

INTERVIEW WITH NORBERT WOLHEIM
(First Interview)
May 10, 1991

Question: Would you please us your name and where and when you were born?

Answer: Uh my name is Norbert Wolheim, born on April 26th, 1913 in Berlin, Germany.

Question: Can you describe your childhood and young adulthood in Berlin?

Answer: Well uh I...my family was a closely-knitted family and my father, bless his memory, was uh uh a commissioned salesman and he had uh developed his own business before World War I when he was called into service and the business then had to be closed. My mother, bless her memory, was a housewife and she took care of us during the time when my father went away to war.

I was only one and a year year...one and a half years old when he left us to serve in France and in Russia with the German army.

He was a member of the medical corps, and when he came back in 1919 or so, after the end of the war, my mother always told me that uh I had difficulties to to to greet him as a son because he had become a stranger to me because he had been away for so many years, and I grew up during the time of uh the Weimar (ph) Republic. I had an elder...an older sister. Uh our parents saw to it that we had a good education and though uh we we longed...belonged to a called...would call it here to the middle

_____ families, uh and things were tough in economical terms uh after the war, during the inflation and later the Depression, but uh as I say our parents saw to it that we had a solid education, a solid uh general education and also a solid Jewish education, so we all...my sister and I, we went to a to a to a upper elementary schools to high schools. My sister to a Jewish high school. I was in a non-Jewish high school where in these years over there uh since I...we had not too many Jewish uh children, I met a certain amount of anti-Semitism but not uh militant anti-Semitism but it was you called more kind of cultural anti-Semitism but uh uh we managed.

Question: Could you describe that a little bit, what you mean by cultural anti-Semitism?

Answer: Well, that we were not included in the human...you had you had groups uh who who did certain things, uh whether be it in sport or socially, and so I was not invited. I was not invited so it I didn't suffer from that, especially not when I, after my bar mitzvah, I joined the Jewish Youth Movement and which asserted me of my Jewish values and my Jewish heritage because that was also somehow I would say a turn in my life because I became uh active in that group. I was thirteen, fourteen years old, and uh it was a group uh uh which was believing in the uh in in political and ideological terms in a synthesis between uh

Germans and Jews. In other words it was a non-Zionist movement.

The uh major value of this was that you met the people who had uh were devoted towards this idealism and hoping for a new world, for a better world, and the working _____ that go by working on yourself. That means in educational terms uh we we we uh read. We were at this time influenced I remember by writings of Martin _____, _____, studying the bible, studying our history...uh which as I say it was a very special value, but also uh uh by by trying to uh to make a contribution we did a lot of call it social work, which means taking care of needy uh uh children, especially uh uh children of our age in distress. We worked with them. We we we we invited them. We we tried to help them. We tried to alleviate their problems by just showing that we are there for them and for them, especially for children who came out from broken homes, who had who had uh a brush with the law and so on, so that we considered them as uh as people who had to be saved and this was part of our work between our contribution to try to help them, and uh this was I would say very important because there we established personal friendships, uh girls and boys and and uh we we we we followed the principle of Boy Scouts. We we we discovered nature. We were hiking. We stayed overnight in tents and we enjoyed the beauty of of of of nature. But at the same time we had very interesting evenings in discussions. People had to be prepared to deliver let us say a lecture about whatever the subject matter was, be it literature,

philosophy, or whatever it is and Jewish and German kings or whatnot...general things, and that that was very, very attractive for all of us and and it gave us a certain sense of future responsibility. I would not say leadership but responsibility and therefore whatever...

Question: We need you to stop..._____. They're not getting quite the angle they want. _____

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Question: Linda is asking me to have you personalize what you're saying a little more, how you as an individual experienced what's happening. Uh did you have a good friend in the Movement? What your favorite experience that you recall from those days? Did you have a leadership role, rather than a general, more of a...from your own eyes is what they're looking for, and also uh if you could, more about your family, talk about that. Also I don't think you mentioned the name of the movement, so when the tape starts again, you probably need to _____.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Question: Would you continue to describe the the youth movement, its name and what you personally got out of it?

Answer: Well the name us first the called _____, which is the German-Jewish Youth uh uh Alliance and later called _____, the Association of Jewish Youth, and and uh what I got out of it was that uh I found people of my age and and my call it mentality and and uh my ideals and we we we uh worked together. We met actually during the week almost twice or three times on evenings. We met over the weekends. We we were hiking uh in the area around Berlin which is beautiful and uh then as I say we uh we were really call it enriching ourselves with with knowledge which which came about by exchanging news, by by putting people to work let us say to to uh uh uh prepare a lecture or whatever it is in whatever the area was. At the same time I would not uh uh minimize the influence of my of my parents on on on me. We uh...my father, bless his memory, came from a very traditional home in in the eastern part of Germany, from Posen (ph). He had a very basic Jewish education and uh we were uh uh not orthodox but very conservative. Uh uh we observed the holy days certainly uh and uh especially during the holy days we saw the families and and friends and then uh my father and after the war as a veteran became active in the Jewish War Veterans uh uh movement, also doing social work for needy uh veterans and my mother, blessed memory, joined the auxiliaries there and so we all...and my sister certainly was also active, so we were all active in in one

kind of Jewish affairs or the other, but there was one day or one evening when all this...when when we assembled around the uh the uh family table and that was Friday evening. Certainly having kiddish (ph) and having the Friday meal and having having the relatives uh who joined us, but mainly after that then people were dropping in for coffee and cake and then then the the events of the week and the events of the day were discussed and I got out a lot from that because first of all it was a wonderful family...family uh uh atmosphere in spite of all the difficulties we had around us because the diff...the economical situation in Germany during the inflation and then at the time of the Depression was not easy, but there was a warmth of a of a Jewish home which which I appreciated very much and I think formed me and and and therefore my my my rightful family and my my love for family, it came from there uh and which was held up in all as I say in all...in spite of all difficulties. My father worked hard to make a living uh but on Friday night as they say in that famous uh uh uh song, Yiddish song, that on Friday night every Jew is a king, and this this was reflected uh in the observance of the rituals and then also in in a social way and uh uh that was known to us so and there there were no invitations sent out.

People just dropped in and we were happy to have them and shared with them whatever we had. Uh and uh in the youth movement, not only did we do uh uh intellectual work and educational work but certainly uh they developed ties with with friends and I must say

that for for...over the years these ties became very...have remained very close, up to today. They are not too many people left survive, but some of them I I went to together to Auschwitz and I lost them, but uh especially I must say when I came for the first time on a on a visit to this...to America. I was sent by the United Jewish Appeal in 1946 to this country to bring the message of the survivors to to to the American Jewry. I met some of my old friends of that time and uh it was interesting that we could...as if nothing had happened in between. These ties were there again in spite of of of distance and and time. We got together again, irrespective of our changed political orientation in many a time or ideological orientation, but this tie...these personal ties were strong ties and have remained uh uh and I would say still today for ourselves, the old guard, we get together whenever we can and and this has remained. I also met my first wife in the youth movement. We were very young and uh and developed a relationship and and later uh uh we got married in Berlin, so uh it it was uh a time which which somehow formed us in in in a certain way and I would say that my uh devotion to uh to uh, if I may say so, to uh things outside of personal interest, to do something for the community, to do something for...to make it...try to make a contribution uh was...originated from the fact that I saw it in the house of my parents who had dedicated their their time and life to certain things within these limits of their possibility, and later uh in the youth

movement where we were educated in the belief that uh uh it's not enough what you do for yourself. You have to try also to uh to uh to do something for people who who are less lucky than you are or or need your help and and and support.

Question: And until what age did you stay in the youth movement?

Answer: Actually I stayed in the youth move...youth movement as long as it existed, because in 1945 our group was dissolved by the Gestapo. Uh we tried but in in spite...in other words they did not allow us to to continue uh to to operate. Certain other groups were still allowed to operate till 1938. We were not. In 1935 as I say, uh we were liquidated, but irrespective of that uh uh we we uh kept our contacts. In other words, what we did was then that we we decided _____. Every week we had birthday celebrations. We came to...got together and uh well certainly under the Nazi time things had changed completely with uh our approach to...or our thinking in political and ideological terms changed. Uh there came a time when we came to the conclusion that that there is no future for for for Jews in Germany and we should help to prepare young people to get out of Germany, especially in the years 1940...1935, '36 when slowly but surely uh we we did understand that uh uh uh the Nazi regime was there to stay, that it was not a transitory uh thing, and that uh uh uh uh there was, as I said, no future for for...especially for young

people. So uh uh if you want to...I've never left the the the _____ Youth Movement. It it's still in me somehow and uh interesting enough, this is something which...a pheno...phenomenon which is not only restricted to Germany. When I speak with my friends from the east, uh there was also something that they called the youth movement and it's interesting when you meet the people who are who are came out of that, they have a certain special approach to to the Jewish community and to to life which I share very much with them.

Question: Yes. Can you begin to describe now about Hitler's rise to power and how that affected you and and the Jewish _____ in the early '30's?

Answer: Well, uh uh this is a loaded question uh because certainly in the '20's uh uh the Nazi uh uh party became stronger and stronger. There were differences of opinion...would they last, would they not last, but uh given the political weakness of the Weimar Republic which was not uh uh able to enamor itself to the to the people, the fact that the uh democratic parties and the social democrats lost more and more in influence...uh uh we we...in spite of all that we thought that the Republic would do...the Weimar Republic uh representatives would do something to try to stop the movement. They were not able to do it, so you had certainly a...during the Depression you had millions of

unemployed and Hitler was uh uh able to...and his henchmen...to capitalize on that and uh in addition to that that certainly there was a nationalistic feeling that uh Germany had not lost the war but was stabbed in the back and therefore the German army was not defeated but was uh defeated by the so-called home-front, which means by social democrats and communists and the Jews. Uh since we had our own Jewish values, I would say, it didn't affect us what the Nazi were were were were teaching and preaching, uh but on the other hand we were no doubt concerned what will what will happen in political terms. One consideration was that uh uh if Hitler should try to come to power, the uh the uh powers around Germany...England, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland...would never...and Russia...would never allow him to do so but this was certainly an illusion as we learned later, and irrespective of that uh I and my friends and my future wife, we tried to uh uh participate as actively as we could still in the cultural life of of Berlin which was in this respect a wonderful city. It was leading in the in the area of music, theater, literature, and so on and we tried to uh to uh to uh to uh to participate to the best of our ability. In 1938...'31, I graduated from high school and I entered the University of Berlin to study law and economics and as students we had certain, certain privileges which...not privileges but certain uh when we went to the theater or the opera, it was for very cheap money and we we we uh it was then still an accepted fact that we

participated fully as Germans in this life, last not least due to the fact that in this cultural life you had many uh leading Jewish personalities. After all, in a city like Berlin...it was a city of Einstein, in the field of music of _____ and Otto (ph) _____ and and and so and and say we uh we uh we really uh enjoyed it. Still we we were concerned about the fact that the uh the uh Nazis uh in a democratic way, uh were able to uh to uh add to their power because when it came to voting they increased their seats in the in the Parliament, especially in the years of 1931 and 1932. Uh life at the University, for instance, already was also influenced by the...remember that, you know, there was there was uh uh a time around eleven o'clock when we all assembled in the lobby of the University in Berlin, Jewish groups, the the leftists, and so on, democratic groups...sorry, not leftists...democratic groups, but also the Nazis and that didn't take long and uh there were brawls and there was fighting and so and since the University was ex-territorial, uh they didn't allow the police to interfere so it was very unpleasant but the uh classes and also the classes of the Jewish professors, were not actually affected, at least not in Berlin. There was cases in Bressler (ph) we know where they where they tried to disturb classes and so on, but not in Berlin and uh uh on the other hand uh also amongst the students it was taken up, amongst the intellectuals who originally _____ very much from the conservative groups of Germany, who had never become uh uh uh

engaged in the principles of the Weimar Republic or democratic principles. Uh there was no real rebirth. I mean, democracy uh in after 1918 in Germany did not become a real fundamental political system, and uh especially these these uh nationalistic conserve...conservative groups called _____, they uh were uh...they produced most of the students. Also due to the fact that uh uh then education became a monopoly of the of the uh more wealthier democracy in in Germany. There was not enough done in order to get people also out of less wealthier groups of the of the of the progressive let us say, so we had our our our difficulties and still uh irrespective we we did our work as students and uh and uh then when Hitler came to power on January 30th, 1933...I remember that day very well. I was a student then and I had taken my classes and then all of a sudden came the news that Hitler had been called in to office by the German President.

Now I want to emphasize that uh this was done in a very democratic way, which means that uh that there was no uprising. I didn't see...I remember in Berlin when I came home from from the University, I didn't see any soldiers uh walking in Berlin. Just the other way around the Nazis prepared for the tremendous torchlight procession they they they had organized for Hitler on on the evening, and there was no opposition. Uh to emphasize in a very democratic way which means that that uh and this was the shock we had that he had actually succeeded in killing democracy in Germany with a means of democracy. Uh at the beginning in the

first couple of days uh uh the uh the uh especially the rowdies and the militants amongst the Nazis, especially the Brown Militia then tried to take revenge against their opponents, but uh I luckily was not affected uh but we heard there was quite a number of cases where they tried to uh to uh to get even with their political opponents, especially social democrats, democrats and so on. And there were a lot of acts of violence and we tried to follow up on it and to report it to the police. In certain cases the police which uh uh uh was not at this time Nazified completely tried to help uh but also they...but slowly this this this uh disappeared. So uh after a certain while uh this uh...these militant acts uh came to an end and the Nazis tried to organize themselves but then uh accepted the power more in in a legal way which means after the the uh burning of the _____ uh and obviously it's my opinion that the Nazis had an act of _____.

