a very special event for your family, so therefore we celebrated it at home and everybody helped out and the furniture was put together so that your family could be accomodated in your home. That was a matter of course. You

celebrated it at home. And certainly we felt honored that after the services, the synagogue, the leadership of the synagogue came to your home to congratulate and they were offered a drink and so, and a speech was made and all this. It was a very special day no doubt.

Q: And the family took a lot of comfort and strength in these kind of occasions? Were there a number of Bar Mitzvas throughout the 20's in your family?

NW: I also remember- as we are talking about it- that there was a certain kind of relief because it was after the inflation and Germany was economically in the stage of a certain recovery. And we all profited from that. And I know that things for my father had become somehow better because there was a tremendous demand for things that one couldn't get during the War or during the inflation.

Q: He was working at that time?

NW: He was a salesman for a certain firm, but on his own, on a commission.

Q: Would he go travelling through Germany or would he stay in Berlin?

NW: For a certain time he was travelling, but then he decided it was nicer to stay at home. He had enough of travelling. So he covered the metropolitan area of Berlin.

Q: During these years, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, did you have a close relationship with your parents?

NW: Yes, especially as my father had such a good knowledge of Jewish history and I always asked him questions. And also I always had a certain knack for history, I asked about his

experiences in World War I. He didn't like to talk too much about it because certainly he didn't like what he had seen during World War I. He had really seen action in France, at Verdun and Russia. But you know, it was always pleasant when he told me about his experiences in Russia where he had met fellow Jews, especially eastern Jewry.

Q: So he would mix up the conversation with anti-war, and the violence, as well as with...

NW: And he was--it was very pleasant when he told about- since he was a rather young man then- when he went out with people in the East, especially they came with their daughters and thought that he would be a good catch for their daughters. Or when he told me about the religious experiences when he was setting up, helping to organize the high holidays and he was together with people.He had no difficulties to communicate with the Jewish people in the East since he grew up in Posen where the population in the country spoke Polish but the population in the city spoke German. And he certainly had picked this up. He knew Polish but also he had an understanding of Yiddish. And some Hebrew. And therefore, as I say, in matters of language he was able to bridge that gap.

Q: Because there was an influx of Jews from eastern European countries into Berlin which was controversial.

NW: But this came later. I think about the time during World War I when my father served in France and in Russia.

Q: He would talk to you about them during the War?

NW: He gave us an idea of their culture, of their life, of their warmth of their dedication to Jewish values especially in a world of Hassidism and which later we came to understand through the writing of Martin Buber, and so when we got older

and we studied these things.

Q: But he was a good soldier even after the war when Germany was defeated he retained...

NW: He was not ashamed of having served in the Army. He was unhappy about the policy for which he had become a servant. Because after all, he had to join. He couldn't help it. He disagreed with many of the things that Willhelm II had done, as many people with liberal leanings had done. But when 1914, the call came, they all served and they followed irrespective of opposition to the policies. Also there were certain things which he believed in. One of the things were law and order, and also he had come home with a very strong feeling of opposition to violence because in his world, in the field hospitals he had seen so much misery and cruelty and so therefore after the war he dedicated his free time to welfare work and social work and so, just to help. And very often I joined him in this.

Q: So your father went out in the twenties, attached himself actively to Jewish welfare organizations and worked through them for the community?

NW: Well, it was not organizations. We had in the Jewish community in Berlin, which was a very well organized community, had these welfare departments in different parts of the city. And he selected just a part of the, call it Schönefeld, where he could speak the language he had spoken with the people in the East during the War, be it Yiddish or Polish or whatever, who had come flocked into Berlin. And there was a lot of poverty, dire poverty. And he selected this area to serve on the welfare board of the Jewish community. At the same time he had become active in the organization of Jewish War Veterans. This organization had been established after 1918, 1919, just to preserve the memory and also to fight attempts

to diminish the service of Jewish soldiers during World War I.

Q: So in Schönefeld, what kind of work did he do? Did he try to get the kids to learn German?

NW: No, it was strictly on an economic level. For example, people had made applications with the welfare board and had asked for help, mostly monetary terms. And he was one of those who went and sometimes I joined him to find out what the situation was. Whether the petition was justified or not. And then he made his recommendations and then the commission decided to grant whatever was available to give.

Q: And this was not state money? These organizations, this was money that they had that didn't come from the government?

NW: No, you see the Jewish communities in Germany were communities actually under Prussian or other rights, which means that they had the right to tax people, but they taxed Jewish members, it was a certain percentage of their income tax. So they had their own budget for the administration, for the educational purposes and for welfare. And a very substantial amount of money went into welfare, in addition to donations made by wealthy Jews. And that was the source of this money for worthy causes. And you needed people who let us say dedicated their time to do this kind of work. It was not done by social workers. We had a very vast group of voluntary workers and my father was one of these people.

NW: So he did it after work in the evenings?

NW: Or on Sundays or whatever, whenever there was a chance.

Q: What was his full name?

NW: Moritz was his full name. Moritz Wollheim. And to a certain extent my mother also joined. You know the veteran organization also had a woman auxiliary. And they tried to support people who were in need and they socialized a lot. And whatever they collected they gave away for welfare or social causes.

Q: And he was active in that throughout the twenties. And you would know what he was doing?

NW: He did this work as long as the Jewish organizations were allowed to operate.

Q: And after your Bar Mitzva, you didn't have to change schools then? You went on' til you were fifteen?

NW: Until I was fifteen. Up to the last class and we got the certificate of the so-called Einjähriges. Which means it was an old remnant; an arrangement that those who graduated from the Realschule had to serve in the army only for one year.

Q: And what was school like for you? Did you like a particular subject? Did you have arguments with teachers? What were you like at school?

NW: Well, I liked languages. As a matter of fact, I especially liked the French language. And I liked always history and I was very good in that. I lost my interest in math and physics --I never expected to be an accountant in the United States one day--but I lost it because the teacher was so miserable that he made me lose the interest. But my major interest was German literature, German history. All history, especially comtemporary history and languages.

Q: And your teachers, did you have any that you particularly

liked? Were there any that you had quarrels with, for example because there was anti-semitism?

NW: Well, there were certain. You know in the years when the political polarization of Germany increased and the conservatives and the nationalists and later the Nazis became more domineering, certainly the teachers were not free of that. Don't forget that in Germany education was always a monopoly. It was a monopoly of the wealthy classes. And what the Republic would have to do in order to change the system was to bring people from let us say the so-called lower classes where the trend was always towards Social Democratic values. They didn't do that. So therefore many of our teachers were, let us say, veterans who still believed that Germany had never lost the war, that it was the stab...

Q: And you remember that?

NW: Oh sure. Well, for example, though I was excellent in German and literature, the teacher of that subject was a lieutenant in the German army who had been seriously wounded in World War I and he kept up the idea that Germany never had lost the war, it was only due to very special dire consequences and a stab in the back. So for instance, when in the higher classes, when we started to speak about social revolution, Marxism and so on. And I got certain assignments, not that I volunteered for that but got certain assignments, you know there were very unpleasant discussions already then when I tried to present the idea just about the manifestation, without taking sides, but there were disputes and that was not very pleasant.

Q: And the disputes were political ones or were there racial overtones in that they tried to dismiss what you were trying to portray because Marx was a Jew or because Heine was Jew? That there were discussions here that always flowed over into

the other side?

NW: Well, where's the dividing line between political and let us say racist approach to that? They were to a certain extent conservatives and certainly there was also the trend somehow to believe that the Jews were--after all Karl Marx was a Jew--and the liberal ideas were introduced by Jews; you had it without pronouncing it. You know you didn't have open anti-semitic utterances, very few cases. I don't know if you've seen the movie recently--you didn't have it too much before '33, you had it somehow because a teacher was still eager to protect his position. And if he was too outspoken against the republic or too anti-semitic, he knew that his position eventually could be in jeopardy and this he didn't like.

Q: You can't remember an occasion where you were personally insulted during your school days?

NW: I remember one case and I reported it to my father and my father took it up with his veterans' group and they intervened and wrote a letter to the principal and the teacher was reprimanded. This I remember. I don't remember the details anymore but it was something which really brought things to a boiling point and after that he changed his tune but I was fully convinced that he didn't change his opinions.

Q: You joined the Jewish youth group in 1926 when you were thirteen?

NW: Yes, shortly after my Bar Mitzva.

Q: Did you join with friends, friends from school or was it your father's suggestion?

NW: I was brought in by the son of a fellow veteran to be

exact. And he came one day to our house and he told me that a group of young people who are congregating and he explained to me what the youth movement was trying to accomplish and he said,' why don't you try it?' And I went with him and I had heard already from other sources that there were also different groups where work was done to fill your free time, where you could meet fellow friends. And we went to what we called a Heimabend; these were these evenings when you were together. And I liked it because I don't remember anymore what the subject of the evening was but usually these Heim -abende were organized in such a way that there was a certain subject matter and somebody was asked to prepare a presentation. And after that there was discussion. I found it interesting and also what we did, what they did, there was a trend to rediscover nature. So on Sundays we went hiking. I liked that very much, and then also sometimes we went out overnight pitching tents and staying and enjoying nature.

Q: Did you have a place where you met for these evenings?

NW: There was also, you know the Jewish community had provided certain places. For example, there were central buildings of the Jewish community in Berlin. One was the famous Rosenstrasse, the other was Oranienburgerstrasse. Most of the synagogues had a certain social hall, offices and so on. And there you could meet. It didn't cost any rent: the community made these places available. And there we met and especially in Berlin which was a vast city we had different local groups. For instance, I joined a group which was mainly meeting near the Alexanderplatz.

Q: What was the German name of this group?

NW: Das ist die Deutsch-Jüdische Jugendgemeinschaft. Later I remember this group rented a store in the northeast part of Berlin and this became our' Jugendteil'; this became a

place used exclusively by our group and where we decorated it nicely and made it cosy somehow. And these rooms were constantly occupied by one or the other group because when the movement grew we had groups of different ages.

Q: How large was your particular group when you first joined and what did it grow to?

NW: Well, we were first in Berlin, later we reached out into the so-called provinces and you see it changed, I don't have the statistics available anymore. But the interesting fact of it is that out of this grew friendships that lasted over the years and even when we were all separated and people went to different countries it bridged even oceans and countries. As a matter of fact, just today my wife invited people who are now in their sixties and seventies, and we still, the few survivors are still meeting because that binds us. Not the ideology because these things change, but the personal relationships, friendships and the memory that we spent time together in the hope that our ideas and ideals would become reality one day.

Q: What was the ideology of this group? And as you probably know, the controversy there lies in the Jewish community between what then were the up and coming Zionists and what was then a more conservative, more German-Jewish oriented group. Was your group leaning one way or the other? Did you argue this with your father when you first joined that there was a problem here?

NW: Your question is almost leading into a dissertation about the Youth Movement. Let me try to say briefly.... Youth Movement, the German Youth Movement developed before World War I because there was a feeling in the Wilhelminian era that people had given vent too much to traditional values but not to the inner values of history and tradition. That

they had forgotten the meaning of things. And they met in 1913, the circle around Stefan George and others to reestablish, to look for the values, to look for the meanings. And to do it independently of the traditions of the older generation, somehow to become independent. In other words, to establish independent thinking, not to accept whatever had come down at face level but to question and re-question it. After World War I, it became even stronger because then the Republic had come into being and old values had been questioned. Because the whole world had collapsed, an era had come to an end, monarchies all over Europe had collapsed, there were new winds blowing from Russia after the collapse of the Czar. So many things were questioned and also as far as the Jewish development was concerned the Balfour Declaration created a question: What are we as Jews? Also, we had quite a new development in Jewish culture in Germany with the appearance of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig and so on the scene. And Edmund Flagg for instance in France. Their writings gave us a lot of material to chew intellectually. And so we questioned our position in Jewish life in Germany. And on many of these Heimabende there were philosophical and historical discussions and we had lived in Germany, especially in our groups, influenced by that so-called synthesis of German and Jewish values. Now with the collapse of the Old World, it became subject to a re-determination and that what was done strongly leaning towards the culture into which we were born. Strongly influenced by the values which we had inherited from our parents as far as Jewish values are concerned.

Q: To just bring the little thought to an end that you were talking about that the attraction, the discussions within the Youth Movement certainly were centered around those issues. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what attracted you to it.

NW: What attracted me is also that I met people of my age.

Also there were older students who were our leaders then. We learned, for example when we went hiking, certain boy scout techniques like pitching tents and just enjoying nature more. But also the main thing was that we learned a lot. It was not just to discuss things and to indulge in rhetoric but just to work on things written and go into it in detail and then to convey this knowledge then to others to create an interest. On the other hand, we were not a Zionist movement. We were not oriented in this direction. But our association, our relationship with the Zionist groups was friendly to such an extent that in Berlin, once a year, all groups from all walks of life, from all ideas and political persuasions met and demonstrated their Jewish solidarity and unity.Our movement had excellent people as their leaders. One man who later, especially after '33, devoted all his time, he was a doctor by profession. He had been badly wounded in World War I as a doctor. He was a specialist in lung diseases. He himself was afflicted by it. And he was one of our prominent men. Dr. Ludwig Tietz was his name. Another man who was very close to me, we were very close friends until his death a couple of years ago, was a man who had originally studied law, then had worked for a lawyer, but later because he was an excellent social worker was the head of the youth department of the Jewish community in Berlin. Martin Sobotka was his name and he was a man of tremendous influence on my life. He actually educated a whole generation. Their responsibility for the community, social responsibility and dedication to social work.

Q: So would you say that this Jewish Youth Group, there was a sphere in your life that was apart from your school life and which your parents approved of and that you spent a lot of time with?

NW: My father was very happy when he heard but my mother was only concerned that the proper moral principles were

observed. And when she heard for the first time that we went on our Nachtfahrt, in other words staying overnight, spending the night in hostels or pitching tents, she wanted to know with whom. And when I told her one of our leaders was the man Ludwig Tietz, then she was satisfied and she didn't object anymore. And then when I brought my friends after youth groups into the house and they saw who they were and got to know them, they were very happy with this.

Q: They usually came from the same kind of background?

NW: Different. All walks of life. We had people who came from the higher middle or even wealthy and others. You see, the Youth Movement in this respect was somehow leveling in the respect that we all were equal. And we had even people in our group, we emphasized certain German values and German heritage, we even had children of people who had immigrated from the East, and these children had gone to school in Germany and spoke German as their daily language.

Q: So you were a member of this Jewish Youth Group right until your Abitur?

NW: No, I was a member until the organization ceased to exist by order of the Gestapo in 1935.

Q: But meanwhile you had of course graduated. You went on to the Oberrealschule and then did your Abitur?

NW: But since you ask that, school was one thing. And there was no jump in between school interest and the interest in the Youth Movement because we were looking forward to these evenings or to the Sundays when we got together. School was a different thing. School you had certain assignments and you had to meet the demands and that was it.

Q: And as we are now moving into the end twenties and the economic situation certainly becomes much harsher in Germany, the political situation itself polarized itself, would you say that there you are now entering the age of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, there was a higher awareness in your family of the increasing anti-semitism, of the problem with Hitler on the horizon? Was there discussion at school and or was there discussion in your evenings in the Youth Movement?

NW: There are two different areas. In school, especially in the Oberrealschule, in the last two years, I was the only Jewish student. And some of those fellow students had already joined the Nazi party, you know there was a time when it was illegal, but we knew that they were deeply involved. But there was no, at least in my class, in our school, there was no violence. Because they saw to it that discipline was obeyed.

Q: On the way to school?

NW: The Realschule was in what they called Diestermeierstrasse which was near the brewery in northeast Berlin. The Oberrealschule was in the center of Berlin near Alexanderplatz. No, on the way don't forget we didn't have any badges, this was not...you realized how heated up the atmosphere became when you saw certainly constantly the demonstrations and especially when unemployment increased. And Hitler built his storm troopers and so to keep them busy they demonstrated on all sorts of occasions. And then the political picture became more loaded.

Q: You remember the first demonstration that you witnessed?

NW: I don't know what you call demonstrations; all political groups tried, for one reason or the other, to bring their militias into Berlin. And we had it in the twenties with the Communists, they had what they called the Roten

Frontkämpferbund, and they brought thousands of people from all over Germany into Berlin. This we witnessed. Then they had, for instance, their Stahlhelm which was a nationalistic group but not with the Nazi program. They brought into Berin, we witnessed that, which was somehow connected with some military appearance. And then the Nazis actually developed their strength towards the end of the twenties, early thirties, to be exact I think of September 14, 1930, they had the first big success in these elections to the Reichstag when they became the second strongest party in Parliament. Then we became aware not so much in Berlin, Berlin was always a city which was hard to conquer for the Nazis. But in certain parts of Germany especially in the areas like Pommerania, Mecklenburg and so, Eastern Prussia, the Nazis had made progress and all these propaganda efforts had paid off.

Q: Now were there discussions either with your family or in your group about the problem that was arising with the economic recession and the anti-semitism that could be seen rising as a result of that? Do you remember discussions like that with your father?

NW: Well, the recesssion affected everybody --Jews as well as non-Jews. And many of our friends, my friends in the Youth Movement lost their position as employees and things became very tough. There were discussions but what we complained about was that the Weimar Republic simply was too weak to resist against the attempt to take over. And we had a constant change of government, constant change of coalitions. But the bickering amongst the parties, the constant in-fighting and all that made us angry. Because they didn't get together for political action to fight the forces from the right. This is what we discussed very often, for instance that the Communists saw to it to fight the Social Democrats more than the Nazis because they thought that was the right political program for them. Therefore the forces to defend the Republic,

the forces to remain free in our society which the Weimar Republic had tried to establish based upon their Constitution, this made us apprehensive. But the question was what was the right way out? And there was no answer. The only hope was that number one, the recession would disappear and under normal economical conditions the Nazis would lose their strength within the group of the unemployed and the disgruntled and so on. So when the first signs came that the crisis in America was over or at least that the recession had tired itself out, we cecame hopeful that the economic recovery would be followed by a political recovery also.

Q: But in your group, wasn't there a movement towards resisting some of the anti-semitism? Didn't you put out pamphlets, didn't you through the larger Jewish organizations, you as younger members were told to go out in the street and argue or show certain things?

NW: Well, you know there was one strong organization of the Jewish middle class especially called the Centralverein. And one of their major programs was to fight anti-semitism. Now how could you fight this? They tried what we called in terms of apologetic--which didn't work because we learned that emotional movements simply don't discuss. So the only way to fight anti-semitic tendencies was through the political system, through the political party. And that was attempted wherever it was possible. On the other hand, there was that problem that the Weimar Republic from the beginning, like the teachers who had been kept, who had very nationalistic and chauvinistic leanings, also the judges who had been re-instated had been taken over from the old system, that they had very strong nationalistic tendencies and therefore it was very very difficult to succeed in court, though in certain cases they did.

Q: In your Youth Movement itself during the meetings in the

evening, there was not that somebody would come from the Centralverein and say, 'here is a pamphlet, read that, that's the kind of argument you should take..., I mean, you weren't educated in that way, influenced by...

NW: Well, we had contact with the Centralverein as we had contact with other major organizations but the Centralverein we helped, for instance, I mean retroactively, it is sometimes naive to think what we tried to do in order to fight this avalanche. For instance, when there were elections the Centralverein was very much interested to bring old Jews to the ballot boxes because many of them had become disinterested and would not otherwise go. And so these are one of the things we tried to do.

Q: So you went out actually canvassing?

NW: No, just to help people. That's one of the things I remember now. But the major work was the work of the big organizations who had the means and the knowledge to do certain things and had the contact with the political parties. But as much as the political parties towards the middle ground and the left lost influence and clout, the less could be done. And this was a source of concern but there was no other way out and it was the hope and the expectation that, with the change of the economic conditions, the political atmosphere would change and then the Nazis would lose votes. Which they did interestingly enough after the elctions in September and again, you know the Reichstag was constantly sent home, they had already lost in elections in December and that was more than two million votes, if I'm not mistaken, so there was an indication that there was some kind of retreat and we considered this as some kind of recovery from a fever or something.

Q: Your father took a similar attitude? You remember

conversations with him where he'd voice the worry to you but then said, 'Let's just hope this will go away and we can just go on?'

NW: Yes. It was not only my father. Certainly when we discussed it but you heard it in the statements of leading statesmen, of leading people of the democratic parties who went on record saying that this is what they expect and therefore we should strengthen our own efforts to keep the values of the Republic intact. But as I say, the Republic didn't have the strength to fight the forces of the upheaval, forces of destruction.

Q: So you graduated in 1931?

NW: That's right. From the Oberrealschule with what they called at this time the Abiturium which was the equivalent of the baccalaureat. At the time I was still in contact with some non-Jewish students. For instance, we got together to check on home assignments and so on, trying to work together.

Q: So to that extent you wouldn't describe the whole situation as abnormal? Just certain tings that you didn't do. Now after your graduation you had made up your mind to go to law school in Berlin. That was your plan. So when did you start law school?

NW: In fall, 1931.

Q: Did you go there with friends, did you have friends from the Youth Group who also started law school at the same time?

NW: Yes, and I would say that the circle of friends even broadened because people who had lived in cities outside Berlin, who had come to Berlin to go to the same law school, the Humboldt University, so we got together especially during intermission

very often. And that was an interesting time, not only because we discussed events of the outside but we worked together on mutual assignments.

Q: So you were actually in close cooperation with friends working not only for university but also still being of course in your Youth Group. It still carried on into your student days?

NW: Yes, but also for certain assignments for the university.

Q: Like what?

NW: If there were a certain legal problem then there would be an exchange on what was the answer to that based on which sources, which law and so on which we did together very often.

Q: And you continued in your Youth Group at the time? Continuing the same kind of going out into nature and afterwards at time discussing political things or were you ever tempted to join one of the Verbindung or internal university organizations?

NW: No, the Youth Movement didn't actually like the Verbindung because the Verbindung had certain values or attitudes that we didn't approve of. Drinking habits or so on which we stayed away from: from alcohol and smoking and so on. So it was a different kind of lifestyle we provided. But we worked together at the university for certain mutual things which we wanted for ourselves.

Q: Would you say that within the university you had certain Jewish friends that you mostly hung out together with?

NW: Yes, there was a kind of habit: at 11 o'clock there was an intermission in university lectures for approximately half

hour. And groups congregated next to--each group had in this lobby in Berlin had their public board of events. So the Nazis congregated in one corner and the Social Democrats in another corner and the Jewish students, for instance of the Verbindung, in another corner. And we were not organized in terms of university-wide so we then got together with the Verbindung. So it happened that once in a while, especially amongst the political groups, there was a shouting match which the Nazis had provoked and sometimes certain brawls but I do not remember, to be very frank, any serious confrontations that made it necessary for the police to intervene. I know that certain of these events happened in 1932, but I was not a witness to them. So there we met other fellow Jewish students and exchanged views and this and that, and you know that was a very informal type of meeting and this was over, you went back to your classes.

Q: You would say that as far as working university went, this was a working university, still open with an open exchange of ideas, there were Jewish professors and there was to that extent a full university life to be enjoyed there?

NW: Definitely, definitely. The universities were open until Hitler came to power. There were several cases, special cases which became famous, for example, I remember there was a case of a very young, very brilliant man who was given the assignment of a Professor Breslau; Cohn was his name. But there the Nazis protested and disturbed to such an extent that then the people in charge were not strong enough to say, 'Nothing doing. This man was appointed by us, his appointment was legal and therefore we have to secure law and order to give him the chance to teach.' This didn't happen and they withdrew his assignment. There was another case of a Professor Ledweil. That was different. He had become a Professor of Economics or Sociology and he was a Social Democrat and a Jew. And the Nazis protested but it didn't help them but this was in

Berlin. So you had these cases but, on the other hand, Jews were serving in very prominent positions as professors in the medical field, as law professors, in philosophy.

Q: Can you name some specifically?

NW: One of the most famous, I attended his lectures, was Martin Wolff who was a professor of law. There was a Professor Heimann.

Q: Did you hear lectures besides law? Were you interested in philosophy and economics?

NW: Yes, we did that. Because there were certain courses which were not required, for instance where law and medicine meet, criminal medicine, these were not required but were our interest so we attended them. There was a famous man, Professor Buschka who was teaching those. A man of high calibre, he was deported to Terescin(Theresienstadt) and perished there.

Q: If you could just mention four or five books or authors you were reading at the time in your first two years at law school? Who were you reading? Who influenced you?

NW: Well, as far as law books go this was more or less the assignments we had and you know how it is, very often you read them and then put them aside. But then there were other things which were interesting to read: Spengler's book about the demise of the Western Civilization, there was Max Weber's book about sociology, even Trotsky's biography of his life which had come out in these days. There were many, many things we did because I felt it was not enough to just study law.

Q: Would you say there was a Jewish interest that you had which you backed up with a number of books?

NW: Yes, especially, as I've said before, one of the strongest influences on all of us, Zionists and non-Zionists, were the writings of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. And to a certain extent books which had come out earlier by Hermann Cohn about philosophy. But as I say, Martin Buber had a very strong influence because of his personal appearance. He came to us and lectured.

Q: You attended his lectures?

NW: Not at the university. He was attached to the University of Frankfurt, if I'm not mistaken. But he came to us for lectures organized by the Youth Movement. Because whether it was the world of Hassidism which he opened to us not emotionally but intellectually, or it gave us a complete new insight into Jewish life. Martin Buber was instrumental in bringing back a whole generation of young people to Jewish values.

Q: When you attended Berlin University you lived at home? Were you living in the same place?

NW: Yes, we lived in the same apartment, Rabachstrasse. At this time it was not the trend to move out when you're eighteen. And first of all, the means were not available. In 1931, times were still tough. In order to support my studies and to pay for my tuition I was tutoring then and spent time turoring young students to bring money into the family.

Q: Did your father manage to bring his family quite well through these four or five years?

NW: Well, it was not always easy to make ends meet. Because the recession certainly affected everybody especially people like salesmen who were more exposed to the effects of the recession. It was not easy.

Q: Did that mean that he continued to work for the welfare, the Jewish welfare organization?

NW: Definitely. Because there was a demand for it more than ever before. More people became subject to welfare needs. People became unemployed, were running out of unemployment insurance and so on.

Q: Is the 30th of January, 1933, the big dividing line? Is that when suddenly the world came crashing down not only on various families but also on yourself to the extent that you could now envision the day where you may be no longer able to study law, where indeed you could see restrictions coming, or what would you say?

NW: Germany and we all were in some kind of a state of alert in all these months because the Governments kept on coming and going. And there was already that event in the Prussian government which was actually a progressive government under the leadership of Otto Braun who was a Social Democrat, had been kicked out by Mr. von Papen, and of course Mr. Sewering who didn't resist these two soldiers or three soldiers who came to kick him out of the office. There was concern certainly and as I say there was some kind of alert but we didn't know where we were going. When the government of Brüning was kicked out and Mr. Schleicher took over the feeling was for a short time that he's a military man, he will see to it that number one, there will be law and order; number two, he'll resist the Nazis through the help of the Army he represented.

Q: That was believed even amongst your age group, amongst your friends, that he was a law and order man and we can certainly trust him for the time being?

NW: We, which means my friends and my family, because there

were not such a difference of opinion, we did not assume, did not expect that Hindenburg who was the President and who under the Constitution had to appoint the Chancellor, that he would do that after having spoken about this 'Bohemian corporal' and so. In other words, he had treated Hitler not very nicely, especially in these elections which had taken place, which Hitler had lost as a candidate for the Presidency. So certainly we were not well aware of the intrigues played by morons like the son of Hindenburg who played an important role and by that very foxy fellow like von Papen who put it all together because he thought, and this was obviously his political strategy, that by bringing some Nazis in, they would outplay their chances and he would then take over and succeed the Nazis. So there were all kinds of games played and we were nothing but just a small screw in the whole machinery; not even that. So when on January 30th, Hitler was appointed we were really flabbergasted because this was something--only later we found out how it came about and which role Papen and the son of Hindenburg and others had played in this game.

Q: At the time that day was a shock? Do you remember that day?

NW: It was and it was something, at least I must say it for myself, and I remember still the first comments in the papers which could still be written in these days: it was a matter of disbelief. But then we somehow settled down in the assumption that he had only appointed three Nazis as members of the Cabinet: that was Hitler himself, Göring who at the same time became Prime Minister of Prussia, and Frick as I think Minister of the Interior, if I'm not mistaken. And the others were all non-Nazis, they were members of the Deutschnationalen and so, but not of the Nazis. So the theory was that somehow they would not be able to solve these tremendous problems Germany was faced with, the tremendous amount of unemployed, economical problems, and also we had the feeling or we were

dreaming about the fact that the governments of the countries surrounding Germany who were associated in the Grosse Allianz, the Great Alliance: France, Czeckoslavakia, Poland would not let this happen without resistance. Because after all, Germany was completely disarmed, had a very capable army of 100,000 men but in comparison to the forces these countries had they wouldn't be able to resist. So we were waiting for the reaction of these governments.

