

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with David Bergman
July 18, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with David Bergman, conducted by Sherman Shapiro on July 18, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

Mr. Bergman has reviewed the transcript and has made minor corrections. The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

DAVID BERGMAN

July 18, 1990

01:00:41

Q: David, we are going to start. And I would like for you to give us your full name, where you were born and when you were born.

A: My name is David Bergman, spelled B-E-R-G-M-A-N. And I was born in a small town in the Carpathian Mountains called Bocho¹. It... at that time when I was born, it belonged to Czechoslovakia. Was a province of Czechoslovakia. And I was born on May 3rd, 1931.

Q: Okay. Can you give us some of your recollections of your early childhood?

A: Well, the early childhood was a very happy life for me and my family. I had a younger brother, older sister, mother, father, grandparents; and we were very close knit family. My father was a tailor. And uh...he made suits for people coming from other countries. We had one of the biggest tailor shops in our town. And my mother, who was a seamstress, made the shirts. And I was just busy running around having a good time. And that we had uh what's considered here...it's a beautiful home. We had...uh we didn't, I should say, have the comforts like in America. We didn't have running water. We didn't have...uh central heating. We had stove from heating, for heating; and uh for the water, we had a well. And the outhouse was in the back of the house several hundred feet. So I...where I lived, I considered that normal. (Laughing) I didn't think that you're supposed to have these kind of conveniences. So we didn't uh...uh think that there should be any other way. And uh...my...uh I went both to cheder and public school.

01:02:36

Now uh actually when I started school was really...is when the first uh--say in '39--the first sensing of the beginning of what anti-Semitism is really like. And I remember, it was on a Saturday once. And that's after the Hungarians marched in. The Hungarians, until 1939 that province was under Czechoslovakia rule. And we had a Czech officer. We had a two-family home; he lived on the lower flat. And all of a sudden, he disappeared just like that. Just like over night. And the Hungarians just marched in. And we were forced to...uh pledge allegiance to the new Hungarian regime. And as soon as they walked in, within a few days... I happened to be on a Saturday at my grandfather's place; and he had a eruy. I don't know if you know; a eruy is a guide wire that sets a perimeter as far as we can walk on the Sabbath. And the first thing they did is, they came with a truck and ripped off that wire. So that was the first harassment that I actually seen by the Hungarian Nazis--showing their muscles, really, what they can do. And then afterwards, we were told that we could no longer go into

¹ **Czech:** Veliký-Bo_kov, or **Russ:** Velikiye-Bychkov. Located in the Transcarpathian Oblast of Ukraine.

cheder, legally. That was forbidden. So we had to go illegally. And then we would have a look out for the police. So we'd take turns. Whenever the police came, they always were in pair. They had their green hats and a little feather on their head like, so they were recognizable from a distance. So as soon as they...we saw them coming, we get a signal-- "Disperse!" And we would run; and 'til it was all clear. And then we would resume again. And we sort of accepted that that's a way of life. We didn't question the parents who they were, why they're doing it. That's the way it is.

Q: This was in 1939?

01:04:56

A: Right.

Q: And then what do you remember immediately after that? Let's say in the...'40, early '40s.

A: Well, then afterwards it started to...for...tightened, I guess use the word "tighten" the noose more. The next step they did is, they took the licenses away of people--professional--of practicing their business. Like I had a cousin who was a dentist, and he was not allowed to practice dentistry anymore. We were supposed... We were forced to go secretly. So that if I went to a dentist and I had work some done and my teeth were bleeding...gums were bleeding, then I had to wait--make sure that the bleeding stopped--before I would leave. Because if they would have caught me, seeing uh that I had dental care through a Jewish dentist, then they would have punished him and me.

Q: How big a Jewish community did you have there?

A: There were about 3,000 Jewish in that...and then about 7,000 Christians in that area there. My father was allowed to keep the store, because for some reason that I can't remember--I was about 10 or 11 at the time--is because we had Czech citizenship. So they allowed those with Czech citizenship to keep the businesses. But those of Hungarian, they took away. Why? I...I...I wasn't old enough there to understand. In fact, we were really such...lived in such an isolated area that the news would come from a drummer. We have a drummer coming like old time and beating on the door; and we would all run out toward the square. And then he would take out a piece of paper, and that's how we got our news. So we never really realized that anything can happen. I heard things--events--happening, but I could not relate to what was going around the world at that time.

Q: Okay. So then what happen subsequently?

01:06:56

A: Well, afterwards...then my father was drafted into the Hungarian Army. And this was a very, very dramatic experience for us, having him away, because we were so close knit. And then he was uh gone for a year. And then they gave him a furlough. And while he was gone, because I was the oldest in the family I was considered man of the house. Uh, This was about 11. I had to go on night guard with an older person. And they gave us a stick in the hand. I had no idea what this was all about, but we had to walk around the perimeter to looking in case some saboteurs would come. Uh, and uh I...I still wonder why should they take somebody my age. I had no idea. If somebody wanted to be a saboteur, do something, I'd run the other way. But you learned not to question. It was a sense...you sense that they have the power, and you have to obey and you have to do it. And then...uh later on, we continued...uh a life. We missed our father very much, and continued going secretly to cheder. And then we saw deportations begin. They...they uh ...took certain people--let's say the Hungarian nationality--first. And I had no idea what was going on. My parents never really talked to me about what was going on. And all I saw is people marching away towards the train station. And this was yet '42, in that time. And uh...some reason, I think people really didn't talk about it. It was like a fear, or they didn't want to talk about it. And I had no idea what was going on, and just accepted as it was. And then, they announced that our turn was going to come. And my father, being in the military, was given the choice. He could either stay in the army and save himself, or come home and be deported with us. So he chose to come home with us.

Q: OK. How old were you at that time?

A: Twelve years old.

Q: So you were 12 years old. Okay. So your father came home then, and uh he decided he was going to go with you.

A: Yah. I don't think he had any idea where we're being taken; because we were told that we are being taken to some city in Hungary, to...for him to work as a tailor.

01:09:56

Q: Okay. And then what happened?

A: Well, the first inkling of what happened is, I recall it was in a Passover in '44. And it was a Pesach night; and we ...all of a sudden, we heard the knock on the door. And we were all frightened who it is, because we had the shutters down. And here was somebody talking with a German accent. And it was the German soldiers knocking on the door. They were not the Nazis. They were the German soldiers retreating. And the strange thing was...about the whole thing is, that they come in... They were very polite in the beginning. They asked if they could stay, because our downstairs was vacant since the Czech officer had left. And

they even offered to pay. And they put on a picture that "Hey, we're not as bad." And now I see why. They wanted to have confidence. They even put on some acrobatic things for the people, to show that they have come within...for good will. But once they got the confidence of the people, then they showed their true color. They came with guns afterwards.

Q: Okay. David, was this in '43 or '44?

A: '44.

Q: This was in '44.

A: '44. And then, we...we were notified that we were going to be deported. And there was uh... Just been accepting for us; because we were very Orthodox, and this was the will of God. And uh...(Excuse me) God will protect us and God will shield us from them, and just put our faith in him. And uh...when it came to our turn, we were only allowed to carry in our possession with us what we could carry. And we got a...like a flat bed, a horse and buggy that we put our belongings, only what we could carry. And I can still remember that sight. This is in 1944. And after we loaded everything up and I looked at the house... And here, what the Hungarian Nazi's did, had the chutzpah to do on top of it--what they...what you call "insult to injury"--is that they gave my a father a signed document, right in front of him. They even put a seal on the door. Stating that when we come back the house will belong to us, that nobody else will take it over. And yet, when I look back, within me I had the feeling that it's never going to be the same again.