They promulgated very stringent laws taking away the uh the basic rights of people uh and uh then I came to the conclusion that most probably to continue studies at the University for law or of law uh would uh would not guarantee me any future. After April 1st, 1933, certain uh laws were promulgated whereby doctors and _____, uh Jewish doctors, Jewish doctors, lost their license, with the exception of those who had served as veterans in World War I, and since my father was uh uh...had seen action in World War I in France and in Russia, I was entitled to continue uh with my studies, but as I say I did...came to the conclusion that uh

this would not guarantee me a future, not in Germany, so then in uh in uh April-May I I stopped with my studies and I uh got...I was volunteering in in some kind of Jewish community work because when I was in the youth movement, the work done...especially the social work being done was always connected with the Jewish community. The Jewish community in Berlin was a a very well-organized entity and had departments for the care from the cradle to the grave, I would say. Uh uh babies' homes and old age homes and so on, and we had a special department also for youth work and we were uh associated with that group. Don't forget the Jewish community in Berlin uh uh consists of approximately two and one half thousand members. There was a certain tax system under which people paid uh like they paid their income tax, they paid their Jewish taxes, and the Jewish community financed all the activities out of these funds. In addition certainly there was certain private donations. So uh what I did was then I uh I became more active in in in this work, looking for something else but then in 19...and my my my family uh was not personally affected though it was more difficult for my for my father to continue his work as a commissioned agent. On the other hand...and this is so absurd today when you're when you're hear this...uh one of the things Hitler did was to uh to uh establish a a new order. My my father, for instance, had come home with his decorations, his Iron Cross which was considered...was...he cherished it very much, so then one of the things Hitler did in

'33 was to establish a a special medal for those people who had seen active service at the front, and my father was a beneficiary of that which means that even Jews who had served in World War I also got this decoration, in the name of the Fuhrer, absurd as it may sound today. So uh...and uh since most of the customers my father had were non-Jews, I mean this decoration which you could display in a certain way, helped him so he was still accepted as a as a German, if you want to, because at this time there were no Jewish...special Jewish _____ or something like. That came later. But things uh things uh...and then interesting enough uh somehow by his force...by his...by introduction of certain uh laws alleviating the economical hardships and certainly the rearmament on which Germany started, the economy somehow improved, uh believe it or not. And uh things also in this respect became somehow easier for my father and and he didn't bad...do badly, to the same extent that uh you can say that Jewish business did not...I mean certain of them closed but Jewish business, retail stores and so on continued to exist. Depart...Jewish department stores continued to exist and had a...benefitted from the improvement of that situation and especially when it came to 1936 when we had the Olympic Games in Berlin, then the Nazis for propaganda reasons certainly stayed away from any from any hostile activities and so on. Also because in connection with the political developments, the Nazis uh very gradually uh tightened the screws. In other words, they

they didn't start with the Holocaust immediately. It it was that they they started to feel their way around. They had to establish they have power. After they had taken care of all the opponents, the communists and the social democrats, the democrats, then they they they they uh uh felt that they were independently powerful and didn't have to listen to uh to uh anybody else and in in this this gave them then also uh as we all know unfortunately a power to to stre...to stretch their muscles in in international terms. In other words, the expectation we had that eventually the powers like France, England and so forth resist, evaporated. Especially we had _____ started to march into the Rhineland (ph) and uh though...we have learned this later...the uh German army was was uh uh under the order to return if if there should be resistance, uh and they had no heavy weapons for that, but neither the French or the British resisted. France at this time already...they had one of their crises so uh so Hitler was successful and when he felt that his power was growing also in international terms, then slowly the party also came to the conclusion that that more should be done in order to exclude Jews from public life and from from economical life, uh especially after the uh the uh the uh Olympic Games. I, in 1935, seeing somehow the signs that the war and and we also in our groups who had believed in our future in Germany came to the conclusion that we had to change our our our approach, that whatever we can do we should do to help people to uh to to get

out of Germany, and also for those who live, as I say for one reason or the other, didn't or didn't want to go to Palestine, to other countries. There were certain uh agricultural educational centers established to give those people who let us say thought to go to South America or to North America and and enter agricultural life in these countries, to give them the tools and the education. In 1935, as I said, I I entered a firm which...a Jewish firm...which was active in the export-import business, especially in metals and and ore, doing business with Sweden.

LONG PAUSE IN TAPE

...so that people hopefully will learn something.

Question: _____. It was interesting to me that as people get older and they remember all these things from early on in their lives, it means that nothing is ever lost. It's all in there somewhere. It's just not easily retrieved.

Answer: Yes. And certain people don't forget one _____, you know. They cannot live _____ memory. I I think _____ had this when we were checking people in connection with ___ of that trial I had against _____. They give these millions of _____ and we brought the people in to check them out and I said well,

for instance, where in Auschwitz, _____

TAPE INAUDIBLE

Question: OK. You can start again.

Answer: In 1935 I joined a firm, a Jewish firm, uh _____ firm in the import-export business specializing in metal trade and ore trade. This firm had excellent business contacts with England, Sweden, France and the eastern countries, so it was my hope that when I would join that firm, I could establish also some kind of a contact in order to find a way out. I was working there as a kind of an administrative assistant. I didn't love that my little work too much, but it was alright because I still at this time uh uh remained active to...in in in in Jewish affairs, especially with the Jewish community and youth work. Uh for instance, the Jewish community at this time had developed a program which was interesting. Since we couldn't have Jewish summer camps any more in Germany, uh the man who was my youth leader at that certain time was very active and innovative, had established contact with Sweden and Denmark and had asked the Jewish communities there to accommodate Jewish children from Germany during the summer, and they responded favorably. In Denmark, for instance, they uh had uh established special special summer camps near Copenhagen where they took hundreds of Jewish

children from Germany to spend the summer there, which was very pleasant and in Sweden interesting enough, the Jewish community in Malmer (ph) and Stockholm organized a a program taking Jewish children into Jewish families during the summer and uh I was able to accompany these transports, so I had a first...I got a first uh uh uh experience how to handle these kind of transports and then certainly when we went to Sweden and Denmark, we also uh certainly got familiar with the families and with the organizations, so we thought that somehow would be helpful if if if need be. And uh so these were also the years where let me say that uh in spite of the Nuremburg Laws which which were established in in then made it clear that Jews couldn't members of the of the German _____, German people and uh uh created the uh the uh laws about racial racial uh associations and so in other words uh for...were forbidding the marriage of Jews and non-Jews and certainly we we we uh we...I wouldn't say we accepted this but on the other hand we also said it doesn't affect us in our Jewish attitude, in our in our...in the judgment what our Jewish values were. We...and I can say also personally...I said the Nazis cannot tell me what kind of a human being I am. I'm a Jew and proud of it. I will not and cannot deny that that Germany, German culture, German language, formed my my my my uh formed my my intellectual being, but the Nazis have no uh...even if they do this, if they consider Jews as second-class human beings, it doesn't affect me because I'm I'm

I'm proud...and that as I say, the uh the uh education in the in my home and in the youth movement had given me that certainty that that I didn't feel offended by it. What I felt influenced by it, certainly did not develop any inferiority complex, or any inferiority complex, so and then came 1936 were the Olympic Games where where all political radical activities in Germany came to a certain halt in order to to present to the world the best face Germany could show. And as you probably know, also the American team which came to Germany was very much affected. The head of the team, Mr. Brundige (ph), uh uh did not make a favorable impression on me when he when he uh uh developed this kind of closeness with the Nazis and and certainly when this happened with Jesse Owens and and and Hitler was uh treating him the way he did, we were I cannot say glad but it it...we were we were glad that the world saw what what Nazism and the racial superiority com....and racial superiority complex meant to them.

Then in the years '37, '38, uh when Hitler felt that his power was growing and that also the uh German army got got stronger, uh and uh the the Nazi Party probably came to the conclusion that there should be more radical solutions as far as the Jews are concerned and they could then _____ slowly feel that uh they tried to exclude Jews more effectively from all ways of life and and especially in '38 I remember uh department stores, retail business and so on were...went more and more into the hands of non-Jews. They called it _____, which means very often

under under pressure people had to sell their business and...but it was still done more or less in a certain...in a certain legal way. Uh until then we uh we uh uh uh in '38, in I think in September, I lost my position with that firm because this firm also had to change ownership, was forced to change the ownership and all Jewish employees lost their positions, I myself included, and uh then I already had come to the conclusion that I should try my best uh to to try to get out. I got married in 1938, in summer of 1938. Things in Berlin were not pleasant because before I got married in front of a big synagogue in in Berlin, _____, there were certain riots against Jewish uh Jewish retail stores and department stores. They smashed windows. They attacked the people walking the big streets in Berlin so was...there was a question even whether we could have the uh the ceremony in the synagogue or not. But uh then this somehow uh uh died down and and I got married in the summer of 1938 to the to the to the lady I met in the youth movement and uh we uh uh uh and I lost her in 1943 when when we were deported to Auschwitz, but that's another chapter. And we all tried then strongly to get out. I...we were we were we were registering under the quota system at the American Consulate for instance and my...and I felt a responsibility also to do something for my my parents. My father could not continue anymore with his activities in the...after November '38 and so we were...he was drawn into...also into the forced labor groups in Berlin doing doing

construction work and so on, so he was on in years but he was still...he was a strong man and he was able to uh to manage and I decided to to try to do something to offer when I got out, because I knew with studies of law, economics, I couldn't establish a position outside wherever it would be, and uh the Jewish community again as a place where where where needs were met of the of the Jewish population, had developed a lot of vocational training uh uh courses and I decided to participate in a course for welding, for _____ welding. I uh...it was a couple of months, and since I had lost my position I had the time to do that, and uh I must say I somehow established...uh I got to like it because uh uh some work with your hands which which which I found interesting, especially ordinary metal, metal welding and so on. Never was an expert, but at least that saved my life somehow. So uh uh and then we uh we uh in No...in October of 1938, uh my wife's parents had come from the east, came from Poland, and as a matter of fact they still spoke Yiddish. My wife, born in Berlin, my first wife born in Berlin went to a German school so she knew both German and Yiddish and in in October 1938 the German government got into a dispute with the Polish government because the Polish government was was not very friendly to Jews, very reactionary and almost anti-Semitic, accepted a law that uh the passports of people living outside of Poland had to be renewed, but that the passport of Jews living, for instance, in Germany, would not be renewed which meant that

uh those people would lose their their their Polish citizenship and nationality and the Germans uh...and after all, there were thousands of Jews from Poland living in Germany still then. We had quite a big well-organized group of Polish Jews, for instance, in Berlin, and and the Germans then came to the conclusion that they will not accept this challenge by the Polish government because then they would be burdened as they thought with stateless Jews which they couldn't deport if they wanted to to especially to Poland, so what they did was that before the uh the laws uh became valid, they uh uh uh rounded up uh Jewish families of Polish origin I might say, all over Germany and in in Berlin just the man...in in in other cities, full families and deported them to the...deported them to the east into the no-man's land between Germany and Poland and uh this created a terrible situation. And of course in a matter of hours or so that that they they invaded their homes in the middle of the night and took people out uh uh and amongst those who were deported were uncles of my wife and uh who had come from Poland and had made their way in Berlin, so we were also personally affected, but there was nothing we could do. Uh the the only thing we could do was again that the Jewish uh community went into action and established interestingly enough call it cooperation of the police and the Gestapo and some relief uh uh and work at the uh railway station where these transports came through and I participated also in that work uh uh because

especially bene...came to help the younger people, the contact between the youth movement members was still there irrespective of their ideological orientation, Zionists, non-Zionists. There was a job to be done and we did it and uh it was it was...there was utter confusion. It was was was a ruling because uh the Germans pushed people into the no-man's land, especially in the area of uh Posen (ph) or this _____ what they called it, in in east Germany and Upper Salasia, and the Poles didn't accept them, so for many many days the unhappy people were exposed to the elements and and were not admitted to Poland and certainly were not re-admitted to Germany. Uh so uh but eventually uh uh this was somehow solved. Poles admitted some groups and organized relief action, as I found out later also with the help of young people of the Polish-Jewish youth movement in Poland, and uh it was so absurd that I remember when we did this work, uh there were transports still rolling towards the east and on the other side of the of the railway station, uh wagons, coaches came back with Jews who had not been admitted and had been pushed back, but they originated not from Germany but from Vienna, for instance, so that the problem for the Jewish community was to bring them back at their expense to Vienna because they had nothing to do in Berlin and uh amongst these uh uh people who were deported were were were was a couple from Hanover by the name of Greenspan (ph), and uh as you know from history, young Greenspan who had lived in Hanover and had left his home in Hanover and had

went...had gone to Paris and lived in Paris under abominable conditions...he was not...he had no permission to stay. He was frightened by a deportation ordinance so obviously in his in his despair then uh bought a pistol and went to the German Embassy and shot this uh German. He got _____ who interestingly enough was not an ardent Nazi. Uh when this happened uh we were all alarmed and I know that I was deeply alarmed because something similar had happened before in Switzerland. A Jew with the name of Frankfurt (ph) had had shot and killed the representative of the Nazi organization in Switzerland by the name of _____, but at this time the Nazis obviously didn't feel strong enough that they could do anything. Uh so uh but now we knew something would. Also uh uh shouldn't forget that this November's events came after Munich, the all...I remember that I think it was September...thought we were somehow on the brink of war in 19...September 1938 under these four, Hitler and Mussolini and and _____ and Chamberlain got together in Munich and hammered out the agreement selling out Czechoslovakia to the Nazis and this also uh somehow gave the Nazis the feeling that now they were very powerful because actually uh Chamberlain had submitted to them and then he was so foolish when he got back to to London to to wave this paper saying that in the morning before he left Munich for London he had another meeting with Heir Hitler and this is to say the proof that we have peace in our time, so when the November events came, certainly Germany already was in a

much stronger political and military situation, and for us uh uh it was the indication definitely that that uh the end of the Nazi regime we had all hoped for, because we had thought that for economical and political reasons there would be...it would be only be a transitory existence...that this was not true. And I uh uh must say that uh...

END OF TAPE 1

...especially Kristallnacht because it's a Nazi label.

Question: OK. They asked me to stop you at this point. The tape is almost finished and they want to change...

Question: Could you pick it up with what happened in November 1938?

Answer: Yeah. Should I go back to the youth movement first?

Question: Yes. If you want to talk about how you got....whenever you're ready.

Answer: I'm ready.

Question: OK.

Answer: Uh before I continue with the events of the November 9th, I think uh it would be interesting to know what kind of a position I had in the youth movement. We call it uh...we were not standing on formalities. We had no statutes and so that no charters didn't exist, but I was a member of the _____, which we considered the executive and I I belonged to the to the leadership of of this group as long as we could...uh we were able to operate which means up till 1935, and then uh uh uh later as I told you when we were still trying to keep the contacts, it it was in a very informal way. There was no position or special position. Just I was...I...based on my seniority if you want to. I had _____. Now to go back to the 9th of November. Uh when it happened in Paris, I was deeply concerned like all of us and I had a feeling that something was going to happen, uh something basically that means the Nazis now aware of their power and of their new won role in the world would say well, we don't take this, and they were whipping up their propaganda. The headlines were deeply depressing. But there was nothing we could do. We had just to wait and see where where where where where...somehow where...when and where they would act. On the November 9th, uh I interesting enough, it was a day when I had to be prepared for my final final examination of the welder course and uh then uh in the in the morning when I got out, somebody was in the street I met and said Norbert, the synagogues are burning, and I couldn't believe it. And then a he...look at these stores...you know,

there were still Jewish stores...and I saw that uh that uh they were smashed, that the windows were smashed. I didn't hear that during the night, and I couldn't believe this, so uh what I did was I went to my synagogue where I had been married and I saw that the the the the flames were coming out from the roof, from the cupola...beautiful edifice, and the fire engines were standing by doing nothing, only protecting the buildings next to it that the fire shouldn't extend to them. And I still couldn't believe it. I went to to another synagogue which was a very prominent synagogue in west Berlin, _____, and I saw the same...uh flames coming out and there, however, was already I could see a tremendous amount of destruction. I was standing there and listening to what the Germans had to say. There was glee amongst them. Uh you know, they said now they got there what they deserve and so on, and I asked myself is this the people, uh is this in whose civilization you believe. Is this the people of Gerta and Shiller (ph) and of the German philosophers, the people of the of the philosophers and poets? And and and I simply...I couldn't comprehend it. It was not acceptable for me. I wouldn't say not acceptable. I saw it but I couldn't digest, not not intellectually and not emotionally. And then I went, for instance, to a synagogue where the famous Rabbi Prince (ph) had had uh been, had off...officiated over the years, and there the building was almost completely burned down. The only part which was still left was the lectern from which he

had always delivered his very famous and encouraging sermons for for the Jews there. Of course, he was a very proud Jew and a very active Zionist. So uh uh and I and and I asked myself is this possible. What goes into into people to do these things? Uh I had...my my knowledge was...I had read about pogroms in the Middle Ages in in in especially before the Crusaders went to to liberate then Palestine uh uh but and when the Jewish communities in in in especially along the Rhine had been destroyed by these Crusaders before, but still I was...we were living in a modern age, and I really...I had believed in...that was part of our education, the goodness of man. Could this be possible? Uh and uh then I went through to take my exam, and uh my then wafe (ph) then wife came to me and said Norbert, you're not going home. We were at this time still living with my parents in the eastern part of Berlin. I said why. She said because we heard that the police is going around taking men into custody, so uh I've arranged already uh that you will stay with the mother of a friend who had just left for for America recently and and she is alone and she would be glad you come so that she feels protected somehow, and I said what about my father. She said also for your father we have made arrangement to uh to uh to uh take shelter in the apartment of a sister who is a widow. And uh that's what we did, uh unaware what what uh what the next step will be. And then the next day more or less we...and I I was going around...I mean you could go around freely. There was no restriction. I