Q: So you would say that, in these weeks following, you were literally there thinking this man is going to fall? That he would come and go like all the governments?

NW: Yes, but I must tell you that we were in very good company. Because the big parties like the Social Democratic party, the unions, who were a tremendous power actually, they also believed this and therefore accepted this fact which was legal under the Constitution because Hitler actually came to power in a very legal way. He came to power under the Constitution, he didn't become Chancellor as a result of a coup or a putsch. He was appointed and made Chancellor under the rules and regulations of the Weimar Constitution.

Q: So you as a law school student could in fact see how he had gotten there and somehow felt that this was the Constitution?

NW: Certainly, we always had hoped that the people of the middle of the road would together with the Social Democrats and the democratic forces would find a way to a coalition which they had before because they had governed Germany after 1919 to a certain extent. But their political responsibilities had disappeared, almost evaporated. They were so deeply involved in their little party politics that they didn't see anymore the real dangers and the bigger horizon. They only saw 'Kirchturmpolitik'; in other words, not farther than just the spire of their own church. So all this came together in an expectation that this was just an accident of history and that as soon as the practical problems would have to be faced by them they would see that they could not solve the problems, that all the promises they had made were in vain and therefore the masses would turn against them.

Q: So your student life in fact continued fairly normally for the next few weeks?

NW: That's right, because don't forget nothing actually happened. Up to the moment that the Reichstag was put on fire. I would say that this was also for many people who were active in the political field the first indication that something had become serious and in that night I think the trains to France and Czeckoslavakia were crowded with people who fled because they somehow sensed that violence might become the order of the day.

Q: In the next six or seven weeks, because when did you finally leave law school, that was in June?

NW: I left law school actually after January 3, 1933. Lectures were already somehow disturbed by Nazi troops, especially I remember the lectures of Martin Wolff and others.

Q: You actually attended lectures where Nazis would come marching in?

NW: Yes, in their uniforms, sure, sure.

Q: They would disrupt and there was nothing the students could do about that?

NW: The Nazis came with their weapons, their knives, these little stilettos. There was no resistance possible. Because we still believed, if there was something to be done, it had to be done by the police.

Q: As they marched into the student's hall there wasn't a students who would say, 'Hey, get out of here?'

NW: No, because we knew that they meant business and that they were probably willing to wield their weapons because they had done that before, even before Hitler had come to power. Because in Germany, before he came to power there

was a constant event of violence, of shootings and stabbings between the Communits and the Nazis, between the Social Democrats and the Nazis. So you were aware that violence for them was not an unknown factor.

Q: Do you remember professors resisting who would throw them out of their lectures?

NW: No. No, I don't remember any professor resisting because this is not a German concept. That concept of civilian citizens standing up to be counted did not exist in this way in the Germany of the times I remember.

Q: So there was never an occasion where a professor said, 'Get out!'

NW: Well, Martin Wolff tried that and somehow they were a little astonished but it didn't help too much.

Q: So the professor would leave the lecture hall?

NW: Small as Martin Wolff was, he wasn't more than 5'6" or 7" with a powerful personality and he was respected even by non-Jews, so I remember the first time when a small group came in he could somehow paralyze them but then they came with more.

Q: So in the next few weeks as the violence increased in that way you finally left unniversity when? Two, three months later?

NW: Well, there was no sense to attend classes anymore because they were disturbed. We went but the educational process had suffered already.

Q: But it wasn't then directed at you as Jews, you just felt

generally the discipline and university had collapsed as an institution or did you feel personally threatened as a Jew attending those classes?

NW: Well, it had collapsed because of the policy of the Nazis to get everybody out of their way who was antagonistic to them. For the Socialist, they accepted it; and the Jews, it was a matter of course.

Q: Were they in agreement with your leaving? (your parents)

NW: Well, they were not in agreement with it. They were very unhappy about it but what could be done?

Q: So really after the 30th of January, it became virtually impossible to go to university?

NW: I wouldn't say it was impossible. You could still attend classes but it was not the same anymore. There was no orderly conduct of business. And especially after the Reichstag fire, things became very unpleasant. And then I would say the floodgates opened because then we heard about violence from all kinds of sources. Our group was in contact with the people from the Centralverein and so they had , for instance, a Wohnheim in Berlin near the Alexanderplatz, on Resingstrasse, and there we met and very often, when we helped when they were informed that their husbands had been taken away or so, we went to find out and to see to it that at least a record could be kept or the authorities, which were still interested, to keep some legal aspects.

Q: When did this start?

NW: I would say after the Reichstag fire.

Q: After the Reichstag fire you say there was a network whereby

Jews tried to keep record of themselves?

NW: Well no, that you did it before but I would say I was one of those who then, like others, offered their service because they needed help to go to these different families and so to find out and to verify because there was no, nothing could be published in the press. That was one of the first things , so in order to become aware of the events we went to the homes of people who were affected or who had called, especially the Centralverein or other organizations. And to get a full record available.

Q: So you from the making of the decision-- was that a decision you discussed with friends not to attend the university anymore simply because it was no good or was that a decision you took by yourself?

NW: I more or less took it by myself but others had the same feeling.

Q: So there were no Jewish friends who continued to go to university?

NW: Some did but they found that it was worthless because, as I say, the orderly process of education had stopped.

Q: And you immediately then volunteered your help after that?

NW: Well, in connection with that, yes. To do something because I wanted to do something and to fill my time and to fill it productively. And one of the things was to say, 'Alright, we need you, so let us find out.' I was, for instance, spending many hours in the headquarters of the Centralverein in Enzerstrasse and also in the so-called Wohnheim in the Magazinstrasse. So what we did was, as I said, we tried to visit families affected by the violent acts of the Nazis.

Interesting enough, most of these families had been politically involved because the Nazis at the beginning were mainly after their opponents especially Social Democrats, Democrats, in certain cases, Communists and so on.

Q: So you would go and meet there and would go to the families and ask them what had actually happened, the names?

NW: The latest news, the names, the particulars.

Q: And now would you be able to get any kind of information on where these people had been?

NW: Certain people were terribly afraid to give you anything. They were so scared they hardly opened the door. And certainly, since they had experienced the knock at the door before with dire consequences, so it was not so easy to get in. But when we told them what we were doing and who we are and so most of them became cooperative and were happy to relieve themselves, to tell the story when they had come into the apartment and destroyed things, ripped books out of libraries and all this.

Q: Can you remember offhand names?

NW: To this is something that is so far away that I can't.

Q: Now as this continued, do you think this was the time, in the next two or three months, where there was definitely a time where the Jewish organizations decided that they would have to try to defend themselves somehow, even if only by becoming more self-sufficient, by seeing to giving more support to the people affected by the immediate violence? Were you thinking, 'I've now left law school. What am I going to do next?'

NW: Well, sure that was in the mind of everybody, ,What's

next?' In many many terms. Interestingly enough my father with whom I discussed it all often, he found that since he had a good reputation amongst his customers, that those people remained very loyal.

Q: Even non-Jews?

NW: Even non-Jews. And you know, he did it the same as others, since he was a decorated veteran and he was displaying this very proudly, he was accepted by most of them. Those who wanted to buy from him before also bought after that. Those who didn't buy from him before didn't change their mind. But he noticed a certain level of loyalty from those who disagreed with the violent policy of the Nezis. That encouraged him somehow. On the other hand, the question came up what to do. And then as far a university was concerned, I remember, you know we had all sorts of hopes: before the Reichstag was on fire there was a big assembly in the Lustgarten. It was the militia of the Progressive, the Reichsbanner had called it. I think it was their last get together there. And the head of the Reichsbanner, Huttermann I think was his name, made a very strong militant speech. And we said, 'Well, he had the courage to do that.' But that was all. The rhetoric prevailed but there was no action, no general strike, no attempt; the unions after all probably could have done a lot if they had taken the decision to go on general strike. But here again this principle of law and order prevailed: Hitler was called into power legally; they would say, 'We have no right to go on general strike because against whom do we strike? Not at a legal government.'

Q: Was there that same kind of confusion sometimes amongst the German Jews themselves? Didn't there come a time when you felt you may have to take some defensive action?

NW: Yes, but what is defensive? There was the hope that

the forces that had served the Republic like the police, for instance, the Prussian police, would remain loyal. There was also the question, 'What would the Army do?' Though we knew that they never loved the Weimar Republic but at least they would not consider this 'corporal' a serious contender for the leadership of Germany. And we still hoped that the intellectual leadership, the scientists, the professors, the artists and all that. But there was no, what we call, 'resistance.'

Q: What about the Jewish press? Weren't there outcries in the Jewish press? We're now obviously nearing the day where you had the first boycott on the first of April?

NW: Yes, when Robert Weltsch wrote this famous article, "Carry the Yellow Badge with Pride."

Q: You would read some of those Jewish publications and would there be outcries there? That at least there would have been a rallying?

NW: I would say that up' til April 1st there was still a rather courageous kind of reaction saying, 'It's a government which has been called into office, so we have to see what's what and we expect that our rights will be protected because under the Constitution we have these rights and we're entitled to them.' Because don't forget the Weimar Constitution was never abolished so therefore it was our assumption that even a government called into office under these conditions would abide by it.

Q: So when the first of April, 1933 happened do you still remember the day? In Berlin what was the actual outburst? Violence against shops? Shops closed down? Boycotted?

NW: This I must say came as a shock because this was something we had never experienced and never expected. And there was

coming and going which means that when the Nazis came out with their expression of 'trust me' progpaganda, especially fed here by Steven Weiss and this group, and then there were statements made by Jews in Germany of the German Jewish establishment, 'We don't need the help of the Jews in other countries, we can take care of ourselves.' That was the opinion. I don't know if that was for the record or because they really believed in that. Most probably at this time they really believed in that. So, it did not change the fact that on April 1st you had those violent outbreaks. But when 24 hours later the order was given that all this had to be stopped, people said, 'You see, they still believe in law and order.' In other words, it's only they want to give their revolutionary elements a way to let off and now things will go back to a more organized and legal kind of existence.

Q: Did you stay off the streets on that particular day?

NW: No, I went around because I wanted to see what's what. Because I couldn't believe what I saw.

Q: You actually saw rampaging crowds of Nazis?

NW: Well, the rampaging became more in November '38. What they did at this time was more that they boycotted, that they put up guards in front of business. You know, you very often had that situation, especially in Berlin, there was some kind of resistance. People said, 'I don't allow anybody to tell me from whom I'm going to buy and where I go.' And they went in. We had that situation.

Q: Where did you go in Berlin?

NW: Well, I saw that in my area where I used to live in the Alexanderplatz, Unter den Linden, Kurfürstendamm, all these areas, certainly there was a serious boycott; more in the

provinces, in the cities outside of Berlin where it was easily connected with violence and destruction. And in Berlin they were rather careful, but it was a serious boycott. There is no doubt it affected the Jewish business people very strongly.

Q: Now afterwards, were there more reports of once again of violence having been committed against Jews? So you would take them down in your register?

NW: Well, we did this also in order to find out. But, after the order was given that the boycott was to come to an end, the Germans as usual, very disciplined as they are, obeyed that and there was no boycott. What they did then was, unofficially, they tried to educate their people in their press, especially the militant press. And it was probably Streicher, it was his day on April 1st because he was in charge of the boycott. He probably was not very happy that he was called back; and had to obey also the order that that was it, because at this time the Nazis were very much concerned about the reaction of the foreign countries.

Q: So the Jewish press would come out still? Were there still Jewish papers available?

NW: They never stopped publishing.

Q: So in fact you had an outcry the next day against what had happened?

NW: Well, within limits. Because already it started that the Nazis stopped papers to appear, they disciplined them but the Jewish press still was in existence. Actually the Jewish press was in existence til November 9, 1938.

Q: You still remember reading them?

NW: Sure. There were, the number of subscriptions went up very strongly. The papers had to increase their volume.

Q: Which papers did you read?

NW: Well, there were all papers. There was the ZV Zeitung, Jüdische Rundschau, Israelisches Familienblatt. There was the Jüdische Gemeindeblatt of Berlin. There was a tremendous amount of literature to be digested, you couldn't read all of them. And there were the local papers.

Q: So when did you finally leave law school? You told us before that you had a final run-in there with some person.

NW: Well, I was invited by a man who was, you know, the Nazis appointed Commissars for all kinds of functions. Which means to legalize illegal activities. And one of these Commissars was a man named von Lefsky, I think. And he called me in and I went there and he, interestingly enough, when I came in, put his pistol on the table separating us. It was a very nice office within the university, I think it was the Chancellor's office even, and he asked me about a man with whom I had gone to school in the Oberrealschule. And he wanted to inquire what I knew about him, how close I was with him. I said the closest I was with him was that I sat next to him at school which was not my decision and that I hadn't heard from him since we passed the Abiturium. And since I said this in very clear terms he didn't question my statement. Then he said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I think that my studies are completed." "Why, isn't it so, according to the papers I have your father was a veteran and you're entitled to continue?" And I said, "I don't think it would be reasonable to continue." And he said, "Think it over again." And that was the end. He put his pistol into his pocket and said goodbye to me and that was it.

Q: So in the course of '33, after June '33, did you immediately then start working for one of the Jewish organizations after you now had finished your law studies?

NW: Yes, because in the course of events in the fall of 1933, we were able to bring together all kinds of groups of the Jewish Youth Movement who leaned towards our ideas and we created a central organization which we called the Ringbund Jüdischer Jugend. I became the so-called Secretary and we had an office in Berlin near the Börse. I started in connection with that to go around to address groups all over Germany. It was a message of, you know we didn't have an immediate solution to the problems surrounding us but more to give them moral support especially in the smaller communities. I went to Upper Silesia, West Germany and so I was really travelling around. I also at this time, something else came up. The man whose name I have mentioned before, Martin Sobotka, had become, had taken charge completely of all youth work of the Jewish community of Berlin. This was a very important position and he was highly qualified for that position. He was a very productive man in ideas. And one of his ideas was, since Jewish children had no chance to take a vacation in Germany in summer camps, to get Jewish communities outside of Germany interested. And the countries closest for that purpose were Denmark and Sweden. And he was able, with the help of the community and the help of the Jewish institutions in Denmark and Sweden, to establish a program where Jewish children were accomodated in summer camps in Denmark; and in Sweden they joined individual families. I remember that in the summer 1933 I took my first trip to Denmark which was quite an event accompanying these children who went especially from Berlin via Stettin which is now Szcechin and there a boat took us over to Copenhagen and then we went to Denmark, left a group in Denmark and went to Sweden. So that was my first excursion into the outside world after Hitler had taken power. And for the first time I was able to read papers and so, like

the 'Pariser Tageblatt' and other papers, so I became more aware of what they were thinking about events. And that was also interesting and to a certain point disappointing because most of them were written in a very militant tone with the expectation that the emigrants sitting in Paris and in Prague ought to be prepared to go back and take over again because the regime of Hitler could not last. What was important in this work was that the children had a very good time. The Jewish communities were so helpful and cooperative that it was really wonderful. The Jewish families they joined in Sweden were very warmhearted and nice to them. And to a certain extent, especially with the families in Sweden, people established relationships which later became helpful when the decision had to be made to leave Germany. And many of these Jewish Swedish families helped certain of those people to come to Sweden for good or at least to go there for a transitory period.

Q: So you did this work for which organization?

NW: For the Jewish community of Berlin.

Q: And were they, your organization, associated with the organization structure established by among other people Leo Baeck at the time, the Reichsvertretung, which was founded at this time?

NW: Well, the Reichsvertretung was actually a central organization of all Jewish communities and all Jewish institutions. It was for the first time, since Jewry organized in Germany, that they all had come together and realized that it was necessary to join hands and try to work in unity. Which was not always easy because there were certain local interests, certain religious interests--the Bavarians for instance, the Jewish communities always talked about the special position in Bavaria, like the Bavarians always talked about

their special political position in Germany. That was not always easy but especially with his very special personality, he who was my teacher and my mentor, whom I consider one of the greatest men of this time, was able to bind the people together on moral principles. So certain of the Jewish communities remained independent, but when it came to a mutual interest they were then sitting together and trying to work it out. So when I told you about the children's transports, that was completely within the competence of the Jewish Community.

Q: Now your work there continued throughout the next six years? At the Ringbund Jüdischer Jugend?

NW: No, because I couldn't. In 1935, the Nazis underwent their own political changes or ideological changes. They had the line, especially after the boycott days, to cool things, being aware of the fact that they needed, absurd as it sounds, they needed the help of the Jewish economic establishment for economical reasons. Jews were very strong in foreign trade. And since Germany suffered a tremendous shortage of foreign currency they were aware that throwing Jews out of the economic establishment would cause damage to their own economy. Therefore Jews were very active in trade, in import and export, and this certainly the Nazis tried to replace but they couldn't so fast. Therefore, especially in 1933, '34, '35, they, especially the Department of Economics, the Ministry of Economics was following the line that the activity of the Jews in this field was in the German interest. So things somehow cooled down which means that Jews became adjusted to life under these special conditions.

Q: So there was kind of a stand-off between the highly organized German-Jewish community and the Nazis who had applied pressure but had certainly not unleashed violence as openly?

NW: Let us express it in more practical terms. Jews had indirectly lost their right to German citizenship. So what? There were no elections held anyhow. There were no elections to the Reichstag or to the Landtag in Prussia or to the City Council and to the municipalities, so therefore, the loss of that right didn't mean anything in practical terms. Economically Jews to a certain extent also participated in the recovery of the economy. Which was also the recovery of the whole world. Since America got out of the recession, so did Europe.

Q: Your father profited as well?

NW: Business in general was not bad. Certainly there were changes of certain businesses, there were pressures in certain areas. But even big companies, big department stores, remained, still kept their Jewish ownership. Then there came a time, and our Youth Movement was one of the victims of that, when the Nazis became nervous that we were too allied with those who had declared their loyalty in former years to German cultural values which were not liked by the Nazis. One of the things they did then was to declare our organization illegal. They prohibited the activities of our organization. Of our organization and some others also. They didn't touch the Jewish War Veterans because Hindenburg was still alive so they were very careful. They played a very, very smart political game. They moved a more strident course only after they had strengthened their own positions. And certainly in 1935, their position was much stronger because they had thrown out already many of the nationalists who were known Nazis and they had brought in the Nazis. So that then the Nazis became the majority of the members of the cabinet and certainly things became tougher when Hindenburg died and Hitler became the Führer of the German Reich. So 1935, our organization ceased to exist officially. We still kept contact, we met "underground," there was no real activity anymore.

Q: You couldn't organize the children to go abroad in transports anymore?

NW: No, but we discussed very seriously the change of the political climate and what we should do in order to support those who ought to emigrate. We changed, we had learned our lesson somehow, and we came to the conclusion that those who wanted to leave should be supported. And one of the results of that was that out of our circle came the idea to establish an agricultural school for those who wanted to go to other countries but Palestine. That was a school which was established in Grossbreesen in Silesia which was conducted by a man, a professor in psychology called Bunde, I think of the University of Jena. And this school played a very important role because it prepared in all terms people who later went to South America, Australia, Kenya and also America.

Q: So these were the first preparations for people to train, organzied by Jews, where they could train in a particular field and maybe then get the opportunity to go?

NW: Yes, but before you had already the Hashira groups who also now were faced with the fact that more people than ever joined their ranks in order to get prepared to be Haluzim, in order to go to Palestine. Which was difficult because the British had put a price on immigration and only those who could bring in at least, I think, 10,000 pounds or something like that could get a certificate to enter Palestine. The others had to wait for a certificate which was granted under the rules of Britain not to offend the Arabs. And this number was very small. So this was through '35, and then in '35 I also discussed very carefully the future plans with my parents and with my then girlfriendwho I had met in the Youth Movement.

Q: What was her name?

NW: Rosa Mandelbrot. She was the daughter of parents who had come from the East. And the problem was that she therefore was stateless. So she was affected by the fact that the Nazi government didn't want to give her permission, a 'Lebenspermit', it was very difficult for her to get one. She was the secretary in a very important firm, very highly qualified, it was the Tietz concern. She was aware of the fact that the difficulties would be greater and we discussed the question to get married and to get out of Germany, if possible. With the idea that eventually we could this way help our parents. Because we felt a responsibility not only to save ourselves but also to save our families.

Q: In these three years would you say that generally your life was overshadowed by the events that the Nazis were, certainly after '35, after the Nuremberg Laws, 15th of September, 1935, would you say that in those three years there was personal gratification or was your whole life so cramped by now by the Nazis?

NW: It didn't feel cramped, no. For instance, for a short time, when I came to the conclusion that I had to do something to leave Germany, or at least to attempt to leave Germany, I joined a firm in Karlsruhe, which is in southwest Germany, and they were dealing in metals; Berg, Strauss, Waldemar, Kuttner was the name. That was for a short time, and then I got an offer by a bigger firm in Berlin and they really had big connections to foreign countries; the name was Rawak and Grünfeld. That was a firm that had been established in Upper Silesia and they were mainly dealing in iron ore, manganese, and so on.

Q: And you joined them as what?

NW: They called it a volunteer, a kind of apprentice. With

the hope to use their connections to foreign countries because they were deeply involved in imports and exports. And to have a chance with their help to eventually get out.

Q: So you wouldn't describe those years as completely unhappy in your life. You still felt there were certain choices, you were still looking?

NW: Unhappy in one respect. To see that the Nazis became stronger and that the world was so stupid not to react to that. And whether it was the moment when Hitler marched into the Rhineland and the French wanted to mobilize but the British stopped them from doing so, or in the other things, you know that was the only depressing thing.

Q: And you saw that the British stopped them?

NW: At least that's what I understand from history. And also that you know the Nazis were smart enough to do certain of their things when, say, the French government had just toppled and there was nobody at the helm of the government. So this is what aggravated us and also, for instance, when you had the events in Spain, and Franco with the help of the Germans and Italians was brought in to power. And the Germans for the first time exercised their ability to conduct warfare from the air. The question was, 'What are the others doing? Why don't they retaliate?'

Q: So you would follow that in the newspapers and then at the time form an opinion that it seemed kind of a sad state of affairs?

NW: Yes, because when you live under a totalitarian regime, after a certain while what is a lie and what can be believed, in other words, in what is in the paper, and you come to a conclusion that the contrary to what you read is true. And

from that, don't forget you could still listen to the Radio Strasbourg which was in German or, if you understood enough English, you could listen to the BBC. Radio was a very powerful instrument to check on the truth of events and information. Our organization had already been dissolved and we knew that we couldn't do any active work anymore, so what we were doing was just advising and helping people, steering them to the necessary organizations.

Q: You joined Rawak and Grünfeld in the Summer of '35, not only taking up an apprenticeship, but also with the view of maybe this being the one way of organizing to leave Germany?

NW: And also, since I wanted to get married, and under the peculiar German laws a stateless person could not marry a formally German citizen without the permission of the government, which was not prepared to give this permission. So we thought it would be necessary to get out of Germany.

Q: In this firm, what was their main business and what were your responsibilities?

NW: Their main business was trade in iron ore, manganese and all sorts of metals. It was a Jewish firm, well established, started originally in Upper Silesia and had extended its activities to Berlin and had very close connections in France and Sweden. Also had done some business with Russia at a certain time.

Q: And where were your offices?

NW: In Hardenbergstrasse, near Kudamm, what is now in West Berlin. Now, in between were the Olympic Games which Germany tried to show the best face possible. At this time you didn't hear about anti-semitic acts, you didn't hear about strong anti-semitic actions. It was just that the government had

manipulated already not only the minds but also the politics, so everything in the newspapers tried to paint the nicest picture possible of Germany. And actually one had the feeling that the public bought that to a certain extent because I remember the brotherhood which was displayed in photos between the American athletes and especially Mr. Brundage whose role I found simply abominable at this time. And since everything was so clean and well organized and so festive, people certainly came away from Germany with the best possible impression.

Q: Did you attend any of the events?

NW: I attended one event. Interesting enough it was the event when Jessie Owens won the, one of his races. Hitler actually did not shake hands with him. I went to school with a man who I knew had nationalistic leanings but I did not know that he belonged to the Nazis. He was fair, I was even in his house and we were on good terms. He was a schoolmate in the Oberrealschule. And when I came to the Reichssport, all of a sudden I saw him and he was in the uniform of the Wach- und Schliessgesellschaft which is some kind of 'Brinks,' I would say. I later found out that the members of the SS had been put into this uniform in order to supervise the audience. He was very friendly to me and asked me about my whereabouts and I didn't realize that this was part of his SS functions. But this is what he did, this is what he was. And I think also from my experience it was very well organized what the German had done. Hitler was there and Schirach, the leader of the sports movement was there and some member of the Cabinet. And there were hundreds, thousands of foreigners at the same time, so then what they did in Berlin, since there was not enough hotel rooms available for all visitors, private apartments had been made available to the guests. Now, if the people who had made these apartments available say to someone from Sweden, he had to show the swastika and the Swedish flag, that was part of the game. Whether the people wanted

to or not. That was in '36.

Q: Now, when you were working for Rawack and Grünfeld, did you ever travel abroad for them?

NW: No, because this was the prerogative of the executives. But I was in contact with them and I raised that question and they said, 'Well it's not easy but let's see because to a certain extent we are all interested more or less to find our way out.'

Q: The employees were primarily Jewish?

NW: Yes, but it was slowly changing over which means I was one of the last to be hired. After that, no Jews were hired anymore. Whenever there was a position available it went to a non-Jew.

Q: Now would there be discussion among the people you worked together with about the Nuremburg laws which had just been passed in '35, Spetember '35? Didn't those indirectly affect you, your daily schedule coming to work, etc?

NW: The Nuremburg Laws didn't affect any of my firends or myself because we were anyhow moving within a circle of Jews and our association was between Jewish girls and boys and so we had no problems in this respect. But to indicate how conditions were, when I was with Rawack and Grünfeld for the first two years in 1935 and '36, when they had their Christmas parties everybody attended and was invited. There was socializing. Everybody was aware there was a certain difference between us but it was in a friendly atmosphere to such an extent that the head of the National Socialist trustee, put by the party into business, he then exploded, and it became known obviously to other people that he didn't like it and from this moment onward it was made clear that this could

not be tolerated because Christmas had to be celebrated by the non-Jews only because this was a Christian and German holiday. But it was still, through 1936, and it was not considered problematical. You didn't have it everywhere, again Berlin was a special place, but at least people tolerated each other especially when they were working together. And in work it didn't affect people because most of the heads of the departments, whether it was the financial department, the export department or so, were Jewish and the non-Jews accepted this. They accepted instructions from the heads of the departments.

Q: Now that the Jewish organization that you worked for had been disolved what was your activity now into the Jewish community? Was your father continuing to work for the Jewish War Veterans?

NW: Well, the Jewish War Veterans organiation continued to exist until November '38, but what we did was to keep together socially. Instead of Heimabende, we had birthday parties where we discussed things and shared the latest information. And also attended special events; concerts for instance, the Jewish Kulturbund became active, we went to lectures. There was a lot of cultural activity. As I told you before, not only the giants of our life like Martin Buber and Leo Baeck participated but also others. There were seminars set up and there was a thirst for Jewish knowledge and all things which helped us to get an answer to 'what are we and where are we going?' And by bringing the Jewish values into our consciousness would make us safer within ourselves. And that was in my opinionn absolutely successful.

Q: Was this a kind of night affair where you would go secretly at night?

NW: Mostly night.

Q: You didn't have to be scared that the Nazis would bust in? Or were you too well organized, hidden away?

NW: No, there was a time when you had to register and they'd send their delegate to listen. Most of the time they didn't listen because they didn't understand so they'd ask for a transcript. So sometimes they would come and fall asleep or they wouldn't come and they'd say, 'let me know what happened.' So all this took place under supervision but it took place.

Q: So one could describe this kind of thing as a state of apartheid?

NW: I remember that sometimes when the chairman would open a meeting he would greet Dr. so-and-so, and the representative of the Gestapo. But then after a certain while it became too unpleasant for them and they asked not to be mentioned. Because for the chairman it was actually a way to make people aware that they are being supervised. And it was not out of courtesy, it was just to let the people know to be careful of what they were saying, what they were asking. But then they asked not to be greeted especially.

Q: And where would you hold these meetings?

NW: There were the rooms of the congregation. Then one of the places where we had a lot of lectures were at the beautiful home of the B'nai Brith lodgers. One of them was a very nice building at Kleiststrasse. And Kurfürstenstrasse. And there were big beautiful rooms which were also used for social occasions. And it depended on how many people you expected.