01:13:04

Q: So you loaded your...your...

A: Personal belongings.

Q: ...personal belongings on a cart.

A: Cart. Yah, a wooden cart with a horse and buggy. It had a couple of wheels.

Q: Okay. And then what happened after that?

A: After that, they uh marched us to a synagogue. And the synagogue was like an assembly point, where what they would do is they would bring enough people until there was enough for a train load. And, for us, this was like electric shock. Whenever we heard a train before, in...in 1942 and 1943, when they began... Uh, because we knew that the trains are coming to pick up more people, take them away. So we already knew that going to the trains. We didn't know what's going to happen. But soon as we got into the synagogue and we were there, it is

like being thrown into a cage. All of a sudden, they show their viciousness. Saw a couple of people passed out, and they beat them up; and we tried to help, and they wouldn't let and wouldn't offer any help. So we already sensed that something bad is going to happen.

Q: Okay. So you were in the synagogue there. What happened after that?

A: Well, after that we stayed there a couple of days. Then the train arrived; and then we were put onto a train. It was still a passenger train, instead of a cattle train. And uh...from there, I found they took us to a ghetto in Hungary called Mátészalka. Mátészalka was sort of a central point where they brought all the victims from all of the shtetlach around in that area. And it's...just like they brought us to the train station from one shtetlach, that camp was sort of a shul for all of the surrounding areas. So when they had enough people in there for a large...or whenever a transport was available, then that's where uh was the assembling point. And that was...uh we lived in tents over there. And uh we...uh we didn't know what's happening. Nobody said anything to anybody: where we're going, what's going to happen, where are we heading. We knew we're waiting for something. For a train to take us someplace else. It was not the place where we knew that we were going to stay.

Q: Okay. So then the train finally arrived?

A: The train arrived. It was several weeks. Four, five weeks. I can't recall the exact. And then, we still believed that we were being taken to a city in Hungary. And this time, instead of a passenger train, there was a cattle train. And they put us in, packed us very tight. And there was hardly room to move. And the whole family there--my grandparents--they were still together. And when they locked the door, the click, and put the key on, I knew within me--I wouldn't share it--I knew we were in for something. I had no idea. And when we got on the train, we could hear the Hungarian guards talking. Even though it was totally locked, we could hear them talking. So we knew we were guarded on the train. And then the train kept travelling. It was maybe a couple of days or so. And then it came to a stop. And we didn't know what it was. Then we heard talking. All of a sudden we heard Hungarian, we heard German talking. And then the Hungarian voices disappeared; and then German guards had taken over. So that put fear in us, knowing that we're not going to Hungary anymore. That this was... And from there on in, it was the beginning. I'd say the beginning of the end, for a lot of people. (Pause)

01:17:52

Q: Now once the Germans took over, what happened then?

A: Then, the train continued. And I think we traveled for another two or three days. I'm not sure the exact amount of time. And I still remember, I could look through the cracks in the train. And I didn't know where was heading...we're heading, or where we're going. And I saw

people working on damaged planes. Uh, there were airplanes. And later on, I found out that that's...Auschwitz was part of where they repaired--planes that were damaged during the war were stripped, used for spare parts. And also I remember seeing these uh...they're sort of balloons, so that planes cannot fly too low. And I had no idea what purpose they were; but there're to prevent planes from flying very far. And later... And I saw that sight. And...and when we arrived, it was like in the morning. It was a nice day. And we were all with anticipation. Where...where are we heading? And then the train kind of kept slowing down; and the train whistle blowing, slowing down. And then we see barbed wire compound there, and we see these things. And within me, wondering what is this. I had no idea. I never was in a camp before. And then, all of a sudden, the train came to a stop. And they opened the doors. And that was... That's was when I saw Hell. (Pause)

Q: That was the first real Hell you saw.

01:19:57

A: That was it.

Q: What happened there?

A: Well, we were forced to get out. And all of a sudden, I...I saw Nazis beating people. I've never seen in my life like that, actually. Physically beating, dragging children away from their parents. Because in... Parents trying to go after children; and you hear shooting and yelling and crying and children... It is a sight that--I could not tell you what I ate yesterday, but I could tell you 45 years ago what...the way it was. And all of a sudden, fear took over me. What is this all about? What's happening? What are we doing here? This is not a city in Hungary. This is not what we had thought. And all a sudden--we heard orders, barking: "That line! That line! That line!" And...nobody knew. It was just panic. Everybody ... And I found myself uh in a line with other youth. And I had no idea which line we were supposed to be, or what. And uh...I was looking for my father, you see; because there were all men on one side. And I ran out from the group of youth that I was in, and I ran towards the adults. And that's what actually saved my life in the beginning. And then I saw, momentarily, my mother and my brother and sister going a different line. And I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to them; this all happened so fast. And I stood in line with my father. And uh...I had no idea what...what is this all about? What is this standing in line for? What is this here, and telling people to go one line, another line and this line? And then my turn came, with my father standing. It could have been Mengele. It could have been somebody else. I didn't even know who Mengele was, or anything. But it was a Nazi officer there. And uh...he uh...since I was with my father, he asked me how old I was. And my voice just froze. For some reason, something within side me said, "Don't say anything." And he kept saying, "How old are you?!"--"Wie alt bist du?!" And I just kept looking him, not saying anything. And my father didn't know, either, what was...why he asked age. And all of a sudden, he said

I'm 14. He sensed something, all of a sudden, then. And he [NB: the Nazi officer] looked at me kind of suspiciously... "14?" And in a split second said, "Okay, you can go with the work group." If I... I kept wanting to say the voice, "No. No, Dad. I'm only 12." And something held me back. If I would have said 12, that would have been it. What made me uh hold back my voice and not speaking, and what made him say... perhaps only God knows. Or somebody.

01:25:20

Q: So then you were put in with a work group, or separated from your...

A: Family.

Q: Okay. You... Okay. You are there. At this time, you had arrived... This was Auschwitz.

A: Right.

Q: Where did you go next, or what did you...? What happened next?

A: Well, in Auschwitz...uh they put us in a separate compounds, and gave us those cotton uniforms. Uh, and we were just waiting there. We had no idea uh what was. And then when I...during the day, when I walked around with my father, I would ask him, "What is that terrible smell? What are all those chimneys, that smoke and everything?" Either he wouldn't know...he didn't know, or wouldn't tell me. He just didn't say anything. And that stench is just gruesome... awesome, from that smell constantly. And you see the smoke from the ovens day and night. And just to give you an example how we were duped into believing, to a point, that what they were doing was not happening, is a man came in all of a sudden in our barracks and he announced. He says, "I've got good news. I've just heard that in a couple of days we will be reunited with our families." And the families were dead already, and he still believed. Now can you imagine that? Still in Auschwitz itself already, and not being ab...not believing that this could be happening. So how can you convince anybody else to try to tell a story, when in Auschwitz itself the people wouldn't believe that this could be happening? So when... after about 5 or 6 days and they had arranged there, we told...we were told to march out and uh to get onto a cattle train. And we were in that group about um...13 people--13, 15. Or in that range. And we got on the train, uh my father said that today's my Bar Mitzvah. And he had secretly hidden, risking his life, a little bottle of wine. And he took it out; and he passed it around to everybody, and everyone had a little sip and had a toast. And that's how I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah. It was very sad. But there was no time to think then on this. The time then was survival. That was... It keep...it kept us going, to believe that we're going to make it. And, hopefully, that our families will survive, too. We did not know what happened to them, actually. Uh...