saw what what had happened in the main streets of Berlin, uh _____, which were the main business streets where you still had quite a number of Jewish stores, retail stores, and they had been smashed and vandalized and the merchandise had been looted. Uh they say that uh I I couldn't control it but...couldn't check it but that, for instance, the ladies of the night had helped themselves to the fur coats out of the of the some of the retail stores on _____ in Berlin. And uh so I spent uh uh a couple of nights outside of my apartment and uh then uh more and more uh news reached us...and I took cont...tried to contact my other friends and found out that also the uh the uh major administrative buildings of the Jewish communities had been somehow vandalized, so that uh there was no...there was no activity. That was for quite a number of days and and and and well, I realize now that uh completely that in this respect the uh the uh saying of my my spiritual leader and rabbi, Leo _____, who was the senior of of and the leader of uh call it German Jewry, was right when he said that the historical hour of German Jewry has come to an end. And my question was what am I going to do now. Especially I felt new responsibility for my parents, for my sister, who uh also tried to do something to get out of Germany, and uh then something happened uh when uh we heard that _____, some of the men had been taken into custody, had been taken away, and we didn't know where. There were friends of mine amongst them and then we found out that

especially those men who had been taken into custody in Berlin had been shipped to the concentration camp of Saxonhausen-Orianenburg which was the uh big camp in the north of Berlin. And that was all we knew. Uh so uh a couple of days later uh somehow uh the Nazis thought that it would be right at least to release those people who had been veterans of World War I, and some of them were found walking around in the streets of Berlin, and uh but they were...there was a terrible, terrible appearance because their heads been shaved. Their...the the Nazis whenever you come to a camp, were delivered into a concentration camp, the first things they did was shave your hair and their clothing was completely crumpled (ph) because it had gone through a so-called disinfection process, so uh...and then one building of the Jewish community had started somehow to operate again, and one of my leaders of the youth movement had immediately uh started to organize some kind of relief for those people who if they had been taken into custody in Berlin, they knew where to go, but many of them had come from cities outside of Germany, from northern Germany, from western Germany...those who had not been taken to Buchenwald or Dachau had come especially from places like west Germany or rural districts and so on. And we organized...and he organized this kind of relief action and he called me into that, to uh try to pick up these people who came by railway from the concentration camp into Berlin, and you could recognize them immediately, and to bring them to the Jewish

community where they uh first of all were treated medically. Some of them had terrible wounds because of frostbite and so...give them a decent meal, and especially those who had uh come from other...who originated from cities outside to establish the first telephone contact with their family. That was part of my work, and that was really...I mean uh call it emotionally rewarding, and I said listen, I have here Mr. so and so. He would like to speak to you. And very often you heard on the other side an outcry so so uh this kind of work uh uh became became uh uh took on took on very substantial dimensions because more people then were released, and as I say, I participated in that and to a certain extent also my then wife, because she had also lost her position, and that was not a ____, a work from nine to five, and there was...that was not on a salary basis. It was simply...it was just relief work to do what had to be done and also, for instance, to organize that these people could get back...uh had by by by railway to their different places. Uh and one of the things they they asked uh time and again when these people came, and said what what what what do you know about about us, what what does the world say? Tell us. Tell me. What does London and New York and Washington say about this? And uh I must say this was one of the of the questions uh I...we...none of us, myself couldn't answer. We felt very bad about it, because certainly luckily we had not...I had not been affected. I had avoided the the the the uh the uh this kind of action and uh when

they...when these people asked me and said uh fine, you are doing all this work. It's wonderful, but the future is now dark there.

I can't...I mean I know that that that my business is destroyed or I am not uh entitled to continue in my activities. Uh we were told uh you will be release...you are being released here from the from the concentration camp under the condition that you leave Germany as quickly as possible, so what can you tell us? And my answer was unfortunately nothing. Certainly uh for those of us who, you know, to to listen to uh radio Strasburg (ph) in in German or to BBC London, it was was prohibited and there were very severe penalties, but still it was being done. So the only thing we we...I could also say from the information I had that there were demonstrations in New York and a big meeting in Madison Square Garden, a tremendous amount of words, uh also but no action. Nothing. And uh I felt almost lost when when when these questions...and the people were...felt lost. Certainly they were they were happy to uh to uh be out of the concentration camps. It was...all of them somehow were under shock, because the treatment they had uh experienced in these camps was torturous. They told us about the details uh where where in also...I mean I had heard before what what people had been exposed to when they were taken to Buchenwald or so but but you know, here you heard it for the first time from people that had just come back (cough) about this this this...the amount of violence to which they had been exposed, so...and the beatings

and and standing in in in the cold for hours and hours without...or, for instance, just marching without any sense or or or shoveling uh uh sand from one heap to another and then...I mean without any sense. Uh so uh I see in this respect we all felt lost. I felt lost, and uh there was nothing. Even when I discussed it with my wife and my parents, uh there was helplessness, absolute helplessness. And and we we felt lost by the world. Now uh then one evening when I was doing this work, the man who was in charge of that relief operation came to me and said, listen, I have just received a call from the head of the uh central organization of Jews...the name was the _____ of Jews from Germany, which means the representative of the rights of Jews in Germany...his name was Otto Hirsch (ph). He also had been taken into a concentration camp, had just returned and he called me and said uh uh...and he was rather emotional...uh there is something then very new development. Uh believe it or not, the situation of the Jews in Germany and Austria, because Austria was also affected by the November events, it has been discussed in the House of Commons and there is some action under the auspices of the former Prime Minister of of England, Baldwin (ph), and Jewish prominent leaders like uh uh Viscount Samuel (ph) and _____ and so they have agreed to uh to uh accommodate ten thousand uh uh oppressed children, Jewish or non-Jewish, but oppressed children so uh uh this is is now to be organized also from here, from Germany and uh Mr. Hirsch said well, we have

terrific social workers who gradually were flocking back to the office, you know, in order to do work, but they need technical help and this is something you have to do. And I said to him, Martin, excuse me. I I'm in the middle of my preparations. I would like to to leave Germany as soon as possible because we all are in the same situation uh and and and he said yes, but you know that's part of our education. There's a job to be done and uh uh in Germany you would call it _____, in other words to do a thing just for the cause and not for the reward. So see...he told me next morning, see uh Otto Hirsch in in in his office and he will tell you all the details, and I came to him. As I say, he was the executive director of all operations, Jewish operations, because we had a centralized uh organization for that. I knew him because he was the father of a friend who was also in our move...youth movement, now living in in Washington, and he gave me details, telling me that (clearing throat) uh he just had been advised that this is what the British government has agreed to and to...but no special conditions. The only conditions were children have to be healthy, had to go with the permission of the parents because the parents could not accompany them, and uh had...were restricted to the age of twelve to seventeen because this would be considered the age where they could be...could go without the accompaniment of their parents and and and uh wouldn't create special educational problems. So Otto Hirsch told me uh uh kindly help us, because uh our social

workers are very devoted and excellent workers but uh unfortunately they have no experience in technical matters. I said but I have never done something like that. Certainly I have participated in the organization of summer camps in England, and and in Sweden and Denmark. He said still uh kindly help us. I said but don't forget I am in the middle of my preparations also to leave Germany, and he said well, uh I can give you my promise that when this will be done and will be successfully done, it will be our commitment and our obligation to help you and your family to get out of Germany. Well, it's a promise to which he couldn't live up because uh in early in 1941, I think, he was uh taken again into custody, was shipped to the concentration camp of Mauthausen and murdered there in cold blood. So what I did then was, I went to this office where there was a department for children, immigration which _____ had established before because there was a trickle of children uh who had been given the opportunity to go to France, Belgium, Sweden and and America, within the quota. And uh I came to that office and uh when I saw what was going on, I almost died. I...my stomach turned around, which was certainly can be explained only from the situation we were in. Uh there was a big conference room in that uh office, covered with uh cards, heaps of cards and there was a desk which was covered with papers and the telephone was constantly ringing and I was given to understand...uh there was a lady who was in charge of it. She had before been uh in high service under the

Prussian government, a Jewish lady, uh had been assistant to one of the uh social democratic ministers from Prussia, and uh a trained social worker, and she told me that something has to be done to to organize this properly, and uh after having seen that and having recovered a little bit, the first thing I did was to call in some of my friends, again from the youth movement. We all uh at this time had no...were not gainfully employed in productive work, and all purposes more or less lost our positions and uh the first thing I organized were these cards...these cards were so called...when I asked what is it...these are permits which had come in already from England to give uh children the the permit to come to England. In other words they didn't need passports and so there were special cards worked out with the cooperation of the home office in England, with a picture and so...which had come from England and then the German police had certified the the the uh the names and the age and so on, and these were cards which which gave the young people of that age a license to enter England, so the first thing we did...was I did was, with the help of my friends, to organize these cards in alphabetical order and in geographical order in order to have some kind of a of a of an idea what was what, and then it would give me some some working room at the desk and organized the telephone calls to such extent that, you know, when, for instance, it happened a telephone call came from a from a desperate parent from anywhere and said what's about the

application of my of my of my child, and then one of these social workers jumped to that table and they they they fished out of the of that mound of of paper the the the permit, because they said yes, I remember it had arrived this morning or yesterday morning.

And as I said, there there was disorder but not...but not _____ because they wanted but things were...had had had had...were were in a rush and and and and had overwhelmed them, so uh then I found out that we...it was...we...it was organized in such a way that people, that parents were advised in Berlin and the Jewish communities outside of Berlin and also under the rules and regulations, they had set already with the with the...believe it or not by cooperation with the with the Gestapo, under which the the _____ had to work, that uh uh the Jewish communities, the the welfare agencies uh and _____ agencies had to select the children, which means that the children...the parents who got a way of assist of this project, made an application to the proper Jewish communities and then the social workers, the local social workers, then checked the...if the conditions were right and and then they they made the application. I had nothing to do with that, so what my task was, and I was advised to do that, was to organize the transports so that they could get out of Germany. Now also that was not an easy task because we had to live under certain rules and regulations because in order to prepare a transport, you had to prepare the proper lists, the records. One copy had to go to the Gestapo. One copy had to go London in

order to advise the people in London that the children were coming and whoever were the prospective foster parents or the the hostels which had to be prepared for these people had to be had to be made ready, and all this was done. Certainly there were no faxes and no computer systems and and and when you made...had...the telephones did not uh...there was no push button system. For instance, to make a telephone call to London from Berlin could last hours and hours and even within Germany it was not...you know, it was still in the age of...the the age when most of the work or all the work had to be done manually. So somehow this we got under control and I set up a certain...I can't say I because uh I was then I was made responsible for all technical aspects of these transports, so that means uh first of all to see to it that the that the lists were properly prepared, that the parents were were advised uh when to when to bring their children to Berlin, especially from eastern or northern uh Germany and middle Germany, because the starting point was Berlin. Then I had to uh approach the railway authorities to give us reserved coaches, because they couldn't travel with the other public. Uh then a special room had to be made available as an assembly point in a railway station. The local police had to be advised, because uh certainly all this was done under the supervision of the police authorities. Uh then we had...and I...that was also my responsibility to find escorts. Parents could not go with their children, so we had to find escorts to

take them, to take these children, so again there was the the human resource...of of the young people of the of the of the members of the youth movement, irrespective as I say, Zionists, non-Zionists, all this disappeared. And we found wonderful people, teachers and and youth leaders and so who who volunteered for that service. Uh and uh at the beginning we were...it was made clear to us that uh these escorts could only escort the uh the youngsters to the border, but there was no chance to take them to England. This luckily changed very soon thereafter because we were able to convince the authorities that uh it was in the German interest also to take them up to London, and they agreed under one condition...that all these escorts uh were to return again to Berlin. Now at this time uh starting in the summer of 1938, all Jews who who were holding a German passport had stamped...and irrespective of the Nazi laws, we were still considered German nationals...all German passports had printed a J into their passports, and when people came back, especially after the November events, to Germany they were taken immediately into custody and shipped into a camp, in a concentration camp, so in order to protect our escorts, the uh Ministry of the Interior, the Nazi Ministry of the Interior, gave everyone who who was an escort, they call it protection letter which he could use for the border police to say and it said that so and so, in my case Norbert Israel Wolheim, you know that's my name, was was is is traveling in German interests and should be _____ and so uh we

had the first transport under those conditions ready in January.

And I was instrumental in...that was my first responsibility, and uh together with some friends who were also escorts I uh accompanied this transport to the border which was uh Bentheim (ph). It was a German...a Dutch border. I also had to inform not only the people in England but people in Holland, Jewish...the uh the uh relief organizations because they wanted to help the children when they were traveling through uh Holland because the technical arrangements were that people...as I said, before came from all kinds...from all cities, assembled in Berlin. Then from Berlin the train left, went via Hanover to the border in Bentheim, uh uh went into Holland, uh went from to _____, Holland where they boarded a ferry and the ferry took these children uh through the Channel or via the Channel to Harwich (ph) in England where they landed in England and they had to undergo immigration uh checks and and customs checks and then the train took us from Harwich to London where at Liverpool Street Station, the Jewish Committee of of uh of London had established their reception center where then the parents and the uh the uh officials came and and and distributed the children. This first transport uh uh still is very vivid in my memory because when we came to the border, uh the SS guards who were uh uh doing custom duties and they were not all of them, or none of them was trained in this respect...they ascended the the the uh coaches and they behaved like vandals. They did not attack the

children, but they treated the luggage...it was completely vandalized, the luggage. Were tearing it apart looking for jewels and for foreign currency and for things like that. Couldn't find a thing, but at least this is what they did, and any attempt to talk to them and so certainly was in vain. And uh then uh it was so bad that they uh separated the coaches with the Jewish children from the other train and the train left for Holland and when this train without the children arrived in Holland, the authorities there were waiting and saw the children were not there. And amongst the people who were serving...I mean who were uh the cause was was were two ladies whose name should be remembered in in gratitude. Both non-Jewish. One was uh Ms. Fontaine (ph) and the other Mrs. Weismiller (ph) who even even had dealings with the _____. Very courageous, wonderful uh lady. She was the uh the uh the wife of a banker, a prominent banker in Holland, had no children and had devoted all her time to to help especially children, Jewish, non-Jewish, and she all of a sudden came from Holland. She had made her way from Holland to Bentheim and uh when she saw and she heard what has happened...uh don't forget, it was before the beginning of the war...she lashed into these SS people. It was...I was so grateful, and _____ one of these SS men, said I have the feeling you don't like us very much and she said well, personally I might but as a group you are impossible. But then, interesting enough, by her interventions she...they they stopped their their