Q: And you still went to synagogue every week?

NW: Sure. Services existed. As I said, life was so active. Jewish life had become a mass movement.

Q: You would congregate every Friday evening for the Jewish service and those were the important times of the week?

NW: That was one of the activities of my father, that he was a vice president of that synagogue. They called it 'liberal' synagogue but in our terms it was conservative because he was knowledgable, etc., and so he was active in this respect also.

Q: So with your girlfriend you had become quite close and you were thinking of getting married in '35, '36?

NW: Well, we had a long, long procedure because of her situation of being stateless. Then eventually with the help of a lawyer we could overcome the obstacles and in the summer of '38, I got the permission of the German government to marry someone who was stateless because she, by doing this, acquired German citizenship, which they certainly didn't like. We got married in the summer of 1938.

Q: Was that a very private affair or did you have a lot of people?

NW: No, in the synagogue, actually in the biggest synagogue we had in Berlin. Then as I told you, 1938 was the year when we saw the first violent reactions. In the field of economics, I think it also had to do with the fact that Schacht who had protected somehow not the Jewish interests, but the interests of Germany by leaving Jews in certain functions, was replaced. And the Nazification of life, politically and economically increased very much. So we saw during the summer of 1938, certain violent actions: stores were painted, then they came with the requirement that Jewish stores had to show their

name in big letters. First in letters, then in big letters so that people could differentiate between Jewish stores and non-Jewish stores. And that was somehow a forerunner of the events you had then in November. So things were a little bit touch and go and there was even the question whether we could have the wedding in the synagogue. But then also, as it often is, probably the Party had pushed ahead and the government didn't like it, there was a certain reaction in the foreign press, so the hotheads were called back. So we were able to get married in the synagogue in Oranienburgerstrasse.

Q: Did you have a large family wedding?

NW: No, we had the family in our apartment. So in those days you didn't go out to...

Q: That was what I was going to ask you. Did you move freely around Berlin?

NW: We did move freely but we would not spend much money to bring together a big social affair. We needed it. We just wanted to be together with family and friends and the apartment was good enough. As a matter of fact, we even went on our honeymoon into an area which I had seen before, we liked very much, they call it the Switzerland of Saxonia. When we didn't make reservations, it was not necessary but there you found all over signs posted "Juden Unerwünscht," which means, 'Jews not Desired.' But those who meant it kept their signs outside and those who didn't mean it kept their signs behind the door so you couldn't see them. But at least in order to abide by the wishes of the Party they had posted them and they could always say it wasn't their fault if no one saw it.

Q: Could you go in Berlin freely to the theatre? Did you

ride the subway freely?

NW: We could. These restrictions came only during the war. You could go to the opera. Certainly you didn't want to go to a certain place because what was offered there we didn't want to see. But the opera was different. But you could still, if you wanted to, go to movies, opera, wherever you wanted. But as I said, you didn't do it. Certain people might have done it, I don't know.

Q: But can you remember the summer of '38, when you were getting married, it was probably a happy time despite it all, you were planning a life together that was going to have a future however difficult it may look, that you were looking forward to?

NW: Yes, and after coming back from our honeymoon I continued to work, my wife continued to work, and then we could feel slowly the progress of the restrictions which were prior to the November event. In my opinion, the November events were only the outcome of a certain development which had started in the spring, 1938. We were living at this time and we were married, we were living with my parents in Frankfurterstrasse which was the eastern part of Berlin.

Q: You had moved?

NW: We had moved to a bigger apartment, a nicer apartment because things were nice--well, not nice-- economically feasible. Then in the course of these further restrictions people were, especially Jews, were thrown out more and more from Jewish firms because the process of Aryanization, which means handing over ownership from Jewish owners to non-Jewish owners, accelerated with great speed. You could see in the papers everyday that let us say, the ownership of this big corporation or this factory has changed, and this was like a daily bulletin

because this was now the policy of the Party, especially the Party, to get Jews out of economic life because they had already gotten out of political life. But still it was not quick enough in their opinion. Emigration was promoted by the Jewish organization, there was a special organization called Hilfsverein, they tried to help people to obtain visas for South American countries, whetever, and to support those who had not the means to emigrate, with the payment of passage and so. It was also a problem that, since Germany had no foreign currency, you had to use German ships and you could only use a carrier which had accepted the German mark. And in October 1938, I was called in by the then Jewish head of the personnel department who said, 'I'm sorry, but the Arbeitsfront,' which was the Labor Front, 'has put a squeeze on us telling us in no uncertain terms that we have to get rid of our Jewish employees.' So I was called in by the head of the personnel department who was Jewish. Son of a famous rabbi from Upper Silesia, Max Kopschein was his name, and he told me the Labor Front had given them an ultimatum that the Jews had to leave the firm. So there I got the pink slip because he said the Jews had to be released or they would close the firm. They had that power at this time. So I had been aware of this possibility. That summer looked already like it that Jews were thrown out more and more from jobs. In connection with that I had thought with my then girlfriend, no, I was already married, that something ought to be done to give me a certain kind of vocational occupation to make emigration easier. And I was advised, the Jewish community in Berlin did a very good job in this respect, that it would be worthwhile to learn welding which is something, a skill which you can acquire in a rather short time and it is in demand in almost all countries. The Jewish community in Berlin had set up such a course and I started with that soon after I left Rawack and Grünfeld. It was a course that was supposed to run two or three months. We were approximately 25 students, it was a course in oxygen welding, 'autogenes' welding, not

electric welding. We had non-Jewish teachers.

Q: Where was this school in Berlin?

NW: In the southeast, I think Admiralstrasse, but I'm not sure. This was a good course. As a matter of fact, I remember that one day when we were working someone of the German Chamber of Trade came to see what we were doing because they accepted it and supervised it indirectly. Interestingly enough, there was also a final test because we got a certificate of having taken these courses and passed them. And the test was scheduled for November 9. On November 9th we were very much on the alert after the events in Paris after Mr. vom Rath had been shot. And since Hitler had brought his fellows together in Munich in the Hofbräuhaus to celebrate the event of the Putsch of 1923, we were waiting for some kind of indication of what would be the answer to that because when Gustloff was assasinated in Switzerland by Frankfurter nothing had happened. But we were given to understand that the Nazis would not tolerate a second case of that. And when Grynszpan shot vom Rath in Paris we were aware that the Nazis would retaliate. So we were listening on November 9 very attentively to whatever he said. Nothing was said and that electrified the situation even more then.

Q: Were you listening to Goebbels?

NW: No, Goebbels did not speak on that evening. I think it was Hitler only. And then on the morning of November 10 I was advised, one of our neighbors said the synagogues are burning. And the mob during the night had started to smash windows.

Q: Did you hear that from your apartment?

NW: It didn't happen in our area. In our area it happened

later because they went about it very systematically and they couldn't do the job immediately, so it took some time. So I met with a friend to look at it and sure enough, I saw it and couldn't believe it. I saw, for instance, the synagogue in Fasanenstrasse, which was a beautiful edifice, which actually had been consecrated by Wilhelm II by his appearance. I saw this in ruins but what perturbed me much more was to listen to the remarks of the German people standing around there.

Q: So there was actually a crowd of Germans standing around?

NW: Sure, and they saw the fire engines. The fire engines only protected the buildings next to them. When I, for instance, came to Fasanenstrasse, most of that was already burned out and was in ruins. I then went over to the synagogue of Rabbi Prinz which was the Friedenstemple on Kurfürstendamm. And that was the same. And somehow the rostrum from which Prinz had preached, delivered his sermons for many, many years was still standing. And I had very special thoughts because what Prinz had preached in these years were not always accepted. You know, he was one of those who had very strongly advocated emigration soon after that in a very courageous way. And then I went to Oranienburgerstrasse and there I saw the synagogue where I had gotten married. And the flames came out from the tremendous dome over the, we had some kind of a Jewish parliament in that synagogue but the dome was standing. And the fire engines, all they did was see to it that the flames should not...

Q: And at all these synagogues there were crowds of Germans standing around?

NW: Definitely. They saw what was going on. Some actually you could see had shame in their eyes. But I heard also and, as I say, this perturbed me tremendously, and something broke in me at this time. Who had still believed in all these things

I had been brought up with, the idea of a civilization to which Germans had contributed, which Goethe and Schiller and Lessing and Emmanuel Kant, these remarks which were very ugly.

Q: Anti-semitic remarks?

NW: Oh yes.

Q: By people who looked respectable? And this was during the morning of the tenth?

NW: Oh yes. For instance, they said, 'Now this is the right place where they can talk to Jehovah', or things like that and much uglier than that. And I must say when I had seen that I realized deep in me that what I had fought for and what I could believe in had collapsed. My belief in the goodness of the German people in spite of everything. My belief that all this what the heroes of German culture and German philosophy, the people of Dichter and Denker, of the poets and the thinkers had done, had obviously been in vain. And that here, under the protection of the government, an act was committed that was simply a challenge to civilization and humanity.

Q: During that morning when you actually walked around Berlin, did you actually see Nazis arresting Jews or had that happened during the night?

Q: No, of this we became aware later. Now, since the test was scheduled I went to that. I was warned not to go to that because the people would know that Jews are congregating there but I said, 'Well, we are taking the course so I'll go there.' Certainly the German masters, the German teachers were there and all of us were there just to take the test. And we took the test and I think I never got the certificate but at least we passed it. And the moment I wanted to leave this place, my wife came and said, 'You are not going home because we

heard from all sources that they are taking men into custody.' To the same extent as they had done before with the Polish action. I'll tell you a little bit about that in a moment. 'You do not come home, I've arranged already for you to join Mrs. so-and-so ',who was the mother of a good friend who was living in America at this time, he was one of our youth leaders, Hans Kellerman was his name. And the mother, she was a widow, had lived in this apartment alone. And so my wife very rightly said the Nazis would not suspect because they were only interested in taking men into custody so this seemed to be a safe spot. I didn't want to do it because I didn't want to leave my family alone. But my wife assured me that my father also had found a place with a sister who was married to a non-Jew and who would certainly not be subject to this kind of treatment. So I went there and spent the night. Then another friend joined me there. All of a sudden we had the same thought, the same idea, the next day we went to find out what else had happened. We made our way to the headquarters of the Jewish community which had been closed but not damaged. And I went up to the office of my friend Martin Sobotka who was there. And we exchanged information, what we have seen, experienced. And certainly the shock was very, very deep. And the question came up: 'What's to do?' And the only way now was to try to find a way out. After a couple of days when all this was over, when they stopped taking men into custody, I went home and lived with my wife.

Q: You didn't move around Berlin freely anymore after that?

NW: Well, yes. You could move around. There was no restriction. But we had to be aware that if they would recognize you they might take you into custody, who knows? But you know, with the German police it was very simple. They had the order to take Mr. X into custody and they wouldn't touch anybody else. Because under the order they only had to take Mr. X. That was law and order and the Germans were very disciplined and strict to the law. The police would just do that because it wasn't Gestapo, it was the police.

Q: Did you have friends who were taken in at the time that you knew of? That were taken in during that pogrom that you had either worked together with, collegues from Rawack and Grünfeld, or members of the family?

NW: You know, interestingly enough, before this happened, a couple weeks before, the Gestapo had made an 'action' and all Jews who owned property worth more than 5,000 or 10,000 marks, I don't know, had to register. And after a short time we found out that in Berlin they were only interested in those who had registered as property owners for more than 10,000 marks. So we more or less knew that those who were not that wealthy would more or less be safe and we went back to our places. And certainly the so-called 'action' was finished.

Now you have to understand one thing, the November event had something to do with something that had happened before, that was in October. When all of a sudden the Polish government decided that they would not renew passports of citizens living abroad of Jewish descent. That means that Jews with Polish passports in Berlin would have been declared stateless from one day to the other.

Q: And had to return to Poland thereby.

NW: No, no. But they said they would not renew the passport. The German government intervened with the Poles and the Poles

said nothing doing. So therefore, what the Germans did in retaliation against this obnoxious attitude of the Polish government was to say we don't want to be loaded with stateless people. And rounded them up and brought them to the Polish border and pushed them over the border. And there then happened something that had to do with the vom Rath accident in Paris because a boy who was living in Paris, Hirschel Grynszpan, was informed that his parents in Hannover had been deported from Hannover to Zbaszyn, to the border. And you know this was very tragic because the Poles didn't want to accept them and the Germans didn't want to take them back so there was pushing and...

Q: Did you know that at the time? Was that something you had discussed?

NW: I was on that evening when it happened... two uncles of my wife were taken into custody and were pushed over the border and nobody knew where they were. So I met in the evening with my friend Martin Sobotka and his wife and then we were thinking what would be the next step? Then to a cafe which was no problem. He called because he found out that somebody was looking for him. And when he called back he said, 'We do not go home, there's work to be done.' 'What is the work?' 'We have been informed that there are still transports coming from all over Germany via Berlin. And most of the people are without food, without--because in the haste of which they were taken they could hardly take anything along. Because in the provinces, the outskirts of Berlin, things were always rougher than in Berlin itself.' And at the same night he called together other members of the Youth Movement, our movement, other movements.

Q: This was in October?

NW: Yes, in October and it didn't take long and twenty, thirty,

fifty people were available and we organized some help squads and stationed them at the railway stations where the trains were expected. And we could do that without interference by the police or the Gestapo because we told them this was just an order, 'You couldn't do the work so let us do the work.' On the same night, the Jewish community went into action. They prepared the food, clothing, whatever it was. So we started, I was assigned to the railway station Berlin Schlesischer Bahnhof where the trains came from Kiel and Dortmund and people came and certainly they were happy to see Jewish faces. Because these trains didn't leave immediately, there was time. So we gave them paper, we had prepared paper and postcards and pencils and all that. We said, 'Write a note to whomever you want and we'll post it.' That's what we did during the night and you know the tragedy of this was that at the same time that the trains were rolling already towards the east, other trains came back because the Poles had pushed these people back. The people we had provided for going to the east came from northern Germany or western Germany, the people who had been pushed back and came on the other side of the railroad station, for instance had originated in Vienna. They were just packed into trains and wherever they went, didn't matter, the trains went, so the people didn't know what to do. So this had to be organized and in this respect the Jewish community did under the circumstances a terrific job. And then when we saw all, really it was amazing how it worked. How we could do all this? Someone said, well here it is the people who had Polish nationality and most of the children didn't know a word of Polish because they were born and raised in Germany. And there were very good friends of ours besides the uncles who said, 'Now it's a question of what will be next.' And that was then the November event. Because Hirschel Grynszpan heard about the destiny of his parents who had come from Hannover and were pushed over the border, when he heard this, in his depression or anger, went and shot vom Rath. And later the parents of Grynszpan who

were pushed out on that night via the border, later went to Russia and survived the war. I met them a couple of years later in Belsen. There's a picture I have saying goodbye to them before they went to Israel. And asking me, because at that time a campaign had started to smear Hirschel Grynszpan, saying that he had homosexual relations with vom Rath. That was the event of November.

Q: And the parents were nice when you met them?

NW: Very nice. He was a tailor, you know, an old man who had carved out a living. But he had brought up his children under difficult conditions. And Hirschel had left because he saw there was no future for him so he had gone to Paris. But in Paris he didn't have too much of a chance because he didn't know the language. I think he had an uncle.

Q: Yes, I remember I read some of that story. He had an uncle who put him up and who wasn't all that helpful.

NW: Yes, he wasn't too nice. He couldn't do too much. So anyway, I remained in contact with my friend Sobotka and his office became some kind of, the only Jewish, or one of the few offices functioning in Berin. Because the.. all the other administrative buildings had been closed for the time being and then we became aware slowly of what actually had happened. Not only about the burning of the synagogues, the destruction of the stores, the fact that they had entered especially outside of Berlin, the apartments and had beaten people but also at the same time they had entered the offices of the newspapers and of the organizations and that all Jewish organizational life had come to an end. With the exception of the Kulturbund, they gave them the order to start working again within the next few days. Why, I don't know. When we were in contact and pondering the question what to do next, we became ware all of a sudden, we were not clear what had happened to the

people who were taken into custody. Because this was something that certainly frightened people tremendously. And then a couple of days later we got the answer. When people had been picked up on one of the railway stations coming from the concentration camp of Oranienburg and he told people that he was from outside of Berlin, that he had been released. He looked terrible, shorn hair, and his clothing was in disarray. So the man who met him had the good sense to bring him to the office of the Jewish community in the Rosenstrasse. And then we became aware that people from our area especially had been taken to the concentration of Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen, and that the people there had begun to release those who were veterans of World War I. What then was done under the leadership of Sobotka, certainly in cooperation with the heads of the board, was to establish some kind of help service. With the permission of the police, we posted people at the railway station Friedrichstrasse in Berlin where the trains came in from Oranienburg. And the people who were spotting people who had no hair or when they disinfected the clothing, the clothing looked completely worn, then they took them out and said, 'Come with me, we have a place where you can rest up, we'll give you something to eat where you can contact your families.' And this we organized and in a couple of days there was a functioning service which was terrific. And especially, I became a witness often when these men made their first telephone calls to their relatives and that was the first word they heard from them. And we could almost hear and surmise how the people on the other end broke down because that was the first word that their people were alive. And we had medical service. People came out there for November, the cold had a terrible effect on the people. Terrible wounds, frozen toes and so on. So medical health was required. Serious cases were taken to a Jewish hospital. Then we were also able to somehow organize that these people in special compartments of the German railroad were taken home to certain places. For example, if they came from Westphalia, we were

able, with the cooperation of the railway people and the police, to give them a compartment of 20, 25 people who were there, separated from the others, and could be amongst themselves. And in the middle of that work, Martin Sobotka came to me and said, 'Listen, I just got a call from the head of the board next to Leo Baeck, this was Otto Hirsch, and they told me that an offer had just arrived from England, that they are willing, on account of the events, to accept 10,000 Jewish children. And would you be willing to help them because the social workers know very well social work but they are not familiar with the technical aspects of transportation, so would you be willing to do that?' I discussed it with him, I discussed it with my wife, and I accepted the offer and joined; in this respect, it was still in those days the Reichvertretung, which later became the Reichvereinigung. I was in charge of all technical arrangements in connection with......

Q: Where did you have your office?

NW: In Kurfürstendamm, overlooking the Kurfürstedamm. And it was certainly a thing which was not easy because of the rush. In the attempt to help as quickly as possible, people had gone a little bit astray. On the other hand, you had to follow the instructions of the German authorities who wanted strict control of over who was leaving. And the British didn't issue special passports but gave permits, they called it, permit cards which were stamped by the Home Office. There was an organization set up in London under the leadership of Lola Warburg who himself was a refugee, but member of the Warburg family. And they had their office in the center of the immigration work in London, the Bloomsbury House. So we were able to prepare things to such an extent that we could send out the first transports almost in January.

Q: You were working around the clock? Did you have assistants?

NW: There was no nine-to-five, that's for sure. We all tried to organize it somehow. The head of that whole department of German emigration was a lady who had been an assistant to the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Sewering. Her name was Mrs. Rosenheim. She was a Regierungsrätin, which you don't have the equivalent of in America. She had started in emigration under different conditions but now all of a sudden had blossomed into these thousands of cases which had to be handled. In February, I went for the first time myself in order to watch what was going on and what had to be done to improve conditions. We were told a certain way which we had selected via the Dutch border had become very difficult, so I myself wanted to see and I certainly witnessed when we reached the border, the SS there, the border control separated, we had a complete wagon of 200 or 300 or more children, it was a complete wagon. They separated us from the other train and they started to search and re-search the luggage and every piece of paper they could find. To such an extent that we lost the train that was going via Holland and England. Luckily we were in touch with the Dutch Jewish organizations. When they heard about it they came over to the border and they gave these SS men hell. It's very interesting that at this time they could still dare to do that. So at the end luckily there was another train eight hours later going to the same direction and we could arrange for the children to go. From that moment onward we had to change our whole operation. From this I had learned that this border couldn't be used, that this crosspoint couldn't be used.

Q: You found this on the first trip?

NW: There were other ways and means. We also used ships going from Hamburg through Southampton or via west Germany, Cologne. So in the course of that, I went to England myself a couple of times. We got special passports to come back

because there was already a policy, the passports had to be stamped of Jewish owners with a "J," which by the way originiated not in Germany but in Switzerland. There a man who was in charge of the police gave that suggestion. And if somebody crossed the border back into Germany with a passport with a sign "J" he was taken into custody immediately. So we got special letters of protection from the Ministry of Interior. You know, it was always very intersting how the psychology worked. On these transports when I went to London, I flew back. Some took the train but I flew back because it was faster and it was a saving in other respects. When I landed in Berlin Airport, at the Tempelhof and they saw the passport and I let them look at it, have a good look. And they looked at me and then when they were starting to ask the next question I took my letter out with the swastika and all that and the stamp of the Minister and then all of a sudden this they hadn't seen before. And I had a certain satisfaction that they thought they had a new case but it was not good enough for them. This work was done until the war broke out.

Q: Until the end of September 1939? How many times do you think you travelled out?

NW: I travelled I think four or five times. Also to improve things, to talk over things with the people on the other side. How to make it smoother, what to do and so on. There were many many problems, tremendous problems. But at least we worked, and we knew that we worked against time. It had to be done and we had hoped to get the 10,000 children out.

Q: And how would you select the children?

NW: That was done by the welfare boards locally. You know, it was a very difficult decision by the parents to let the children go. Many of the children didn't want that. Many of the parents didn't want that. They felt 'If we have a

destiny let us share it.'

Q: Did you have contact with the parents or were you in the central office?

NW: No, I was in the central office. The only contact with the parents I had was that it was my task that when the transports were ready to go to address the parents. And we had also with the cooperation of the railway people, we got a special room in Berlin, Schlesischer Bahnhof, where the train started to go. And there I had to address the parents and tell them that they should say goodbye. That under the instructions of the Gestapo they should not make an appearance on the tracks because they didn't want that whole commotion. You can understand, you never knew if there was foreign press taking pictures and all that and they were very aware of public image. So this was certainly heartbreaking to convince them that it was in the interest of the children and in their own interest not to circumvent this advice.

Q: And how old were these children?

NW: They were between 12 and 18. And actually they came from all parts of Germany. They also came from Austria interestingly enough because it was not under German jurisdiction. And we were able to get out approximately 6,000 of these children. Then the war broke out. And also we had certain transports that went to Sweden. I accompanied also transports to Sweden where most of those children joined the Hashara center to be educated for transfer or emigration to Palestine.

Q: But most of these transports went very smoothly. Maybe you could tell us about the two incidents that you had referred to earlier?

NW: Well, as I say we had so many problems. One of those, and I like to remember those about which you could have a good laugh. During these transports, parents gave their children all kinds of goods to take to a foreign country. Valuable goods because money couldn't be taken out, the limit was ten marks which was almost nothing. But you could take out Leicas, cameras and so on. So children came with all sorts of valuable things and the British had made us understand that there had to be a stop to this because after the children reached England, there were all of a sudden hundreds of Leicas thrown on the market and the economy was affected and they didn't like that. So, certainly you had to have the cooperation of the parents but you also understood that was the only way to give these kids something which they could convert into money. On one of those tranports I accompanied we found a kid who had taken along a violin. And on inspection it turned out that it was a very valuable violin, not a Stratavarius but a valuable violin. So we were a little bit concerned. And I asked the boy, 'Do you know how to play the violin?' And he, being a real Berliner said, 'Sure, sure, no doubt.' So I said, 'Listen, you might have to prove it.' And he said, 'Let them come!' We came to Harwich and in general the British customs officials and the immigration officials were very, very helpful, cooperative and nice. And so we came and certainly when the boy passed with his violin, the customs official stopped the boy when he saw it was a very valuable violin, he asked me since I was accompanying the boy. And I said, 'It's probably a violin the parents gave the boy because he likes to play.' So the customs official asked the boy and I helped him somehow in the translation: 'Do you play?' And he assured him yes. So the customs official said to him, 'So please let us hear it.' And I didn't realize immediately what had happened but that boy started to play and within a half of a minute or so the customs official and everybody around him stood to attention and didn't move until I realized this boy had started to play 'God Save the King.' And certainly it was a holy

moment for them, they didn't move, the officials. That boy didn't stop, he played all three verses. He didn't stop and he could have played until today he enjoyed it so tremendously. After that, there was a moment of silence, the customs official turned to me and said, 'Thank you very much,' and that was it!

Q: Could you recount the other story in order to show the kind of tricks that in fact you had to play. And could you say whether you were all the time tricking here around a little bit? Were there bad occasions where you lost children?

NW: You know, when you are under pressure and you are exposed to a certain situation --I noticed that later during my time in Auschwitz-- that you always somehow find an answer or try to find an answer which is out of the ordinary. For instance, we were under strict instructions only to bring children only up to the age of 18 into England because that was the decision of the Cabinet and of the Home Office, that was the dividing line. We crossed from Flushing into Harwich on the boat crossing the Channel and we were checking the permits and rearranging the list in order to make the passage easier for immigration and the officials. And all of a sudden amongst the cards I found one which indicated that the boy was over 18 years old. I checked it again and realized that it was true. So we said, 'Let's ask the boy what happened.' So we called the boy who had gone to sleep already, we had a room there with cabins. And he confirmed that the date on the card was right, that he had passed his 18th birthday. This boy had been taken into custody in November, had been taken to Dachau, had come back from the concentration camp with his hair cut and looked abominable. So the question was what to do? So together with my friends, with the staff we had, we discussed what to do and the result was to try to sell the immigration officials the idea that the police had made a mistake and that he was one year younger. So at the same time a friend

of mine who was a youth leader and knew child psychology well said, 'Well we also have to try to convince that fellow that he is one year younger because otherwise he will be in trouble.' So then we really brainwashed him somehow and every half hour he was awakened and asked 'When were you born?' Until he himself believed it was the wrong date and not the right date. We landed in Harwich, the immigration officials checked the papers and sure enough picked out that case immediately and I knew what was coming, had waited for that moment and he asked 'What's that to bring over somebody over 18 years?' I said, 'No, that must be a mistake' And I played the innocent bystander. And he said, 'Why?' And I said, 'It could have been that when the rush was on the German police just made a mistake.' The immigration officials didn't buy that and said, 'Usually German police and Prussian police especially hardly make any mistakes.' So then I played out the game and said, 'Alright, ask the boy.' And I helped in translation and the boy as he had been taught during all the nights said he was born on such and such a date which was the wrong date. The immigration official looked at the boy, looked at me, there was a pause, and I knew and realized that he knew very well that the boy was lying, and that I was lying, but he said, 'Alright, I'll take your word for it.' And that saved his life because otherwise if he had gone back to Germany he probably would not have survived.

Q: So these transports continued until?

NW: Until the war broke out. As a matter of fact the last transport went at the end of August. I was ready to join them again and when I saw the political development I decided at the last moment not to go with the transport. Because after all, I had my family in Berlin. My wife was expecting our first child. So the transport went and I did not go and that was the end of the work. We still were able to bring some young people out, very few, after the beginning of the

war to Denmark and Sweden. I didn't go with these transports, I had gone with them before. Also a transport to Italy interestingly enough. But in general, the children emigration had come to an end. I then was asked by the head, the managing director, Paul Eppstein to take over the work for the vocational traning schools which had been established all over Germany. That was my work then from 1939 to the summer of 1941.

I then realized with the developments, when the deportations started, that all work, there was nothing to be done to help people, that we were to a certain extent nothing but some kind of an accomplice of the things the Gestapo wanted from us and I lost complete interest in that and told at this time the people in the Reichsvertretung that I thought it was time to--if you wanted to go underground, it means you voluntarily join the Forced Labor Force and wait for things to develop.

Q: If we could go to the vocational training schools. That was of course a particular development within the Reichsvertretung, to the extent that here was the stress put to educate people in something. And obviously you could no longer educate them to become lawyers, go to universities or such other things so what was the basic idea here and what did your responsibilities consist of?

NW: Well, that movement was actually to bring people back to skilled labor, and had started before Hitler came to power. There were certain schools to make them farmers. Like in Aalen, near Hannover there was a famous school, Gartenschule Aalen they were called. And the old school actually had started their work but certainly after 1933, it became a movement and boys and girls got the opportunity with the help of the Jewish organizations, especially the Jewish community and the old schools, to learn trades, whether it was in metal work, wood work, whether they got an education as electricians, as opticians, and for the girls as tailors, beauticians, and so on, there was a whole network of institutions all over

Germany. One of the problems was certainly that very often these students had to be brought into the cities in order to join the institutions and for this the police had to give permission, so it was also our task to arrange that. Very often we did it in order to give the boys and girls the opportunity just to get out of places where their existence had simply become intolerable. And one of the major places where we had these institutions was Berlin but also Breslau and Hamburg and Munich and Nuremberg and so on.