01:26:23

Q: Okay. So you were now back on a train.

A: Right. And the train took a couple of days. And then we embarked in a place that I found later on was called Plaszów.² Plaszów was a combination of work camp and extermination camp. A lot of the Gypsies were brought in for extermination in that camp. And one of the things that I was told is survival means the ability to work. If you could work, there was hope for survival. If you couldn't work, you were done. So mentally I had to psyche myself out that I'm adult and I could do the work; and I wanted to survive. And so when we got there, I was still with my father. And one of the first thing they did, is they asked...they wanted to have people who had trades. First thing they selected first in work groups. And then they were...uh with all others, if they couldn't fit into work, then it was back to the extermination camp. So then my father was fall...fell out of the group as a tailor. And then they said, "Bricklayers. Who's a bricklayer?" I raised my hand. "I'm a bricklayer." I never laid a brick or a stone in my life. I never even touched one. But as I was in the camp, I saw how people laid the bricks and the stones, how they mixed the cement. And so I figured, "Well, I could do that." They said, "Okay. Fall in line." And they put me in the work group; and I...in their eyes, I was a professional bricklayer. (Laughing) And I would mix cement and carrying the wheelbarrow. And we had to go to a mine where they mined stones, and then we had to carry each stone to a certain area and build a little wall underneath the barracks. It was useless work, for all practical purposes; but it kept us busy. In their eyes, we were doing something. So, at least I was able to be with my father together. And one of the things that stands out in that camp, that I remember, that I was working with a Polish. He was Christian, and he was there... was incarcerated because he committed a crime. So they also put him with us. And he got a certain... And when we worked together, we talked about things: life, and uh he was telling me why he was...what crime he committed. And next day, to flaunt [it] in my face, he waves goodbye. Because he was released, free to go. And here I thought, "I did not any crime or anything. And mine, there's no time limit for me. Only death would be the limit." It was uh very, very sad to see that-- knowing that here he could go free, and here I didn't do anything that I was virtually sentenced for life.

01:29:52

Q: How long were you there?

A: Well, in uh Plaszów, I was there about 6 weeks. All of a sudden, without any warning, they yanked me out from the work group. Nobody...there's no such thing as sitting down like you would say, "Well, tomorrow you're going to go someplace else, or do that." Just, "Come!" And they yanked me and said, "Tonight, uh you're going to a different camp." And fortunately, I looked all around and I was able to find my father. And we said goodbye

² **Also:** Krakau-P_laszów. Located in the district of Kraków. Closed January 15, 1945.

through the fence. And it was a very, very sad moment, too; knowing that I would never see him again. It...it just you had that feeling. I didn't give up hope, but it was very strange feeling. Then they put me on a train, and uh was like an overnight travel. And I found out after we arrived that it was a camp called Gross Rosen. Gross Rosen was...I found out was a combination. An extermination camp, and processing camp. So that when (excuse me) when the Russians were getting closer in Plaszów, they didn't want us to be free...they took us to Gross Rosen. And in Gross Rosen, they uh...we were waiting there and in process of being sent to another work camp. But before...uh we...they determined if we're going to be sent to a work camp or where, we were forced to strip naked in front of a...a doctor or somebody. And he looked us over like cattle. And he determined whether you were physically fit to do heavy physical work. Or if not, then there was..they had the extermination camp right there. And I...they did not tell you where you're going to be sent or what. And after about 6 weeks--it seems like an average cycle (laughing)--6 weeks, they put me in a train again. I'd become a professional (laughing) traveller at that time. And then I found out...at this time I was in a concentration camp. Actually, the first concentration camp itself. And the concentration camp, meaning that in this camp it was primarily for work. And when they wanted to exterminate somebody or end his life, they took him to places like Groß Rosen or Auschwitz.

01:32:35

They had their methods to their madness. So again, in Reichenbach,³ the same thing. "We need bricklayers." Now, since I was a professional bricklayer (laughing), I right away raised my hand. And I was put into a work group. And it was very, very, very difficult work. We had to march several miles to work. And I was already half dead when I already got to work. And then to work yet, uh it took all the strength just to make it through the marching. And then, when we marched back, if a person was not physically able to complete the march, they just shot him on the spot. There was no...there was no such thing. So uh... So in Reichenbach, it was...uh this is where I spent the most time. I was there about 6 months.

Q: This is where you spent most of the time. Can you tell us something about what... What was your daily life like?

A: Well, we lived in the barracks. It was like this for the winter. Ice cold; no heating at all. In the morning, we had to get up about 4:00 in the morning and take an ice cold shower in an ice cold barracks. After we took the shower, we had to go and stand outside in the bitter cold for roll call. And finally, after that, they would give us some coffee and a piece of bread. That was our ration. And then...uh we would then be on standby for which work group we're going to go. Because every day they need work in different areas. So then they would select us to go to a certain...oftentimes, work in the city building air raid shelters. And when there would be a raid, we had to stay in the open. And they watched us from a distance. [If] we

³ **Also:** Langenbielau I. Subcamp of Groß Rosen located in Lower Silesia.

ran, we would be shot. So we were not afraid; because when we saw the airplanes, we knew when we heard the bombing that they're coming to liberate us.

01:35:14

A uh very unique incident happened in Reichenbach that kind of stands out a little bit. Is when I was standing for roll call there; and as I'm standing, all of a sudden I hear a noise in the sky. And during roll call, it was a rule you were not supposed to make any movement. Not anything. And I was very curious. I looked up to see where that noise was coming from; and I saw it was American bombers flying over there on a mission to destroy Germany. And as I looked up with envy, wishing that I was one of those planes, thinking [of] being free, all of a sudden I hear a shrill right in front of me that could be heard in front of the whole camp. There was a Nazi Commandant saw me looking up. And: "Du! Schweinhund!" Why did I disobey his order? And he had a big stick in his hand. And his habit was, if somebody disobeyed one of his orders, he would ask him first, "Why did you do that," or "Why did you disobey?" And soon as the person answered, wham! He let him have it. And oftentimes that person would be beaten so badly that he could not go back to work, or [it] put him to death. Now here was my turn. "Why did you disobey?" And the little voice inside that told me in Auschwitz not to say anything, to keep quiet, was there the same thing. Saying, "Don't answer! Don't say anything!" And I was just looking straight in his eyes. And he was waiting for me to reply, and he was getting very impatient. In front of the whole camp there, here's a little Jew standing up there (laughing) that won't do what he says. And that little voice inside saying, "Don't answer. Don't say anything." He's getting...he says, "I know why you looked up." He says, "You wish you were on one of those planes, don't you? You wish you were free!," he says. And I just keep looking straight in the eye. He says, "Well, I got news for you!" He says, "You'll never be free again. You'll never make it out alive from here!" And I just looked him straight in the eye; and I said, "Someday..." He couldn't even see my lips move. "Someday, I will be free again. And some day I will see your country destroyed for what you have done." And this is what I was just thinking. And he's looking, and he's waiting for me. Here it is. I'm almost bracing myself that he's going to do it; and I'm just holding there steady and not saying. And he's waiting and waiting. And somehow he sensed that I wasn't going to answer. And he was in no condition...condition to hit somebody who didn't answer, and just walked away in disgust. (Laughing) Phew. And here it was, another day of survival. Now the interesting ending of this story is that during the Korean uh Conflict, I was drafted in the [US] military service. And afterwards I was sent overseas on a mission to keep the peace in Europe; and as I was flying over Europe and over Germany, I looked at the ground below. And I wondered if that Nazi Commandant was still alive. And if he was still alive, what would he have said if he knew that I was not only free, but also in one of those planes. For me, it was a moment to remember, that when... They say that justice triumphed over evil. That day that...