vandalism. The two coaches were then attached to a later train which still made in time for the ferry and we then uh uh were able, as I tried to explain before, to get the permission of the of the Department of the Interior to get passports to take these children to to to to England. Now to select these people was a very uh uh uh difficult thing and I felt the responsibility because certainly everybody uh who had a chance to go to England certainly looked for a chance, and there were friends or relatives pressing on them and said are you stupid to go back, but this was the condition, and they had...the the Nazis had told us in no uncertain term that if people would not uh obey their order, then these these transports would come to an end and this certainly we could not afford. So as I say, I was very, very careful in the selection of those people and thank God with the exception of one case, it worked. Now we had uh uh uh approximately I think twenty, twenty transports uh which left Berlin. Uh it was my duty to see all of them off, and I was uh uh uh every morning when they came together, I was there to to arrange it, so uh uh whether I went with the transports or not, that was in a in a big hall in in in call it _____ Berlin, and also part of my duties were to see to it that the children came to Berlin in time so that they were pre...and certainly they came with their parents or their relatives and this was then the uh the the moment of their goodbye, so uh there was a problem uh with the first transports which...for which I had not been

responsible. A smaller group had left in in in December I think, and the parents had accompanied these children to the to the trains and certainly parents in good faith they try to get the best window seats for for their children, and there was a certain turmoil and the police told us in no uncertain terms that if this would be repeated, they would control all the all all these arrangements. We were able to convince them that we will take over, that we will see to it that order should prevail and that they shouldn't interfere, that they could be present if they want to, not ___ present fine but they shouldn't interfere. And I think it worked. So uh when in the morning when when when such a transport was due to to leave, as I say, I was there and uh it was a very, very, very...I remember that very distinctly the atmosphere, you know. It was...there was tension in the air. There was an atmosphere of expectation. There was concern by the parents. There were...there were kiss...there were tears of laughter and tears of of joy and and the concern and pain and it was a very, very special atmosphere which was difficult to describe. And then when the when the hour of departure came closer, I uh ascended a a chair, some kind of a lecture, and told the parents...ladies and gentlemen, the time has arrived to say goodbye, because we are under strict order not to let you accompany your children to the platform. The escorts will take over and the baggage handlers had to do their work before to to handle the baggage, but you cannot come and don't...please uh

cooperate and don't make our our work more difficult. But this is the time you have to say goodbye. And there were, you know, last kisses and last hugs and and and and...but in general I still admire these people, how courageous they were. Nobody broke down, but also there was the expectation that uh sooner or later they would be reunited again. Very often I asked myself the question later, where did I take the courage to do that you call it _____, where where from? I was young. I was only twenty-five in these days, and I thought uh uh that this is a job to be done in order to help these children and I also I must say that at this time I and nobody else could have thought for a moment that this would for many, for almost ninety percent, the last goodbye. Nobody could expect that let us say a year and a half later after these transports had rolled to the west into freedom, that transports would leave for the east into the into the slaughterhouses of Hitler in Auschwitz or _____ or Treblinka. I said nobody could foresee it in the worst of of of your vision, and then uh thus I I say this probably also...yes, gave me the justification to say to these parents and many I talked to to the children who were safe...I said that this is a moment, one of the most important moments in their lives which they still remember vividly, and I was involved in that. But I came to terms with that by saying this is the contribution which which we had to make and in the long run, at least for these children, it turned out for the good. And uh when we

landed in in England, uh we were uh helped...the the Jewish Committee was then the Bloomsbury (ph) House in in England which cooperated with the _____. It was the central headquarters of the board of Jewish deputies in England and and helped us to stay in England for two days or two...two and a half days. I had...constantly I had uh uh discussions with my counterpart in the in the Committee there to streamline operations, to uh...also there were certain requirements in England which had to be obeyed and there was always...I didn't have too much time in England to see friends or relatives though I tried to manage somehow, and also I had the privilege...the other escorts on their way back had to take the train. I had the privilege to uh to uh to take the...to fly back which at this time was still a big thing, but since I was needed in Ber...Berlin so badly, I, as I say, I could fly back. We did not see where the children were going because we didn't have the time. Our job had ended the moment we handed them over to the committee at Liverpool Street Station and they were then uh uh acquainted with their foster parents or or or the families they took them in or the hostels. Only one transport I took uh uh from London up to the north of England. That was the transport of _____, of trainees for for for then Palestine, because uh Lord Balfour (ph), the father of the Balfour decoration, who had no children, had made his castle in in Scotland, near the _____ near Edinburgh, available to the Jewish agency and the Jewish agency had used one of his janitor homes or

so to establish a kibbutz there where the young people were educated uh for and prepared for for Palestine and uh I think a group of ten or twelve of mainly boys I took to that place because I wanted to see what was going on, but that was the only time when I was really...at this time when I became familiar with the conditions of the children we are taking to England.

Certainly later I've seen a lot of literature about these events.

I saw the problems, the tremendous problems, and I think this should be made part of of history because uh uh first of all, it is part of the Holocaust history but I would also say it is something which which for which we have to express gratitude to England. After all, when they discussed it and when they promulgated this this project, they were still somehow under the influence of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and uh nevertheless under the impact of the events in Germany, especially in November, uh uh they came to the conclusion that we want to do something. They did not uh make uh uh work out charters to see after so many years the children have to go back or they can't stay longer. Nothing of this respect was said. Just England wanted to give shelter to these people...to these children to to to uh to save them from oppression and in this respect I am using a word, when I talked about it before, of of the man I admire so much, Winston Churchill, when he said that even this was England's finest hour, and should recognize that and I think we...to repeat it we should make it a part of the

record even here in Washington in the Museum in my opinion, because this belongs to the to the to the successful action and reaction of the rescuers. Uh the last transport which left Berlin was prepared uh in the end of August. It was supposed to leave Berlin on September 1st. I was supposed to go because there were certain uh problems which had come up and which had to be discussed with our people in London. I had my passport. I had my protection letter. I had my ten marks in foreign currency. More we were not allowed to have, but certainly the the the war fever developed into a pitch and uh then we were bombarded from England with a request to try to somehow uh change the date of the departure to an earlier date, and it took tremendous efforts to do it because all the children and all the parents had to be notified and things had to rearrange, so anyhow we were able to to to uh uh to uh have it, to change the departure date from September 1st to August 29, and I decided then uh on account of the situation not to be the leader of that transport because uh my then wife was in Berlin and I and my parents and my sister and I felt responsibility and and I was concerned that if something would happen, especially if a war will come, I will be cut off and I I felt that uh uh I could not have done this toward my family and this is the reason why I was caught in Germany. The transport luckily left uh Germany on the 29th, had difficulties to uh get through Holland. Holland had already mobilized. Uh there were no boats available at the

beginning, but also with the help of our people in Holland in the last minute they found a ferry, ferrying these children to England and when they arrived in Harwich they they...England had already...was already in a state of a blackout, so they came to England or I would say on the eve on the war. They...I think they landed on the...on September 1st or 2nd, before England had declared war but Germany had already entered...start military operations against Poland. That was the end of the uh of the project. From Germany we had uh been able to get out between six or seven thousand children. Uh Austria also a couple of thousand. As I said before, we we we didn't have any contact with Austria. We were not allowed to corroborate with them, so that was extra, extra operation and uh then after that, still a few transports, small transports, left for Denmark, for instance, _____, for training there, but that was all. The the the the children immigration stopped by the beginning of the war and that was the end of that.

Question: What was the total number of children that you got out?

Answer: I said from Germany approximately seven thousand.

Question: Do you remember any of the children particularly?

Answer: Uh, no, because uh uh, you know, don't forget these were thousands of children. I I remember certain certain uh children.

I I remember the grandchildren of Rabbi _____ who who were taken to England so uh uh but I never met them after the war anymore, but it so happened that not too long ago, uh I addressed a group of children, kinder (ph) they call themselves, in Los Angeles and a man with grey hair came to me and said, you must have been my uh leader of the transport in February 1939. And I said yes, I do, because that was the first transport I took from Berlin to London, and this is true. I certainly didn't recognize him anymore, and uh then at the same evening a lady came to me and said, and you must have been my my leader in April 1939, and I told her it must have been approximately on April 18th or so and she said, yes, but how do you remember, and I said I remember that when I flew back uh it was Hitler's birthday on April 20th, and the Germans had illuminated the the major uh avenues of Berlin, so when I flew back and I had that privilege, the pilot would do us a favor to show the spectacle of Berlin, seeing this this sea of of of of of light from the air, and I think I came back on on April 21st, and and _____, and by the way uh this was also little little little...it is not revenge but but call it satisfactions I always had when I landed in in in in in Berlin, the airport at this time was on _____ which was...the airport which was used during the bridge...the air bridge, and when I landed there and I met the uh the border police and there

was a fellow, you know, almost out of a _____ opera with a with a with a like _____ with a big metal shield and all kinds of things put on there, and I showed him my passport and he thought already he had caught one of those who could become his uh customers, and then very very slowly I took my letter out and show it to him and he couldn't quite grasp it and he said one moment please, because he had to go to his superior to verify that this is genuine and so on and then he let me go, to his regret, so that was a certain...call it a certain amount of satisfaction.

Question: Was attempts...were any attempts made to let the children...the parents know that the children had arrived safely?

Answer: Oh yeah, because uh because as...before the war, there was correspondence and some of these children then, and it was one of the first things they did, was that they uh uh asked their foster parents to help them to get the uh the uh the parents out.

In certain cases they were successful, but I would say between eighty or ninety percent were not, and then you had the situation that when the war broke out, you could only communicate via the International Red Cross. And uh that took a long time, but it worked at the beginning but then starting with the deportations, these letters didn't arrive anymore from from Germany and the children, you know, are quite desperate _____ the events slowly

realized that something must have happened, but they became fully aware of the situation only after the end of the war when the truth came out. Uh you might ask me if I have special...special memories of that. Uh there are two stories I like to tell because they are so very interesting and typical. One was uh in the summer of 1939, uh we were advised by the British government through the _____ House and Bloomsbury House that we should...ought to be careful with the import of merchandise which could be used for commercial use. What does it mean? Since uh you couldn't take out funds from Germany...we all were restricted to just ten marks...uh certainly parents and other groups which who uh tried to get out, took with them whatever they could...uh jewelry if there was the permission to do it, but also uh expensive cameras and and so on and these cameras or uh music instruments and so had found their way into the uh uh British market and the Chamber of Commerce in England had brought it to the attention of the government that they considered it unfair competition because, you know, when the people came there with no money, they sold it for whatever they could get for it. So uh we advised the parents accordingly and tried and hoped that...so on one of these occasions when I was the transport leader, we came to Harwich and uh then all of a sudden I heard a a voice, my name, Mr. Wolheim, and there was a customs official and I asked him what's the problem, and my English, thank God, was good enough, I mean my schooling which was good enough to communicate

with him...uh what's the problem? He said, sir, we have a problem here because we just found that this this boy or this this lad has has a has a...is carrying a violin. I said what's wrong with a violin? He said, it's not an ordinary violin. It's a very valuable violin. Uh certainly it was not a Stratovarious (ph) or _____ or _____ or _____, but it was a valuable violin, so I said, sir, but most probably the parents gave this to the boy because he liked music, and uh this was probably his violin before so he took it along, and he took it along because he liked music. I didn't know that the boy was able to play. So he looked at him and he said...then in order to save the situation I said, why don't we let him play something so that you can be...uh see that this is something which actually belongs to him. He said that's a good idea. And that fellow started to play, and you know I was very nervous because I didn't know would it succeed or not, so he started to play and all of a sudden everything around that boy and us became very quiet and I didn't realize at the first moment what had happened, and then I came to to realize that he had started to play "God Save the King," and because of that, you know, the customs officials couldn't continue to operate, so I started...tried to stop him but he was playing all three stanzas. When he was finished and I felt better and asked, sir, are you now convinced that this boy loves music. He said, oh yes, thank you very much. And the other story I like to tell is uh, you know, we were under a very strong

regulations to see to it that only children up to the age of seventeen were coming in, and we checked the the uh records carefully and the cards back and forth and we thought everything was fine. On one of these transports when I was the leader, you know, when when when when you got to uh to uh _____, Holland and put...and the children boarded the ferry, we put the children to to sleep. They had certain bunks and so we, the the escorts started to work in the lounge in order to pre...prepare for the next morning because we wanted to be as helpful as possible to the immigration authorities not to have any hitchup. So still working on that and uh we were treated very, very nicely by the crew of that ferry and that was really, in comparison to Germany, was a wonderful thing. In the middle of that a friend of mine, was an escort, came to me and said, Norbert, we have a problem here. I said what's the problem? He said look at the card. I said what is it. He said that boy is is is is...has passed his seventeenth birthday. He's eighteen years old. I said let me said again, and sure it was true. So I knew we had a problem. I said let me see...let us ask the boy. So they brought the boy out of his bunk and when he came, I almost...I almost fainted because he had just been released from a concentration camp. His hair was shaven and obviously he realized that something was wrong and he was shaking like a _____ bone. So we asked him when were you born, and sure enough, he was eighteen years old. So we went into a huddle with the other other members of our escorts

and there were two opinions. One was to throw ourselves at the mercy of the immigration officer the next morning and say sorry, but that would mean that uh he had to obey his rules and regulations and had eventually had to send him back and if he would have been...if they would send him back that was the end of him because they would take him back into a concentration camp immediately, and there was the other group, and I was one of them, who said well, the only thing is effectively is to say it was a mistake made by the German police, and they entered the the date that they made up...that they changed the...the the date they put in was was wrong, but we had to tell the boy that this was it, and made him our ally, so uh he realized that and we said listen, you are not born in this year. You are born one year later. You understand that. He said very well. And we...also one of our friends who was a teacher said you know what we should do it is we should somehow try to program him that even in the middle of the night we should ask him when were you born, so that when the question will come up in England that he can...that he will not stutter and and and stumble but will say it. OK. We landed in Harwich, all tired, dead tired, uh went through the usual process. All of a sudden I hear, Mr. Wolheim, kindly see the immigration officer...

END OF TAPE 2

...what's the problem. He said well uh I cannot admit this young man uh because uh he is eighteen years old and you know very well that uh under the uh rules and regulations adopted he cannot be older than seventeen years. So I said well, ask the boy, and when the boy came, you know, and he was shaking and he sort of...hair was shaven...that officer also I mean somehow uh fainted. Something had to be done, so uh uh uh uh how do you explain this. I said it must have been a mistake by the German police. He said but the German police is well known and almost infamous for their accuracy. I said yes, but today under the Nazi regime, they brought in a lot of people who came in just for the party affiliation and not for the efficiency and and bureaucratic work. He said is that so. I said definitely. So he again looked at the card, he looked at this boy and there was a moment of silence and and and really I felt...I felt...I mean this was the moment where we...a decision had to be made about the life of a human being and then he said to me, sir, could you guarantee that this is a mistake of the German police, and I said by all means. Now he knew that I was lying and I knew that he knew that I was lying, but then he took a stand, admitted to the United Kingdom, because he knew that if not, something terrible could have happened to him, so this uh...he saved his life.

Question: We need to stop right here.