Q: How many schools were there and how many students?

NW: I cannot tell you but my estimate was that we had together, with also certain schools and also just night courses, I don't know, it could have been 100, 150; you know, even just digging fountains were taught to people who wanted to learn it, like myself welding work. I think a lot of stuff was available for this purpose.

Q: And this was solely organized by the Jewish organizations in cooperation with the police, to an extent?

NW: Well, not the cooperation of the police. But it was mainly done either by the initiative of the Jewish communities or, for instance, the Old School or under the auspices and of these organizations, so the police had nothing to do with it. They were not supervising that. Only later, when the war had progressed to a certain extent, all these schools were closed and the people were transferred to forced labor groups where their skills could be used for the war effort of the Germans.

Q: Was that, do you think, a prime motive for the Germans to allow that kind of system to grow? Or was that something that you initiated and they acquiesced?

NW: You know, the Germans, the Nazis could be bought on the idea that certain things we did were in the German interest. Emigration was in the German interest. All activities in this area were in the German interest. The preparation for emigration was in the German interest. So therefore, all that was done in this field was considered to be done for emigration, was in the interest of Germany and therefore should be accepted. This was accepted until the Nazis came closer to the Final Solution.

Q: So that, in fact during those two years that you were working on these Berufsausbildungen, you were travelling the country looking after various schools run by Jews? Were there mostly Jewish instructors in these schools?

NW: Both actually, but mainly by Jews. We were lucky there were enough engineers and there were enough tradesmen who knew their trades well as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, opticians, etc. But in certain cases we had non-Jewish instructors like I experienced when I took the welding course.

Q: Now, in setting up this system was the idea to make the Jewish community self-sufficient to the extent that then you'd have your own welders, etc., that you could separate your life? Or was it more to enable these people just to be able to earn a living, to emigrate and be able to earn a living or anything that was needed to make them independent?

NW: You know, the events of 1933, and later the restrictions developed a certain, if you want to, Jewish economy for certain Jewish needs but this was never self-sufficient. So what was done then, especially after '33, was to give people a chance to acquire a skill which made it easier for them to establish their life in a new country.

Q: Were any of the people who worked, or were you personally

ever threatened by the Nazis in any way while you were undertaking these? Was there never any suspicion from the authorities to your collegues about what you were doing?

NW: No, I didn't experience it and if there were questions I just explained to them who I was and what I was doing. And that was enough.

Q: And you continued to live in Berlin even though you were travelling widely? And you lived with your parents?

NW: No, I had moved in order to be closer to the office because before I had lived in the east of Berlin but since we had late hours deep into the night, and since public transportation stopped at a certain hour during the night, it was considered more appropriate and practical to move closer to the office. And we rented a furnished apartment in the western part of Berlin.

Q: But you led otherwise a fairly, and these are war conditions now, a still fairly unrestricted life?

NW: Yes and no. First of all, certainly you had the blackout which restricted your movement. But then, very soon thereafter, the major restrictions came into operation. For instance, on Yom Kippur of 1939, which was after the war broke out, the police came and took our radios away, for the protection of the German Reich, I don't know. And then gradually the other things happened: the telephone was taken away and so on. Then certainly you suddenly felt the strong part of the restrictions. In the beginning, believe it or not, there was still the Kulturbund... was still playing, we had still, I remember, a performance of what was the 'Barker's Bride.'

Q: So there was next to a Jewish economy, to an extent, a Jewish cultural life?

NW: Well, there was no cultural life anymore because there was no more Jewish press which had stopped appearing. There was only a so-called 'Mitteilungsblatt' which couldn't discuss things anymore. But the real restrictions actually came about in September 1941, when the pronouncement about the yellow badge came out. And with that restrictions in all ways. And then certainly, you had the other things, a whole line of things that you couldn't use, certain streets in Berlin that you could not go shopping on certain hours, that you had to be restricted. There was a curfew and so on.

Q: Specifically for Jews?

NW: Definitely.

Q: Which streets, for example, were out of reach?

NW: For instance, you couldn't use the Kurfürstendamm, you couldn't use the Unter den Linden, and so. All the main thoroughfares because that probably endangered the existence of the German Reich, I don't know.

Q: And meanwhile your family had in these unusual circumstances survived? Had anybody been arrested?

NW: Well, my father had been also taken into the labor force as one of the reconstruction workers. He had joined a group because that was now, with the beginning of the war, they were now short of labor and so they brought people together from wherever they could find to join the labor gangs. But difficult as it was you still lived with your family. That was of major importance. So they took, for example, the ladies, hundreds of Jewish girls and women worked for Siemens in Berlin in their electronic factory. Some of them worked in the chemical works in the east of Berlin. So they drew the labor force

together into their program wherever they could. And I myself, after I had told the people of the Reichvertretung that I didn't think it was worthwhile, that I felt it was better for me to leave them, I became just a simple transport worker in a firm of Wilhelm Otto, in Berlin- Lichtenberg.

Q: Did you have to wear the yellow badge before you left the Reichvertretung?

NW: No, it started on, if I'm not mistaken, on September 18, 1941. And we were all subject to the same rules and regulations.

Q: Was that a serious occurrence? What was your initial attitude towards wearing a yellow badge? Was that something you tried to cover up or when you saw friends you would try to cover up the badge?

NW: Let me put it this way. At the beginning we also believed in law and order and said this is a rule, we should obey it. But gradually we tried to circumvent it. It took courage to do that but we did it. For example, my parents were living in the east of Berlin, we were living in the west of Berlin. In the beginning, when we were not allowed to use public transporation, I only could use it on my way to work, we walked and it was two and a half hours, so we stayed overnight there. But then came restrictions that you couldn't stay overnight, so since we had our child and we wanted my parents to see the boy, we then certainly found ways and by just covering up and using the transportation, or during the wintertime the darkness was merciful enough and since it was black, complete pitch black, it was difficult to discover us. But this came later, as I said, in the beginning we tried to follow the rules.

Q: When you made the decision to leave the Reichsvertretung

did you have any arguments? Or were there arguments amoung you that you had just become accomplices here? Leo Baeck may have argued it.

NW: My work also had come to an end. The vocational training schools had been closed or had been taken over by the authorities in their interest for the war effort. So there was no function anymore for us. The deportations had started. And things now became very, very serious. I was offered, you know one of the evacuations was in summer 1943, I think, before I left the Reichsvertretung, there was an evacuation of Jews in Baden to France, to Gosse. And I was asked to go down there to do certain administrative work. I refused that categorically because I didn't want to leave my family. And I told Paul Eppstein and also Arthur Lilienthal, who was in charge of certain work, that this was not an offer I would like to accept. And I also told them at this time that now I had the feeling that it was not worth while anymore to be a Jewish functionary and Paul Eppstein said, 'I wish I could take your decision.' And he paid with his life. And Mr. Lilienthal, who never probably in my opinion could realize that the Nazis could be these beasts that they actually were, tried to argue but I stopped them saying this was my opinion and I think it's a better way out.

Q: So with your work coming to an end at the Reichsvertretung, what were your choices now? Where were you going next?

NW: I had no choices anymore, the options were not available. But what I thought was the best was to not be a functionary anymore but just to join the thousands of others and see how we could survive because now it had become a matter of survival.

Q: Deportations had begun in the summer of '41?

NW: Actually, if I'm not mistaken, in September of '41.

Q: So, pretty close after the time you left the Reichsvertretung you then decided, where were you going to stay next? As far as I can see you were prescribed a place where you had to work by the Nazis.

NW: There was a special office just for Jewish workers. It was centralized actually and the head of this entity was a man by the name of Eschhaus who later I understand was done away with by the police because he was accused of having taken bribes or so.

Q: So where did you start work?

NW: In a factory for transport equipment. And this factory was busy mainly with work for the military establishment. And they had non-Jews and Jews and naturally I became part of the Jewish work group.

Q: These were forced labor forces?

NW: Well, it was forced labor in the respect that you were not protected by labor laws, you just had been ordered to join that group. But non-Jews also didn't have a choice anymore, they were also directed to join certain entities. And this factory had approximately 25 or 30 workers. Some of them worked as plumbers, as metal workers, and I had volunteered as a welder but at the beginning my main work was just transport work.

Q: Was this a large factory?

NW: Yes, the main work that this man did, he was a private owner, a very nasty fellow.

Q: What was the name of the firm?

NW: Wilhelm Otto. He mainly did work for the air force, in other words, to transport parts of a plane, to do maintenance work and things like that. And that, to a certain extent, protected us against deportations.

Q: That's what I wondered: was one of the reasons that you took that decision was maybe the anonymity it could provide as the deportations started? That you felt maybe you could protect your family better?

NW: Possibly, but my main interest at this time was, at this point, was to get out of Jewish organization work because it didn't serve any purpose anymore.

NW: Had you in the previous years, and did you continue now to make any inquiries if you could leave somehow?

NW: Don't forget that at the beginning of the war the borders were closed. There was no chance anymore to go for instance to England. I had made efforts together with my wife and don't forget, I was torn between responsibilities. What could I do for my parents, my sister who was still there in Berlin? My cousin who was living in London made all attempts to provide a room for us when I was travelling to London and I saw her regularly in '38 and '39. But the history of emigration in connection with the United States efforts to save people during the war is not a very glorious one. Because as soon as the war broke out, even before America even entered the war, the American consulate all over Germany stopped processing visas, not completely, but all kinds of obstacles were put in the way. And if I'm not mistaken, one of the reasons were that you could get a visa if you were called already and you had all the papers but no relative should remain in Germany. In other words, if parents or sister or brother, whatever it was, couldn't get a visa then the consulate would not grant

you a visa and all kinds of other obstacles. And then, you know, it didn't take long for the consular relationship between America and Germany was demolished and that was the end.

Q: Had you made the efforts to raise the money or find somebody who would give you an affidavit, say in America with which you could maybe bring out your wife?

NW: Certainly, we had made very strenuous efforts especially after the events of November 1938. As a matter of fact since we had no direct relations in the United States we had used the help of the telephone directories which were available in Germany and we found the name of Wollheim in the directory of Chicago. We wrote to those people and after a certain while these people gave us an affidavit.

Q: Complete strangers?

NW: Well, there is a certain, I don't know how many times removed, there was a certain kind of relationship. They gave us an affidavit but that was too late because I had a registration number which was very high and so you couldn't argue with the people of the consulate. I had sent in a registration request, probably they had gotten basketsful of, and they had probably grabbed them whenever they could. It was not in order of sequence of time or hours when these requests arrived but probably when they had a chance to grab them they registered them and you got a number. And you could not argue and say you needed a lower number. The only hope was that many of these numbers would not be used and you would be called. As a matter of fact certainly, after the consulates stopped working they called me to produce the papers but then it was already too late.

Q: Because the borders were closed by then?

NW: Sure.

Q: Did you have family that tried the same way and were successful?

NW: Well, certainly I had friends who, for instance, a friend of mine had helped actually to contact these people in Chicago. He was a doctor, a good friend of ours, the father was one of the leading pediatricians in Berlin, Dr. Mendelsohn, had sent him to America to find out and he had also gone to Chicago. When he came over to Chicago he started to work in the Michael Reed hospital I think. So he was helpful and talked to the people in Chicago and helped me to get the papers. So I had friends who managed to get out, certainly.

Q: And amongst your family?

NW: I had an uncle who managed to get out to Shanghai. He was a brother of my father. But none of the others, most of them were caught in Germany.

Q: So you started working in this factory in September '41. How long did you work for them?

NW: Until the 'Final Action' in Berlin, March 1943.

Q: Where did you live at that time?

NW: In my apartment together with my wife and son. Under restricted conditions subject to the air raids which took place already. The British usually came during the night and the Americans came during the day. Which we didn't mind because it was still a kind of psychological relief. I witnessed the first major attack of the American air force against Berlin which was very effective. And believe it or not when I saw the city burning here and there it was somehow for me an

indication that somehow the tide had turned, that Germany's military superiority had somehow reached its limit and that now the Germans got just what they deserved.

Q: What were your information sources?

NW: Don't forget that during the course of these restrictios we weren't even allowed to buy papers anymore. I had a neighbor who was with the Labor Department and she actually subscribed to a newspaper for me and gave it to me under the protection of the night. But she was called by her superior who said this paper is not for members of the Party. She wasn't actually a member of the Party but she had to stop that. So what you could get for information was that you used your imagination and a second sense that what the Germans reported was not always true. But what I then did, and that was very helpful, was that under the Nuremberg Laws, Jews married to Germans with non-Jewish educated children did not have to wear the badge and therefore could keep their radios. So one of these fellows was also a member of our labor gang. And one day I approached him with the idea that if he would be willing to listen during the night to BBC London to keep us informed. Because once in a while he came with bits and pieces of information. And he said, 'Yes, under the condition that you help me out with coffee because otherwise I will fall asleep during the work.' So what we had to do was get coffee here and there to help him. And he came every morning with the news he had heard during the night over BBC London. So, for instance, we could follow closely the events in Stalingrad. And when the Germans were still winning we knew already that the German army was suffering badly. So I exchanged that information with close friends or with, for example, Paul Eppstein who I continued to see as often as I could, almost every week on my way home.

Q: Did you continue to see friends somehow in secret? How

about on Friday evenings?

NW: On evenings you couldn't go out because there was a curfew, so we did it during the day or people would dare the police and would cover the badge and come in. One of the men who constantly came and that was a source of great joy was our pediatrician who was a gifted man, gifted musician, and he had the right as a doctor to go out during the curfew. His name was Michaelis. And he once in a while came and said ,Let us sit down and straighten ourselves out in the microcosm of the macrocosm." And that was helpful because he had some contacts to former non-Jewish patients who helped him with some food and there he also got some bits and pieces of information.

Q: And your wife would still go out during the day and try to buy some food?

NW: Yes, but she had to take care of the boy and then had to go shopping which was not easy.

Q: In terms of your private life, and it took what, 2½ hours to get to work every morning?

NW: Well, I remember that I got up at quarter to five and I took a train at approximately five thirty to be at work at six fifteen, or something like that, and then work a full eight or ten hour shift. And on certain nights, the irony of that, on certain nights we had to stay in the factory to protect the factory against air raids. In other words they had a non-Jewish anti-air group and a Jewish anti-air group. And we were equipped with steel helmets in order to fight the Americans. If the bombs came down there was nothing you could do. The only thing they tried to do was that when fire bombs came down that the factory should not go down in fire.

Q: So you would work then until five or six in the evening and then it took you an hour and a half to get home? So basically your life was dictated with the day by day grind between the factory and going home?

NW: There was no chance in the evening to read or so. It was difficult. The only time that I could try to read, when I still had my library was on a Sunday because Saturday also we worked half a day and half a day you tried to see parents or whatever, if that was possible. But life had become slowly unbearable. It was dictated completely by these long hours of work, by the long travelling to and from work and by the duty to protect, to be part of the air raid protection squad.

Q: Would you say there was any kind of network amongst friends left that offered some kind of solace from time to time in terms of that you could see friends and talk for a few hours a day?

NW: Well, we did get together say on Sundays once in a while. We saw people but, you know, when you have a child and it was restricted you would hardly go out. So it was a kind of life. But on the other hand, yes, we got together with friends almost up until the very end.

Q: And in terms of discussion with friends, what was now the theme?

NW: You know, when you are living in a totalitarian society, cut off from all kinds of information, no telephone, no radio, no papers, no newspapers, no nothing, rumours are the rule of the day and everybody knew something else. Especially, you know, we were concerned when the people in the deportations started, we had no news about what had happened to them. You know, you are willing to believe any rumour. Especially during the time when the Germans were so successful you were willing

to accept any good news justified or unjustified. That became a game somehow. And there were certain people who, veterans somehow knew and could somehow predict what could have happened. Certainly, it was disappointing that neither the French nor the British did anything in the first two or three years. It was terribly disappointing when the German army advanced so deep into Russia but we were aware when they had the first defeats in 1941 approaching Moscow.

Q: You described that your day was in fact ruled by those kind of hours. What did you know about as deportations started how they were proceeding? Did you find out how they were going, what actually was happening? There was no way of actually finding out?

NW: What the Germans had done was to invent a scheme that people were forced to write postcards from camps and these were considered resort camps and certainly these cards we realized were censored and certainly did not reflect the truth.

Q: Did you ever receive any of them.

NW: No, we saw when people were taken away from our group from the factory.

Q: People were deported from there?

NW: Some of them. When they wanted to join their family. And then we saw some of these cards. And some said, 'Well it's not as bad as we were made to believe.' And certain people said, 'What are you saying? It's just an eyewash.' But how do you determine that? How do you determine the truth when you're completely cut off from all sources of information?

Q: And even you certainly had knowledgeable, influential friends, somebody like Martin Sobotka, they didn't have news?

NW: Martin Sobotka was lucky. He had already managed to get out of Germany in January 1939.

Q: And other friends who had been members of the Reichsvertretung, they themselves did not know what the logistics of what was going on there? I'm trying to find out how much in the life that you led could know?

NW: Well, I had not discussions but conversations, let us say. There was a man who was the president of the labor court in Germany. He was what they called Senatspräsident which was a very, very high position. Senatspräsident Joachim was his name. He had rendered some basic decisions which had influenced labor relations in Germany. And we liked to talk to each other. He was a man who was strongly politically inclined. He was an active member of the Social Democratic Party for many years. He was rather pessimistic. And he had despaired because of the policy of the Allies. They didn't take a strong stand when there was still time to do it. He said 'Now probably it's too late.' On the other hand, there was also a man who was the head of the financial department, his name was Meierheim. I understand he was a pilot during World War I. And he explained to me that the Germans would run out of steam soon and he believed very strongly, since he had travelled widely, that the American industrial power would have its effect and it would be only a matter of time before they would win out. These discussions you had but there was no time to check it with anyone. I understand that Leo Baeck had certain contacts to diplomats or journalists on a very cautious basis. I didn't. People didn't talk that openly because it was always dangerous. You never knew whether 'big brother' was watching you from all sides. When you live in a controlled and totallitarian society you get used to that. To be careful, to weigh your words and to speak between the lines.

Q: They must have known about the deportations, people who worked in the Reichsvertretung.

NW: We all knew about the deportations.

Q: And weren't they after all involved, isn't that the Hannah Arendt argument that they were in fact setting the quotas with the Nazis?

NW: No, it's not that easy. Certainly we all knew about it. The old deportation procedure started with a different scheme. Jews were ordered to report and to move in Jewish houses. When the air raids started living space became scarce. Then Jews had to give up their apartments and they established so-called Jewish houses, not ghettos, we never had a Jewish ghetto in Berlin and not all over Germany. So then one day, that was on Yom Kippur 1941, the head of the communities were called in and were told that people had to report but that they should report to the synagogue on the Wetzelstrasse. And it would turn out that this would mean deportation. Nobody knew about it in advance. Nothing, no indication whatsoever. Certainly we had some indication. There was one transport in winter 1939 from Stuttgart, for instance, which had gone into Poland and only two of the people survived and came back. But that was one train. The other deportation, as I mentioned, from Luttenberg and Bergendorf into Berlin--again, interestingly enough, there was one group that had been collected for deportation but this could be avoided. I was actually sent by Paul Eppstein, it was in the middle of the war, to Sniedenmur where in 1940 there was an arrangement made that these people were taken to one of the Jewish vocational training camps which was a transitory solution, we didn't know about it. More I would say nobody knew because in this respect the Germans were very effective to keep away from the public all knowledge about that.

Q: So throughout '42, when you were working, there was really no way where you knew what the logistics of some of these things, how they contacted Jews, how they'd asked them to report to finally have them deported? Wouldn't they have them report to a synagogue or a train station?

NW: That's right, that's what they did. But I don't think that they actually knew what the outcome was because the moment these tranports left Berlin there was no information.

Q: And no one in the Reichsvertretung knew either?

NW: No, how could they? I knew most of these people and I ask myself the question what would they have done if they had known. And this I include definitely Leo Baeck because he didn't have knowledge either, it didn't exist. Because I told you about this so-called information service I had established in our factory. In spite of the fact that this man gave us the news everyday, not only about military operations but certain other information. I didn't know anything about Auschwitz until I arrived there. That means the BBC simply either didn't have the information or that they didn't believe it in order to make it public. I don't remember that this came over the radio. Later certainly when people fled from there and the famous Werber case, you know, when they had the opportunity to report, that was different. But at least until the time when I left Berlin, no.

Q: Now when was your father deported?

NW: On December 8, 1942, with my mother.

Q: Was he able to tell you before, had you heard anything?

NW: Nothing. I had stopped in his apartment and he told

me that he received a letter saying that they had to report to the Grosse Hamburgerstrasse which was one of the collection points. Then the next day when I came they had sublet their apartment because it was a big apartment and the wife of the man who was renting it was non-Jewish and she told me that the Gestapo had come and had taken them away. They were taken to the collection point and a couple of days later they went on a transport and that was the first transport to Auschwitz from Berlin in December '42.

Q: Nobody out of your family had been deported before?

NW: I had relatives who had been deported to Lodz, to Lietzmannstadt. You know, before Auschwitz, the transports had gone to different points but this is all knowledge that I acquired after the war. That the first transport went to the ghetto in Lodz, in Lietzmannstadt. Then a transport had gone to Riga, Warsaw, and certain transports which had never arrived.

Q: So once your parents had been deported, which was just before Christmas, you were then deported three months later?

NW: They came for us a couple of times but, since I was working in that factory, we were released. The last time I was taken into custody, on the day when Berlin was made 'Judenrein', in other words, they took people away from all over. My sister who had worked as a secretary for a long time had become a secretary for the man who was running the collection point in the Rosenbergstr

And she called--I didn't have a telephone but luckily my neighbor let us use it--she said definitely I shouldn't go to work the next day. They didn't know anything but there had been rumours that the next day there would be a 'big action,' as they called it. So against my will, I stayed home and sure enough, it didn't take long, people came running to our apartment saying that somehow they had heard that the SS had occupied factories and had taken the people away.

Q: People who were warning you, were they friends, neighbors?

NW: They knew only that men had been taken away. So my wife said, 'Luckily you didn't go and are here.' We were waiting in the apartment and there was nothing you could do. As a matter of fact I remember I sat down to write a letter to a friend of mine in Sweden. Because this mail still went on an ordinary route. Otherwise you could only correspond via the Red Cross which took months and months. And mail to Sweden was censored but went through. So you had to compose it in such a way that they didn't detect anything that was detrimental to their interests. So I tried all kinds of things until the day came when they picked us up.

Q: On the 12th of March, the police came into the apartment, knocked on your door and took you away?

NW: They came and told us that we should get ready to go. And I know that my son was sleeping and we asked them to give us time. And you know, after a certain time, these were not Gestapo people, there was an old German policeman and I got into a discussion with them and said, 'Give us at least a little time to get prepared.' But we had our knapsacks already prepared for the occasion: warm clothing, a book and this and that in the expectation that they would transfer us to some labor camp where we would need it. And so he said, 'Yes, we'll give you some time. But what do you think if the Russian

Jews would come in here? You think they would give us so much time?' So you know, I say it was basically a hopeless case but at least their treatment was human under the circumstances.

Q: So where did they take you?

NW: They took us downstairs. Neighbors looked and saw what was going on. So what they did was, after we left, put a seal on the door. And took us down to a truck and there the truck was manned by SS troops of the Leibstandarte of Adolph Hitler. This I didn't like because they were infamous for the fact that hostages had been taken and shot in their barracks before and they were a violent gang of fanatic soldiers. So they took us around and around and then in the middle of the night we landed and it was dark and with the blackout you couldn't see a thing, you only heard voices and other people. So you tried to find out where you were and what was going on. This was, we later found out, one of the miliatry baracks in Berlin in Moabit, out in Ruhrstrasse.

Q: Had you been put, just the three of you, in the truck?

NW: Just the three of us, but my sister was not home, she was out working which was good because the next morning she actually, with someboedy else, came and took us to Hamburgerstrasse and we were released for a couple of days. We were what you called 'helpers,' so what they did was we got special arm bands. For instance, since my father-in-law had been taken away and my mother-in-law was completely out of herself, we thought it would be helpful to bring her at least to my father-in-law because this we were allowed to do. Or other people were put up in a temporary camp in Klug, this was an old establishment. So that's what we tried to do somehow, to bring people together. And then they came again three days later and that was the end, that was the

final call.

Q: You were taken where?

NW: To Hamburgerstrasse. We were there two or three days.

Q: Were you subjected to any kind of abuse? How large a gathering?

NW: It was approximately 1000 people. We went through all kinds of procedures. Amongst other things I had to sign a statement that because of my activities against the interest of the Reich I had lost my citizenship and I'm deprived of my property and so on. And I had to sign it also for my son who was at the time three; he also, because of his hostile activities, was deprived of his citizenship.

Q: Did you in this group of 1000 people, during the two or three days, did you meet people there you knew?

NW: Sure, you could freely move within that group. For instance, there I met a man who was the president of the Jewish War Veterans, he had been a captain during the War, Löwenstadt was his name. And we discussed the success or defeat of the positions we had taken. And had we become guilty somehow, because if we had changed our positions earlier then more people would have found their way out. But we were aware that this was water over the dam, but it was interesting to discuss that then in that collection point.

Q: So there were a number of people that you knew that were deported at the same time? What was the mood like? What was the atmosphere like?

NW: It was not an atmosphere of despair, it was to a certain extent, believe it or not, a mood of relief because the tension

was so great and, you know, the expectation of the knock at the door could come any moment, that people said, 'Okay, whatever will come will come but we will now be free from this.' That it would lead to total destruction nobody believed that. Amongst the people that I met there was the mother of the only cousin that I have who has survived. He's now living in Paris. My uncle who I told you went to Shanghai had married her and they had a son who is my cousin. Then they got divorced and she had married again a man who was very active in Jewish affairs in union work and so on. And also he had been prominent in the emigration department, the Hilfsverein. He was a veteran of World War I with special decorations so they sent he and his wife to Theresienstadt and that's the last I heard of the mother of my cousin.

Q: So after the two days you were actually loaded on the train?

NW: Well, we were loaded again on trucks and were carried through Berlin. The population saw that and some obviously were very happy to see us go.

Q: Did they insult you?

NW: Well, at this time they had already been made to feel the pinch of the war. The first big extensive air raid I had already witnessed--and worse was to come. But obviously some had come to realize now that after Stalingrad, and I shared this view, that things would turn for the worse.

Q: Had you in the past two years ever experienced any run ins with Germans?

NW: No, the only people who were nasty who shouldn't have been, were the fellow proletariats who I met in the factory. There was a foreman who was the head of the Jewish group who I was told was an old Social Democrat. He was fair but nasty.

Nasty but fair. But there were some others, fellow proletarians who took it out on these intellectuals.

Q: So it was the classic anti-semitic, anti-intellectual?

NW: Sure, and there was one fellow, he was a hardened Communist, when he passed by our group--and he had to as he was an excellent craftsman--he would say, 'Don't worry, hold out, keep up the good work, keep up the good mood.' He was one of the few who did it but most of the others were very obnoxious individuals.

Q: So after two days at this station you were then loaded on to trucks to be transported across Berlin?

NW: To a railroad station. Not an ordinary station but one for freight and merchandise. And there were cattle cars waiting for us. And they filled these cattle cars with approximately 100 people per car and the only thing you could find in there was just a pail for hygenic purposes, but that was all.

Q: You were with your wife and son?

NW: And also with my sister and some friends.

Q: You had actually formed a group?

NW: Somehow. I know we started to sing just to keep up the mood. It's peculiar when you ask me what the mood was. Let me repeat it was somehow that now we were looking forward to something new, whatever would be, would be. It was a Friday evening and you know, we Jews are a peculiar kind of a race. We left Berlin at four o'clock, I remember that because I saw the clock there and we didn't know where we were going, we only realized that it was somewhere towards the east because I recognized the stations on the way. When darkness came,

a lady took out a candle and lighted the candle because it was Friday evening. I discussed it once with Eli Wiesel and I asked what was the sense of it, waht was the motivation? There is no answer, we Jews are a very peculiar kind of people that here people were going towards death not knowing but still somehow representing or manifesting their spiritual resistance.

Q: So this was a Friday evening?

NW: A very special one, yes.

Q: How long were you on the train for?

NW: Approximately 24 hours. Because I remember when we went towards the east via Breslau and all the route down toward Bautzen, a city I knew because I had visited there before. And then we crossed into Polish territory and then we reached, and nobody knew exactly what it was, a place which only later I learned was Auschwitz.

Q: You had no food on the train?

NW: No, only the food you had taken with you.

Q: So you were a group who knew each other, about ten or fifteen?

NW: Well, we were approximately four or five couples who it so happened had stuck together because we knew each other and we decided that we would try to stick together. That was our naive belief.