01:39:15

Q: Let's come back to your typical day.

A: Yes. (Drinking water) Excuse me.

Q: In this camp. You stood for roll call, and then you went to work?

A: Well, afterwards they uh...the Nazi Commandant sensed that there is still some youth left under 16 in the...in the work groups. And he didn't know how to...I guess you use the words "flush them out." Because we all said we were older, and we were able to do the work. So then they couldn't say that we couldn't do the work; because if we couldn't have done the work, they wouldn't have kept us there in the first place. But he was very determined that he was not going to let any youth. And then he decided he's going to play one of his games different; that he is going to offer extra rations to anybody that can turn in a youth under 16. It's amazing what happens. There's only a few that knew about my age. Adults there. And before I knew it, all of a sudden I was yanked out from the work group and put with... We were about 13 in the camp who were still...uh managed to hide until now. And this time, they told us that we're being sent to an extermination camp because of...of our age. And I remember standing there with a group of others; and my thoughts were going through that this is the last day of life and that tomorrow will be end, and that I'll never return home again. And all of a sudden, I started concentrating mentally: that I want to return home, I want to be with my family, I want to be free again. And I started--without me even being aware of this coming--it's like the mind almost like going out of control, the concentration. All of a sudden, as I'm doing that, here's the Nazi Commandant front of me, standing there. And I thought... "Raus!," he says. And I thought I'm the first one that going to be shot or something. And all of a sudden, what happened that moment was that a group that was going out, a person had just passed out. And he [NB: the Commandant] went...passed through over a hundred people who were on standby--adults--and didn't ask them. And came to my group, and ordered me to go back into the work group. All the others were taken to extermination.

01:42:24

And for me, it was like a rekindling. Here I was. As long as you were in a work group, there was still hope for survival. The interesting thing was...is that while I had hopes for survival being in the work group, I knew that now the Nazi Commandant knew about my age. He knew about me. And every day, I wondered, "How long am I going to remain in the work group?" I knew that he was very obsessed. Sure enough, after 6 weeks, I was yanked out of the work group and was taken into another compound. What they did is that they had a separate compound for those who are no longer considered physically fit to work. And they would take them over to the compound, and then a train would take them to a extermination camp. So this time, I pretty much resigned myself that no...no more concentration of being surviving, being able to make it; that this time I'm not going to make it, even though the will

and desire was still there.

Q: So you...you sort of somewhat gave up on it. But you...then what happened to you?

01:43:58

A: Well, after about two weeks of uh...and being in that compound with the disabled and others... Uh, ironically, is during all this time--throughout the time there was now is about 9 months--throughout the ordeals, being exposed to all kinds of sicknesses and diseases--typhus, cholera--I never even got sick once. Didn't even catch a cold. And because of my age...uh they found that I'm now...I was now with the disabled. And after about two weeks, they said, "Okay! Everybody up!" They didn't tell us what. And they took us into like half open cattle train. They gave us each a piece of bread. And to march in; and they packed us in in the train so tight. I mean, like standing up, there was no room to move. It was like sardines. So we knew that wherever we're heading, that this is going to be the final journey. This is not being taken to a work camp. And this was a journey that I will never forget for the rest of my life. First, it...when we started that some people start getting weaker, and they could no longer stand anymore. Then they would fall down; and they'd be trampled on, because there was no room to move. And soon as they were trampled on, they died. They did not remove the dead after the train started. And this...as...this was a 7 day journey. And as the time went on, more people started passing out. And one time, I still recall this, one uh Nazi came. And then he...somebody spoke up or asked for some help, and he shot him right through the neck. And he just fell down. And it was an experience that I will never forget the rest of my life, is I fell down; and because there was now... About half of them were dead already; and you would sit and you talk to somebody just like a person like that like I'm talking to you, and all of a sudden he'd stop talking. Just like that. Just in the middle of the conversation, he died right there on the spot. I had no idea. This is the first time I was really confronted with death; because throughout when I lived in my hometown, not...not one member of my family ever died or even went to a funeral. And this was a strange experience. You just see him and all of a sudden stop talking, and he stays with the eyes open. Then when I fell down, I uh...there was somebody fell on top of me. And I felt like...I actually felt like I'm dying already. I could feel like...there was a feeling like I wanted to go to sleep. It was not a painful feeling. Just going to sleep. And there was inside...this is... We have some...such awesome power within us. There was like...kept seeing, like an electric shock I kept getting. "Don't fall asleep! Don't fall asleep! Wake up! Wake up, because this is gonna be your last sleep!" And I didn't know how to get the body off me, because I was so weak. And yet I knew that if I don't push him off that it'll be the end. So that little voice saying, "Come on! Muster all your strength, and you got to push him off." So all of a sudden then I just got on and the last strength. And I pushed him off. And then I fell on top of him. And now he was trying to struggle to survive. And I just...I didn't even have the strength to move. And he was trying to push me off, and he didn't have the strength. And I didn't have the strength to move, and we... Neither of us wanted to hurt each other or anything, but the

bodies were all around. There, nobody moved. It was the most awesome, gruesome thing that ever human beings can do. And we would travel by...I remember we would be...would be like a bridge overhead, where trains go by, and it stopped. And people would look down, and look at us like, "What's going on? It's kinda strange." And they had no idea what it was all about. And then all of a sudden, when I finally did push him up out of the way and I...he fell down and I...I fell on top of him. Now he was struggling to push me off. And I was holding there; and all of a sudden, he got up and his final moment of breath and he bit my leg, right in here. And then he fell back and died. I had the most gruesome, gruesome nightmares for many years from this experience. (Pause)

01:49:15

Q: How many days...which day was this here? You said the journey was 7 days?

A: About seven days, I recall. Yah.

Q: Okay. What happened...what happened next?