Answer: Well, the second story I would like to tell because it had a very interesting, human aspect is uh under the rules and regulations, uh we were not allowed to bring in children over the age of uh seventeen and uh therefore we we not only prepared the uh papers and the lists, we checked carefully everything so that we shouldn't have any problems coming to England. On one of the transports uh when I was the leader of that group uh uh we had a problem because uh usually we uh when we landed in in...when we got to uh _____, Holland, we put the children into their bunks and the ferries then took us from _____, Holland, to Harwich which was a trip of approximately six hours, sometimes a very rough crossing of the Channel, but for us, for the escorts, uh there was no time to relax because we had to prepare our lists and our papers for the next morning for the landing in Harwich and in England in order to make it easy for the immigration, to help them. So we were sitting in a lounge uh doing this kind of work, treated nicely by the crew of that ferry to tea and cookies uh and all of a sudden a friend of mine approached me and said uh uh...who was also an escort...said there is a problem. I said what's the problem. He said this boy here has passed his seventeenth birthday. He is definitely eighteen years old. I said I can't believe it. He said look at this. So I looked at this and sure enough, found out and had confirmed that he had

completed his seventeenth birthday, so the question was how to handle the situation, and there were two opinions. One was to throw ourselves at the mercy of the immigration officer and tell him that there was a mistake, an honest mistake, and appeal to his uh uh sense of fairness, if you want, which certainly uh could endanger the boy because uh he could say no, I am not allowed uh to to admit him. But first I said, let us see the boy who it is. Uh we asked the boy to come down from his bunk, and when I saw him I almost fainted because it turned out that he had just been released from a concentration camp. His head was shaven and he was shaking uh because he realized that something was wrong. We asked him how old are you and sure enough, the uh date reflected on this card was correct. He was already eighteen years old. So as I told you, for in this deliberation what to do, the group uh...the one group uh thought we should we should inform and stick with the date and and let it pass, hoping that the immigration would have mercy on us, and the other group, and I belonged to them, thought it would be easier to say that the Germans had made a mistake when then entered the birth date, but also tell the boy that he has to lie in his own interest, and the boy understood this very well. So we told him that that was...the majority then came to the conclusion they uh try to convince immigration of a mistake. And one of our escorts, a teacher, said well, we have to try to program this boy, even during the night have to wake him up to tell that he has to

confirm that he is one year younger than the paper says. We came to Harwich. Didn't take long. Uh I was called...Mr. Wolheim to immigration office. I want to see you. What's the problem? He said sir, we have a problem, the immigration officer said, because uh I cannot admit this this lad, he said, because he is over seventeen years. I said I I can't believe it. I said ask him, so that boy came, shaking, pale, but when the immigration officer saw him with his shaven head, somehow happened to him...I could feel, I could see it...so he asked me what is your explanation here. I said uh the police made a mistake and he said well, the German police is not known for easily making mistakes, and my reaction was to tell, well the police is not the same police you are knowing from the old days. Many Nazis just on account of party affiliation have entered the service and they are not of the same quality as before, and I'm fully convinced that is so what the boy said, that he is seventeen years old, so he looked at me and he looked at the boy for quite some time and I...it was minutes uh uh just sounded like eternity and then he turned to me and said sir, can you guarantee the fact that the German police has a mis...has made a mistake, and immediately I answered yes sir. I can do it. So he knew that I was lying, and I knew that he knew that I was lying. He looked again at the boy, took a stand, and stamped admitted to the United Kingdom and in this way he saved a human life.

Question: Can you tell us now what happened to you when the war broke out?

Answer: Well, when the war broke out we uh we uh uh...when I say we I mean it means also myself...lived with the expectation that they might do something, the Nazis, take us into to labor camps _____, being afraid that uh we might endanger the German war efforts, who knows. All kind of crazy things were possible, but but nothing happened. I continued my work uh for the uh central office in in Berlin, for the Central Jewish Office in Berlin, for a certain while. We had still a couple of small transports going to Denmark, to the _____ center, but this fizzled out soon, and then I was asked to take over the administration of the vocational training uh schools, uh the the...this organization uh had set up, especially outside of Berlin...carpentry, plumbing, metal work and so on. These were very good schools uh uh and let...by Jewish and non-Jewish teachers. Helped very much uh children to acquire vocational training, and so I also had to travel to a certain extent in Germany which was not easy at this time but I still...it was it was possible. And uh then uh uh in in the summer of '41, uh in the course of the uh events and especially uh after uh uh...after uh Germany was successful in Poland and in France and in in in Norway, and had taken over all these countries and occupied them, uh there started what we called the the final solution also in Germany, especially in

Berlin, and uh then I came to the conclusion that uh it's better to stay away from work in the central office because there was nothing we could do any more for our for our Jewish people, and I had the the feeling and I want to be careful in this respect, that we more or less uh would be in the danger to be more helpers to the Nazis than than to do what what was necessary to do in the Jewish interest, though I realized fully that all these leaders, devoted men, most of them had become martyrs, tried to do their best to save Jewish lives, but uh uh there was nothing anymore to be done, so I decided to to become separated from the work for the for the rest..._____ call them...of Jews in Germany and I uh uh had to uh report to an office which distributes uh distributed uh Jewish workers in in...for forced labor. In other words, the uh Jews who had lost their jobs and who could not work any more in in in offices and so they were drawn into all kinds of work, digging work, transport work, uh uh factory work, whatever it was, because also on account of the uh disappearing manpower of of Germany, they needed us for this. That's what we thought. So uh I was uh uh...I reported that I was a welder, so I was uh then uh sent to a firm, to a German firm in Berlin uh which had a Jewish group which means at this time uh Jews could not work as individuals. Jews could only work in groups and the people who had taken on these groups had to provide special facilities, special toilets and so, so that Jews and non-Jews didn't mix. And uh this group I I joined certainly not voluntarily but but uh

the special problem was that this was a factory which was located in the eastern part of Berlin, uh the northeastern part of Berlin. I was living at this time on the west and it was a long way to the factory and I had to get up between four thirty and five o'clock in the morning in order to make it on time. Uh this was also the time when the first uh air raids started of the British air uh air force against Berlin, so uh during the so-called alarms, when I was at home we were...had to take shelter in a basement. Jews were separated there also from non-Jews and later we realized that these basements certainly didn't give any kind of protection, but this is actually what was done. But also in that factory, uh Jews were were pressed into service uh for for as...not air raid wardens but uh uh uh a group to uh to uh fight fires or whatever it is if something should happen, so that uh very often I didn't come home uh uh for for almost two days, didn't know what was going on at home. Uh in in in November '39, by the way, uh my wife and I had our child...a boy was was born and uh since we had not uh...yeah...I forgot to tell that certainly at the beginning of the war, Jews were not allowed anymore to have a telephone or have radio, so I was not...was not was not able to communicate with them, so uh so uh uh that means very often, especially after an air raid and if it was a heavy air raid, I didn't know what happened to my family and my family didn't know what happened to me, and uh then in the summer of '41, there started what we called the final solution.

Uh we...in Berlin the head of the Jewish community was called to the Gestapo and he was told that (clearing throat)...excuse me...that for a thousand people uh apartments should be made available uh and uh the uh the people should uh should assemble in a synagogue uh and not be accommodated at another place. Now I think I overlooked one thing, that uh also in September '41 there started...laws were promulgated to force Jews to wear a yellow badge, and from this time on...that was September '41. By the way, it was also the time when no immigration was possible from Germany anymore. Even during the war in the first part, there was still certain possibilities to come to America via Portugal or later after the campaign in Poland, via Siberia, by train through _____, but in September '41 this this was over and uh what I'm also sorry I forgot to say that we tried very hard but the German...the American Consulate uh with which I was registered uh asked us very late to uh to uh to uh get our papers, our affidavits, but that was not easy to get in America and also the the Consulate stopped very early to process applications. It also set conditions which were impossible. More can be read about this in the book of David _____ about the abandonment of the Jews. The American bureaucracy at this time was not very helpful to save people it could have saved. Now uh in connection with the with the promulgation of the laws about the about the yellow badge, there uh other restrictions started. We were not allowed anymore to uh to use certain

streets. We were not allowed to uh to uh to buy and to go shopping, only at certain hours. We certainly...we couldn't see a movie or our theater and uh uh any...we were were also...we had to to place the Star of David at the outside of our of our doors in the in the apartments. So life became became became more and more uh difficult, almost impossible. We still tried to uh get to...I, for instance, saw friends if possible and we uh we uh...and my parents lived in the eastern part of Berlin and we, as I said before, in the western part and certainly my parents were very much interested and also the parents of my wife, to see our boy but uh when we were not allowed to uh to uh use the public transportation, we even walked that way which was two and a half or three hours. Now at the beginning we did it. Later we did it under the protection of darkness which was dangerous, uh uh hiding the Star and then at least to give our parents to see to see us and and the boy (clearing throat) because uh uh communications over the telephone and so didn't exist. Uh in in the course of of of that time, the restrictions became became became became more uh rigid and also then uh to come back to that order to the heads of the Jewish community, not to make room for the people who had to uh make their apartments available, to provide them with other shelter...there started the first deportations to the east. Uh we were not fully aware what...and I I uh uh uh tried to get information wherever I could, but uh don't forget that at this time you had no public press anymore.

Uh uh the press was completely controlled. There were no letters to the editor or free speech or free writing and so and certainly the press did not report about anything like that so it were mostly rumors you had follow in in order to find out what was going on, but the deportations started first with the with the deportations of elderly people who were not uh in the in the...part of the forced labor program, because they considered them as uh as disposable and so transports went to first to to the ghetto in Lodz, or what they called, what they called, the Germans, _____ and other places like Riga, Kovno, Minsk, and some of these transports, as we know from from from information later, never arrived. I uh uh uh...it's difficult to say how did I react. I know we were exposed to a development over which we had no control. I realized that uh all my attempts to save myself and my family, or to save my family and myself had been in vain and, therefore, we we had to take whatever, whatever...I can...only had to hope that uh the military operations would result in a defeat of Germany and that only in the course of that defeat we could hope to be free again, so that means all our...it was my thinking about survival was to see that that uh Germany was defeated. Uh certainly there were, especially at the beginning, uh many of our friends and somehow we still tried to meet and exchange uh information about the military situation and so we were convinced that Germany was invincible, and there was not only of...then when you read today the the reports which came

out from the father of of Joe Kennedy, he also thought more or less that uh uh uh the western world is...and Russia is defeated and that uh Germany will be will be victorious. Uh but we uh...I pers....personally must say uh I was a great believer in in in whatever Churchill said. Not whatever, but but his way of of telling the the people, you know, we will we will never surrender. We will fight at the beaches. We will fight wherever we...we will never surrender. This gave me hope. Also my expectation that one day uh public opinion in in America, which was rather isolationist, might change and become aware that Germany is not only a danger for Europe but also for for for America in the long run, so uh and also that that especially after Germany uh attacked Russia, that there was a certain parallel for anybody who knew history, that when Napoleon tried to uh to uh to fight Russia, that was end of his of his Empire, so I I was convinced that uh in spite of all the the military might Germany had developed, that uh uh it could not last. The question only was how long? And in this respect also I...how did I know. We were cut off from the world. We we couldn't see uh uh any any news objectively. Whatever we saw in the headlines...and by the way we were not even allowed to to buy a paper. A neighbor of mine brought me a paper once in a while, but that was all regulated _____ and uh only the suc...the success was reported but defeat were not. But uh then when I was in in this in this labor gang, if I may call it, and uh the

attacks by the air force became stronger after Hitler had proclaimed and _____ had proclaimed already that the British were defeated. It gave me no hope, and my wife also the same way, that in the long run uh uh uh there must come a turn, and uh then uh especially when when when the military uh events uh changed the whole situation by the defeat of Rommel in Africa and especially after the defeat of Stalingrad. Uh this gave me a tremendous hope and gave all of us a tremendous hope, but this was a time already when one transport after the other left, for instance, Berlin, and the question was how long will it...when when when will when will the sword come down on us. Uh I had uh uh in this labor gang in which...where we were working, there was one member, a Jewish fellow who worked with us, who was uh what we called a privileged Jew. That means he didn't have to carry the the yellow badge, the Star of David, because he was married to a non-Jewess and their children were educated as as uh Christians, so he had still the right to uh to keep a radio, and with him we could arrange...I say with him, with some friends in that labor gang, that during the night he should get up and certainly that was something which was uh...the threat of death penalty if he would be caught...to listen to BBC London and and and to the German service to find out what the situation was. He did it under the condition that we would provide him in the black market with with coffee because he said when he had to get up during the night and he couldn't find sleep immediately, in the

morning he was dead tired so he needs real coffee in order to survive the day. This we could do. And I I...I said I was one of them who was instrumental in this, so every morning when we came, he whispered to us what he had heard during the night, and in this respect uh we, or I was fully familiar with the progress of uh the Russian army in Stalingrad and of the other defeat of the 6th German army under _____ in Stalingrad and especially when when it came to an end with the with the loss of approximately three hundred thousand German soldiers, so the question came, how long will they be able? Would that mean the end of it and how fast would would the end come. Uh but uh uh on the other hand, uh the the the Nazis, in spite of of uh these military developments, continued with their deportations. In December 1942, my parents were deported. Uh I was...on the way home I tried to to see them. Then I was told that uh uh the Gestapo had come, had taken them on short notice. Uh later I found out that they were in a collection center which was in the former Jewish old age home. I was able to get them some food, prayer book and so on, but then in a short time they were...this uh uh home was was cleaned out and later then I found out that my parents, blessed memory, were were in one of the first transports which went from Berlin directly, directly to Auschwitz, and certainly in Auschwitz uh uh uh they they obviously got murdered the the first uh moment when they arrived.

Question: How did you feel when they were taken?

Answer: When they were taken? Certainly I felt lost and and and call it depressed, but still I must say my my power of resistance was still there because I had...together with my wife, we had...call it we made a pledge, call it an oath, whatever it is...that we will not try...we will not give in, that whatever the circumstances, we will try to to to hold out. And and and uh uh though we we have no means to communicate with the outside world, with relatives and friends left in the western world, and so being alone and and but still uh this spark of life was still there, that uh in spite of everything that we will try to to remain alive, last not least to tell the tale, to tell our story later. Still we didn't know at this time about Auschwitz, so when I came to the apartment and and a neighbor of my parents told me, told us, certainly I I I was I was shocked. More than shocked, and and and it was almost...uh it didn't sink in immediately, that this...that I would never see them again, and that this this was the last...when they were when they were taken away, we couldn't manage to see them in the old age home, because this was closely guarded by the by the SS, so uh it didn't occur to me immediately, but certainly it affected me, but I said to myself I do not like to to that this bad news, the terrible news should overcome you or should should should paralyze me. I would like...I would I would try whatever I can to survive, to survive

this monster, and uh uh I think this is the spirit which which certainly I've tried to carry forward and also later, so uh when when...that was in December uh and then I think it was early in February, after the defeat in in in Stalingrad, _____ made a speech to which I listened inofficially, because as I told you, we were one of the last to have a radio...when he said well, uh uh certainly Stalingrad could not deny that this was some kind of a defeat, but now uh it...the time has come for the totalitarian...total war and uh the time has come also to uh to uh uh make a final uh...to to get even with the with the domestic enemy, with the internal enemy, and he used a certain expression which is _____, which means now uh people arise and storm uh uh...start in other words to uh to uh...like like uh I think it was as a parallel in history like uh in Paris in 1870 when the the ____ I think they call it...to to have an uprising of the people in order to save Hitler and the the regime. And uh soon thereafter, and I was still working in that labor gang and it was still _____, and though America had entered already the war, uh we didn't feel the effect of it immediately because they had to get installed in England and they had started with the first air raids, but not towards Berlin. Uh and then my sister was also supposed to be deported but since she was a (clearing throat) skilled stenographer and writer, they took her out to do secretarial service in the collection center, so she was able to help me to get something to my parents there. Uh and then we

were...uh one transport after the other left Berlin. Some cards...post cards, interesting enough, arrived from the people who had managed to throw post cards out of their wagons and none of them certainly knew exactly where they were going. We heard rumors about uh...and I heard rumors about uh uh events in Poland, about the the attack, about the ghettos, about the murder uh uh...the uh killing actions in in these areas, but don't forget (clearing throat) that all this could not be confirmed. This was just to the same extent that I asked my friend who listened to to to the radio, to BBC, what does BBC London say, and he said uh nothing. There is a certain uh uh uh appeal or certain address which was delivered by _____ where he indicated that uh Jews were taken away from France and so, but no hard facts are available, and uh I also uh still had contact with my people of the of the Jewish organization, and when I had a chance I saw the head of that, at this time was Paul Epstein (ph) and we exchanged some more information, but all the information only said that there is a turn, but but we came to the conclusion (clearing throat) for the Jewish situation in Germany, it anyhow might come too late. And uh uh then in in uh at the end of February, early in March, uh from one day to the other, Berlin was was...there there started...there was...came the end of the so so-called final solution. The SS, interesting enough, the elite SS called the _____ of Hitler, occupied in the morning all factories where Jews were working in these groups, and

certainly for them it was easy to get to to them, because they were working in groups. I for one reason or the other had been advised the night before...said stay home. You never know what's going on, and I was staying home, and uh then uh a neighbor came running and said I just heard they have taken away my husband. He was working there and there and don't know where he is. It's terrible. What is your...what what what can you do? There's nothing. You just have to to wait and see. So I tried to read and to to to to even write a letter to a friend in Sweden, because with Sweden there was still...since it was neutral uh you could have still uh an exchange of letters though it was censored, so uh uh and then uh uh in the afternoon of that day, two uh uh policemen who were members of the Gestapo came and told us that uh uh we we are under custody and we uh we uh in ten minutes we should leave. Now in connection with all these transports, my then wife uh had prepared a knapsack with all kinds of things we thought would be helpful when we would go to the east to some kind of a labor camp and so what we expected, and had some some uh underwear and some books and the bible and and a chess set and so on, and certainly things for the for the boy, and uh had that ready so in order to grab it whenever whenever the occasion would arise. And uh as I say in that afternoon they came, and gave us ten minutes and my son was sleeping, so we managed somehow to...we all, after all, spoke the same language, to tell them after all we have to get him ready

and should give us some time and uh with some hesitation they said alright, we'll wait. To talk to them was almost impossible.