Q: So when you got there, where did you think you had arrived? Were you standing around for a while?

NW: No, no. The moment the train stopped, guards from outsdie opened the doors and the shouting started and they used their rifles-- you know, the SS guards, very courageous heros that they were-- and they pushed the people out. Some didn't make it because some had taken poison.

Q: In your cattle car?

NW: Or because the air was so impossible that we had, I think two or three casualties. And then we were jumping out and some of the elderly people couldn't make it that fast and after 24 hours not being able to move you are a little restricted about what you are doing. And we didn't realize about what was going on. It was a very peculiar view. You saw people in a certain garb we had never seen before. You saw a lot of SS people in uniform going around.

Q: These were all Germans?

NW: Yes, all Germans. Then they told us to leave all our luggage where it was. In this moment of shock and surprise you just do it. It wasn't something you could understand but some said, 'Well, you'll get it later.' Because most of us had our names on it. We were thinking in naive terms that later it would be delivered by them.

Q: Was there immediate intimidation when you got off the train?

NW: Yes, you could feel immediately the SS atmosphere and everything had to be fast and violently that was it. Then they asked all the people to line up at fives. But only the men. They had three groups: men, women, and women with children. These were three groups. And as I said, these people in garb that we couldn't understand, I later found out that these were the so-called inmates, Häftlinge they called them. And

also for the first time in my life I saw SS women with their pistols running around. To a certain extent, I found out later they were worse than the men. Probably the scum of the earth, and all Germans.

Q: In terms of numbers, could you see that there were say, 100 SS guards?

NW: It was so vast the area that it was hard to tell. It was not actually the camp, it was the railroad station actually. And then they started to load the trucks and I remember we were waiting. And when they ordered us into one column and as I said, the women and the women with children, my wife suddenly joined the group with the children. And when they separated us she said, 'You know, that's the moment I have feared most.' And then we stayed standing around. It was rather cold because it was in the middle of March and in Poland it's pretty cold at this time. And then they loaded the people, the women and the other group with the children. It so happened that my wife and the boy came to sit at the end of the truck, and when they were driven away I could see them, and that is the last I have ever seen of them.

And we had to wait quite some time and then they loaded us into the trucks and still we didn't know anything about what was going on.

Q: You didn't see any name? Were any other trains coming in? You were the only group being separated into three sections?

NW: Yes. Then they pushed more and more people onto these trucks and we could hardly move. I came to stand next to two or three guards. So I tried to talk to them, then I found out that they didn't speak German well, they were so-called Volksdeutsche who knew Polish better than German. So I asked the people if there were anybody who understood Polish to make it easier to them in order to find out what's what.

But you couldn't communicate with them. These were already the times when they had, not the officers, the officers and the non-commissioned officers were all Germans, but they had filled the lower SS ranks with the Volksdeutschen and whatever they could get then. And certainly people who had seen no action because otherwise you would see ribbons, but they had nothing. And they took us away from that station and we passed by a vast area where we saw tremendous buildings and almost a city under construction. I still couldn't understand what it was. And then after a while, adjacent to the road which we went down, we saw some watch towers and some barbed wire and our truck turned into one of those camps. And when we turned in there and passed the gates, I said to one of my friends who was standing next to me, 'May God help us to get out of here alive.' But still we didn't know where we were.

Q: Who was the friend?

NW: That was one of those who unfortunately didn't make it. We were ordered out of the trucks.

Q: You were now just men?

NW: Yes, we were approximately 220 to 250 men. We were ordered down.

Q: Were you all approximately the same age?

NW: No, some older, some younger. But you know, the people over 65 were automatically taken to Theresienstadt. So our group of people was made up of ages up to 65. Then, other people in some kind of different garb ordered us again to line up in fives. They told us we should give up our watches and rings and our valuables and so on. Still there was no explanation of where we were. We knew that this was something very special. Then they conducted us to barracks where they

told us we should undress and only keep our shoes and belts. Then we were led into a room where showers were working. Luckily we hadn't heard of the showers of the gas chambers otherwise there would have been some commotion but we were happy to have a shower after this trip. The water was very cold and people who were not very healthy got their first attack of cold or whatever else. When we were there in the showers, one of the inmates came and introduced himself as a man who had been in concentration camps for almost four years. Erich Markowitz was his name. He came from Hamburg and he had been actually a political prisoner though he was Jewish. He had been caught when he was fighting with the loyalists in Spain and then taken to Germany and from Germany into the camps. He had already passed through Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen and was now in Auschwitz. He survived and later became the Minister of Economics in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. He was a man of substance. And we asked what are we doing here and where are our wives and children. He gave us the first instructions saying, 'You have come to Auschwitz. This is a concentration camp. Don't ask about your wives and children because we don't know anything about it. Now you have to care for yourself. If you don't you are lost. We have made it for the last three or four years under these conditions, now it is up to you. You were lucky enough to live with your families and your wives all the time that we were already inmates. And what you are doing here is slaving for the I.G. Farben. They are establishing here the biggest factory for artificial rubber, called Buna. You will have to work for them. The only advise I can give you is to try to make it.' He was very helpful in this respect because it was the first information that we got.

Q: He was very matter of fact about it?

NW: Yes. He was a man of political education. He thought he owed this to newcomers. He didn't have the arrogance that

certain old timers had.

Then, after we were through with the showers, they cut our hair completely. Then they smeared us with some kind of solution against lice because the camp was infected with lice and the SS was deadly afraid that it would affect them because lice are the carriers of typhus. After that, they gave us barracks and we met the Blockältester. This fellow was a political prisoner, he was a Communist activist from Essen. Lobel was his name. An obnoxious fellow who actually was serving some time in Poland after the war for his misdeeds. Then the Poles kicked him out and sent him over to the Germans. This was Block Two in Buna.

Q: In that Block, you were the only new arrivals?

NW: Yes, the whole Block was occupied just by us as newcomers.

Q: Why had Markovitz come up to talk to you?

NW: He was probably on that evening in charge of some function so he said he wanted to take the opportunity to talk to us.

Q: And this barrack was how large?

NW: You know, out of 250 people you had only 150 beds so many people had to double up in these beds which were not too big anyhow. And the mattresses were nothing but just a sack filled with straw and very thin blankets and during the night there was not good protection.

Before we went there we were given the same garb we had seen before. As the Frenchmen called it, 'the pajamas', because they looked like them.

Q: These weren't very thick?

NW: No, it ws no protection whatsoever and was dirty.

Q: Was the Blockältester the one who told you where you were to work? Was that the hierarchy?

NW: He was neurotic in one respect: cleanliness. His block had to be clean always and the beds should be in perfect order. There was no place to sit except the beds, but, God forbid, that you disturbed the good order of the beds it was a problem. Certainly we arrived in the middle of the night and in the morning we woke up very early for the first so-called roll call which was in a big field in that camp. There we had to learn to line up in fives and what happened was that the Kommandant came, dressed completely in a fur coat, very impressive. His name was Schüttel. He had served a couple of years in Dacchau, obviously successfully, so he was assigned to be the head of the camp in Buna. And he was the Obersturmführer. The person in charge of counting had to report to him that the inmates were ready to be inspected.

Q: The roll call was for the whole camp?

NW: With the exception of certain people who, as they called it, 'Kommandiert gemeldet waren,' which means people who were in the hospital or couldn't get away from the job. But certainly 95 to 98 percent of the camp had to be.

Q: So there were thousands of people lined up?

NW: Well, in the beginning, we were 3,000 when I arrived there. When we left, we were more than 10,000 in that camp. The way in which it was done was that the moment they were ready, some of the Scharführer or the Blockführer went down all the blocks counting. But they were never good at figures so sometimes it took hours until they got the figures together properly. And they counted again and again and again and it was very often a problem for them to get it right. The

Reportführer actually then reported but before he did so the order was given, since we couldn't salute in any other way, to take our caps off: 'Mützen ab!' That was the order. And the Reportführer then reported to the Sturmführer that so and so thousands of Häftlinge are angetreten and said, "Heil Hitler," and that was it.

Q: And this happened every morning?

NW: Every morning and every evening. Approximately a year later they did away with the evening calls and had them just in the morning.

Q: How long would these calls last?

NW: Sometimes, especially if somebody had tried to escape or if they couldn't get their numbers together, it could last an hour, hour and a half, even two hours. Ordinarily, they were over in a half hour but sometimes they lasted much longer.

Q: And were these the occasions where the SS really tried to show up the inmates and certainly show who was in control here? Was there all discipline, reaction in front of these roll calls?

NW: First of all, the towers were occupied all the time and the machine guns were directed always at the barracks. Also, when they came for the roll calls, I don't know how many of these so-called Blockführers and Reportführers and other Führers, so they really showed up in strength.

Q: And they were all armed?

NW: Definitely. How could they dare not to come with their arms?

Q: Now at these roll calls did they discipline people regularly? Is that where they held public punishments?

NW: Yes that, beatings and also they executed people publicly. But then they had special roll calls.

Q: They had special roll calls for the death sentences?

NW: Yes.

Q: So, after your first roll call, where did they assign you?

NW: It was a Sunday, so our major task was to get prepared as an inmate. In other words, they gave us numbers. And they tattooed us. And then you had to put your labels with the number on your pants and on your jacket. And there was a special way of identification. The political prisoners had a red triangle. The homosexuals a blue triangle. The criminals, the hardened criminals, a green triangle. And the anti-social elements a black triangle. And the Jews had a Mogen David, built by a yellow triangle and a red triangle. So they had all kinds of identifications. And then you had this triangle with your number. And so we were busy on that Sunday to get prepared. And then the next morning they took us out for the first time to be assigned to certain work details. And then at this time SS guards were still walking with us. Later when there was a manpower shortage, they changed it and put a guard line around the factory, marched us into the camp and then left us actually alone which was a great help. But at the beginning, the SS marched with us all the way. And they had their special tricks, you know, as they had nothing else to do they played all kinds of games. Most of these people were very healthy, well fed. None of them, you could see, had seen action anywhere. So they had fought their heroic fight at the concentration camp front.

Q: So every morning you were marched under guard with constant harrassment by these guards?

NW: Well, to walk faster and so. And then after a couple of days, we had the first losses in the respect that people, especially when the weather was miserable, people ran out beyond the line of the guards because they wanted to be shot. The guards liked to do that because, as we were informed later, for any successful shot they got an extra day free, or extra meal, or something like that.

Q: When did you experience the first casualty from your group?

NW: We didn't have that from our group but there were certain from our block. I remember a father gave to his son his ration of bread and said, 'For me it doesn't serve any purpose anymore.' And then he ran away.

And then when we were actually in the factory, I saw for the first time what they were doing: building a tremendous city of factories in order to produce artificial rubber because Germany was short of that. And they thought that in this area where they were protected against air raids and they had enough coal, which they needed for the process, and water.

Q: When you were first assigned there, which I think was known as Commando Four, what did the work consist of?

NW: It was a transport command. Just transport work. For example, to unload--this was one of the worst things which one could do--to unload bags of cement. That went very often under time pressure because they were interested to get these cars on the road as soon as possible because that would cost them less money. On normal days you could handle these bags though it was a load of 100 pounds, which means 50 kilos. But when it started to rain and the weather was very bad,

especially in March and April in this area, then these bags became wet and the cement could pour out and cake you from top to bottom and it was almost impossible to remain clean and to clean yourself. That was something that many people couldn't actually take.

Q: Was that from your group the time that the first people died?

NW: Well, I remember one of my friends whose name was Fritz Schaeffer, he was a member of our Youth Movement, a wonderful musician, he actually had studied to become a cantor, he one day, when he came, said he had enough, he didn't want to go on any longer. I tried to convince him that this was not the right attitude, and I reminded him of our tradition. He was a conservative believer, conservative values, but he said, 'I can't help it. Before I am tortured to death I would rather take this liberty to seek death on my own volition.' And that was all we could do, and I could do. That was on April 3, 1943, so very soon after we came there. So during the night you heard very often shots ringing out. Quite often the guards in order to keep awake, and obviously they still had enough bullets left so they could afford to do that. And so during the night we heard the shots, had no special meaning for us, but then the next morning somebody said that 'Did you know that Fritz Schaeffer had run against the wire?' Which means that in order to put an end to your life you just had to run towards the barbed wires and then the guards were instructed to shoot, though the barbed wires were loaded with electricity. So he was one of those we lost.

Q: Did a lot of people die just from exhaustion and their health not holding out?

NW: Yes. I remember that in our group we had a man who was a very well known cantor in Berlin. Weismann was his name.

I listened to him very often. And he was simply not prepared for this kind of work. And one day when we came home and had the roll call he collapsed at the Appell Platz, at the place there. The SS had a very special way of solving this problem. A man had collapsed but he couldn't be moved until he had been counted, until his number had turned out to be right. And after that we took him to the Krankenbau, to the hospital, but he expired on the way, in our arms. And this I remember also distinctly because I was one of those who tried to take him to the hospital.

Q: When you were assigned to this Commando Four, you worked approximately twelve hours a day?

NW: I can't tell you because we didn't have a watch, but I can tell you in the winter it was from sunrise to sunset. During the summer it was different. It probably came to ten or twelve hours.

Q: What food did you have at the end of the day?

NW: In the morning they gave you some kind of bread which was not looking very healthy. It was a very poor quality. Plus a little bit of margerine and that was it for the whole day. Or marmalae. And some coffee which all coffee producers of the world would be ashamed to see this kind of brew. And then IG Farben for whom we worked delivered a special soup which was some kind of a watery concoction--they called it a Buna soup. The advantage was that it was warm during the winter which was helpful but had no real food value. And in the evening there was another bowl of soup, vegetable or this or that. In that soup you could find some bits and pieces of meat once a week. And so the consequence was that you had to run during the whole night. You know you couldn't go out to the latrine, you had to do that in the barracks. And people were running all night. And people certainly blew

up because that water settled in your system. So I personally have some left over which does not dissolve. But many people at that time were running around with swollen feet. That was unbelievable, you could hardly walk.

Q: So within weeks people's health quickly deteriorated? Did you lose weight?

NW: Yes, I remember there was a weigh-in several months after we landed. And I was down to approximately 130 European pounds which is approximately 67 kilos. Which is approximately 150 American pounds.

Q: Did all the men you had arrived with, did they all work in that Commando Four?

NW: Most of us at the beginning. And I, after two or three weeks, became aware that this couldn't last very long. People disappeared more and more. For instance, my friend Werner Forse went to the Krankenbau and never came back. And later I found out that he had been taken away for a selection.

There was another man who was a jurist, a fellow student at law school, Poppenlauer was his name, and he had contracted jaundice and they didn't keep him in the Krankenbau too long. So gradually people disappeared and I was aware that I also couldn't last too long. And I said to myself before I would let them do violence to me I would rather take the route of Fritz Schaeffer. Because I didn't want to suffer any bestiality from them. And just when I was going around with these thoughts in mind, there was one evening when we came for a roll call, there was a call that all 'Facharbeiter', they called it, which means workers with some skills, should report. And for me that was like a message from heaven. I said, 'Oh, now the welding probably can help me' And I was already running around with swollen feet and had difficulty to march. So we registered and heard nothing. Slowly I was becoming again

doubtful whether I could make it or not. And then one evening when we came home, my number (you know, you lost your name, there was no name anymore, just a number which was tattooed on your arm), so my number was called and I should explain that when we registered and got our number, we certainly had to give our name and our profession. When the fellow asked, he was an SS gangster, what was my profession, I had heard from people who had been in camps before in the 'November Action', and so that one should never tell them that you were a professional and never tell them you're an intellectual because this is what they hate and you would be exposed to their wrath. So I said I was a welder. So the SS man looked at me and I had my glasses and he didn't believe it. He asked how long was I a welder. And I said, 'As long as I can remember, all my life.' Now he couldn't prove to the contrary so they entered "welder". And that helped me because when I came to the head of that labor detail, the head said, 'You're registered as a welder. They need welders. A commission from I.G Farben will come tomorrow and then you have to prove that either you can do it or you can't do it.' So that happened the next morning or the next day, and civilians, people of I.G. Farben --obviously Nazis but not the SS type-- and they were interested to find skilled labor. And they gave us certain work to do and they asked us certain questions, for instance, how to bend and weld pipes. This I had done in my course and practised also when I was in the factory. And the answer was right. So then we were asked to do certain things, also complicated work. And you know, there's a God in the world: it happened that it was alright. So I was with another fellow selected to become a welder and in June or July I joined another Commando, a completely different Commando. Interestingly enough, including the Kapos who were in charge of the labor details, when you were a skilled worker, you were already on a higher level of achievement. So we were taken to a hall. There I saw my face for the first time in the mirror and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't recognize myself. They

introduced me to a man who came from the city of Dresden. And that man was a typical German workaholic. He said to me-- and afterall, I was one of those who spoke German, many of the inmates didn't speak German-- 'I am not interested what you are. I'm not interested in your political convictions. I'm interested in one thing: good work.' And he, I must say, treated me fairly. I tried my very best. I confided to him that I was not an expert but I was willing to learn and do what he asked me to do if he would help me. And we somehow hit it off. Once in a while, for instance, he was suffering from some kind of stomach ailment so he got some extra rations of white bread and he would give me a slice of white bread. He offered me cigarettes which I certainly didn't need but I could use them to barter them for something else. And the major thing was that I was away from that Transport Command which was a murder Commando. And I could work also inside. So I was not exposed to the elements because I was in a hall.

Q: So you went around the factory and did certain jobs?

NW: Well, in certain halls. For instance, to clean in the big, big towers where the chemical solution had to be cleaned. They were dirty so we had to clean them. It was work which didn't require all your energy and you could time yourself somehow and you learned somehow not to expose yourself completely so as to ration your strength so that you could do it. Especially when you had the feeling that your strength was going.

Q: You were working there in small groups? Two or three of you together?

NW: Yes. The other fellow, for one reason or other, was sent back to the camp and I was then alone. So I worked with this fellow for a couple of weeks. Then some labor dispute arose between his firm and the SS, so therefore I had to be

assigned to another job and I found then a position with the repair commando in the camp where weldiing work was required. The man who was in charge of that detail was a Jewish fellow from Magdeburg who had been in camp for quite some time. He was an excellent expert. Very tough in his requirements but fair. The advantage was that we didn't have to march out anymore which was good for my legs. And also there was a lot of private work developing within the camps and I started to barter work for food. Which means that the elderly of the blocks always had certain extra rations or extra something. And when they asked me to do certain things for the decoration of the blocks or whatever it was, I then started to tell them that I would gladly do it, but for a price. Also I used the opportunity to establish friendly contacts with the doctors in the hospital. Which was not actually a hospital, it was a place where people didn't dare to go. Not because of the doctors but because of the danger that after a couple of days the SS made selections in order to sort out those who were not able to work anymore for them. That was a time when I was able to recover my strength somehow. And didn't work hard. There were requirements which sometimes took many hours to complete a certain job. For instance, at this time the SS had the terrific idea to establish a brothel for the German inmates. They had one for themselves in Auschwitz and in the big camp they had one for German and Polish inmates, so they got the idea to have one in our camp of Buna. And there was a lot of plumbing work and welding work to be done. And this is what I participated in.

Q: Who did you work with?

NW: Well, mostly with that fellow or by myself. But the advantage was you were in a camp, you didn't march, you were protected mostly against the elements and you could somehow recover your strength and somehow get extra food here and there. And then one day, I got the news from the fellows

in my block who said, 'Can you imagine, British prisoners of war have arrived.' Which means the factory was so big, you had German civilians, you had Ukranians, civilian Ukranians, you had Polish civilians, and you had inmates working there. In addition to that, because they needed that, they brought British prisoners of war in. These people had been taken prisoner mostly in Africa, mostly in Tunisia. Had been brought to Italy. Had been kept in a prisoner of war camp in Italy. And when Italy stepped out of the war all those prisoners were shipped to the north, to a so-called stalag in Lammsdorf in Silesia. And against the rules and regulations of the Convention of Geneva, they were made to work in that Buna factory.

When they appeared on the scene they changed the atmosphere of Buna completely. That was one of the turning points because number one, they were rather well fed, very cocky, despised the Germans, joked about them. They were not guarded by the SS certainly but by army personnel. But this army personnel was already the last resort the Germans had. And when they were marching, these soldiers, the German soldiers could hardly keep step with them. And they loved to play all kind of tricks on them.

Q: Was this in the barrack next to you?

NW: It was not far from us. But we were separated certainly by barbed wire. We had no way of getting together. What they did was, I was told, on the first day when they were marching in and inmates were marching in the other direction, they took out their cigarettes (you know they had all this because of the supplies provided by the International Red Cross) and threw the cigarettes and chocolate packages and so on at people and the SS could not stop them. So that was a tremendous encouragement. In all respects. And when I heard this, I said, 'Now I must get out to the camp again.' First of all, my english was not too good but good enough

to communicate. After all, on all those trips to England I had picked up English. I had negotiated in English with the people of the agencies and so. I joined a commando as a welder which had just been built. It was what they called a 'Rollfahrtkommando' which was considered some kind of elite because each member was considered a skilled worker. And I then had regularly my own working arrangement far from the major activites. And there I could do a lot of things, also illegal things which were not under the supervision of the SS because the SS already had given up to control the whole camp since they were short of manpower. And there I established my contacts with the British soldiers which were a blessing.

Q: When was this? At the beginning of '44?

NW: I think it was in the summer of '44. Or in the spring. I can't tell you exactly.

Q: But during the whole time, the SS you could see, the terror was decreasing as they were running out of manpower. And tried to get more people to work, rather than somehow the terror...

NW: Yes, because somehow, after they became aware of what Stalingrad had meant to them. And after they had to draw out of the labor force more people. The inmate became more important and also more inmates took over important functions. And so therefore, for instance, they had given strict orders that at the places, especially the factories, neither the guards nor the Kapos were allowed any beatings and that, I mean, they didn't improve our lot a lot but at least they stopped somehow their most brutal treatment because we had become important. To such extent that I remember when there was a so-called Chemico Commando, a Commando of chemists. They were in charge of the supply depot, of the supply warehouse. And when the German 'Meister', the German fellow went home

for Christmas, they had to come to the inmates to help them to get, let us say some pots or pans, whatever it is, to bring home as a gift, because they wanted to acquire it. So therefore, I say, inmates had taken over very important functions there. And also, I felt this because the 'Meisters' became more, in their tone, they had to change it somehow. Not they they apologized for their behavior, but they changed somehow the tone, especially when the military situation deteriorated to the extent to which it did.

I came back to life again, I must say, when I met for the first time the British soldiers. I could communicate with them, certainly with the necessary precautions. And I practiced my English again. The British soldiers were very reluctant because you know Britishers are reluctant by nature. And they don't become your buddies immediately. But after a certain while they saw that we could trust each other and we became very, very close friends. And they were very helpful.

Q: How did you manage to create the situation where you could actually see them?

NW: Because we couldn't get together in the camps, but in the factory we had to work together. There was always the moment where you could talk to them. And just let me give you two examples how important that was for us. Not only that they kept on giving chocolate or cigarettes to people when they had it. One day, one of the fellows who was working with me sometimes, I found out had been taken prisoner at Toburg. He had been born in India, his father was the sheriff in Bombay or wherever it was. He hadn't seen England. And when he heard that I had been to England very often, when I told him about Engalnd he told me about India and certain things. He was a wonderful fellow. One day, he told me that, I asked him what kind of reading material he had, he told me that he had gotten material from Boston, the Christian Science Monitor had sent him stuff. I said, 'Do you have

a way of communicating with the United States?' He said, 'Yes, via the Red Cross we can do that.' 'Would you do me a favor and write for me a letter to friends of mine in the United States?' He said, 'Why not? It has to be done in the right way.' And I had remembered very well the address of friends of mine, very close friends of mine who had left in time. Had learned farming and had settled down in Decatur, on a farm in Michigan. And their address was not difficult to remember. So what he did then for me was that he, in his name, wrote to them saying that I have news for you, I have met our friend Norbert here. He is alright, he sends his love. He doesn't know too much about his family. And he is hoping... And so he sent this out. And I had completely forgotten about it, almost completely forgotten about it. We had suffered a couple of air raids starting in August '44. The American air force knew very well to find Buna but not to find Auschwitz. It is a special chapter if you want to talk about it later.

The area was already devastated somehow. It was after Christmas, 1944. All of a sudden, that fellow came running over through all these craters. He said, 'I have good news for you.' I said, 'What does it mean? Are the Allies already in Germany?' He said, 'No, but I have a letter for you.' I said, 'You're kidding.' It turned out that my friends were somehow stunned or flabbergasted. They couldn't quite understand what was going on. Had answered him. But somehow they thought that I was in a prisoner-of-war camp. And they had answered him and said, 'Give him our love and affection and that we hope that when this terrible war is over we can join with him and he is always welcome here and so.' I couldn't believe it. And I remember, we had a latrine there which was under the administration of a fellow who unfortunately didn't make it. And I told him 'I'll give you whatever you want in terms of bread or so. Watch out, I have to read something.' He said, 'What is it, a letter from a girlfriend?' I said, 'No, more important!' So I read and reread it again and in the

evening when I came back, and I told my friends, they said it was impossible, it couldn't exist. So foolish as I was, I brought this in, in order to prove it. If they had found it you know what would have happened. People said that was unbelievable. And after that I certainly destroyed it immediately. But that was with the help of the British prisoner-of-war.

The other interesting incident was, one day, a man I met in the block of a friend of mine who had just arrived, he was a doctor, Sterber was his name. He originated in Czechoslavakia. He was active politically against the Nazis in Czechoslavakia. When the Nazis invaded Czechoslavakia he fled via Poland to England. And when the war broke out he volunteered for war service. But the British couldn't use him as a soldier, so they assigned him to the merchant marines. And he joined the Blue Funnel Line, serving from Liverpool to India or Singapore. He made one trip with them and was fine. On the second trip when his boat was just out of Singapore, in the Strait of Malaca, a German raider of the Atlantics came and overpowered his ship. That German raider had come from Japan and had already two Allied ships in tow. They conquered the ships, there were some victims. And the British had prepared all their papers so nicely, so when the Germans searched their papers they found immediately that Sterber was a man who was not a Britishman but was...so they took this boat also in tow and they went through the Indian Ocean around the Cape of Good Hope, through the Atlantic Ocean, undisturbed by any British fleet because they were very weak at this time. And they made it into their Bordeaux. And in Bordeaux, Sterber was taken into the prisoner-of-war camps together with the others. After a very short time, he got a special order signed by Heydrich because in the meantime they had found out who he was. That he was considered a political prisoner, not a prisoner of war, and that he had to be transferred to Auschwitz. And he arrived in Auschwitz in the uniform of the British Merchant Marines. Which was

a sensation. He was taken to a different camp. And he came to us and said, 'For you, I'm waiting all the time because I know, don't tell me how, don't tell me why, I know you have special contacts with the British. I need your help and you have to help me.' 'What can I do?' He said, 'I want to get my story out to the War Department in London because there's no other way to get me out of here.' The British had a military system, some military practice that at certain times people had to escape from the camp in Lammsdorf and try to make their way into Switzerland in order to keep the British intelligence in Switzerland informed about on-goings in the area. All this he knew. I don't know why, but he knew it. He said, 'You have to bring me into contact with one of the British men in order to get my story out.' I discussed it with Mr. Raleigh and one other fellow and they couldn't believe it. They said, 'Alright, we'll talk it out.' They had some kind of political office or whatever it was. And they came back after two or three days and said, 'Norbert, they are willing to believe it under one condition. The fellow must be brought out here and they have to talk to him.' And that was not an easy task because he was as a doctor working in the Krankenbau. It was managed with the help of some other fellows that for one day he was let out. And I brought him and somebody came, the name of that fellow was Coward who I didn't know before. They got together in our little shed there and after two minutes they came out and said, 'We realize it is a true story.' And what then happened we don't know because that was in December '44 and in January '45 we were marched out.

Q: So they were above all important for the morale they could offer? And the contacts into the outside world?

NW: Also because they would help wherever they could. For instance, they were also fed a special soup by I.G. Farben. They laughed at it, they spit into it, but to us it was wonderful. So they gave it away. They had already 'their

inmates' to whom they gave this food. They were laughing about it because they had as long as possible their Red Cross parcels with all the goodies, and with the cigarettes and so they could acquire certain food which was helpful.

Q: How many prisoners of war were there?

NW: I don't know. I only know we had the first air raid in August 1944. A bomb hit their camp and a shelter and forty people died on the spot. A very good friend of mine included.

Q: So throughout, near the end of '44, the bomb attacks increased?