A: Well, the journey...my thirst. They didn't...they just gave us a piece of bread. We couldn't even eat, because we were very thirsty. And the thirst pains were so bad that I even tried to use the urine from my body, just to wet my lips. And I pretty much, as it went down uh... When we arrive, this was, I found out later, in Dachau. And when we arrived, I had already passed out, virtually. Three out of 150 there survived. They all...the rest of them just lay dead. And what they did is, they pick me up from the...with the hands and somebody else with the legs. And then they threw me in a stretcher...and they're getting ready to take me to the crematorium. That's where they took...that's where their objective was. And somehow, they...somebody who was carrying me noticed a hand moving, that I was still alive. So at a risk to his life, he took me into a barrack. It was actually like a shower room. And I was dazed at that time. Virtually, I had no idea. I thought... And when I came to [in] the bathroom there, it was... I woke up, and I...I thought I was dead. I felt like I was in another world. "What are these people doing here? Where am I?" And I thought, I...I...I was totally dazed. I couldn't figure out even where I am. And then somebody came over and told me what happened. Explained to me that "You were just a few seconds away from being thrust into the crematorium, and they saw that you were still alive." And they said, "You're the first youth that age who actually made it alive." And then they took me and they hid me, you know, secretly in their barracks. So I was not even supposed to have been there. And I became like, to them, like a hero. That here are these fathers who said, well, if I made it then maybe their children would have made it through. And they...since I didn't get any rations, because I was... The ration was there like a piece of bread--enough to keep them alive until they were actually being...were going to be taken to the crematorium. And each one would take a piece of bread; and they would break off a piece and make up a slice for me, so that I could survive. And they said, "David, you must survive and let the world know what

happened." I had no idea what they meant, or what they said. That basically was what had driven me to tell this story--not to make sure that it is not...make sure that it is not forgotten. And so over there, after... In Dachau, I...uh started getting on my feet again; and found out I was in Dachau. And uh... Every night I heard the earth shaking from the bombardments. And here, in my mind I was thinking, "It is now really a race against time." We knew any day that this is going to end. The question was if we're going to make it out alive.

01:52:58

Q: So this gave you some more courage?

A: Hope. To be able to go on, to...to believe. What kept me is the belief that maybe my family is still alive. And it was... in Dachau, it was uh really uh very traumatic experiences that you would talk to one person one night, and the next morning he's dead. And then he would be taken like a piece of garbage and thrown on the stretcher. You don't think...you're not a human being anymore. You don't even know what you're thinking. You're just a person dazed, traumatized. And don't even know by what I'm hanging in. But the will to live there was still strong.

Q: What happened next after that?

A: Well, I was there about 6 weeks. And all of a sudden, again, I was yanked out (laughing) without any warning and put on a train again. Now this time I could consider myself really a professional! It was a really a strange experience. I actually walked out of Dachau on my own two feet--which a Nazi said...Commandant in Reichenbach said I would never do. They took the few of us that could still walk, and they marched us out. And we had no idea why they were marching us out. This was about three days before the Americans came. And they put us in a passenger train. And I learned, years later, what actually their main purpose was. But at that time, I didn't know. And we travelled for about a couple of hours or so; and then they told us to get off the train. And I found out that I was...it was a little town in Austria called Innsbruck. And as we were walk...marching off from...getting off from the train station, I remember that I saw...I looked...a couple of women in a group there, looking...were staring at us. That they were crying. And within me, I sensed that something is going to happen to us. And after we marched out of the station into the forest, they started shooting at us. They massacred many of them. And we got to a street, uh...and it was, this was...this was in the mountains, in the forest...in the Tyrolian Mountains of Austria. And all of a sudden, they started...the machine guns started firing at us. And many just panicked, run in every direction. Something...I had something inside told me, "Look where that fire is coming from." And as I saw it, and I dived into a hole in the side of the street and it just missed me. And uh this was still in April of '45, now. And I slept all night in that hole. When I woke up in the morning, snow was all over me and I was virtually frozen. I couldn't get up. And I had to walk bent over. I had no idea where I was, what in the Hell I'm doing here. And I

started...I just started trying to straighten out a little bit; and then I started marching. And all of a sudden, the Germans came and rounded us up again--those who survived. And then...

01:57:03

Q: Okay. Can you hold for a little while?

A: Yah, sure.

Q: Because they're going to have to change and put in a new tape.

A: Yah. Okay. Good.

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

02:00:27

A: Well, after they rounded us up again...uh it was a strange phenomena that happened. All of a sudden, there were soldiers, civilians, hunters with their rifles got together with us. And no one talked to us. No one said a word to us, or what's going, or where we're heading. And just told [us] to march. And...(excuse me)...and we had no idea where we're going. All I knew is that I was marching towards the front lines. And I saw the German soldiers retreating, going the other way. And we kept going 'til nightfall. And all of a sudden, when we got through...nightfall came, they told us to march forward. And then they disappeared. Everyone! The hunters, the civilians, the soldiers... No one tells you, and you don't question. And then, as a protection, a few of us, we went and started climbing the mountain there. We figured we would be safer. We didn't...the guards disappeared. We were left on our own. So then I marched to the highest mountain, with the strength that I had left; and I slept in a barn there overnight. We found a barn on top of the mountain. And when morning came, there were about 10 of us assembled there. We could look from the top of the mountains, there were vehicles going there. But we couldn't tell whether they were German vehicles or whether they were American. And so somebody said... You know, I didn't have any food. I was very starved. And somebody had [food] there. They said, "We'll give you some food if you'll go down and take a look." (Laughing) Well, I figured like this: "If they're Americans, I would be free. And if...if not, either way, I'd end up being starved to death or be back in captivity." So I said, "I'll go." That was the most suspenseful walk down the mountain in my life. I am walking slowly, slowly, slowly, to go down and see who are they. Well, I could not tell what American vehicles look like; but I knew they were not German. So I assumed it must be (laughing) the Americans. And as I walked down and I saw that they were not German, I motioned for the others also to come down.

02:03:41

I never did get the food, (laughing) because I never went back up again for it. And I saw military vehicles going by. And for me, that was one of the most moving experiences in my life. Because I actually saw the mighty German Army surrender. American soldiers holding guns behind. And here are these same soldiers [who] were holding guns on my back, and now somebody else. This is...it's so difficult to explain...to...how life can be. Here, one day here's a group of people that wanted to destroy you; and here's another group of people that want to save you. And as I got down the mountain, I waved a vehicle to flag him down. So [he] pulled over. And it was one of those small trucks where soldiers were sitting in the back. And I waved at him; and I couldn't speak a word of English. So, the only thing [NB: way] I would tell him that I'm hungry, I just pointed my finger (laughing) at my mouth. So they

gave me some crackers, and they just went on. And I just started walking. I don't know where I was walking. (Laughing) There wasn't anybody there uh picking me up, or asking. They were just busy, the soldiers, going up to finishing up the final remnants of resistance. Um, I wanted to share something, to back track a little bit, on... When the Germans had retreated and the...we were walking towards the mountains, we were actually walking into a line of fire. Because the American soldiers... That's what actually the Germans wanted. They wanted us...hoping we would get killed by American firepower. And we received a terrific pounding. The earth was shaking and trembling from American guns. Because they...we were right in no man's land, there in between. So after having gone through that Hell--and I remember that night, saying, "If I'd only make it through that night," I said, "I would be free." And I wrote... Later on, I wrote a poem about that...I'm not afraid... Entitled, "I'm not Afraid to March Forward, Because that's the Road to Freedom." And that poem won a golden award for that. So it made me feel pretty good. It describes my feelings as I am marching toward the front lines--the thoughts, and the feeling that tomorrow I'll be free again. And then I...I have some music with it; and I used it as a teaching [tool]. And when I speak to students, we sing it together. And...and it's very inspirational for them.