Uh uh I tried but uh I knew it was dangerous because for these were people who were fanatic Nazis and and and they took...uh take out their wrath against you on the spot. They had the right to kill you on the spot and nobody...nobody would would take them uh to court for that. So uh then we took our knapsacks and we took our son and and and then we went down. We were living in an in an apartment in the back of a big building and uh uh when we came down we saw a truck uh surrounded by SS guards with rifles.

It certainly was not a pleasant...pleasant uh uh moment, because we certainly didn't know what was going to happen. And uh then we were...when we were ascended this truck and saw other Jewish people because they all had the star and they all had the same destiny that their husbands had been taken but uh uh uh the...since they had the address of these people at home, they were picking up the people in their in their homes. Those they didn't found in the factories, they found at home and then we were cruising around in in in in Berlin. It was in March, early in March. It was cold. It was...it was raining. It was miserable and then they stopped and cruising and we were absolutely uncertain, but I had the wonderful feeling at least my wife and my son was with me. The others were in that unfortunate situation that they were separated from their families and uh also I must say my then wife was in a rather good mood and let's

say whatever will come, will come, as long as we can stay together, and uh then we were taken to a to a big place in the middle of the night. Don't forget that Berlin was completely blacked out on account of the air raid sit...of the air situation, and uh then from that big place we were transferred...transferred to another place uh where also my parents had been before. It's a collection point. Also in between we were released for a day or two to our apartment again uh uh and we could do something because we had uh red arm bands to help uh to to be...to bring some food to a place, but that was only very minor. There was nothing...nothing really where you could say uh you can help people. We were all exposed to the same...to the same danger. So uh uh and then uh uh again we were we were called in and we were taken in to that place in in the old age home, and on March 11, 1943, we were we were (clearing throat) made part of the transport. Interesting enough, two days before we became...and I became the witness of the first major air raid of the American air force against Berlin. As long as the British air force came, certainly I mean they had tried what they do, but they are...the the damage they were they were inflicting on on on the on the buildings in Berlin were rather minor, though they were there I mean and it was...you never knew where they would hit and what would be hit, and we were part of that, but when the American bombers came, I mean there was...there for the first time I realized that was a massive

attack and you'll see when we when we uh looked around that Berlin was really burning, and we had to hope that the railway uh uh would be destroyed, but that didn't happen. And then on the 11...uh March 11th we were made part of of that transport. Uh we were taken together with...I think we were all in all a thousand people out of that uh collection point. Men...wo...men, women, children, elderly, young...and uh my sister was with me, with us and also luckily some of our friends from the youth movement and we tried to stick together. We were uh shipped to a freight yard within Berlin and there were forced to board one of these cattle cars, uh approximately I think a hundred people in a car, so we could could hard...we couldn't lie. We could hardly sit...mostly stand. There was just a hole for for for...there was a hole in the car for ventilation (clearing throat) and one bucket there for for hygiene purposes and uh...but still I would say that I, in spite of that, and also my then wife, had a feeling well, we'll take it...we can take it, because none of us uh was aware what was going to happen. Uh we didn't know where we were going.

Uh I only noticed on my watch that exactly at four o'clock in the afternoon this train left and was moving east, because I was familiar with the geography of Berlin and Germany, so we know we were were uh going to the east, and uh as a matter of fact, uh since we were together with other other friends, in order to to not kill times but to somehow alleviate the situation within ourselves somehow started to sing Jewish songs we had uh learned

uh uh in the in the youth movement. _____. How nice is it to to be with friends, under those conditions. It's absurd today, you know, but you see this was still part of the of the mood we were in, and I remember that also my wife also wrote some of these cards which were very safe because you could throw them through the hole and sometimes they were picked up and people uh then mailed them. Uh it was Friday night and uh when it became dark, interesting enough, one of the ladies there uh aware of this was a Friday night, uh took out some candles she had prepared, was lighting the candles, was bless...blessing the candles, and and and uh expressing the prayers, you know, to welcome the Sabbath, and you know, the...later very often thought about this, you know, what...how how absurd life can be that, you know, here there was a group, just a death wagon of a hundred people, most probably ninety percent of them did not live to see the next evening anymore, but still riding in that car, they were blessing God and welcoming uh the Sabbath, in that mobile uh prison going from Berlin to we still didn't know where. So we traveled all night and uh then I realized in the morning that we were going via Breslau (ph) in this area and uh uh came to Upper Salasia and uh then uh in the afternoon, almost twenty-four hours later, we uh we stopped in a kind of a railway station uh and there I saw for the first time written the name Auschwitz. I was not aware what Auschwitz was in spite of the fact that I had uh uh listened to to to BBC London, had tried to get all the

information I could in Berlin. We knew about uh ghettos in Riga. We knew about the ghetto in in in Lodz. Auschwitz...I didn't know what it was. And uh obviously also at this time uh uh neither BBC London nor any other information uh sources, had any any concrete idea. Auschwitz was new. So uh uh when the train stopped uh they they they the doors was opened and we were all somehow stiff and so it was a cold night and so and so, but we were driven out. There were...there were SS guards with the with the uh uh uh sticks and uh yelling like animals, and uh beating people out of the cars. Uh there I also saw when we left our uh wagon that two of our people who were with us or three had committed suicide, so uh uh because they probably...it was it was too much for them, and then outside we were we were assembled on a platform. Uh we were ordered to leave all our uh belongings there, all our knapsacks we had prepared carefully and whatever it was remained there, and then they ordered us to uh line up in different groups, men, uh women with children, and women. And this was the moment when when when I was separated from my wife and my child, and this is where my wife then said well, this is the moment I have...I was...I will be...I was afraid of. As long as we were together...and sure enough uh uh this was the last uh uh day I have seen her and my child. We were lining up and uh uh there stand a man in a in a very elegant SS uniform. Later I came to understand it was Dr. Mengele, and uh when he approached he asked only how old are you, what's your profession, and then

he directed people to the left or to the right with his thumb. And he asked me how old. What's your profession? I certainly did not say that I was an administrator or a law student. I said I was a welder, and he directed me to one group. I had lost track of my wife and my son, but then also what I saw and what was completely new to me was all of a sudden women in SS uniform with with their pistol holsters, you know, where they...the pistol uh dangling, and they also prepare...behaved like animals, and they uh uh uh were especially busy with the women with children and the elderly and then we saw uh and I saw people in in a certain uniform I had never seen before, with stripped clothing and peculiar kind of a of a of a cap, and uh so then trucks uh were were driving up and one group of people, especially the women with children and the elderly were put on one truck and we still had to wait and uh then this truck left and it so happened that my wife and my my my son had...they were sitting or were standing at the end of that truck, and my wife was somehow waving to me. And that was the last I've seen of her. We had to wait and then were were were pressed into another truck, and though we thought it was full already they they uh they still pushed I don't know how many people into...it was less...it was worse than sardines. Uh and there certainly everywhere were SS guards. We tried to uh to uh to uh speak to them, but interesting enough they hardly spoke German because they were what they called _____ which means ethnic Germans,

but their main major language was Polish, but they had volunteered obviously for the SS and did this kind of duty. So we couldn't find out anything from them and then we were driven away from that railway station and passed by a tremendous uh uh area of industrial buildings. I don't know how many buildings we could see that was under construction. We couldn't understand what it was. We didn't know...after all, we still didn't know where we were. And uh then after having passed this area of industrial buildings, uh we entered...we...all of a sudden I saw a a camp surrounded by by barbed wire, with watch towers and SS guards with machine uh guns, machine pistols, and when we drove into this I said to my friends who were standing next to me from the youth movement and luckily we were still sticking together...may God help us to get out of here alive. So uh that's the moment when when we had arrived and I had arrived in Auschwitz. What happened to my wife and my son I did not know. The others didn't know what happened to their people, so and then we were ordered uh to descent this truck and and and uh were driven into to to some barracks and were ordered to undress completely, only to keep our our shoes, our glasses certainly, our belts and uh then the SS ordered us to take off our rings, our watches, whatever...and uh uh then we were were...I together with these other people and we were approximately I would say two hundred people in this in this group, from Berlin...uh were were led into a shower. We were not quite clear what what it was. It

was cold. It was miserable but even later when we...when the water came down although it was cold it was somehow, it was...believe it or not some kind of a relief after this trip that we hadn't eaten. We had not...we were not in in very good shape, but in all tense (ph)...I I remember that everything that I...I said at this time to myself, register in your mind whatever is going on. With God's help one day you might be be be called to give evidence about that, so somehow I I tried and not to forget and uh then we...after that...in that...then we were in that shower. A man came also with a uniform, with a stripped uniform, and we asked him who are you and he said I'm from Hamburg. I am a political prisoner, a Jew but a political prisoner. I have taken part in the uh fight of the of the Spanish Republicans against Franco. I was caught there and and and delivered by the Spanish to Germany. I am in the camp already four years. You have arrived in Auschwitz. The camp here is named Buna. You will be working for a big factory where they are trying to produce artificial rubber and it is under the under the administration of _____, and _____ for us had a special name. It was like DuPont in...or British British Chemical and so it was a tremendous firm. It's stocks were widely held, also by Jewish stockholders, so this is what you are going to do, and we asked what's about our chil...wives and children. He said don't ask about them because uh I can't tell you. We don't ask questions. We are here already. You are

lucky that you came now. We, the old guards, the old timers, called old-timers are here already for years. We have gone through Buchenwald and Dachau and Saxonhausen and now Auschwitz, so try to make your best. Try to be strong. Try to take it. Otherwise you are lost, and uh then after the shower was over, we were given the same kind of uh dresses these people had. It was not fitting, you know...it was terrible. And some caps also with the same stripes, and then we were led to one of the barracks we had seen there in that camp and a man who called himself the elder, the block elder, blockaltester, block elder received us. He was a political prisoner who was uh allied with the communist party and so and had been caught very early, so he had already seven or eight years of imprisonment behind him, and he said I want you to be clean. I want you to ____ and so and we were then given our our beds, which means in this barracks there were rows of bunks, three tiers and there was...there was a thin blanket and the so-called mattress was a straw sack and uh and uh we were given to understand that this is our place where we can sleep. There was no place to leave your things. There was...there was uh no place uh to rest, to sit down, so uh...and then I realized that uh...the events were so fast and so overbearing and so shocking that it was not possible for me to fully analyze what was going on, but uh I realized one thing that certainly uh I I...that the Nazis had tried to dehumanize me by taking away all my private...my most private things, my hair, my

clothing, to make me a number and that I was degraded to to become a slave, that I was a prisoner, that uh I was not any more able to do what I wanted to do, that I had to uh follow uh orders...how nonsensical they were...and uh that that all this in the name, I said, of German civilization...I was puzzled. And also uh especially then came a little bit...got used to this...came to the realization that there was no way out because uh certainly the camp was was was surrounded by more than one fence of barbed wire, was electrically loaded, that to run away would be impossible and even if so, in a Polish area...it was still a Polish population where you don't know the language...was hopeless, so that the only hope which was there is to to live to to see uh that Germany was militarily defeated, and had surrendered.

Question: I think we should stop here..._____. We're at a good stopping point.

END OF TAPE 3

...I had to get out and uh one of the first things you learn in a concentration camp...one of the first things was to to make your beds, and the Germans, the Nazis, in this respect uh they had an obsession for for for orderly uh bed building. It had to be done in a mathematical, straight fashion and since I I had the bunk on

top I was the first to have to do it because other...the people...and I had to stand on the on the rim of the of the second tier and the first tier, so, therefore, I had to finish it first and then the others could do it. Now that was a thing, and then we were...I was treated to my first uh breakfast there which consisted of an awfully tasting coffee and a piece of bread and and that was all. Oh, a little piece of marg...of sausage or so...I don't know, but anyhow this first day was a day when when we were registered and and and also again people came and asked what was your profession and I stick...was sticking to my lie that all my life I have been nothing but a welder, because people had told me who had been in in a camp before in the action that the Nazis despised tremendously any people looking somewhat intellectually or or professional or so the worst were the were the lawyers and and and when they found a lawyer they really...they they mistreated them very very badly. So I said I was a welder and then we got we got...uh I got my number, which was 107984. Uh we had to...I had to...I got some patches of of of stuff of linen and and had to to sew it on my uniform, and also then uh somebody came and tattooed this number on my left arm, so uh that means I I I...and I still have that...uh which means that you were completely uh uh...you were...you have become a number and one of the first things I said to myself is I would like to become not a number. I had a number but I'd like not to become a number, so still there was that spirit of resistance if

possible. And then on that first day also I I went through something which never uh uh experienced before, what they call appell. The Germans and the Nazis, they are in this respect and especially at this time, they had obstinent appell, you know, and counting was one of their hobbies. Uh and they had it at least twice a day, so we were all led to a big place, a big square and there we had to line up...our block...in in rows of five and had to wait until an SS man came, and there were...were the head of the camp, the SS that was...the SS stormfurher which means captain. Uh since it was cold, he had the privilege of wearing a nice fur coat, uh a military fur coat, so we were counted again and again and again, and uh uh then uh the next day, it was the first day when when when I was I was uh uh commanded, after the appell in the morning, to go to a certain kommando they called it, working...working uh squad or working platoon, and uh the newcomers had no choice. They were attached to a very special one. I only later I found this one of the kommands to uh to wear us down, to grind us down, uh which we called _____, the the killing...killing kommando, the murder kommando, uh number four.