NW: We had the first attack on August 20, 1944. It was on a Sunday. I didn't march out but many people did. And when they came back they said the factory is badly hurt. So what they did was to put us back to work to restore it. And they had to get lime again in November--October, November. The day before they were starting again to operate somehow. You know Buna was never in full production--the day before they started that, the American planes came from Italy for their second raid which was even more successful. Then they put us to work again. And rushed us to at least repair what could be repaired.

It was not unknown that the Germans were on the retreat on the front in Russia. That the Russian army had entered Poland, the eastern part of Poland.

Q: How did you find that out?

NW: We, especially the civilians, not all of them were Nazis, not all of them were hostile. And wherever we could we tried to get newspapers--not newspapers, but a page or half a page. And they'd get the reports of the Commander of the Wehrmacht. And from that you could gather more or less where the Germans

were operating militarily. And also we were aware of the fact, with the help of our British friends who had their clandestine radio, that the Allies had landed in Normandy and that they were making progress.

Q: The civilians who worked with you in the factories, were they engineers for I.G. Farben?

NW: Well, engineers and mostly skilled workers. They were in the higher echelons.

Q: And they numbered how many?

NW: I have no idea.

Q: But you would have daily contact with them?

NW: Well, they were those who were supervising the work. The SS was not able to work out the program or direct the technical aspects of the construction work. For this they needed especially the German civilians. There were also other civilians. There were Polish civilians, all kinds of categories. The highest was certainly the SS. And after that came the Army people who were guarding the British prisoners of war. But there were the German civilians without uniform. They put on a special kind of uniform only once when the crematoriums in Auschwitz were blown up. Because there was some kind of alarm in the area and they then probably called into some kind of special service as some kind of militia. Otherwise the German civilians were always going around in their ordinary clothing. Then you had the Polish civilians. And then you had what they called 'Zivilgefangene', Poles who were not actually inmates, not part of the concentration camps. And then you had the inmates. And the British prisoners of war.

Q: So as the attacks continued, was the factory work actually disrupted?

NW: Buna never produced anything as far as I know. Because that came out in my suit later aginst I.G. Farben. They were building and constructing certainly the power house, tremendous power station, this I think was operative. But the chemical factory was not. So what they tried was to somehow eliminate the destruction so that at least on a minor scale they could hope to begin production one day. It never came about. So certainly the attacks affected us and also this fact that we saw the signs on the wall, at least we saw the signs, and once in a while in remarks to the German civilians. Something slipped through. They couldn't completely keep it a secret because some of them were concerned. I remember that for those with whom you could talk there was a deep concern when they got the news from the cities they had come from. The air raids which had destroyed their homes and so. When they got the news from their families how bad things were certainly this didn't increase or boost their morale. So the events of the war affected the situation. Also, when the war progressed, the food situation became more precarious. That means there was a time when, for instance, salt was not available. Because I understand they needed the salt for their chemical purpose. And very often power was cut so you had no heat. The events of the war affected the life no doubt and made things not easier for us. But easier in the respect that we had the feeling that the end is coming nearer and there was only one major question: what will be faster, the Allied armies or the destiny against us?

Q: Were you in these last months at the end of '44, were they still telling you to rebuild what was destroyed in these attacks? Or you were constantly on the move trying to repair what had been destroyed?

NW: Well, sure. They had a very effective first staff of engineers and what they did then was that they probably made new programs to get together those parts of the factory that might be operative enough for a time. So let us say they gave up on the big columns they had built, and settled for small productions instead of big productions. And this meant we all still were part and parcel of that hustle but it was not taken too seriously anymore because this strict discipline I had found when we arrived in March of '43 was not there anymore.

Q: What were your duties in these last four or five months?

NW: I had my special shed there where I did welding work. And we stretched that out as long as we could. After all, there are certain ways and means that you can weld in such a way that very soon these pipes would break or blast and it can not be avoided. And we didn't take it very seriously. When certain orders were given to do this and that, and either we had forgotten about it or we had misunderstood. The major thing, the best way to sabotage was to misunderstand. It was not without danger because there was still the threat that sabotage was threatened by death. But certain ways and means were always there, not to do what they expected us to do.

Q: What was your physical condition and the condition of your other inmates must have been pretty bad by now. Did you think your chances were still good of getting out of here alive in these last four or five months as the attacks increased? Or had the terror of the SS reduced to the extent that you could get by by cheating and sabotaging and lying low? Were there still people dying constantly around you?

NW: Now the SS also changed. They brought in, for instance, people who to a certain extent didn't speak German amongst

themselves They were to a certain extent dangerous individuals. You had to be careful. The officers certainly and the non-commissioned officers were Germans, but the rank and file to a certain extent were non-German. They were all kind of ethnic groups who had joined the SS. And Hitler had them recruited all over Europe, especially in Eastern Europe. And they were pressed also into service for the SS in Auschwitz. So that changed.

On the other hand there were still terror acts. One of those was that three of our people, I knew all of them very well, had tried to escape and to our regret this was discovered, probably by a traitor who knew about it. And in August, or September, in fall 1944, when things were pretty tough for the Germans, they decided to execute them in front of us to serve as an example that we should not think about resistance or whatever. That was an unforgettable thing: when one of them just before they were actually executed, one of them in a very loud voice which penetrated the whole area, thousands of us were assembled and had to watch it, and he cried out in German because he came from Cracow and knew German well: "Kopf hoch Kameraden, wir sind die Letzten!" Which means: 'Keep your head high because we are the last.' And that went through like a shock through all of us. For us it was a tremendous boost and the SS people were completely flabbergasted because somehow they realized that this man who was dying was right.

Q: What was his name?

NW: It was Jannik Weismann from Cracow.

Q: Now in these last months, maybe you could tell us about one or two close relationships with one or two friends. You described one...

NW: Well, you know Auschwitz was a microcosm of the macrocosm,

which means that people from all walks of life had been deported to that place. Whether these were bankers or the industrialists or the professionals or the lawyers or the doctors, we had the most famous doctors, the most famous musicians in Auschwitz. We had a fellow who was at one time a champion of the world at boxing, Perez was his name. He came from France. So there were the dock workers of Salonica in our camp. There were the cobblers and the shoemakers and the tailors from Poland. There were the teachers and the artists from all over. And somehow you saw the structure of the Jews all over Europe there. And one of them I remember we tried to help and unfortunately couldn't. He was a man, a lawyer by profession. He had attained quite a position in France. He was I think the Chief of Cabinet in the Cabinet of Tardieu. He was very close to Tardieu when he was the Prime Minister in France. And he had been taken prisoner in Nice. And even in Auschwitz he couldn't believe that this was possible and that this existed. That legal norms he was used to didn't apply to life in Auschwitz.

Q: He died?

NW: The work was too difficult for him. We tried to somehow to get him into some work that was easier but I think he contracted some kind of infection and that was fatal in Auschwitz.

I remember there was another fellow who came and was somehow, in the beginning at least, protected even by the SS. He came from Paris with special instructions. He had been, if I'm not mistaken, a part owner of a French paper which was friendly to Germany in the old days. And somebody in the SS hierarchy must have known about it so he came to Auschwitz and he was not put into the murder commandos and so. But he also disappeared very soon after. I don't know what happened to him but obviously also sickness or something happened.

Then I, for instance, met a man, he had come from, he was taken also in France. He was a Jew born in Egypt and he was prominent in the movie business in France. And with Pathé he had some association. I don't remember too well anymore, but also he was one of those who tried to make it but for one reason or the other...

Q: Would you say that people who had been more involved with intellectual work pre-war and pre this experience were more likely to survive under these harsh conditions than people who had done a lot of handy work in their life before? Was it a physical thing in the end?

NW: I would say that in general (all generalizations as you know are wrong) but in general, the professional and intellectuals suffered more and became much easier the victims of the living conditions in Auschwitz than, let us say, people who were used to hard work and to harsh conditions. Also, those of us who had been in Germany, had been drawn into the forced labor groups, we were used to certain work which we also had to perform in Auschwitz. So for instance, we knew how to dig properly without using too much effort and not to be too clumsy. Or for instance, for transport work, to transport things, we had certain tricks we had learned during that time and this was helpful. But for instance people who had been dragged out of their homes immediately--I remember the Dutch, they died like flies. The same, unfortunately was true for the Jews who came from Greece. They were not used to the climate. Though for instance the dock workers of Salonica were sturdy types but number one, they were passionate smokers and they gave away their bread to a certain extent for a smoke, but mainly it was the cold and the ice which killed them. They couldn't resist the elements.

Q: Were you able to talk everyday with other inmates? Was there any problem communicating with people you wanted to

within the confines of your barrack?

NW: The moment the SS established the Postenkette, which means the chain of guards around the I.G. Farben compound, it was easy for us to communicate with each other. Certainly there were controls, there were SS controls. But usually, people warned each other before and we watched out for that.

Q: When did the SS move out?

NW: I think it was, not moved out, but changed, I think that was also a consequence of the Stalingrad defeat. That was in late summer 1943. So we could talk to each other which we couldn't do before especially when these SS guards were supervising us and also made it their game to push and to press.

But there were certain other tricks. If I wanted to go somewhere or would send somebody of my group to somebody who was working away from our places, hundreds of meters or so, what we did then was put our welding gear together and put our apron in front of us and put our goggles up and we walked over the area and nobody would doubt for a moment that you did not have to go over to another place with a very important mission. And if we would have been asked we would have said we had to weld, that a pipe was broken on a high bridge and we had to repair it. Nobody could control that.

Q: What do you think sustained you most during the two years you were nearly there? When you look back was it the contact you had made with one or two friends? Was it a religious faith you had? Or was it just survival?

NW: There is no rational answer to that. There is no such thing. It is an accident. Survival is an accident. The fact that I luckily didn't catch any of the diseases there. Partly probably due to the fact that I was very, very strict

with myself to keep myself clean. Also the fact that I was able to overcome the shock of the first two or three months with somehow that burning desire to tell the world later what had happened. Not that they should write the history but that we should be able to witness to that. But it is the same if you ask a group of soldiers who go into battle, how come that your comrade next to you was hit with a bullet and you were not. There is no rational answer to that. It doesn't exist.

Q: To what extent could you help people immediately surrounding you in the barracks when things for them went bad or when they became sick or could you cover up certain things for other people? Were there networks by which you tried to help?

NW: There were things we could do, not big things. For instance, I had an assistant who thank God is alive. He was afflicted with some disease, I don't know what. So he had to go to the hospital a couple of times. But we were always afraid to do that because if you stayed too long, more than three, four, five days, people were selected for the gas chambers. Because they didn't want to feed worthless people. So when he went to that place for the second or third time, I went to the doctor of this block, I knew him well: he was a man who had come out of Salonica, Dr. Kwenker was his name. He had studied in Vienna. I told him 'Be careful here. Watch out for that young man because he is a skilled worker. You know skilled workers are protected.' At least I used that excuse. And this somehow helped.

One of my friends before, unfortunately, he was taken away. He had jaundice. He said, 'The food here is terrible. I am terribly hungry.' So we tried to get a little extra food together to bring it to him. These things were helpful. Or for instance, at one selection which was very serious, it was in summer or fall '44. That was done by the SS in such a way that people had to come out from one door of the

barracks and then enter another. An elderly man who is still alive, he is today in his eighties, he was an old camp inmate. He had been taken by the so-called 'Polnische Aktion' in September 1939. He knew that this would be fatal for him. So what we did was we put him into one of these mattresses, we buried him under the straw there. Put him into the bed and then covered the bed. And arranged it in such a way that a second fellow who was still looking healthy would jump out of the window in the back of the barracks, come into the other home and go through a second time. So that the number was actually alright. And in this way we saved his life.

Or sometimes some people came and were completely in despair. You know, a few words or an indication that the military and political situation is much better and that it was only a matter of time for us to be free again, all these things helped people somehow. I had a close connection with a man who was in charge as an inmate of the labor department. And once in a while somebody really couldn't do the work and we tried to shift him to another Commando where he could recover for a certain time so that he was not exposed to say the elements or so. All these things were done at this time. Today they seem to be so small; at this time they were great because that was the only way we could do things to help each other.

Q: These were fairly frequent? Would you say there were maybe one or two occasions a day?

NW: The psychological help was important. I told you about that we were helped by the appearance of the British prisoners of war. The fact that they were there. It was not only the cigarettes and the chocolate they had and gave to us or whatever it was. But just the fact that they were there in their optimism. Especially since they had acquired a radio set with the help of their Red Cross parcels, they helped us with the news. For instance, when we got some of the people who had participated in the Warsaw uprising. They found their

way to Auschwitz and certainly we wanted to know from them what went on and how was it. And this always helped strengthen the morale somehow. Or, I would say we talked about the air attacks. You know we were not allowed to use any of the shelters. We were completely exposed to the attacks. The SS had built for themselves special bunkers, I don't know how thick, of concrete and cement. And they would withstand even direct hits. We were not allowed, we were not worthy to enter and share the company of the 'Super Race.' So the only protection we had were trenches in the Buna area. And from these trenches we could watch the flying fortresses come over. And I remember when we looked at this somehow our hearts were beating faster. And somebody said, 'Well, if they now throw a bomb that's the end of us.' But we assured each other that these planes could not do any damage because the bombs don't come down straight but in curves. And by the way, you never knew if there were relatives of yours sitting there being the pilots or the navigators or whatever, so be happy. And somehow that was, the idea that here the Germans and the Nazis with their big mouth and their glory now were condemned to protect themselves in these bunkers and were hiding there and that the Americans and the Allies proved already their military superiority--that was helpful.

Q: How much did you know at this stage, we're now talking about the end of '44, how much did you know about the extermination camps? The fact that they were systematically murdering people?

NW: I must admit, peculiar as it sounds, that even I did not become aware immediately of the full extent of that process. When this fellow inmate Markowitz told us about Auschwitz, he only said, 'Well, you see a fire shine there. These are crematoriums where those who can't make it anymore are burned.'

Q: You saw the fire shine?

NW: Well, you could see it, sure. And there was a slogan, If the SS or the nasty German 'Meisters' said, 'Well, if you don't do it, you will go through the chimney.' That was a clear indication that you would be burned. We knew that this was there. But about mass gasses, I must say, believe it or not, I was not fully aware immediately. Until one day a man was transferred to our camp, and he came from Birkenau, late in summer '43. And we asked him immediately what he knew about Birkenau because we had heard rumours that at Birkenau there were women and children. It is true that women were incarcerated in Birkenau because there was a woman's camp. So we asked him about it. About our women, our children. And he was completely flabbergasted that we asked that questions. He said, 'Don't you know what's going on there?' And when he told us that thousands had arrived daily and that there was a mass extermination.

Q: How many people did he tell you?

NW: He didn't address an audience.

Q: In your barracks?

NW: Maybe two or three people. He said, 'I was there, I've seen it. Are you really not willing to believe that?' And we still couldn't completely believe it. He said, 'This is what they are doing there. They are burning people day and night. They are gassing them in the thousands. And if you have any hope or ideas to see your family again, I can't give you any hope.' And that came, believe it or not, as a shock to us. And we came to realize the truth of that in a very special way in summer 1944, when the German army had entered Hungary and Szalasi had taken over the government, and then the Nazis were able also to bring their 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' to Hungary. And transports arrived from

Hungary day and night. The air was full of stench you know of burning flesh even though our camp and our factory was approximately five or six kilometers from Birkenau. So what we did was after we were aware of that, we were going around sniffling, indicating in this way--because you didn't tell the German 'Meisters' this way because that would have been a folly. But we told the British prisoners of war that this was going on. And they couldn't believe it. They simply couldn't understand that this was possible. Let me say this also, the whole scheme of the Nazis, bringing the people to Birkenau, sending women with children immediately to the gas chambers, all this, in the full extent, we learned only after the war. We didn't know. Because this is what the Nazis did very effectively. To throw a veil of secrecy around their operations and only let a very few people know what really was going on.

Q: You mean none of the civilians knew?

NW: Well, the civilians knew that people disappeared. The civilians saw to a certain extent how the SS treated people in the worst times. And to a certain extent the civilians participated in these misdeeds. But nobody had access to that special area where the gas chambers were working and the crematoriums were burning. This was not in the cards that just anybody could just go there to have a look at it.

Q: So by December or January '45, then it was obviously becoming clear that this camp was slowly being laid to ruin?

NW: Not the camp, the factory. So what actually happened was, that after the third major air raid, very ,very little work was performed. And I think it was also possible the I.G. Farben had given up to rebuild or reconstruct because the news on the military front was so bad. The Russians had advanced very fast in Poland. And actually at the end of

'44, they were pretty close even to Cracow, or had stopped at the Vistula.

Q: So did the atmosphere change now in the work camp?

NW: Well, it was guarded. The question then was will we be able to survive? Because certainly we were aware somehow of the fact that the Germans would not like any witnesses to survive so that they could serve as their witnesses for the prosecution.

Q: So there was a feeling of anticipation, but at the same time there was that feeling that...

NW: There was all kinds of ideas: is it possible to escape but where, especially in an area under military operation. And don't forget that Auschwitz was surrounded by, to a certain extent, hostile area. There were Poles and Germans. We didn't see a chance to escape to the Beskite Mountains or so because there was nobody probably to receive us. Where could we go? We had not money, we had not the most basic things to sustain us. Also don't forget especially in the SS was armed to the teeth with pistols and submachineguns and heavy armaments. So therfore it was only the question since we were close to the Russian front, would the Russian army be fast enough to over roll us, or would the Nazis have the time to do what they probably had planned, namely to do away with the prospective witnesses against them.

Q: So on the 15th of January, when you were taken out of Auschwitz...

NW: No, no. On the 15th of January, the Russians started their major offensive. And they crossed the Vistula and they advanced towards Cracow. Cracow was approximately sixty kilometers, approximately thirty to forty miles east of

Auschwitz. And we heard the guns blazing because they were not too far on January 16, On January 17, we were not marching out anymore to work. After all, the weather conditions were very bad. The snow storms had covered the area before and it was bitterly cold. I remember it was eighteen centigrade below zero, which was approximately zero in Fahrenheit. So we didn't march out on the 17th, and the question was what's going to happen. And there was the expectation that since we heard already the guns blazing, that the Russians might be able to advance fast enough or that they would encircle the area somehow so that there would be no way, so that the Germans would eventually escape and leave us alone. Or anyhow, we would be rescued in the course of that military operation. And it came on the 18th, in the morning the SS cleaned out the Krankenbau. Those that were able to walk were released or pushed out of there. We were given small rations of bread and so. Also, the indication that something was going on we may not like was we saw there were a couple of new SS non-commissioned officers all of a sudden walking around. One of them was a man by the name of Boll. Boll was the man who was to a certain extent in charge of the gas chamber operations in Birkenau. And when we saw him we didn't like that.

Q: How did you recognize him?

NW: We were told by people who had been in Auschwitz before.

Q: So you were talking among each other trying to guess?

NW: 'What does he want? Does that mean that he's making preparation for dynamiting the camps?' Because he was infamous as a ruthless fuck. I mean who else could have been in charge of the gas chamber operations? And obviously the military operations went faster than even the Nazis thought. We were more or less convinced that we would stay there and be taken over. Over rolled and taken over.

And then came the order all of a sudden that at four o'clock in the afternoon we had to be ready and we were going to march out. This order came on the 18th. That's what they did against our expectations and assumptions. Around four o'clock, darkness was just setting in. We started to march out, to walk out. The streets were terribly icy. I must say also that days before we had seen on one of the streets facing our camp whole convoys of army trucks and German soldiers and German army personnel going to the west. They came from the east and we thought they were on the retreat with all their equipment. So we then walked the same road.

It was terribly icy, cold. We were not too well equipped but I luckily for instance had, by my connections with the British soldiers, had the army underwear. And the British were always very, very nice and we had a very special relationship. I had even British army boots and army socks which were warm. But this cold was tremendous, it was blowing from all sides. The SS was guarding us. And certain contraptions had been built to carry their luggage because certainly they were now very sorry that many of the things that they had stolen and collected over the years shouldn't be left there. So they were eager to transport this booty with them.

So the main interest for them was to reach the river Zola which was near Auschwitz before the bridges were blown up. Because they were not eager to fall into the hands of the Russian army. As soon as we had crossed the river, somehow the pressure let up. Also then at this time, slowly people started to collapse because of the cold, because of the malnutrition. And the moment they collapsed they were shot on the spot. Some people tried, it was dark in the meantime, so many people tried to escape into the woods surrounding us. Some managed to get away. Some, most probably not. Anyhow, there was constant shootiing going on. So under these conditions we marched the whole night. I was affected not so much by the cold but by the urge to sleep. To somehow

even for a moment to close the eyes but we were going together with a group of friends: my assistant, my welding assistant on my side and some other people, so we were trying to support each other not to fall asleep because that would have meant the end.

So we marched the whole night in the direction of Germany. The city they wanted to reach I later understood was Gleiwitz which was already in the old German part of Upper Silesia. Because there was another concentration camp which was what they called a 'Nebencamp', a subsidiary. And at least to get there and then evaluate the situation. We were not able to do that in that night. When it was dawning already somehow we reached a factory, a brick factory. In Polish they called it a Nikolai, which was still in the old part of Poland. And there they drove us in and said we should find whatever place we could to sleep. But who could sleep in that cold and there was nothing to eat. It was rather miserable.

Q: How many were there of you?

NW: That I cannot tell you. Thousands. They came from all directions. Not only from our camp from Buna but also from the other neighborhood camps. And we merged somehow. So all of a sudden people saw or met people they hadn't seen for a long time. Inmates and so. Because don't forget that Auschwitz consisted of so and so many of the main camp, which was called the Sturmlager and many other: Lagerhot, and Yivishowitz and Yuvoshno and so on.

Q: And your reaction to this must have been very mixed because after all wasn't there a sort of relief to leave Auschwitz?

NW: Well, we knew the end would be near. At the same time we were still marching with the hope that since we heard these guns blazing all night and sky, you could see the fire shine in the sky, that the Russian army would be faster than the

retreating Germany army, that we would over rolled.

Interestingly enough, when we left this camp of Buna, I wouldn't say there was a nostalgic feeling, but for a moment...you know we had lived there for almost two years. And there were so many memories and so many events associated with that: people we had known, things we had seen. Somehow, believe it or not, you become attached, even in Auschwitz you could become attached to something. We knew it was absurd, it was obscene to say that. But on the other hand, we saw we were going back to Germany and somewhere we must land. And the military events must hopefully take a turn in our favor. So that was when we reached Nikolai, we couldn't stay there too long. We hardly found any sleep. So we were again forced to, you couldn't call it march anymore, to walk. Even the SS guards were already exhausted and not capable to keep up. But when they were near collapse they simply climbed on one of the carts and asked the inmates to draw them along.

That was then we got to Gleiwitz. Gleiwitz was a city already in German Upper Silessia. And there they put us into a camp. The people who had been in Gleiwitz before had evacuated that camp already before. But when we came in it was overcrowded immediately and everybody looked for a little corner to rest up. There was very little food, almost no food. I remember that during the night we could hardly sleep because there was a very, very serious air raid and all kinds of military activities. And again we said hopefully that is it. And against all expectations we were then taken out again after two nights and were told we were walking towards Groß-Rosen. Groß-Rosen was a concentration camp near Breslau which was 150 or almost 200 kilometers from that place. But the moment we had reached the end of Gleiwitz, we were outside of Gleiwitz when we were told to go back because the roads to Groß-Rosen were closed. The Russians had reached that main connection.

Then the next day, against our expectations, we were asked to walk. They walked us towards a railroad station and there we saw cattle cars. I don't know how many but they

made some kind of a roll call before we were boarded on these cattle cars. We were approximtaely 6,000 people. And we were pressed into these cattle cars, we could hardly stand. There was no way to lay down. And then after many hours...

Q: What was the mood at the station? Was it frantic, chaotic? Was the SS frantic at this point? Shooting wildly?

NW: We saw that they were concerned. That this was something they didn't expect. And if they thought that the war was over and that would be the end of it, I don't know. But they still obeyed the orders and they still mistreated people. If it wasn't fast enough they still used their rifles to make it faster. So it was not a friendly atmosphere surely. They forced us up into these cattle cars after hours of waiting which was terrible because the cold was the same and we had hardly eaten since we left Auschwitz.

So the trains finally moved. We thought it would never move. That they wouldn't have the engines, the locomotives to move these trains. But they did. We were going during the night, we didn't know the direction.

Q: You still had your group around you?

NW: Yes, we still had our group but you could not, you were simply standing. There was no way to lie down. But if people collapsed or so, then life under these circumstances is very ruthless. If people died, the only way was just to throw them out of the cattle cars. Because there was no way to place them.

Q: How many people were in these cattle cars?

NW: Could be 100, 120, who knows? Filled to capacity. Could have been more, could have been 200, 300. Absolutely packed, standing side by side.

Q: People died and were thrown out?

NW: Yes, and certainly there were the Germans who were criminals, who were what they called professional criminals (Berufsverbrecher) and they had always a very quick solution in these situations.

Q: Did you talk to people?

NW: Sure we talked. But when the first case happened in our car, somebody said, 'Well, we have to throw him out.' And people said, 'You can't do that.' So for a certain while that was the answer. But then when the conditions in the cattle cars became unbearable we said, 'Where do you leave a body in this situation?' And under the condition, that was the only solution possible.

When the train was rolling, then at least those of us who were familiar with the area could tell that it was rolling towards Czeckoslavakia. There's an industrial area, in Bitkowitz, Mährisch Ostrau. We had reached this place somehow in the evening before it was completely dark and stopped there. When we entered Czechoslovakia, we saw the change of atmosphere. Those of us who were able to look out, not everybody, for instance those in the middle couldn't even look out, saw that women were for instance falling on their knees and praying. And when the trains stopped there was just a change in the shift of a big iron works, the Bitkowitz, and the people working in the factory had to pass by, cross a bridge going over our train. When these men saw what was going on, and it had started to snow again and we used our blankets as cover, then they started to throw their sandwiches into the cars. The SS started to shoot into the air but these people didn't stop, they defied the SS. And this was an experience that none of us can ever forget. Because they really proved their solidarity with us.

Q: Were you just men on the train?

NW: Yes. And then from there we continued, went through Czeckoslovakia via Brüm (Powdervitz?) Went into Austria and we crossed the border into Austria at Pregarten. And then we realized that we probably would be taken to Mauthausen which was an infamous camp in Austria. There were quarries and hardly anybody survived there for a long time. So we were taken to Mauthausen and there was no food.

Q: You had had no food whatsoever apart from what the people had thrown to you? Had you been able to grab something from them?

NW: Well, we had some of the bread saved we had with us but that was all. But what was worse was the thirst. So luckily it was snowing hard and you could use it to quench your thirst. But no food.

When we came to Mauthausen they threw us some kind of -very few breads into the cars, but people were like animals trying to grab it. And if one had grabbed it, the other tried to grab it. It was a terrible situation. And after a certain while, we were standing there. We were not allowed to disembark. We were told that the commander of Mauthausen refused to accept the people and we were going back. We didn't know where we were going. In the meantime, the number of people who had died had increased. And obviously they knew that this had happened and the civilian population had become very distressed about it and let the Germans know about it. So at one point when the train stopped the order was given not to throw the bodies out anymore but to wait until we stopped at the next station. And that happened. So for instance when those who had died in our car were, with the help of the other inmates, just laid out on the ground. And then one of the SS gangsters said, 'Since we are so many dead, let us have the 'Muselmänner

raus,' those who were close to death but still alive. Let us also have them. We refused but there were always those, among especially the Polish and German criminals, people who wanted their comfort because they obviously thought the less people on the car the better for them. So some of those people were handed over to the SS and then one or two of them--one of them was Moll who we saw again-- shot the people on the spot. One of these gangsters was discovered after the war in northern Germany by chance, and I was instrumental to start procedures against him. He was brought to court and sent to jail for many years. Hauptführer Rauchus. He was from northern Germany and had been released from an American prisoner or war camp. Somebody had recognized him in the street. And the police there were ready to release him and we were aware of it. I luckily had a connection with the district attorney in Hamburg. I callled him immediately and told him this was one of the murderers-- we had him also in Auschwitz and he was there an infamous guard-- so they kept him. Then we brought the evidence together and then there was a trial. I was already in the United States. I was flown over to be a witness together with another friend who had witnewssed it and he was sent to jail.

The train entered Germany at Theche (Johann Georgerstadt?). So this is how I came back to Germany. Then we went via Dresden which was still completely untouched.

Q: How did you feel about coming back to Germany?

NW: Well, you were already so numb after almost ten days there on the train, that you didn't have any special feelings. The only thing you wanted was, I remember, to have a hot meal, to take a bath and to be warm somewhere and to go to bed. You saw the trains with all the refugees and all that and you had the feeling that they were now getting what they deserved. Not vengeance but you came to the conclusion that's what they wanted and that's what their propaganda led them

to.