02:06:33

And as I started going back, I started walking, a military vehicle stopped and picked me up. And what they were doing, they were picking up survivors like me, stragglers who were lost. And they carried me through...first to a German town, and uh...Gar...Garmisch. Yah, Garmisch is there. And we...it was interesting. I saw most of the women were wearing white nurses' cap. So I asked, "What is a white nursing... Why is everybody all of sudden a nurse?" Well, what I was explained is that the Russians, when they invaded, they used to rape women. And this way, they thought the Americans would do the same things. So by being a nurse, they were hoping they wouldn't be. (Laughing) So they then took me to a sanatorium. Oh, no. Not at first. First they took me into a German home. And they were giving everybody the C-ration food now. And everybody was grabbing it, and taking... We were in that home...I think we were about 10 or 15 people. And I was the only one that turned them down, American soldiers. And they said, "Look here, everybody's eating the food. How come you're not eating it?" I said, "That food is going to make me sick." I said, "I am not used to eating that good kind of food." They said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "I'd like to have some fresh vegetables." "Where are we going to get fresh vegetables? There's a war going on! (Laughing) And you want fresh vegetables!" Well, they saw the seriousness of me, that I really wasn't going to eat that food--even though I was nothing but skin and bones. They went to German farmers and collected potatoes and carrots. And they brought it to me; and I had a little pot, and I boiled it. And that's the only food I ate for about 3 weeks. And I didn't need any medication or anything to recover. Many of those who ate that food became sick. Some even died. Mainly because their system just wasn't used to it. That little voice, again, was there: "Don't eat that food." Now after about 3 weeks, I was able to start eating regular food. But until the body became acclimated, then I was just eating that. And

they were just [so] amazed, that I was like this American soldiers' center of attention. They look at me. How can somebody who is skin and bones still be alive?

02:09:08

Q: And then you went from there... Let's see. You were in that home. Then where did you go from there?

A: Then they took me to...they called Garmisch-Partenkirchen. This was a sanitarium used by the Austrians for rehabilitating people. And they used that as a shelter. So they took us to a central point there; then awaiting transportation to go back home. So again, when I was over there, the American doctors wanted to give me medication and all that. And I said, "No. I just want to have the natural foods, and then I'll be all right." And I didn't have to take any medication or anything. And within three weeks, I was ready to travel. Again! (Laughing)

02:09:54

Q: So where did you travel?

A: Then from there, the American army took me uh to Czechoslovakia. It's called Plze_. In Plze_, they...it was then that portion became...it was...it was divided in American and Russian zone. So I remember an American officer was saying, "Are you sure you want to go back into the Russian zone? Sure you don't want to stay in the American zone? Come..." I wouldn't even think of it. In fact, I remember when I was in uh...recuperating in Garmisch, there was somebody there from France. And he had a son my age; and he wanted me to come to stay with him, to live. And there's no way. Uh, so once we got into the Russian zone, then it was entirely different. We didn't get treat...any special treatment. And as I was going to the train station to take another train, all of a sudden I saw people...people uh there. Yelling, shouting, throwing stones; and here they caught a Nazi. And they're... Somebody said, "Well, why don't you stop. And you can have revenge on them." "No. I want to go home." And that was the first. And I had run toward the train station; and I ran and ran, and I just missed the train. It felt...it was very depressing, because I was so anxious. Then finally another train came and took me to Hungary. And Hungary, when I walked in there...in that square, it was like a million people all had converged--they're coming home. And it was ironic that after I arrived, they start asking question about your age. And was the first time I could tell what my real age (laughing) was, without having to have fear that uh something would happen. And then, they said that it would... they didn't know how long they could...I would have to wait, because there were so many people who wanted to go home. Those who had survived. And that the only way to get home was to travel on top of the train, one of those cattle type trains. Can you imagine the experience? Travelling overnight when I had nothing to hold on to. And just swinging there, going through tunnels. I was so anxious to

get home. And finally when I got into Sighet⁴... This was in Romania. It was about 15 miles from where I lived. And this was my next point before getting home.

02:12:54

Q: So then you... Eventually, you did get home?

A: In Sziget, the only way from there to get home was walk. And this was at night. And I finally got into the town. It was about 2:00 in the morning. I was scared. There was the Russian soldiers there. And I didn't know what they'd do; I thought they'd shoot. So I just stood still in those bushes all night. And I was so elated I was finally home. And then the next morning, I went home and I found that there was a Russian family living there. They wouldn't even let me in the house. They said this is their house now. It belongs to them. And I said, "Can I just go in and just open the door?" Because my survival was the ability that I saw myself opening the door to my home. And I just wanted to have that. I opened the door; and this was the most touching moment for me, that here is a vision that I carried with me and finally came through. Then it entailed a scene what it's like living under the Russians. I would lose my freedom again. I found a cousin that survived; and uh we both decided that we are going to leave from there forever, and not...not make it our home anymore.

Q: Okay. So then where did you go from there?

02:14:20

A: From there, I went back to Sziget again, where I came. And I didn't know where I was going to head. I just knew that I wanted to leave. And I heard...word was passed on that there is a uh organization to help people to go to Palestine. And here I was on my own. Nobody cared for us. And the only way to get--we had to go to Hungary--was by train. And this time, we had to have tickets for travelling. I didn't have any tickets. I didn't have any money. And I went on a train; they didn't notice me. And when I got to a city--it was probably Debrecen, or something--they started checking for tickets. It was at night, and I didn't have one. And I ran out of the station; and the ticket master yelled to the police, "After him! After him!" And I ran, and ran in a bombed out building. And I was there by myself. And I said, "My God, what in the heck am I doing? Here I was supposed to be home free, reunited with my family. Here I'm a fugitive, the police are after me!" And I heard them talking: "Did you see anybody run in here? Did you see anybody running there?" They couldn't. And then they finally left. The next day, I didn't give up. (Laughing) Back on the train again. (Laughing)

Q: So that took you to where?

⁴ **Rom:** Sighetul-Marma_iei, or **Hung:** Mámarossziget. Located in Romania near the northern border with Hungary and the Ukrainian SSR. Under Hungarian control during 1940-1944.

A: It took me to Budapest. In Budapest, I found out that there was a youth group. Those that were...few that survived, and others that were hidden during the war, were now decided also to leave Europe. And we formed what we called a "kibbutz" to go to Palestine, it was called at that time. And after waiting for about six months over there, (excuse me) they told us that the only way we'd be able to get out from Budapest is to go on cattle train, like we went to Auschwitz; because the Russians were not allowing legally. So they had to...whatever arrangements, whoever made it didn't explain anything to me other than get on the train. And...and I remember we were travelling at night, and the train going through just like in Auschwitz--cling, cling, going; cling, cling, stopping. And just wondering if we'll ever be discovered, because we went illegally. Finally, morning came; and they told us that we were in Austria, in American zone. So we knew we were finally free. So when we got to Vienna and we stayed there about two or three days... Uh, I'm trying to think in which...there's a place that uh...very famous hotel. I can't think of it right now; but we stayed there about three days. And they said we will not be able to go directly to Palestine, because the British were blockading it. Uh, that we'll have to go to Germany and wait. Talk about depression (laughing) setting in!

02:17:28

Q: So then you are now on the move again.