So then we uh we we we we walked out, again in military order, uh always five because that was easier to count. We were counted at the uh square before. We were counted when we marched out and at this time the SS uh uh guards were walking with us left and right, so uh in other words each kommando had so and so many SS guards attached to them, and uh it was quite a....quite a

distance we walked and uh...well, I was still able to do that. Of course I had still a certain strength in me, and then uh uh then we were...we entered the factory area where where you had these num...numerous buildings there under construction. Uh streets were not completed. There was a lot of mud, ____ soil, especially since it was a cold morning, it was all flour (ph) and we had...we had just the this very thin kind of dress and and and it was not easy and uh then I was led together with the others uh to a certain place where we had to unload uh uh uh railway wagons of metal and cement and so on. And this was done mostly uh not in an ordinary way, but running. I mean metal...you cannot...big beams you cannot transport by running but but for instance when you have a sack of cement, then they wanted you to run because it had to be fast. And also for the first time I became acquainted with an institution I didn't know uh uh before, that each kommando had a a a inmate leader called kapo. Where this term originated I don't know. I have never found out. It comes from Italy somehow. Uh but they called it kapo and it has been...had entered the the language of the concentration camps, so you had a kapo as the leader of the...and he had certain foremans to to to help him, especially in bigger kommands, bigger bigger bigger kommandos, but then you had the SS also so they all then uh uh were around us to to watch what we are doing and how we are doing it, that it went fast enough and so on. And uh I remember that on that first day uh when we were when we were doing this kind of

work and I had done part of it in Berlin so it was not completely new to me...I I saw that one Jewish fellow of another kommando uh throw himself in front of a locomotive of a small uh engine to commit suicide so that was the first that I I saw there uh and it was the first which was followed by many many more. So uh when it came to uh to uh to uh the so-called lunch break, some trucks came with some watery soup which was called buna (ph) soup because the name of that factory was Buna and it was provided by the firm which they think was a tremendous uh tremendous gain for us. It was very often absolutely stinking and and and consisted of nothing but just water uh uh with some some vegetable remnants or so. It's awful. And so uh and since...and also we had...there was...yeah...one of our possessions was uh a bowl which you always had to carry with us. That was your only possession and a spoon. When we we got the soup, we couldn't sit down and so it all has to be...had to eaten standing up and then after a short while the the work continued up to the very end of the day. So at the beginning...I mean it was hard but but but I also considered bearable, but then, you know, not a couple of days later...was early in March, uh terrible rain storms hit the area and the area became muddier than before so the work became more difficult, especially when you have to carry these cement bags. That was not...the paper was not of the best quality so they very often broke and when you mix cement with water, you know, it it becomes very hard caked and it was setting also on

your clothing and so...now the other problem was that I couldn't change...change the clothing. I I I...there was no way to clean yourself. There was so-called washroom but the washroom was there for hundreds of people. To get to the faucets was almost impossible, so to keep clean was one of the most difficult things, and also there was always the danger uh that you you would acquire lice which then would would uh result in typhus. So how to keep clean I don't know, but anyhow that that was one of the problems and also, you know, you certainly you didn't need a a a comb anymore because you had no hair, but you even didn't also didn't have a towel. You had...really you had practically...you were devoid of any things uh uh which makes fundamentals of of life. Who speaks about about books and paper and and...it didn't exist, simply did not exist. You were really uh a slave. You were rented out by the SS to _____. I was, therefore, a slave working uh uh uh for the benefit of the SS for _____ and I was aware of the fact that I was allowed to live only as long as I as I was able to do this kind of work. The moment I became weak or the moment I would I would uh contract any any illnesses and so that was the end, so therefore I I also tried very hard to uh to keep myself clean but, of course, I mean especially when you had these rains and you came back in the evening and the the uh the uh so-called uniform was was covered with with the cement dust. You went to bed and you were you were wet. Everything was wet. So how to sleep under those conditions

I don't know, but but, you know, obviously human beings can can can can can tolerate a lot. Uh many of our people...I wouldn't say many...some of our people simply said enough is enough and uh I remember distinctly that that uh uh starting the third or fourth day uh certain of the people who were also in our transport and were still in that same kommando, simply when we were walking out of the camp, ran what they called ___ so the person had ran away, tried to ran away and then the SS started to shoot immediately and shooting him to death. Uh and the SS loved to do that because for any for any victim I think they were paid at this time twenty or twenty-five marks and a bottle of of of cognac and so on and a day or two of rest. And I remember for instance we were walking uh one one morning. It was the fourth or fifth morning. A father was walking with his son and the father then when we were out of the camp, gave the rest of his bread and whatever he had to his son and said uh uh I don't need it any more, gave it to his son, ran out in order to be shot, in the presence of his son. And uh uh uh this I saw. These first days uh especially became the the worst I would say in my life and very often when we came home, you know, we...after you came back from the factory, you were counted again. You were counted when you entered the camp. You were counted again in the evening, and uh this sometimes could last uh hours and hours because Germany was the place where where let us say where where scientists work on mathematics and make progress, but these

people were not good in math, and very often when the when the when the numbers didn't didn't didn't jive, we had to wait and and and they did not uh let us uh let us go before everything was was just just right to the last man, so it happened, for instance, I remember that one evening of the fourth or the fifth, one of the men of my transport just collapsed in front of us. Uh we he was a cantor, a man I knew well because I had attended his service. Weisman (ph) was his name. A wonderful, powerful voice, and and and and well, highly-educated man. He collapsed and when the appell was taken and the SS man came and kicked him with his with his foot and he could hardly move and uh then when the appell was...when the roll call was over, uh we decided we had to take him to the so-called uh emergency..the krackenbaugh, the hospital and uh it was not easy for us to carry him but we did it because we thought it's the only way to help him, and then on the way, which was quite a long way over there at the end of the uh place, he expired and he died in our hands and uh uh this was, I must say, the first uh casualty I witnessed of somebody I knew well, and then from this day on, many many things happened because the resistance, the power of resistance somehow evaporated. How I did it I don't know. I I thought out all kind...I I also felt that I I became weaker. As a matter of fact, one morning I fainted and my good friends uh lifted me up and the whole day was difficult for me. Uh but I somehow managed. It was one of these miracles, but uh but uh uh after

one month I would say, from the two hundred and twenty or so we had been when we were newcomers, only I think a hundred and fifty had survived, but to save the other's place, later, after liberation when I tried to find out how many of our transport had survived, of the thousand who had left Berlin, not more than six, and I am one of those. So uh uh I myself asked the question, how long would I be able to to to tolerate that and uh also uh we were cut off. We didn't know what what was the latest on the front. We were waiting for the second front and didn't know any...hear anything because we were cut off from any news. We didn't hear anything about uh what was going on on the eastern front, so I said how long can it last. And I remember that one moment then when I went to the toilet, I found a piece of newspaper that probably an SS man had left there, and it so happened that I took into my...you know, pockets I didn't have, but...yeah...was hiding it under my underwear and and, you know, we had to be careful to to to handle this and it so happened when I was in the block with my friends I said watch that somebody should discover us and uh I read it and it so happened that was a piece with the report of the of the German Wiermacht saying that they had been driven out of Krackow (ph) which gave me an idea that the front, the Russian front, was advancing, but more I didn't know, but somehow it it added again, you know, to the spark of life and uh then uh there was another day when I almost lost uh my my my uh belief that I would be able to make it. In

our group was a man who uh uh was very active also in our youth movement. He uh was uh uh a Jewish civil employee, and he was a man with a beautiful voice. He had studied music because he wanted to become a cantor, and he had been in another kommando and uh I met him and he was desperate. I said to him uh...his name was Fritz Shafer (ph)...uh what happened. He said I've had enough. I can't take it any longer. I said what are you going to do. He said I have uh...I was sick. I went to the hospital.

After three days they threw me out. I can hardly stand on my feet and I don't like to be to be to be kicked to death, so I'd rather take my own life, so I argued with him. I said Fritz, how can you do it. Think what we have gone through. Think what we have been taught. How can you take your own life. After all, you are observant Jew. It's un-Jewish. He said, this is my decision. I don't want to be to be to be kicked to death, because what happened here...for this there is no provision in the bible and in in our scriptures, and the next day I heard in the morning whatever shooting going on during the night. Very often the SS guards on the tower, they were sometimes shooting because...to keep themselves awake let us say, and they could order you...they had these Jews that they saw something in there for the...it was suspicious and therefore they were firing, so uh so we heard shooting constantly, and next day somebody said you know, did you hear the shooting this morning. I said yes, what happened. They said your friend, Fritz Shafer...he uh he uh he

tried to be admitted to the to the hospital again. They didn't accept him, so he said under those conditions I I ____ went against the...you know, this was one of the ways in which people also put an end to their misery. They went to the to the wire and then the fellow from the the gangster from the...the SS gangster from the watch tower was shooting because that was his order, so he went to the wire in order to be shot and and that's what happened. And I remember it still...it was on April 3rd, 1940...'43, soon after we arrived. Uh so when I heard this, I must say I I I I was almost lost because I had lost a battle and I saw the parallel and I was uh said...asking myself how long will we all be able to make that, and then uh one day or two days later, all of a sudden there was uh uh a special roll call that people should register again their their their uh profession, so that gave me another hope and uh there was what they called the labor service, _____. Again registered and I registered myself again as welder. The uh reason was that the Germans had lost on account of Stalingrad a lot of manpower, had uh uh inducted into the army also skilled labor, so they were short of labor, and obviously were interested to to now somehow in our in our skill, if you want to. So I I I uh registered. Nothing came out of it but somehow it gave me some hope, and there was another event which uh was of immense importance. All the time when when I was there at the beginning, we were constantly under the under the supervision of the SS gangsters, and they were brutal,

brutal, brutal uh uh beings. I cannot say human beings. So uh uh even, you know, when you wanted to go to the toilet and so you had you had to to to honor by taking off your cap and asking for permission, for his permission and so on and what they did in order to play around was very often to take, when you when you take off your cap, take the cap and throw it away and when the moment when you...when the people went to get, to collect the cap, then the SS man was shooting him on the pretense that he was trying to uh to uh to uh run away, so uh that...and this this was the uh the situation the first couple of weeks. Also in connection with the Stalingrad defeat uh they then came to the conclusion that they wanted to save manpower and they organized the uh the uh guards in such a way that they were surrounding completely the whole area of that industrial complex, so that when we marched out, when we got into into into the factory area, the SS stayed outside uh keeping guard out...yeah, keeping guard outside but we marched in only with the kapos. And that alleviated certainly the situation somehow because then the kapos in order to keep their pos...their position who were very, very rough with their own people...they were mostly German criminals and and anti-social elements and so they then were not not not provoked anymore by the SS to to to become tougher with the...so this helped somehow, but still it was no no no no solution and and as I say, I I I I thought what what...still I was able to move but but I said something has to had to be done. For

instance, we were then...I was put in another kommando under the command of a kapo who was a Polish criminal. He had committed one or two murders uh and and he was such a human being the only regret he had that he had waited too long to murder his wife and his mother-in-law, so uh so uh and he was taking...he was not sent...sentenced to death for one reason or the other because uh...so uh he was a kapo there and he had uh used the foul language especially in Polish, because he was also was also one of these ethnic Germans who didn't know exactly where they belonged. You know, they they they they they had a double standard. They wanted to be Germans, and at the same time uh uh they wanted to to remain with their fellow Poles, so uh...and he he uh he was the head of a digging kommando, and that was also that was that that uh he was called in a German expression was Juden Franz (ph). Franz is a German name, but Juden Franz was Jew Franz he got because he was a grinder of Jews. He had shown so many Jewish uh casualties on his conscious. And he would always say, well I had to do it in order to enforce the ____, and we were not protected. There was no protected because not only had I lost my my my name and my hair and my clothing and my family...I also had had lost completely my my right to claim any human rights. And uh that's what certainly these these people, these gangsters knew very well that there was no protection and uh then one day uh the uh the uh...we were called again to the labor office, again for registration, but this time in the

presence of a representative of _____. And again we were asked what is your uh uh profession, name...uh not name, number and profession, and I said welder. He was somehow doubtful, for what reasons, but uh then he asked me certain technical questions and I was able to answer them, and then uh uh two days later I was transferred into a kommando where I I got out of this grinding work of transport, digging, and all this and uh was attached to what they call a German meister (ph) uh and uh uh the work was...and it was a great help...was to clean big plates which were used in the uh gasoline columns which had come in order to uh to be installed in the in the factory. That gave me a chance somehow to to to to rest a little bit in between because I was not under the super...this the kapo there was a political prisoner from from _____ so uh I could recover a little bit. The only thing which I dreaded very much that because of that I was transferred also into another lager, to another barracks and had not the daily contact with my friends there who were still doing work and as I in that terrible kommando there. Well, uh so uh uh especially, as I say, uh uh at the beginning uh life or the day in in Auschwitz was simply a day of getting up, starting to run, uh being exposed to uh to uh the whim of the blockaltester or kapo, so hardly be able to to sit, uh watching what what what uh left and right uh what what was happening so that it shouldn't happen to you and especially uh to to try to to do the work, which was not work, which was really slave work reminding you

somehow of the illustrations you saw in the _____ when the Jews in in Egypt were building the pyramids. Uh it, as I say, it improved somehow, and I felt at least the improvement uh when when when the SS guards were taken away...

Question: At that point did you make a decision to try to ration your energy very carefully? How soon did you do that...