Q: So there was a certain amount of satisfaction there?

NW: Well, satisfaction because we were in such a situation, as I said our main interest was just to survive that thing. We didn't philosophize a lot. But certainly, subconsciously it was a certain amount of call it satisfaction that what the Germans had done to the others was now served upon them.

Q: The train was now moving north?

NW: North towards Berlin and this is when I saw Berlin again for the first time. As a matter of fact the trains took a route not far from my home. But when we saw Berlin it was already in bad shape. We couldn't see too much or we didn't notice too much because it was still cold and snowy. We had no protection against the elements. We were almost starved. But the little we noticed was interesting. And then from Berlin we were taken north to a place, to the concentration camp Oranienburg which I knew, certainly everybody in Berlin knew, because that was the closest concentration camp we had to Berlin. And this is actually the place where the men were taken after the November pogroms in 1938. And they tried to make some kind of a roll call and certain people simply couldn't descend the cattle cars because they were so stiff and frozen they couldn't move. It wasn't easy.

So in the first roll call we found out that we were not more than 1800 people which means that two thirds of the people who had boarded the train in Gleiwitz had perished.

Q: You lost friends?

NW: Yes, one close friend who was from Berlin. He already, I remember that night in Gleiwitz when we had the air raid, he already was in some kind of delirium, he obviously had

an attack of pneumonia. Also he liked to smoke and he gave away food for a smoke and obviously had no resistance anymore, so the moment, and this is the tragedy, we entered Germany he died. He was in the next car next to my own.

We were then led to a camp which they called Heinkel. Heinkel is a factory for airplanes. And there obviously concentration camp inmates, non-Jewish inmates had worked before. When we reached the factory we saw that the factory was already out of operation completely. There were a few unfinished planes standing around but there was no real production anymore. The glasses were blown out and we were driven into these tremendous halls and given to understand that we had to sleep on the cold floor. And certainly there was no protection, there was no heat, no nothing.

Q: What condition were you yourself in physically?

NW: Well, certainly I was rather weak but somehow the idea that something was happening somehow kept me alive. That we were going towards something. Because after having seen the destructions of Berlin, the trains with the refugees, the retreating German army, you know we were aware that any moment something could happen in our favor. And we wanted to reach that moment of survival. Also I was aware that this couldn't last long in Heinkel.

We had been cut off from any news. This was the end of January and things everywhere were in an uproar. When we reached Oranienburg, some of the old inmates had a radio and they told us that the Russians had advanced into Silesia but then had stopped and that the Allies had actually reached Aachen already in fall and had advanced and were on their way into the interior of Germany.

But nevertheless I wanted to get out somehow. Again, one of my habits was to keep clean in spite of everything. So what we did was since we had no water, we used the snow to wash up and to refresh. And I even-- it's not pleasant

to do that-- but I even somehow shaved with the help of snow. And that helped me. Because two or three days later there was a request for people who were able to type on a typewriter because they needed, since so many thousands had come in, they had to prepare lists for the registration. So I volunteered. And I looked clean as I was taken into the what they called the administrative building of that camp. And we were starting to work during the nights because there was so much work. It was their night shift. But the beauty was number one there was more to eat and for the first time after twelve days I had something to eat--really more than I could tolerate.

Most of those people we met there in Heinkel were old political prisoners from all countries of Europe: Poles, Yugoslavs, Danes, Dutchmen and so.

Q: Who was guarding you?

NW: This was a concentration camp. Certainly the SS was around on the watch towers. And luckily, during the night after an hour or two, after having worked, the Americn bombers came, so there was no light, and also no protection. But we couldn't continue our work, so we slept during that time. So this became then rather tolerable.

All this time I worked in clerical functions. I also then thought it's about time to declare myself a so-called political prisoner which means that, not that I wasn't proud to be a Jew, but since I spoke the language and my mark had somehow faded, the yellow had faded, so once when a fellow asked if I was a political prisoner, in my audacity I said yes. Also I didn't allow anybody to cut my hair anymore. So I let the hair grow, so in this respect I became a so-called political prisoner without foregoing anything which was Jewish in me.

Q: Were your friends around you able to do similar things?

NW: No, they were smiling about it and said, 'That's a nice trick.' But there were not too many who were actually working in the administration. That went on from January until the end of March, early April. We had daily and nightly attacks and we hardly could do the work anymore because the bombers came. There was absolute superiority of the American air force, and to a certain extent, the British air force in the air. And they always passed by our place going towards Berlin.

Q: There were no attacks on this particular camp?

NW: No, not then. As a matter of fact, things there were completely different from Auschwitz. For instance, at least when I worked in the administrative building, I had my own bed. I didn't have to double up with anybody. We had what they called a place where you could sit in the evening. You had benches and tables and even a cupboard to leave your things. You were able to keep yourself clean. So that was a tremendous change.

Q: And the atmosphere in the camp?

NW: It was already somehow in disarray. I remember that I was thinking seriously, since I was now close to Berlin, to find some way to get out. Because we knew that during the air raids they had shut down the electricity of the wires so this danger didn't exist at this time. But on the other hand, I didn't know what to do because I had in Berlin only a neighbor of mine who had sent money to me in Auschwitz who was there. And I established, illegally, contact with her through one of the civilians working in the camp. She even had the courage to confess that she knew me and if I needed anything she would help to the best of her ability. But what could she do?

One Sunday afternoon, at the end of March, I was walking

along the barbed wires with a friend of mine talking. Some of the guards had changed on the towers. You saw, for instance, people with a red hat, these were Bosnians. Bosnians who had joined the SS. Who spoke volksdeutsch; ethnic German. And when we were walking by one of the towers, the fellow from the tower had a uniform from the air force, the Luftwaffe. This surprised me somehow but obviusly they were so short of SS that they had to use these people. And he started to talk to us. He said, 'Well, it's a nice day. I wish I was out of this dirt and shit here. I would like to run away because I don't like to be caught when things will change and they have to change.' I said, 'Are you sure of that?' He said, 'Who are you kidding? They put me here against my will. I have nothing to do with these criminals and so.' And then I thought for myself that I would know that this man would be there at a certain time that would be the easiest to eventually get through there because he probably then would not shoot. But also came again the question of where to go. Where do you leave yourself?

So you see that the discipline was changing already. I remember that people, the German criminals came to me one evening when we had an air raid alert and said, 'Well, soon that will be over and you will be on top of the world. And I hope you will not forget us.' So it was the feeling that it was a matter of time. It went so far that we started to build some kind of committees. In case the Russians would reach the area first, members who could speak Russian and Polish became members of that committee. And there was another of those who spoke French and English. And since I knew some English, they asked me to be available. They were mainly old political prisoners who also certainly were aware of the fact that in the last moment something could happen: they could dynamite the camp and do away with the evidence against them.

Q: The daily terror had subsided?

NW: Yes, because there was hardly any work done. There was almost nothing. Some of my friends, my formers assistants, had to do some work in a group called Klinkerwerk. This was bad because they had to get out there early and they were working with bricks and sand. But there was nothing productive anymore. This had ceased.

On April 20, we had an alarm very early in the morning and our only protection was to go into trenches. The soldiers and the guards tried to get out of the area somehow as far as possible. And we saw on that morning, I didn't count them, but there were hundreds and hundreds of flying fortresses coming over our area and also coming from other directions but all going towards Berlin. And you could hear their bombs released nearby. There was a clear sky and at the end of the sky looked from the exhaust of the engines like sheet music written into the sky. And there was no German resistance anymore. I remember one German fighter tried but he was shot down and I saw him explode in a field nearby. So the war was definitely lost. But the Germans still didn't give up or give us up. So after that was over, after the all clear sign was sounded, there was no water, no electricity, no nothing. One or two of the bombs had fallen into our area and had hit the munitions depot. And when that went up, that certainly gave us a lot of satisfaction because we were aware that this munition couldn't do us any harm anymore.

So we thought that we were now waiting for who was going to over run us first. Either the Allies or, and interestingly enough, every night we could listen to the radio of the camp, this was on. And we knew that the Americans had already entered Frankfurt. And we knew that the Russians had been close to the border. So either it was a matter of days or hours until they would reach us. So we were more or less certain that we had to watch out carefully. I had provided for myself a civilian jacket. Somehow, I had connections with the people of the so-called clothing department of the camp and had gotten

a jacket without any signs in case it should be alright to slip into it. Because I was still toying with the idea to look for the moment to get away.

So after that terrible bombardment where nothing worked anymore and nothing could move, all basic services were suspended. We were sure that Sachsenhausen would be the place of either our destiny or our liberation. Then, all of a sudden during the night somebody came from the administration building telling us that our instructions were to march out tomorrow morning. We couldn't believe it but we followed them. So we marched out the next morning on, I believe, April 21. The weather was beautiful, thank God, on that day. And when we marched out for the first time, we saw women again. But what was more to our heart, was the defeat of the German army. For instance, close to our camp, there was a forest, and the trucks and the military equipment of the German army were being hidden under the trees. And it was clear to us that there was no fighting capacity in them anymore. So they were driving us towards the north in the direction of Mecklenburg. What the purpose was we did not know. We moved rather slowly but the moment we moved out we saw already the refugees coming from Berlin. Because there was a deadly fear of the Russians. And anybody who could move, moved on that road towards the Americans or the British.

Q: Were you aware of that at the time, that that was an issue or you were just being marched out?

NW: No, you see, in Oranienburg we had closer contact with the civilians so we were aware of many things. And certainly that there was a deadly fear amongst the German population on account of the crimes the Germans had committed in Russia. Which had become known after the liberation of Majdanek and Auschwitz.

So there we somehow mixed with the refugees. You saw people on bicycles, even on horses, on the most impossible

trucks or cars available; anything that moved: milk trucks, whatever was available. There were civilians going. Women with children, but also soldiers. Soldiers with equipment, without equipment. Soldiers with their cars or trucks. It was a complete mixture. We had in Sachsenhausen before we marched out, had gotten some rations for bread and some other food but it didn't last too long.

Then as we moved towards the north, the weather changed. And we didn't like that because you had to sleep during the night mostly in the wodds. So here my experience as a boy scout helped me somehow because we took our blankets and covered the ground and when we were lying down we got as close as possible in order to keep warm somehow. So this was somehow bearable. The more we marched towards the north, the more we found air activity. Not only the bombers, but also fighters and this mixture of fighters and bombers. Strafing to a certain extent the roads on which we were marching because they saw some military equipment and they were taking it. And we passed by certain areas where after such a raid you saw a lot of dead bodies and a lot of dead horses. That was a blessing in disguise because, especially the Frenchmen amongst our people were experts in cutting out of these horses with whatever they had (some had knives); especially they were after the liver because they thought it was a delicacy. Then in the evening we made a fire and tried to prepare that as food. Also what helped us was that all of a sudden a convoy appeared with British soldiers who brought International Red Cross packages, and distributed this to us. We didn't know that this was arranged by Herr Bernadotte who on certain days had spent time in Lübeck which was declared an open city, because from there the prisoners of war got their supplies of Red Cross parcels. And that helped us tremendously because this was at least something, there was solid stuff in there, fat and chocolate and things like that. And we were able to at least fill our stomach with something. Then for a certian while we were kept in a forest in Mecklenburg. We were not

fully aware of what was going on. We were waiting and waiting and waiting for either the Allies or the Russians to come in. Nothing happened and I remember...

Q: You were still guarded by the Germans?

NW: Still guarded by the SS or the Germans. What they had done was to call out in these last days, German inmates, criminals or non-criminals, and had given them uniforms and a rifle to be our guards. And we were laughing about them. So it was already a breakdown and certain people tried to get away because there was no control. But to run away there also didn't seem to make sense because the population probably was hostile to us and I didn't think it would be wise.

Q: Were you discussing it with friends?

NW: We were discussing that. And one of our friends for instance, a Jewish fellow, declared that he is a political prisoner. And all of a sudden, we saw him in an SS uniform! We got a good laugh out of that. But still the situation was fraught with danger becauase we never knew what would be the outcome. We were camping in that forest for a couple of days. I remember that because it was my birthday, my 32nd birthday. When we eventually continued from that and walked through a city, it was approaching slowly May 1 or 2, we were walking through the city, some French civilian prisoners were yelling at us, "Hitler kaputt, Hitler kaputt." And that certainly made us alert. And we saw there a German jeep listening to the radio, and certainly the news came over the radio that Hitler 'fighting as a hero had fallen in Berlin,' and everybody was requested to continue the fight. So that meant we were still their prisoners.

On May 2, we were approaching the northern part of Mecklenburg going towards Schwerin, the city of Schwerin. All of a sudden, a German soldier on a motorcycle came towards

us and yelled, 'What are you walking, you idiots? The Americans are already in Schwerin!' Schwerin was from there approximately 30 kilometers. And that made us all awake. So we were ordered again into the woods. The weather luckily was alright. So we prepared ourselves for the night. The meat, we had gotten from the horses, we tried to prepare. And all these days we certainly saw military action. At one point, not far from there, we saw American fighter planes coming towards us and the German guards ran into the fields for protection. We couldn't and we were afraid that they would open with their machine guns or whatever they had. Luckily they didn't because probably at the last minute the pilots realized that this was not just military movements going on. So they moved in deep, then went away, so we were saved. When we were in that forest, just preparing our so-called dinner of horse meat, the guns opened in the back of us. We had heard these guns on all these days, but obviusly we were walking faster than the army somehow. And the fire came closer and always heard my father speak about experiences in World War I that usually when the guns are blazing the shells do not hit the same spot twice because they are always moving. So when the fire came closer, and dangerously close, at this very moment we said now is the moment to try to get out. Because either we would be hit by gunfire, or whatever, so let's take our life into our hands.

So we left the dinner with the horsemeat there and took whatever we had, blankets and so, little things like I had a shaving set. And we ran towards the road from which we had come. The guards were still around. We crossed the line and there was shooting after us, but luckily it didn't hit us because it was getting dark already. And then when we were out of that line, I was in a group together with my assistant, together with the first husband of my wife, and some other people including a Frenchman, a Ukranian, a Belgian, I think we were a group of six or eight people. We then discussed what to do because this was a precarious situation. The bombardment was still going on. The refugees on the road were certainly excited because they were also afraid for their lives. And there were a lot of tanks moving in that area.

We decided to follow the direction towards the north, toward Schwerin because it said on the signs. We knew the Americans are in Schwerin, so it was only a matter of hours, or the last effort to reach that line. We were actually at this moment in a military pocket, in a no man's land. I threw away at this moment my coat with the stripes and put into my pocket the cap with the stripes and I then put on that civilian jacket. We were not going on the road but next to the road, going forward in that direction.

We thought we were safe until one moment all of a sudden we were surrounded by some SS troops. And amongst them were one or two SS women, who I considered always more dangerous than the men to a certain extent because they were absolutely (I don't like to say this about women) the scum of the earth, who had served for many years with these men. Absolutely ruthless. They were dangling their pistols in front of us and asked 'Who are you? What are you?' What we didn't understand, what we only became aware later of that was that many of the German soldiers had thrown their rifles away and their military equipment. And somehow the Poles and the Russians had taken these and had started a private war on their own. So in response to that, especially the SS had given the order

that anybody caught in suspicious clothing ressembling either foreign workers or concentration camp people ought to be killed on the spot. So when they stopped us we didn't know what they wanted but at this moment I was glad I knew German as I did. I addressed them in no uncertain terms and said, 'What do you want from us? We have been driven out by the Russians because the Russians are behind us and that's the reason why we are here.' And when they heard that the Russians were already that close, they for a moment also got scared. They said, 'Alright, you stay here with us. You don't move and we'll watch you.' Because they were also afraid that we could take up arms against them.

That was the longest night I ever experienced. Because I don't know how long we were waiting there but all of a sudden they gave the order to move and they moved and left us alone. And after we had recovered from that experience we thought we should be more careful not to run into them, so we walked slowly together with the refugees. In other words, mingled with them so that we wouldn't build a special group. And that was the best policy under these conditions.

So we walked. Slowly it became light. There were woods left and right of the road. And all of a sudden, we saw in the dawn some crossing somewhere. Couldn't make it out completely because also the refugees who were walking rather slowly. And when we came to that crossing, we saw all of a sudden on the other side of the road, the American flag had been hoisted and one of their jeeps of the people there had directed the big lights towards the direction of the flag which meant that this was the demarcation line. We understood later that this was the demarcation line of the American army because they didn't want to go any further because they didn't want to take any further casualties.

And they probably knew anyway that this was an area they would probably have to evacuate under the Yalta agreement anyhow, so there was no sense to proceed. Which means that the military pocket for them ended at this spot and they let

the Russians come closer. At the first moment we were dumbfounded. We couldn't quite understand what was going on with us. Then when we saw that and when we realized what was going on, it was a very special moment. And some of our people, you know, hardened inmates, broke down. We still were not quite sure because we had not passed the soldiers, but we knew that that meant there was a new life hopefully waiting for us.

We went further and all of a sudden, I saw across the street a group of soldiers in a uniform I didn't realize, I later found out, was the American uniform. And a young fellow who I later found out was a Texas boy, directed his pistol at me and said, "What are you doing here?" Then I was glad that my English was as it was already in these days. I said, 'We have just escaped from the Nazis. We are prisoners of the concentration camp.' And he lowered his pistol and somehow something was ging on in him and he said, 'You're very welcome. You go where you want to go. And whatever you find from here on is yours.' We couldn't quite understand what it was that he meant. The fact was that the moment the German soldiers passed the demarcation line they had to give up their trucks, they had to give up everything because they were taken into custody and sent to the prisoner of war camp. And there was a tremendous place behind this crossing where they had lined up all these cars. The Americans had just made a serach of these cars to find out if there were explosives or so. But there were mostly papers. The Germans were always travelling with papers. So the whole area looked like a snow landscape.

What was important for us was a quite substantial amount of food. Army food, which was both good and bad. Because many of the people who came after us jumped at this typical Germany food: the very fat lard with peas and things like that. And because they were so terribly hungry they ate whatever they could. Many of them dropped dead on the spot. We didn't do that. After we had recovered somehow we tried to realize

what had happened to us in the last hour. We continued and there we saw the defeat of an army which is very difficult to describe because there was everything you could imagine in weaponry, in equipment, in food, and so.

We were on the way into Schwerin and we saw some American soldiers guarding certain areas. It was a chilly night but a beautiful night. In order to warm themselves a little bit they used as fuel whatever they could find. Amongst that was German money because it was worth nothing. So I saw for the first time it used as fuel. And wherever we came, and we were one of the first groups, we were greeted and they directed us to the building of the military government which we found out later was the city hall of Schwerin.

We reached that spot, I don't know which hour because we had no watch, but probably it was four or five in the morning. And when we reached the military which had been established by the Americans the night before. As the soldier on the motorcycle had rightly said they had reached Schwerin the afternoon before. And they had established a military government in that building where we were directed. We came but the doors were closed because there were no office hours at this early morning hour. So we were standing around deliberating what to do. One of my friends was very sick. He could hardly walk any longer. We thought there must be some kind of relief or help organization. I said to myself, 'My goodness, where are the big Jewish organizations? They must know what our situation is!' But there was nobody.

Q: Was this still a happy few hours?

NW: These were memorable moments which are the highlights of certainly anybody's life and my life especially. Because slowly it was sinking in that we were free. We were in Germany but we were free. And we were now under the protection of the American army. So when we were waiting there, all of a sudden a jeep turned up and a soldier jumped out and he

also tried to open the door of that military government. And he was rattling, almost breaking the door. It didn't open. And I made some kind of remark in my English that I had tried before and it doesn't work. He said, 'Where do you come from?' And he wanted an explanation of what I was doing. And I explained what I am. And he said, 'You know, I came exacctly for that problem. I come from the demarcation line. Now hundreds of people are coming. Those people are not refugees, they are not soldiers and we don't know what to do with them. And we need the help of the military government.'

So while we were standing there discussing it, we all of a sudden saw German soldiers, even non-commissioned officers walking around. Air force, army, whatever it was. And that fellow, all of a sudden, was in a fighting spirit. He called these people together and told them to stand in front of him because they were still walking around, some with their weapons, some without. I remember after he had ten or twelve together he said to me, 'You understand some English I see. You are my interpreter.' You know, just two or three hours before I was still a prisoner of the Germans and now all of a sudden I was the assistant of that American sergeant.

After he had twelve or fifteen together, he saw some fellow, sergeant, German sergeant walking slowly around the corner from that military government. He yelled at him but that fellow didn't want to hear. He yelled again and that fellow started to run. So he took his pistol out and it didn't take long, two shots in the air, and that fellow came shaking. You know, there were two fellows in the jeep but he was a daring fellow. He took the whole group. And asked me to translate into German what he wanted from them. It was not easy in the beginning because I had forgotten for myself to use the language of orders and instructions!

When we were still waiting, all of a sudden another sergeant, a German of the air force, and said, 'I understand you speak some German.' So the American said, 'What does

he want from us?' And he explained that his colonel or his general is in a staff car and he doesn't know what to do with him. So I translated that to the fellow there. He said, 'What? He doesn't know what to do with the general? Tell him in two minutes he had to be here.' So I translated that to that German sergeant, or whatever he was. He said, 'No, two minutes, that 's not the right time. You have to awake him and he had to get prepared and so.' So I told this to the American soldier. He said, 'What? He cannot do it in two minutes? Tell him if he's not here in two minutes I'll get him.' So I was translating this and I must say I had fun in spite of everything. So I told him and sure enough in a little over two minutes, maybe five minutes, this soldier with a very high rank came. The American had collected them all. Then slowly other soldiers came and they deliberated what to do. And they marched them off and I was happy that I got out of that--but it was my first job with the American army.

I thought that something had to be done because the government didn't open. So all of a sudden the Frenchman amongst us said that there must be somewhere a bistro (Il y a un bistro ici!), there must be a bistro here, meaning a coffee house. I said to him, 'Gerard, how can you expect after the war, where would they have a coffee house?' He said, 'I have to find out.' And sure enough after a certain time he came back and said, 'I didn't find a coffee house but I found somewhere an apartment on the first floor with a nice lady and she helped me with a cup of coffee and something.' So I said, 'Let me see. Lead me there.' So I went there and started to talk to her and said, 'Listen, we are a group of three people. We are Jews. You should know that. We are persecutees of Hitler. I need for one of my friends immediately a room with a bed where he can rest up because he cannot walk anymore. So rent me some of your apartment.' This I said after I had washed up and refreshed a little bit. She said, 'How can I do it? My daughters are

here and they are refugees.' I said, 'As proof of my good will I'll give you twenty marks.' These twenty marks I had still carried from Auschwitz from one of my commercial transactions. This and a picture of my father I had in Auschwitz.

You know, I gave her the twenty marks which was the last money I had. And she provided the two rooms and we moved into that apartment. And that was the first night that we slept in real beds. But we couldn't because we were not used to that anymore. I as the big boss had a room for myself. My other friends (my assistant and my wife's first husband) had another room. During the night we got out of bed because we couldn't sleep in these soft beds. And certainly the events were working in our system.

Then the question came up, what are we going to do? How can we help ourselves? Then I had a brainstorm. I went back to the military government and in the meantime and by the afternoon things had moved. People were coming and going. I thought to myself that I had quite a number of friends who were able to escape to the United States. I'm certain that they had volunteered for the army. It was just possible that one of them had come to the place and I might see them. So I was looking and was standing there but had no such luck. It was a little bit naive. But all of a sudden a jeep came up and a very husky fellow descended. And I looked at him and I went to him and asked him 'Are you Jewish?' That fellow was almost six feet two, six feet three, and he looked down on me and said, 'Yes. Why are you asking?' I said, 'I'm Jewish too.' I almost didn't dare to say it. He said, 'For the hell, what are you doing here?" And I explained to him that for me this was a very special moment because he was the first Jew I saw carrying arms against Hitler. He had difficulty to speak. He embraced me and said in Hebrew, "Shalom Aleichem" which means "Peace be with you." And he said, 'What can I do for you?' And I told him that I was not alone and that I had a couple of friends who were in bad shape. He

said, 'Listen, it's now four in the afternoon. Be here in an hour or two. We have some more Jewish boys in our tank group. Our chaplain at the moment is not with us. He should actually take care of you. But I can assure you that we'll see what we can do for you. Be here in two hours.' I was ashamed to tell him that I had no watch. So I said okay.

I went back to my friends and said, 'Listen, I've met the first Jewish soldiers in the American army. Help is on the way.' And sure enough I was there two hours later. And he brought some other buddies along. The first fellow's name was Victor Cohen from Pittsburgh. As I said, he brought some other Jewish buddies along. And they had already collected whatever they had not used in the last couple of days. For instance, they were sick and tired of their K rations and all that. And they brought this, and this was the first help we had. The first social work by people who were not appointed social workers. So that was helpful.

Luckily I could move around. I felt after having overcome the first weakness I was moving around, I felt strong. So they took me to Jewish people they had found somewhere. There was for instance a mother with a daughter. Her toes had been frozen, she had frostbite and couldn't walk. Her daughter had carried her for miles and miles. I was taken to her and when I told her who I was she didn't dare speak because she was still afraid that there could be a spy or a disguised Nazi.

So slowly we got into contact with the other remnants of the people there in Schwerin. I went to the court building in Schwerin because there I heard they had established the CSC which was the counter-intelligence corp. And I was told that in this group there were a lot of refugees. But you know how the army is: in that group I found mostly Austrians who had come from Vienna and from Innsbruck but not from Germany. So I was disappointed but they asked me what I wanted. And I told them that I had been active in Jewish affairs and was looking for Jewish friends and that I wanted to establish

contact with the people still alive to let them know that, thank God, I am safe. Two days later the girl who had come with her mother said, 'There is somebody in that court building who wants to see you.' When I came a man who, at this time they still have to carry the rifle, and somehow I had the feeling that the rifle didn't completely, that he and the rifle were from completely different worlds. A very nice man. He addressed me in English first and then he switched to German. And he asked me who I am, where I was from. And he asked me does the name so-and-so mean anything to you. And I said yes. He said how? Because this was a man who was my youth leader at a certain time in Germany. And I asked how he knew him. And he became very warm hearted and rather emotional and said, 'Listen, I am a friend of your friend in New York. My name is Herman Simon. I am stationed, doing work in a prisoner-of-war camp of German generals. I heard about you because it was reported to me from the people here at the CSC. Therefore I came. I now understand who you are. I cannot say that I'm happy to see you here. But be assured that whatever I can do for you will be done. Be prepared, I will come back. I came here becauase I actually have certain things to attend to in the area and I wanted to make sure. Be available in two days. I will work with you and get the story out because I think it's important.'

Two days later, at I think it was eight o'clock in the morning, all of a sudden the landlady came. And she was all excited and thought that her last day had come because this gentleman knocked at the door of our apartment. And when she saw soldiers, she was a wife of an air force officer, she thought her last hour had come. That they came after her. And this gentleman came accompanied by a French officer with the name of Vogel. He had lost many of his relatives and hoped that maybe I could give some information. My friend with his jeep had brought whatever you can imagine. Whatever the army didn't need in this hour after the liberation. Again the K rations which were many for us with the chocolates and

the cigarettes and things we hadn't seen or dreamt of for years. And some other stuff. But also what was important for us were cigarettes which they knew already was the currency of the area.

I was not even up yet but he said, 'Alright, I'll come back and then we will go work a little bit together.' So an hour later we went in his jeep. That Americans had taken over the area of the villas in Schwerin as their headquarters. And we drove to the Intelligence Corps to which he was attached. He was a member of American intelligence. There I met his captain who was a German American. A non-Jewish German American. They invited me for breakfast which was terrific for me. And we talked a little bit before the gentleman started to work. And one of the questions, and this is typical of how unprepared the American army was for the job waiting for them in Germany, one of the questions that the captain of the Intelligence was: 'How come we have our prisoner-of-war camps overcrowded? We can't keep so many anymore. So we have instructions to release the clergy because they were a non-fighting group. We have found quite a number of Catholic clergymen, and Protestant clergymen, but we haven't founed any Jewish clergymen amongst these people. Do you have an explanation for that?' For a moment I looked at him and I looked at my friend. And I thought that I was living in a fool's paradise. And after I had recovered, I said, 'Sir, are you aware of the fact that it was a German policy to exterminate the Jews? There was no Jewish member of the German forces and therefore no chaplain was required." He said, 'Oh, is that it?' I said, 'Yes sir, that is it.'

He asked other questions which showed more intelligence from the Intelligence Corps. But that is something that I will never forget. It shows only unfortunately how ill prepared they were for the task waiting for them. My friend then came and said, 'Listen, we are moving out of this area. What do you intend to do?' I said, 'I want to join you and go with you to America.' He said, 'You can't do that. How can you?'