A: Back on the train again! (Laughing) This is why I had done this story before. I called To Hell and Freedom; and this is a continuous story where I superimpose the sounds of the trains. Because that's what this is all--the whole story of trains, trains, travelling. Then, when we got to Germany, they put us into a former German military camp. And uh it was called Leipheim. And we were then there processed, preparing ourselves to go to Palestine. One, we learned military drill; because they told us that as soon as we're going to get in there, we're going to be in the fighting. From one Hell to another Hell. But we were not afraid, because we knew this time that we'll have to fight for our freedom. It's not going to come easy. And in between times--this is really ironic-- they arranged, whoever was in charge of the whole thing, for us to learn farming; trained by German farmers. So we learned farming, learned how to plant seeds for farms; and learning how to prepare for war again. And we found out that after...it's almost a year waiting, tha...uh the...they would not allow legally. They would only allow one [person] a month from our group. From the various groups, the British would only allow so many per month. So what we would do in the kibbutz is we would put our name in our hat...in a hat. And then the one that got pulled out, that [one] got [to go]. I remember one, the first one that got [to go], when he arrived--he went to Israel...he went to Palestine, and told us how wonderful it is there. And uh we were really eagerly looking forward to the day we would join him. And then after about a year waiting--frustrating, depressing, waiting--all of a sudden somebody from the office calls me in and that somebody wants to talk to me. "What is it about?" "Well, do you have any relatives in America?" First thing, I said, "Well, I think I have an aunt. But I don't know any of them.

Why?" "Well, your relatives just found out about you." I had about four aunts that I didn't know, my father's sisters. "And they want you to go come to America." I said, "Oh, no, no. Not me. I'm... And America's not for me." Okay, then they sent telegram back to America, saying, "He doesn't want to come." Then they sent another telegram. They said, "Well, if you really want to go to Israel, then it will be easier to go to Israel from America than from Germany." And I just wanted to get out of there. I said, "Okay. I will accept their kind offer, and I'll come to America." That's how I came to America.

02:20:39

Q: And where did you come to live?

A: I came to New York, and I stayed there for awhile. And I lived in a small shtetl; New York was just overwhelming for me. So then they...I...they sent me to Cleveland when I arrived from New York. And I stayed there with the family, for a little while. Then I started high school. And that's when... I was one of the few, very few, of my age who made it; and when I started high school and I...I was looked at like [I] came from another world. Because uh I was their age, and uh they were all very nice. But they didn't even know how to approach me or ask me any questions, because everything was so fresh. In their minds, they had just seen in the movies the horrors and these things. So I was looked at as uh somebody who had come from another world. You know, it was a strange experience to go to school. And yet, it was a struggle; because the teachers had a struggle with what to do. I was at an age, I was too old for junior high school and I missed all that background in junior high school to be in high school. So what do they do? They send me [to] both! (Laughing) To high school, and junior high school private tutoring. From that, and... Talk about having a rough road! But I managed to keep up with them; and...and I finished high school. And I was just getting on my feet, starting... starting to college, when I get a "Dear John" letter from Uncle Sam. That was when the Korean War was on. That was just a joke. (Laughing)

02:22:31

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was about 19.

Q: OK. So what happened then?

A: Well, they said, "There's a war on, and you're of military age. And you're going to be drafted." And then I tried to explain to him what I just went through, that Hell. I told him that uh being in a camp would be very detrimental for me. Well, they were...listened and said, "Yah. We'll give you two choices. Either go to the draft, or go to jail. Which one do you want?" (Laughing) Very sympathetic. Naturally, uh...I didn't want to go to jail. I took--I

may not say the better of the two, but I took one of the two. (Laughing) And when I arrived in that military training camp... That night, it was the most gruesome, the most horrible experience of my life. Because it brought back all of the traumatic experiences. It was at night. Flashlig...the lights were on the perimeter of the camp, the barbed wire of the camp. And the shouting: "Get off! Get off! Get in there!" You know, it was just like a repeat. And get in there; and the first thing, that "You guys are the lowest scum on earth!" And telling you, "We're going to make men out of you!" And so on. And I thought, "Here we go again." And the next thing they do is that we're going to shave. And I said, "Oh, no. They're not going to do that!" But they did it. And to do it, I had to numb myself like I did in the camp. All that healing that I was just going through, that they were just coming; with everything there, [it] was destroyed in that period.

Q: You're talking about shaving your head?

A: Shaving my head, and cutting the hair. And just being back in a camp again. So I lived with the same survival instinct that I had to do in the camps. And it was very depressing. It was very traumatic. But there's no one to turn to that you can say how you really feel. No one can really understand or relate. They had no feeling to even think how I would feel. And so I'm just like a machine, numb machine, going through the mechanical motions of something that I was forced into doing.

02:25:15

And I managed to keep up with the training, until one day they announced that part of the training exercise will be...is to go through a gas chamber of tear gas. And that was like a bolt of lightning would have struck. Suddenly, the next day I...I started limping a little bit. I just couldn't walk anymore. And the limp got worse and worse. And it got so bad that I just could not walk anymore, and my whole body became totally paralyzed. I...I was just like a piece of wood. I'd pick up my hand and it'd fall down. Well, they carried me in in the stretcher, just like the kind they carried me in--a little bit fancier, but it was like in Dachau, it reminded me. And the doctors started asking questions, "What happened?" Well, after they learned of what happened, they were so upset that how could they--the military authorities--not recognize some compassion of uh helping me stay out, or do something else. So they said they are...that I have suffered enough in my life already. That they are now willing to give me a medical discharge, and I can go back into civilian life again. Well, there was that little voice again. (Laughing) For better or worse. And uh...I told the doctor, I said, "One." I said, "I want to stay in, because I want to complete my military obligation. Because I want to pay...repay my debt to America for liberating me. And the other thing is," I told him, "the Nazis could not keep me down on my feet. I walked out of Dachau. And I want to walk out with an honorable discharge, and not a medical discharge." They were very surprised; because they said, "My God," they said, "they...there are some guys here, they'd give their right hand if they could get out. Because you're going to be in the fighting right after you get

through." But I was just numb. I...I was just... I don't know what I was...whether it was really me saying; but I just said, "I'll make it." And I went back in training again; and I asked them only one thing, before I went back, is to waive the requirement of having to go through that gas chamber exercise. And they said, "Okay." And I went back training again. And it was just like in the camps. Up in the 4:00 morning, standing roll call again. (Laughing) "You're the lowest scum on earth!" Again, too. Oh, no. Here we go again. How much more can a person take something like that? But you become numb, you know. You...you're not really sensitive to feelings any more. You just...you know that you have to do that to get over to get to the next step. And I knew, just like in the camps, that they are rewards for hard work in there. And I went and I really worked hard. Not only in physical training in the military, but we had to do a lot of training we had to learn from books--tactics, manuevers. And I made up my mind that I wanted to be on top. And we finished...we were like a hundred and fifty of us; and I finished in the top three on the 150. And then, because of that, they sent me for special military intelligence training school.

02:29:06

Q: What happened with the school?