Answer: Especially when I when when I came to the conclusion that what little I had, I had to to stretch out my energy. For instance, there was...I don't know if it's right, but I got the bread in the morning. I didn't eat it immediately. I kept a little bit and kept it in my pocket somehow so that they say, when when it's drier, then it has more nourishing value, or one instance I tried to uh to uh to uh...especially after the SS was taken away from the kommandos, to go to the to the toilet unobserved as often as possible to have to have a minute of rest, or for instance uh you know, uh uh we had as tool only our bowl and a and a and a and a spoon. Now I came to the conclusion in order to cut the bread...we had no knives certainly. That was dangerous for the Germans, for the German state. Uh I sharpened part of that of that spoon so that it was easier somehow to cut in order to save energy and and and this...and also uh uh uh what I tried in spite of all obstacles to to to remain clean. Uh because I realized that the moment I would give in, that could be

the end easily, so uh uh and then when I was working for that first German meister, uh uh who was who was more or less pleasant, uh uh because he treated me not as an inmate, as a heftling, as a slave. He treated me as somebody who was like a helper or uh...not in his category but as a helper and uh then I tried, you know, to sit down as often as possible and to to relax to to...whenever I could and not to exert myself, do anything special, certainly not to run anymore and so to try to to to walk in a way that that I don't consume too much ener...energy. Uh after a certain while I lost that job because there was a conflict between _____ and the and the and the _____ which was doing this kind of work and uh then I was uh uh handed over to another fellow who...as a welder...uh the German meister who came from Saxony (ph) and he was a first class worker, but his religion as you have it very often in in Germany...his whole religion was work. He didn't understand anything about politics. His politics was work. He didn't like it. He didn't like the war but this doesn't affect it. He was just...as long as he could work, and he was very proud in his work, so at the beginning it was not so easy because I was not an accomplished welder, but I tried to learn from him and he realized that and I must say in all fairness, he treated me like an equal. And when he saw that I made progress in whatever he wanted me to do, then he gave me some cigarettes uh which I didn't use certainly because I then bartered the cigarettes for bread which was very

important, also to to get up some more energy. And uh uh so uh also what was a tremendous advantage, that uh when I worked with him I could work under a roof so that the elements...I was not exposed to the elements. I also remember that uh when I entered this building where I worked then, I for the first time in weeks I saw a mirror, and I looked myself into the mirror and I was aghast. I was simply...I I I mean this was the worst, one of the worst things I must say that happened to me. I didn't recognize myself anymore, certainly without hair, unshaven you know, because we had a chance only to to be shaven once a week, and I said for goodness sake, what happened to you. Uh uh but still the fact that I was somehow now in a better position helped me tremendously and and I was still felt sorry that for my other friends that they having no skill and having nothing to offer in this respect were not able to alleviate their situation somehow, and uh so I I I worked with this man for a certain while and again then something changed uh because because uh uh uh they wanted to have welders in in in in the camp directly. There was a welder kommando and the Buna was constantly expanding and at the beginning when I came, the total of was approximately two thousand or two thousand five hundred. Then we we we grew to approximately ten thousand. What they did was also that uh they uh and the Germans were...the Nazis did things which are not well known but should be should be recorded. At a certain time, they established brothels for the German uh inmates and the Polish

inmates, and they brought prostitutes from Poland and from Germany into a special barrack where the the the Polish uh uh inmates, non-Jewish Polish inmates, or the German inmates had an opportunity to go whenever there was...there was a certain schedule for that. There was a special barrack built in the middle of the _____ and we were called to uh to do the heating there, to establish the heating so they needed welders and I was one of them which gave me a tremendous uh uh...which was a tremendous help. Number one, I mean I was suffering from certain _____, from from swollen feet, so I didn't have to walk these long distances to the to the to the factory and uh also I became acquainted with the with the people there in the camp, ___ people and so and I started to do certain things in my free time, using scrap and making hooks for the beds, or or for the curtains and things like that and I...and it turned...there was no money. I mean none of us was allowed to have any money certainly, so you were bartering for bread and and and so this kind of work uh uh uh...I wouldn't say I liked but it was helpful also to to come back to my to my somehow to my health and to my to my energy. Uh also uh in in...in between I started to work outside in in that area with a with a with a man who was, interesting enough, a Polish national but who was an artist as a welder and I learned a lot from him, and...though he was a very nationalistic Pole, he was no anti-Semite. He was special, and we got on good terms. Uh he bought me papers, newspapers, I mean _____ and once in a

while a piece of of of of uh sausage. I even could could ask him to write for me a letter to a neighbor of mine in Berlin with whom I had left some money and some things, and sure enough this lady, a wonderful lady, wrote back and and sent money and some food to this Polish man, so I left him with the money because I couldn't use the money. It was too dangerous but he gave me the food and that was manna for me. So uh uh and also this...____
____ was his name...he had a very interesting technique. Since he hated the Germans so much, uh and hated certainly to work for ____ for the war effort, he had developed a certain technique, you know, when you weld pipes you have to be very careful because uh under high pressure they could burst easily and therefore you have to be have to be very accurate. I knew how to do this. I knew how to do it, and then he taught me how to do it that it looked good from the outside, was bad from the inside, by, for instance, apply more oxygen or an abundance of oxygen so that bubbles would would would would build inside the the the metal and it would...the weld of metal, and certainly the pressure...and the pipes would not be able to to to to tolerate the pressure. Uh and that's how...I say when I worked with him for the first time, we established a contact. Then I I worked in the camp for the...partly to establish that brothel and then when I was working in the camp, I heard one day that there were British prisoners of war who had appeared in that factory and sure enough, uh what the Germans had done was uh the British, as

you know from the records, had fought Rommel in North Africa, had surrendered at _____. The soldiers who had been taken prisoner in _____ had been brought to Italy and when Italy got out of the war, the Germans didn't let them go but transferred them to Germany and to Upper Salasia. _____ was that camp, a tremendous prisoner of war camp and against the rules and regulations of the Geneva Convention, they brought _____ of these prisoners of war to Auschwitz, not to work like us, I mean like inmates, but in their uniform. Uh they had a special camp, a special prisoner of war camp and they were guarded by German...by German soldiers, by by by by by army soldiers, but they put them to work in that factory and when I heard this I said I have to come...I have to meet them. How I didn't know, so I uh arranged it somehow that I got an assignment with the same kommando I was before, this _____...(pause) and uh when I saw the the the...they also when they got into the...under the uh uh area of their ____ complex, they were marching, but they were marching differently than we were. They were marching to such extent that the German guards were mostly elderly fellows and they could hardly uh keep up with them, and when they saw us, I tell you they were throwing cigarettes at us and whatever they had and uh keep up these good spirits and so it was tremendous. And uh I could almost weep when I when I saw that. That was a tremendous...tremendous uh...give us a spirit...tremendous spiritual uplift, and I could feel it and then I I thought how

could I come into contact and luckily when I was transferred back to that fellow _____, uh British uh prisoners of war were working in the neighborhood and under very, very careful circumstances and all because they had to be careful. Uh uh I was then able to establish contact with them, and luckily my school English was good enough..._____ English which I had improved during my my years at the University. The British were very careful, on an individual basis, because they never knew with whom they were meeting, you know, and slowly but surely, and I say it with pride, I was able to to establish a very close personal contact and the moment the this kind of sound barrier was was was pierced, they became the best friends you could imagine, and what they did was not only for me but many others, for instance, they had, you know, there was a different categories of of soup for the luncheon and uh the quality of our soup was the worst. The quality for the German civilians was the best. For the English prisoners of war, theirs was in between, but they didn't need it. They didn't want it because luckily they had their International Red Cross parcels, so, therefore, they had already clients amongst our people, our inmates, to give them the soup which was very helpful because it was of better quality and uh they uh...since I was on such terms with them, they helped me with chocolates and and things like that. At the end actually I had British...when I walked out from Auschwitz, I had British socks. I had British shoes. I had British underwear, so uh uh because

they had enough of that stuff and they didn't need all this, but what was most important was...or two things I ____ the British ____ was, one day uh uh they told us that would...you know, they they they they had chocolate and cigarettes. They were also trading with the civil population in that in that in that area, in that complex, uh so they they were able to construct a radio set via uh like in what...Stalag 18 (ph), you know...and they every night were listening to BBC London. They had certainly technically tech...people with technical knowledge and so on, uh so...hiding it certainly from different German guards and after I had established this uh atmosphere of confidence with them, uh they uh agreed to tell me what they have heard, so that I actually was able to uh to uh to follow the news of BBC London in Auschwitz and compare this news with what was written in the newspapers...discuss it with them. Also they asked me...once in a while, you know, they met girls, Ukrainian girls, Polish girls. They said they fell in love with them, or girls from Czechoslovakia, and they wanted to communicate with them but the girls certainly didn't understand understand English, so I volunteered to write in German to these girls. After the war, when it's over, we'll come and marry you and I give you my word as a prisoner of the of the of the English uh soldier that I will never forget you and so so that was that was that was uh uh with them and and I must say this this helped uh tremendously, because it it kept us...at least kept me...I couldn't communicate with

everybody in the camp but with the close circle of friends I had, what we had heard and what what what the progress were and one one of the most was...emotional days was when first uh there came the news...you must remember that by error a girl had played around with a telegraph in London and the the news had gone out that the Allies had landed in Normandy, and then it turned out it was a hoax, but on the day when they did land, uh somehow there was an electrifying atmosphere in Auschwitz and the Germans became very nervous, and I immediately went to my friends and said what what uh happened. They said we don't know because we don't like to talk about it before we have a confirmation, and the next morning uh uh they were jubilant and almost drunken, so said it happened. They have landed, and then I could come back to my friends in the camp and said listen, that's it, and it's created...I mean then we somehow we we knew that it was simply a matter of time when when when the the front in the east and in the west would come clear and though we were more or less aware that the Nazis might not allow us to live to to to experience the day of liberation, that at least that that there's some hope. And that that we can look forward to that moment eventually, so uh as I say, the the role of the of the British prisoner...I I I'm very very grateful to them and I must say for for for for most of my friends. Uh years ago, BBC London brought me over to uh to London, because they had a show, "This is Your Life," of one of the prisoners who interesting enough had been a member of

the British army, had survived Dunkirk, had had been had been had been taken prisoner at Dunkirk, had been I don't know in how many prisoner of war camps, had tried to to escape and unfortunately could never make it, and he was a daredevil. He was some kind of a _____ and uh so uh uh uh they they they uh uh he had the courage to smuggle himself into our camp to find out what it was or what _____ was, because when I talked to these people, and I said listen, uh you I'm sure will survive. I, I don't know, because we don't know...but I want to give you all the facts and when you come back to England and come back to your families, tell them our tale because I'm not...I cannot be sure, and they very often said to me, Norbert, how is it...how can this be possible. I mean what you are telling us is so impossible. Uh uh there the Gerries (ph) are going around, even these gangsters in SS uniform, and you know, we had also cont...SS control in the in the camp...in in the area, _____, but they look like human beings would with with their noses and their eyes and their mouths are the same like others. How is this possible? And uh uh (coughing) I said I have no explanation, but this is what it is and especially when in the summer of 1944 when the Hungarian transports came en masse...that's a transport uh with which, for instance, also _____ came from _____ to Auschwitz, to our camp...the gas chambers worked over time, but the crematorias were not able to uh to uh to uh to uh do their work anymore, so hundreds and thousands of corpses were burned outside of the

crematoria so the area of Auschwitz was filled with the...call it stench of of of burned flesh and uh then when this also waded into our area, I went around and I said to ____, you know, this must be it because we were aware ____, and uh uh uh in in...luckily, you know, under...amongst these British who had no nobody who had any sympathy for Hitler or his racial _____. They were really wonderful friends with with with with uh with a sense of solidarity and as I told you, when I came to that BBC show, this man, _____ was his name, they said this is your life and they brought me over as one of the of the witnesses to to give evidence what...what he had done and how he done it and and uh uh to repeat this again, I hope that this story of the British prisoners of war in Auschwitz will be told one day, because it deserves to be told. Uh...

Question: Did you...uh could you tell us about the...your birthday in 1943 with the ____?

Answer: Oh that was...that was that was still at a very bad time. Uh uh you know, it was...my birthday was on a Sunday and uh I turned thirty on that day, on April 26th, 1943. I had been in Auschwitz uh six weeks and uh I was uh uh run down but not not completely desperate but not in good mood and uh especially on that day, on that birthday, it was a Sunday. We didn't march out to work uh so it was a beautiful day and uh Auschwitz was not far

from the ____ Mountains, beautiful area in Poland, and the air was so clear, blue sky...you could see the mountains and their beauty, and somehow that affected me and uh uh uh gave me gave me some courage and then on that day for one reason or the other, uh we got bread and some marmalade, which was not given too often and uh when one of my friends from the youth movement said you see, on that birthday...it's almost better than cake ____ and that that that happening somehow, that that was really a...you see, you you are...every little bit was was was helpful in order to to to uh to to uh strengthen your your spirit of...your spirit of ____...your your...yeah...your spirit to live. Uh also uh I must say in this respect, another experience is interesting. Uh we had in our block amongst the old timers a man who originated from Vienna. He was uh uh a ___ scholar, and he was taken with a so-called Polish...Polish action in September '39, uh was taken to Buchenwald, from Buchenwald to to Auschwitz where I met him, and he was one of those who uh knew the bible and ____ and so very well, but, you know, you had no no books there. Whatever was done there, were taught or discussed was was from from your memory, and he established a a service on the block so uh thought I was not...I mean certainly I attended service in Berlin, not every day but certainly on holy days and so so then under certain precautions, under precautions uh uh he assembled in the corner to have a minion (ph), to have ten people and he said the morning prayers and he knew them by heart certainly and uh, you know,

this is...this was an expression of directly resistance, that in...you know, God was treating us as he did treat us as we thought, _____ had forsaken us as we thought, but nevertheless we said, _____, we still believe in you, and we came together for service and it was, I must say, I had the experience of unforgettable uh uh service. We had Yom Kippur service in in in Auschwitz with a few of our people uh and uh uh there was a cantor who also recited all the prayers from memory and we said our prayers. Certainly we were very very careful that the SS or _____ would not discover us, and in spite of, you know, in other words praising God in spite of everything, and uh I must say uh it it was strengthening us spiritually which was also very important only...after all, you don't exist only physically. You also exist spiritually and one can be uh uh uh the function of another, uh so uh uh this this...all this added to the to the coming back of energy I would say, that I wasn't...after one year, let us say, I wasn't used to Auschwitz. I still was despising...but I had become somehow numb. I knew I couldn't change things...all these people I have lost, all these victims I had seen, all these corpses I had seen lying around, and by the way I lost also then within a short time, two of my close friends be...because they they could...one was a man who was highly idealistic and he couldn't take the misery and the the this this this this height of inhumanity, so he he uh said enough is enough. Didn't take his life, but he just resigned. And another

friend of mine contracted jaundice and there was there was no no way to help him, so as I say I lost but I also were able to establish contact with other people who had come...from all over the world people had come to Auschwitz. I had met people from from from ____ with whom I communicated in my broken French, and and tried to help them somehow. There were people coming from all over, not only Poland and Yugoslavia but also Holland and Norway and and and uh France and and Germany and uh then after a certain while, because they knew that I had this call it information service and had contacts with the British, that uh they came to me once in a while, tried to help. For instance, one day a man came to me whom I met in the in the barrack of a friend of mine. He was the elderly of this block, an old timer, still alive, now residing in Los Angeles, and uh he came and he said he was looking for me, so uh what do you want, and he said he just came from a from a branch camp, from a from a mine, from a coal mine camp. Uh Max ____ was his name, and he said I need you. I said what do you need me for. He said I know that you have special contacts with the British. Try to help me. I said why. And he told me the following story, that he uh uh originated from the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, uh _____. He was a gynecologist, practicing doctor, but also was active politically against the Nazis and when they took over Czechoslovakia, it was time for him to to flee, and he was able to reach England and when the war broke out, he volunteered as a

doctor for the for the for the military. They didn't take him into the army for one reason or the other, but they gave him a position as a doctor on the merchant marine and here was was...got a position with the...I think it was the Blue ____ Line in in in Manchester, in Liverpool...sorry...Liverpool. From Liverpool uh ships at this time went to still to the Far East, so he made a first journey from Liverpool to Singapore and came back and it was absolutely uneventful, but when he went on a second trip, he came to Singapore and when he left Singapore, his boat was attacked by a German raider which had come from Japan, and that German raider was armed and had already ____ some other ships, so it attacked his ship, was overwhelmed because they were not were not properly armed and was also taken into ____ and and they made their way...I think it was in the Strait of _____ where they were attacked, made the whole trip through the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope into the Atlantic Ocean and landed in Bordeaux (ph) and were not interfered with by the by the by the Allied uh ships or the Allied Allied Allied air force. There was a time when when when England was very very weak but...when they came to to Bordeaux, he together with the crew was taken to a to a uh camp for the merchant marine, but when they searched the uh safe of the ship, of the British ship, they found out that he was not a British nationalist but a Czech. Why the British were so stupid to to to to mention that in this I don't know, but they did it. And they then investigated in

_____ who he was and found out that he was active against the Nazis, so very soon after he landed in this merchant marine camp, he got an order signed by _____ personally to be transferred to Auschwitz, and he came to Auschwitz in the uniform of the British merchant marine, and he was looking somehow to bring his message out. When he was in the coal mine he couldn't find anybody, but when he came to Buna he heard about me (coughing) and uh I said what can I do. He said try...he said I know, and we informed of that, that amongst these British prisoners of war, there is a system that every month or every second month, every third month, one of them...it's like a military action, has to try to escape to make his way into Switzerland, and there he is bringing news and information about about the life....

END OF TAPE 4

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