I said, 'Give me a uniform, I will join you.' After a short time we realized it couldn't be done. And then he told me that on a trip to Hamburg he had gone via Lübeck, a city that looked rather intact. And Lübeck would be part of the British zone, meaning one of the western countries. He wanted to know if I intended to go back to Berlin. I declared that I had no intentnion to do so because there was nobody I could find anymore probably.

So we went together to Lübeck with a friend of his. When I had asked him 'Why can't I leave?' He said, 'Be aware that it will probably take much longer than we can all dream about because Europe is in complete disarray. It will take quite some time to bring the soldiers home. America has to solve that problem too. To get to the problem of immigration will take quite some time.' And unfortunately he was right.

So therefore I settled for his second suggestion to look at Lübeck. We went with the help of the British authorities; we got the consent of the German authorities to provide my group with approximately 25 people with apartments. Which means to sublet apartments to us. so I collected my group a couple of days later. We rented a bus. It was not very easy. We left Schwerin and went to Lübeck.

Q: These were all survivors?

NW: They were all survivors. We came to Lübeck and went to the German Bürgermeister, to the mayor of Lübeck who had not been elected, he had been put into the position by the British because the British had occupied Lübeck on May 3. and we told him, 'What about your commitment? Did you provide apartments or rooms for those people?' And he said, 'No, we have made provisions in a barrack for all these people to be accomodated.' At this moment my friend and I looked at each other and he did something that is only understandable under the situation then. He afterall was an American soldier, though a staff sergeant. But he was in a territory occupied

by the British. But he assumed a certain jurisdiction he wasn't entitled to but in order to help it didn't matter. He actually touched his rifle and told the mayor in Lübeck in no uncertain terms in German that they had made a commitment for people who had enough of barracks, who had lived for years under the most unbelievable conditions because the Germans wanted it that way. That therefore if he doesn't fulfill his commitment, he would see to it that he will sweat it out in the jail of the Allies.

And that fellow when he heard those words said, 'Certainly he didn't mean it that way.' And this and that; so to cut a long story short, a bus with our people were waiting and then another bus was provided which went from apartment to apartment according to a certain list which had been prepared by the administration in Lübeck and we were all put as sub-tenants into rooms of German landlords. And this is how I came to Lübeck in June 1945. There I lived until I left for the United States in fall 1951.

Q: Had you established by the time you arrived in Lübeck any contacts with Jewish groups at all?

NW: Outside? No, because don't forget that there was no postal service, there was no telephone, there was no service whatsoever.

Q: Had the Americans or the British authorities provided you with any information about how to get in touch with Jewish organizations in Germany.

NW: No. The soldiers were very helpful. The moment they saw fellow Jews, they offered not only what they had in food and so, even money, German money which we didn't need. But they offered then an accomodation which was very important, namely to send letters to anybody whose address was known to our people. And they sent the letters through the military

mail to any country, whether it was England, Palestine or the United States. That was the first sign our people could give that they had survived and that they were around. When we came to Lübeck this was then something that became more common. The British soldiers were more reluctant to do so. Because the American soldiers had a completely different approach. I remember when I met one Jewish fellow from Arizona, he told me that he on his own, just on his own, when he found some six or eight Jewish children in Schwerin, had gone to a certain building, had asked the Germans to move into the basement and had made the rooms in that house available to the children. And had put an elderly lady in charge of the children to take care of them. So I asked him, 'Aren't you concerned about military discipline?' He said, 'Listen, I will explain to my officer it's my people and he will understand that very well.' That was the reaction we found amongst those non-social workers who were actually the best social workers I have ever met in my life.

Q: And these were American soldiers you had told us about?

NW: Yes. On the other hand, when we met some British soldiers who were refugees, and these people had not become British soldiers because of a very peculiar British rule during the war. During the war, Britiain did not extend naturalization to them. They, when they even came to the synagogue, were very, very careful and reluctant because of the policy of non-fraternization.

So it was a different atmosphere in Lübeck and we had to get used to it. Therefore what this gentleman had done with us in order to secure the apartments for us was a very, very special act. Luckily it worked alright for us but it could have worked the other way around.

Q: So in Lübeck you now became the work of organizing your little Jewish community there?

NW: Well, again I was looking for my brethren. When I came to Lübeck, one of the things was, for instance, to get registered. In other words, to get papers, identification papers. That was the first identification I got after I was deprived of my citizenship. Then on the way to the police, a lady who heard our explanation-- you know, in Germany you have to be registered with the police. At this time you couldn't have an apartment or live anywhere without being registered. So that lady had heard about it and said, 'By the way, do you know that Lübeck is a special city because there is an old synagogue in this city and it was not destroyed. It's one of the very few synagogues in Germany which was not destroyed.' Which was true because that synagogue was located next to a museum and they were afraid that if they burned the synagogue the museum would suffer. It was destroyed on the inside but the outside was intact. So she directed us to that synagogue and this is how we saw the synagogue for the first time and met some fellow Jews. And it then turned out that at this time in Lübeck there were approximately between 800 and 900 Jews living in DP camps which had been set up by the British. And slowly they also moved over from the later Russian occupied zone there to the British zone. Then we rebuilt the Jewish community of Lübeck which was an old, old community and had become famous because the congregation had been under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Ezra Karlbach, a very famous name in German Jewish religious history.

Q: Was that with the view to find some kind of center knowing that you would have to live in Germany for a few months?

NW: The first needs were to look for food, for clothing, for shelter, and also to satisfy if possible certain religious needs. So what we did was to reopen the synagogue. And we had the first Friday night service in that synagogue which was a very special spriritual experience because there were

no scrolls and no objects of our rites. But it was a very, very special evening and along these lines we were working.

Q: What condition were you in emotionally? Were there lows that you went through now after the first few weeks or were you just trying to really pull it together here?

NW: No, there was a very high spirit because everything was new. Ordinarily you don't remember when you're being born. But here this stage of renaissance, of being reborn was something very, very special. Everything was new whether it was to see again, to move around freely, to congregate with our fellow congregates freely, to talk about our future. Don't forget, in the concentration camp you didn't even have the privacy of your own toilet or bathroom. Now you got used to the privacy again, to sleep in a soft bed. And to provide for yourself. In all these years somebody made the decisions for us. You had to get accustomed again to make the decisions for yourself. To cook for yourself, to take responsibility for yourself.

In this connection, without talking too much about it, we knew that we would not stay in Germany.

Q: Were you talking about your past? Was there a certain amount of taking stock about what had happened here and where your Jewishness would have to take you now in order to be stronger, in order to teach, in order to leave something behind?

NW: You know, many things which had been problematical before were not problematical anymore. We had become more Jewish. We had stopped to be Germans or Poles or Hungarians or Yugoslavs. We had been disappointed by the non-Jewish world. But what had remained was the Jewish values. They were there. There was such a thirst to know again. To practice all things Jewish which we were not allowed to practice. And even people who were not religious attended the Friday night services or Saturday services just to be with their people. It was a very, very

new way to come back to our roots.

The thought that there was a Jewish future in the form of a nationhood, not as Germans, not as Poles, not as Russians, not as Hungarians, but as a Jewish nation became very appealing. And it was natural under those conditions. So therefore we didn't need any Zionist propaganda, we didn't need any campaigners to come to us and convince us. It was the natural reaction to believe in a future as a Jewish people.

Q: What were your relations like with the Germans around you?

NW: Actually, only in the most necessary context because you didn't know who they were. To which extent they had actively participated in the destruction of our families and our institutions and our lives. So therefore we were very, very reluctant, certainly slowly we got to know certain people who had not participated, had proved that they were alright. Then we slowly, slowly came to the conclusion that certain of those people deserved to be treated differently. But this was something which was haunting us for many, many years.

Just to give an example, a couple of years later, I accompanied the press chief of Hamburg, Mr. Ludd, who had played a very special role in that action, peace with Israel. He was invited to address the students at the University of Kiel, which is a famous university. And it was a very interesting evening. I was also asked to address the people because I found a certain amount of resentment and I tried to tell to them what I think of the leftovers of Nazi ideology. Somehow the people told me it was effective. Later we were sitting together with the dean of the university and with the then Prime Minister Ludemann. We were talking and he asked me about my past and I told him that I had hoped for an academic career and this career had been interrupted. And he asked why. And he said 'It would be an honor for us to help you to complete this career. Is there anything I

or we can do?' And I said to him, you know you address them as 'Magnificence.' 'Magnificence, I'm sorry but I cannot accept an offer.' He said 'Why?' 'Because I cannot know and you cannot guarantee me not to sit next to somebody who let us say was part of the force that murdered my child and my family and my friends.'

So that attitude was prevailing in all of us. All of a sudden, you know the German attitude after the war was interesting. All of them all of a sudden were resistance fighters. They had nothing to do with the Nazis. They had never served in any capacity. Certainly never participated in any misdeeds against the Jews.

Q: That was an attitude you found south Germany, west Germany, mid Germany?

NW: Everywhere. They didn't know about it and they had suffered so much. They also suffered so much. But certainly they were all resistance fighters.

Q: Tell us a little more about the Germans you encountered in the next few years. You really think that was an attitude that all Germans took? Or would you make a distinction between Germans who were in the university, who were in the administration now, who were in political life, do you think there was a difference?

NW: You see, all generalizations are wrong. And certainly I had met quite a number of Germans in concentration camps. Who had been incarcerated for quite some time because of their belief and because they didn't cooperate with Hitler. I had the example of my neighbor who proved to be a wonderful human being. But she answered it, when I came to Berlin after the war and was talking about it with her and thanking her for all these things she had done and explained to her what it had meant to me, and she said, 'Don't thank me. I only did

what I did what I think was right to do. The only regret I had was that there were not more of us who did the same thing. Because Hitler could never have taken all of us into concentration camps.' And this is actually the answer to this question. That is right. It is the same when, for instance, you're familiar with the resistance of the Danes against the Nazis. They don't want gratitude. They think it was the thing to do.

Q: You did not find that attitude among the Germans?

NW: The attitude underwent changes. Even those who were still reluctant in 1933, became more and more dragged into the mainstream, into the propaganda songs. Believed more and more the propaganda. The real turn came in Hitler's favor, I think you can say those that were somehow reluctant when he came back from France after having overwhelmed France. The Germans had fought in Verdun almost four or five years and were never able to completely conquer it. Here he had done that, or his army had done that, in a matter of days. And he had taken Paris. And there many people I thought would still hold out said, 'Well, there's no doubt. This man's a genius and this is the future of Germany.' So that was the turn actually.

Now, not all Germans did that. To repeat it: the people who went, a man like Schumacher who later became the head of the Social Democratic party and others. The man who was later the first editor of 'Die Welt' in Hamburg, all those people, they went in for a cause.

Q: In your travels just after the war, and we will talk in a minute about when you came into an official capacity with the British government representing Jews in Germany, in your travels there meeting Germans and German officials at various times, was it always a different explanation they offered for what had happened there? Or were there different reactions

you got?

NW: I would say you developed a certain sixth sense for their stories. To believe or not to believe them. I must say I became a close friend of many Germans I met after the war. But on a very selective basis. And those people I met were very unhappy about the attitude of their fellow citizens. They were suffering actually from the fact that if they had tried to do something they were more afraid of their own neighbors or their own people than of anybody else.

Q: Who were these people that you felt close to?

NW: For instance, I became very close to that man who took the initiative to start the Aktion Freedom in Israel, Peace with Israel. His name was Erich Ludd. He was a man who had been thrown out of his job. He is an old man living in Hamburg. I'm still certainly in contact with him. As a journalist he had no right to work any longer. He never made it with the Nazis because it was against his convictions. I was close to a man who later became the District Attorney in Hamburg. We met in connection with the case he developed against Veit, the director of that movie, 'Jud Süss', one of the most poisonous, anti-semitic movies ever made. And Kramer was conducting personally the prosecution. He also had done, to the best of his ability, work for instance for foreign workers in Germany. The Nazis had sent him to all kinds of spots, Russia for instance. He was not on good terms with them. So with him I developed a very close relationship and we were close until his death.

I spoke about this rather simple lady who was my neighbor. One day when I came to Berlin and asked her 'What can I do for you after all these years?' She said, 'I don't want anything to be done. But eventually you can help me with some intervention. Although I was working for the Labor Department I never became a civil servant because I was not a member

of the Party. Now on account of that I cannot get a job in the Labor Department because they are taking back all civil servants or people with a civil service status. I therefore established some kind of food business with a friend of mine selling butter and so on an open market. But I can't get a license.' So luckily I had a special contact with the Senator für Inneres Lipschütz in Berlin. I went to him and after 24 hours she had her license. In other words, she was penalized for the fact that she was not a member of the Party and had not been one of them. So this was something which was irritating.

Q: Were there some very painful moments where a lot of bitterness came out in you as you travelled in Germany?

NW: Not so much bitterness. There was, for instance, when I was a witness in trials in Germany. I was a witness against Veit. This trial got lost, was lost. Kramer who really did his very best as prosecutor couldn't convince the judges who were the same judges who had served Hitler that Veit had contributed to the destruction of the Jewish people and of the Jews in Germany. Because he himself had not taken the pistol in his hand to shoot. So they released him from the charge.

Q: Did you have the same experience in Nuremberg?

NW: In Nuremberg it was an American procedure. No, this was different because I had the feeling that at least the American judges were listening to you. Many of those people of I.G. Farben against whom I was a witness were sent to jail. That later the American authorities extended clemency to them was not the fault of the judges.

Or when I met this murderer, this Rauckus in Osnabrück in a trial in 1957, 1958, he asked the guard that he wantd to talk to me. And I was not too pleased and he said I should

have mercy on him because of his mother. I said, 'Let me ask you on how many Jewish mothers did you have mercy?' And that was the end of it. But this irked me because there were all these heros all of a sudden had become cowards.

Within the German population let me say again we had developed a sixth sense for those who we considered acceptable. And we were reluctant, very reluctant with many of the others because directly or indirectly they had somehow participated or had given Hitler his due in whatever form it was.

Q: So you kept the contact to a minimum.

NW: Yes, with the exception of those people I got to know. And these people knew why we were reluctant very often. And had the tact not to press themselves on us.

Q: So now in Lübeck, towards the end of '45, you now take on a more official capacity which you actually find your energies channeled into representing Jews left in Germany during that period. Maybe you could describe your organization and what your responsibilities were?

NW: It came about when we were sitting there in Lübeck in splendid isolation, if I may say so. With seven or eight hundred Jews who were looking for help, to attempt to break out of that ring around us. Then I heard over the radio in Lübeck that there was a concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. Neither in Auschwitz nor in Sachsenhausen had I heard the name. It was completely new to me that there was such a camp. That what happened there. And there was a senior Jewish chaplain who was devoting time to rescue work. So the plan somehow developed in me to get there and establish contact. Now you couldn't do that just like that. You couldn't go to the station and buy a ticket or take a car. Because all the roads were controlled and you needed special permission to go from here to there. And the British took it very seriously in their

zone. With good reasons because the Nazis were still running around like mad and you didn't have many of the major criminals, they had not caught. So I think it was absolutely right what they were doing.

So I had gotten, also by chance, developed a contact with the representative of the International Red Cross. This group which had helped the English and the American and other prisoners-of-war during the war via Lübeck because the supplies had come via Lübeck. And he steered me to a man who was doing the forwarding work, the transport work. And I asked him where he was sending his supplies. He said, 'We're sending them here and we're sending them there because there's a surplus of Red Cross parcels. And once a week we have a convoy going to Bergen-Belsen.' I said, 'You're my man. Next time that you have such a convoy let me know.' He said, 'But you cannot go without permission.' I said, 'Leave it to me.' So one day he informed me that such a transport was going. And the next morning I was contacting the driver who was a Swiss fellow. And I told him what I wanted and for which purpose. And he said, 'Listen, it's a dangerous road. How can you do it?' I said, 'Don't you have a room behind your driver's seat? I'll disappear into that when you are crossing the border. And afterall you are a Swiss truck, they will not do the same kind of research work.'

This is the way I was able to pass the bridges over the Elbe because the controls were very strict. In other words, I smuggled myself into Belsen camp. And there I met on the way into camp, the man who was the first British soldier who entered Belsen camp. He was attached to an amplifier unit. A man who spoke several languages and he actually gave those people the good news that the British army had arrived and that they were free. Klein is his name, Sargeant Klein. He had become almost a historical figure. I have him also in one of the pictures.

He told me for instance in his amplifier unit who was from Berlin and his name was Harry Harrison. He wondered

if I knew him. I said if he was active in Jewish work then it was likely. It turned out that he was a close friend of my late sister. I met him. It took some time for us to recover from the surprise to have gotten together there. He helped in Belsen and he steered me to the man who was already elected the chairman of a local committee in Belsen of liberated Jews. This man, Joseph Rosensaft, he was called by everybody who knew him Josel or Josele. He had come from Lublin which is close to the border in Poland. He had the first time been taken into custody when they evacuated the ghetto. He had jumped the train. The guards had shot after him. He jumped, he was a very good swimmer, into the river there but one bullet had lodged into his thigh which was never removed because it was dangerously close to one of the important functions. Another bullet had just grazed his forehead and he had still a scar you could see.

Then he was caught again and he was taken to Auschwitz and from Auschwitz he had the courage to escape. One of the few. But again he did not have good luck. After a couple of days or weeks he was caught in his hometown and was brought back to Auschwitz. He survived all the things that came after that and was brought to Belsen when Belsen was liberated. We became very close friends. He passed away in approximately 1975.

When we met I told him that we are in bad shape. That we need a lot of help. And that I understood that Belsen was in the headlines of the world press. I hoped that he could help us. He said, 'I cannot help you at all. I listened carefully to whatever you told me. I wish I could help. But let us join hands and let us close our ranks. Let's establish an organization of all those who have suffered. And let our voice be heard. That I hope can help.' Then a week later, two weeks later, he called a meeting and in the meantime, with the help of a Jewish soldier who had originally come from Munich, I was able to requisition a small car, a DKW with all kinds of problems. And with this car

and some official and unofficial documents I made my way to Belsen for that meeting and then after that almost every week to work with the committee.

We worked on many many issues. Belsen was still filled with, almost the whole camp was a hospital. After liberation alone almost 55,000 people died there, could not be saved anymore, especially of typhus. And the sister, for instance, of my second wife was taken away and they thought already that she was lost. Because typhus was rampant.

Q: Is that where you met Ilse Kahane?

NW: That's right. So the first order of the day was to help those who were sick, if possible. And that was a matter again of food, shelter, of spiritual food. Of reestablishing some of the institutions which had been destroyed. To provide religious services for those who wanted it. To establish school opportunities for the few children we found in Belsen. And also to formulate our goals: what do we want in political terms?

We had the first big convention in Belsen in fall 1945.

Q: Was Leo Baeck present?

NW: No, but present was a man who was then a captain of the British army who today is the president of Israel, namely Chaim Herzog. And some other people who came from abroad, the president of the Board of Deputies, Sidney Silverman who was the head of the British section of the World Jewish Congress. Alex Easterman who was the political secretary of the World Jewish Congress with whom we had established close contact. Professor Bendfitch who was at that time the Attorney General when the British were in Israel. He was a brilliant jurist and a great help for our persecutees. Then we had the members of the Jewish Brigade who had joined the British forces. A man who was their political leader, at this time his name

was Gobofsky, later he changed to Meier Auerhof and he was in the Israeli Parliament, he was the head of the Security and Foreign Affairs committee. And so quite a number of people with whom we worked out and hammered out our requests. One of them, that was indisputable, that we considered existence in Germany only as a transitory existence.

The emphasis was to ask for the opening of the gates to then Palestine. But at the same time, to ask the free nations to let our people come in. Because don't forget, even after the war, World War II, neither England nor the United States was open for immigrants. And it took quite some time. People were living in the cities, it was a special kind of existence, but the majority were living in camps. So therefore our formulation was that we are liberated but not free. Because to live in camps means that you are not free. You are still suffering from economical distress. People were not able to pursue normal functions. We all were victims of the black market rampant in Germany at this time. So all this we put together into some kind of a program.

Q: How many people were there in Belsen?

NW: I would say there were times that there were twenty to twenty-five thousand in the camp. But there was also constant coming and going. Because you know, there was a time after the pogrom in Kiersa when Jews in Poland who had still remained in Poland decided it was now time to get out. Then also Jews who had saved their lives in Russia, had escaped from Poland into Russia, now came back from Russia. They all came then especially to the American zone, but also to the British zone.

And then we also had the exodus problem. Where the British decided that the illegal immigrants ought to be brought back to Germany. There developed a stiuation frought with danger. Because the emotions went high.

Q: At what point would you say there was a certain success

to the extent that you were able to get people out of Germany?

NW: For instance, on my first visit to England in May 1946, I was invited to address a group of parliamentarians in the House of Commons together with Mr. Sharet who was the foreign expert at the Jewish agency. And I emphasized our need to get out. Because life in the camps could not be tolerated.

So in this connection I want to mention the fact that England had not opened its gates. Even for people who had close relatives in England. One lady, a member of Parliament, Mrs. Ergud, a member of the Labor Party, heard this and said, 'Tomorrow I'm going to Bevin. I'll give him hell.' And luckily very soon thereafter they allowed people in. A secretary of mine I had in Lübeck, in order to do the work, was one of them. Her husband and son had escaped to England shortly before the war. She didn't have a chance anymore to get out. She had managed to live underground. That saved her life but it took a long time before she could join her husband and son in England.

Q: Similar problems with Americans?

NW: Similar problems with the United States. Under the quota system many numbers were unused during the war. So the suggestion was to a least make those available. Those which had been unused over the years. But then the Americans developed a policy that first they wanted to help the people out of the American Occupied Zone and didn't establish any offices in the British Zone. So I remember when I was here in the States on a visit in the end of '46, early '47, together with a representative of the then American Jewish Conference, I went to the head of the Immigration Department in Washington. And I appealed to him to do justice especially for those who had close relatives and wanted to join their people. Because they had a right to do so. And then he told me that there was not enough funds available to establish the necessary

offices in the British Zone. Thereupon the man who was there with me suggested that the Jewish organizations would take up a collection in order to support the American government to finance such a procedure. But it didn't help.

So therfore there was no free immigration. One of the things we tried to emphasize time and again in these years, when we were traveling all over to all conferences, just to raise our voices and say, 'Either you open the gates of Palestine, also the gates of other countries because the DP camps in Germany, two, three, four years after the end of the war are a shame to humanity. Then eventually, very, very slowly, when the DP bill came into existence, I think in '48, '49. But the first relief came when the State of Israel was established. As soon as the government was able to secure the administration and was able to organize the necessary procedures and also to establish the so-called Marmorotz which were camps to receive the immigrants. Then slowly we were able to liquidate the camps.

I personally stayed in Germany until this work was done, until Belsen could be liquidated.

Q: Belsen was liquidated when?

NW: In connection with the rearmament of Germany, Belsen again became a military base. Not only for the British troops but also for the German troops. And the British needed that. There were many hard-core cases, people who for medical reasons couldn't go to Israel. For instance, those who had lung diseases. So there was some smaller camps established in the north of Germany. But those also ceased to exist approximately when I left which was in 1951.

Q: Why did you decide to come to America? As opposed to England or Israel?

NW: Well, there were personal reasons. I was looking for

my friends and I was looking for my family. Because we had approximtely eighty or ninety members of my family. Because both my father and my mother had eight sisters and brothers. None of them survived except a cousin now living in Paris. And a cousin who had lived underground in Germany. That was all. So I was looking for people who were near and dear to me. I had a few relatives in the United States and I then found gradually the lost friends of my Youth Movement and others in the United States. And also I had acquired a better knowledge of English.

Also my second wife was always together with a group in these years. Had a very close relationship with her sister. And the sister and her husband decided to come to the United States and my wife didn't want to be separated from her sister. So that had nothing to do with ideological reasons. It was more personal reasons. I had come to experience the United States in '46 when I was invited to come over as a so-called messenger of the remnants and had gone all over the country to speak to people and to give them an idea of the situation. So at this time I had solidified my relationship with the people I hadn't seen for years and years. Including my Youth Leader, Marin Sobotka.

Q: Did you immediately feel welcome in this country? How do you relate to this country now being a Jew living in America? As opposed to maybe being a Jew and living in Israel?

NW: I probably could have made quite a career in Germany. As a lawyer it would have been easy for me if I had finished my studies. Before I left, one of the subject matters of concern to me were the question of indemnification and restitution. Which means the restoration of property which had been stolen and indemnification for the vicitims. I could have probably developed a very substantial practice in Germany. But my wife and I came to the conclusion that we considered Germany as one big cemetary of all those we had lost. And

I wanted to avoid the question of my children to be asked 'After all we know about your past, why do you stay with these people?' So I then made the decision to find a new place. America attracted me. I knew about America certainly before I was here from literature. Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis

and Faulkner, and "Gone With the Wind," so I was somehow familiar with the peculiarities, call it, of America and the special things, things which are great and things which might be considered not so great.

And I can only say' retroactively, that I have never come to regret the decision to come to the United States. It has become a new haven for my family. America gave me all the chances. America is a wonderful country in this respect that it doesn't ask about the ethnic group or the economical group you came from. More or less it gives everybody the equal right to prove your metal. I went back here to the university to study accounting and never found any obstacles. There were no hurdles to take. And I feel with all the problems of this country, with all the problems we're involved with, with all the difficulties, it is a country where you have the chance to stand up and be counted. When people ask me sometimes 'Aren't you afraid that the same that happened in Germany can happen in America, after all there are certain symptoms, certain indications?' I say to them that it could happen anywhere but I know that in Germany it did happen. This I have not forgotten and I never will. Therefore I cannot blot it out. With all due respect for the people I knew in Germany who were honest, sincere, courageous, unfortunately far too few, they were not able to stem the tide. Germany has a historical burden, the chapter of the Hitler era. This cannot be eradicated from history.

In this country, thank God we never had this and it's my sincere belief that hopefully we'll never see this again.

Q: What did you tell your chilodren about the Holocaust?

NW: I didn't have to tell them too much because they were exposed to all the stories we were telling while sitting around the dinner table or when we were together with our friends. Because in our home certainly we congregated with those people who had gone through the same. And who like myself had

established a new life. There were certain questions. My daughter for instance was active in the Second Generation Movement. She met her present husband there. So we tried to explain but there is one basic problem. We always said that our task is to tell the tale, to use Eli Wiesel's words. The question is were we ever able or will we ever be able to convey the message so that those who were not with us can fully understand. And I think this is one of the most impossible and most difficult jobs because this kind of inhumanity to human beings cannot be digested, cannot be rationalized, cannot be fully understood. I have seen after the war, I don't know how many books written by psychologists and historians and social scientists and psychoanalysts and whatever trying to come to terms with the Holocaust. None of those books I found satisfactory. Not because people didn't try very seriously to wrestle with the subject. But there is an unsolved rest and probably will be and remain forever.

Q: How do you feel about Germany today? Have you been back there recently?

NW: Well, I was travelling constantly as long as I was pursuing my case against I.G. Farber. I was a witness in two German war crimes trials.

Q: Both to do with Auschwitz?

NW: Yes, both to do with Auschwitz. I don't travel in Germany. Two years ago on my way to the World Gathering in Israel I went into Germany for one day, two days, just to pay my respects in Belsen. And to look after the mass graves. But then I had a very peculiar experience waiting for the plane in London taking me to Hamburg. I came to sit next to a couple of Germans, young age. It was was just after the Israelis had bombed the atomic reactor in Iraq. And they didn't realize since I was reading the Herald Tribune that I could understand them.

And when they saw the headlines from that they exploded and said that the Israelis are worse than the Nazis and Begin was definitely worse than Hitler. So this was my greeting before going to Germany. And that gave me a lot to think about. I reacted to that very strongly because I couldn't stop myself. But this is something that you cannot forget. I said they should be aware that Hitler existed in the history of Germany and the world only once. And that the Nazis existed only once. And that if this is a help to take away what they had done it would not work. And they said they didn't mean it that way and the usual thing. But that was my greetings and I was chewing on it for a long time and was under those conditions happy when the plane took off from Frankfurt and took me to Israel.

Last year I was travelling with my wife. She wanted to see an old uncle in a nursing home in southern Germany. We went there in the morning and came back in the evening. We both agreed that this was the best under the circumstances. I'm not going vacationing there. Interestingly enough, I was never invited and I wouldn't accept an invitation. Because either I can afford to go for myself and remain independent and not be forced in the presence of microphones and cameras to say how good I feel that they are doing all this and that I have forgiven. I have not forgiven and I have not forgotten. And for these reasons I say again: I keep my contact with those people I know are the better Germans. And proved to be the better Germans even during the Nazi era. But I will not vacation there and I will go there only if it's really necessary.