A: Well, uh...when--ironic--when I finished and they sent me out to the school, they...uh they made me in charge of the group of the... They gave me in charge of the record. And I had no idea why, really, I had all those problems from the...from what caused the paralysis. And since I was in charge of the records, I looked up...I was able to look and see. They wouldn't tell me why it was. They just said... And then I learned that it was because of that. Because I didn't understand yet all this what's going on inside the mind. I knew it was from that, but I really did not know the details of it. So this kind of helped me uh understand myself a little better. So then, when we got into training and I finished, I was almost a year in communications intelligence; because what they trained us for is to be front line person for the war, to report what's going on for the airplanes. It was in the Air Force. And then after I finished training and they sent me to the South for more advanced training; and then they sort of divided up. Half of us went to Europe, and the other half went to Korea. Fortunately, my name--because it was alphabetical--they took the first half of the alphabet list, they sent to Europe. So it was a little bit of luck there, because if I had gotten into Korea I would have been sent... My function was the training to be a front line observer like. So when they sent me to Europe--they didn't say where--when I got to Europe, they said I'm going to be sent to Germany. (Laughing) And ironically, when there I was...I was numbed again. I said, "There is one thing that I'm gonna do...want to do. Is I want to finish my military obligation, and I want to visit Palestine." Because when I left that group in Germany in 1946, I made a commitment that someday I'll look them up. And so I saved up all my military leave time, and uh used it up to go to Europe [**NB:** Israel]. It was a...as I'm talking, there was a little incident that is ...happened in Germany that I thought it would be worthwhile sharing with you. Is...uh part of my job was also delivering supplies to the area where we were

stand...where we stayed, in the mountains there. And once when I was driving--this was a real big-semi truck that I was driving--and it was really rainy, very slippery. As I was going up the mountain, I was going...and all of a sudden, as I was going downwards, I see a group of civilians right in the middle of the road. I didn't know what happened. I slam on the brakes and my whole truck went out of control. And the civilians scattering all over the place. And here I am fighting to bring the truck under control. And all of a sudden, finally, I was lucky. The truck went a little uphill climb, and it came to a stop. And all of a sudden, the German civilians were came and all around the truck. So since I could speak German, I asked if I did any harm or any damage when this... Because I didn't know. They said no. Uh, then I said, "Okay. Why don't you just move out, and I want to keep going." "No." They took ... And they had a truck, a small truck; and they parked it right in front of mine. They weren't going to let me go, and they wouldn't tell me what uh it's all about. And I figured ... Well, I took the truck in gear and started pushing that other truck off the road. And they were trying to prevent me from doing... And all of a sudden, I see a German comes up and with a gun. Yells, "Halt!" And that was... I had a gun, too. We were given it to protect ourself. All the fury that ever came out... Because I didn't want to, before, intermingle with anything; because I knew I'm there to do my job. I yelled out...back at him, that he was so shocked. Here a American soldier is yelling at him in German. He didn't know what to say. He said, "Raus!" And I said, "I didn't do any harm. I didn't do any damage to anything, and I'm not going to get out." And he saw the seriousness on my face, and he saw... And he reminded me of that Nazi Commandant, and...that in Reichenbach. I mean, here...in Reichenbach, being if it was like that, I wouldn't have said one word. And here, there were all kinds of witnesses around. There were two in the front. And he saw that it was a good chance that he could have died, too, if he did something. And I that felt...I said, "I'm not going to let go." I felt, and a thought came to me, "Here I came as a...to keep the peace, and I could end up dying." And he saw the seriousness there was. And he was looking around and he was thinking (laughing) that maybe (laughing) it could happen to him. And he put the gun back in his holster. And I asked him, "What happened? Why...why all this happened? What's going on." He said [that] ahead of me, there happened to be an American soldier was driving [who] inadvertently killed a German civilian. So the civilians were harassing the American troops. Or anybody that come down. And be like in the middle of the road, and the person go out of control. And then they'd run away. And I just happen to be in the road again. (Laughing) And what did he do? Three weeks later, I get called in by the commander from the camp. He says, "Dave, I just got a report that you killed a German civilian." Of course, I had the witness and told the story. He was so angry of what that German policeman did, trying... because of what I did [that] he wrote to the mayor of that town, telling that this is not Nazi Germany anymore. And so that's when that ended.

02:35:51

Q: Okay, then, right after... Then, after you completed your service in Germany, you came back to the United States?

A: I went for that... I told you about that visit to Palestine--it was Israel, in 1956. And after I got back, I went back to civilian life, and tried one more time. (Laughing) So then I went to school of engineering, since I was in communications engineering. And I went and also got a job, working in the day and going to school at night.

Q: OK. How did you end up in Detroit?

A: Well, this company I stayed in Cleveland that I worked for, uh transferred me from Cleveland to Detroit. And that's...

Q: Okay. Thanks very much. I think we went through the whole thing.

A: Yah, it's... I think that uh we can all learn from what has happened, that... The things that I try to emphasize, as I teach it in the schools, is to...for the...those who are involved in teaching education to teach the youth that this is not a one-time happening. That we must understand ourselves first. That we have to understand that--and this is difficult to communicate--that every human being is capable of carrying out horrors and atrocities. Because there were some uh victims in the camps, who became Kapos, that were more brutal than the Nazis. Because they wanted to have favors. And then there were some guards, who did...all they did is guard. They did not uh actually uh abuse people.

02:38:04

In fact, as I look back, there was one incident in Reichenbach that happened that I was working in a woman's compound. And there were uh newly arrived women in that camp, who saw me uh working there. And was...must have been a mother. And she says, "Kinderle." (Beckoning with his arm) I turn around. "You! I got some food for you." I said... She says, "Come on! Come on! The guard is not looking now." So I ran to the fence quickly, and she gave me some bread, and I ran back to the detail...work detail. And there was a guard coming [who] saw me. And that was it. Once you did that, that was the end. And he said...it was uh one thing...once you were caught, it was off to a wall. It was traditional they take you to a wall with a stick; and you got the stick and picked it up and walking to the wall. And I prepared myself. And all of a sudden, just before we got there, he stopped and he asked me how old I was. And here was a little voice that said... For the first time, I had to make a decision. If I told him my real age, I knew I was gonna... If I told him the truth that was my age, then I knew that that was the end; because he would turn me in. There was a voice saying, "This time, tell what your age is." I told him that I am 13. He looked at me. He says, "Get back to work!" And I was expecting, after that incident happened, that he would turn me in. And he never turned me in. Strange things happen.

Q: So you gave the right answer that time.

A: Why I did, I don't know. It...it just... You...you're faced with a split decision. You don't know who's telling you to do what. You just...and then you... I know if I had have said 16, that would be the end. And I took a chance, [a] risk, saying that I was 13. And...

Q: Dave, I want to thank you. It was a terrific interview. You really expressed yourself well.

A: Thank you very much. And thank you for inviting me.

Q: I think that there were some wonderful things that you brought up, and you brought out some new facts and things.

A: I hope that what I shared will be of benefit to others.

Q: Okay. Thanks a lot.

02:40:43

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

PHOTOGRAPHS & OBJECTS

02:40:44

- (1) David's grandparents and aunt in an automobile. Taken in Bochoy in 1937, when his aunt returned from the America to get married.
- (2) David's father, Abraham Bergman. Circa 1920-1922.
- (3) Three children: David's older sister, Sarah; David (then age 5); David's younger brother Mendel. Taken behind the family home in Bochoy, circa 1936. This is the only picture of the three children together which survives.
- (4) ID papers, with photo, from Leipheim DP Camp, 1946. Shows circular stamp: "UNRRA, American Zone, Leipheim."
- (5) David and his best friend from Bochoy, 1946. His friend (no name given), who is the same age as David, survived the war in hiding.
- (6) David in a USAF flight suit, 1952. This photograph was taken just after the incident concerning gas chamber training, during which David had lost some weight. He appears quite thin here, but says he quickly recovered after he was told he would not have to endure the tear gas training.
- (7) Wooden clogs, of the type prisoners were forced to wear in labor camps. These have the wooden bottom and leather top. They have heavy nails or rivets in the bottom, and were painful to wear. This pair was given to David by a friend who was a combat artist. After the war, this friend found the clogs at Dachau.

02:45:00