

IMPORTANT

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NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

OSKAR WINTER

interviewed by Milenka Jackson

F300 Side A

We had been a middle class Jewish family. We were living in Berlin. Charlottenburg. I was born on the 19th of July 1906. And - the birth was at home. I don't know exactly why. But mother didn't want - didn't like to go into hospital. It was a heavy birth. Something ruptured inside my mother's body, and she had severe bleeding. When father later put that down to the doctor's inability to help properly. And never contacted that doctor again. But everyone advised my mother not to have another baby before several years. Because in those years of course medical science was not advanced enough.

And you were the first?

I was the first. Then my brother was born December 1912. And immediately regarded as the good one. Was helped everywhere. And I felt pretty much neglected.

Why was he supposed to be the good one?

By chance my mother had - some stomach illness. And as she was feeding my brother that was immediately transmitted to my brother. He had severe diarrhoea for quite a while. And that only - adjusted itself in later years. Anyway, I felt pretty much neglected. And that showed itself by my behaviour towards the little one. Quite naturally, as I never was prepared for the birth of another baby. But at that age partly beside the point, partly not, because also father did not commit with me about political questions. That I had to find everything out on my own. And that's why in later years I came into contact with communist fellows. But father was a well known agent for textile companies. From outside Berlin. For the Berlin vicinity. And was doing quite well. He had a second in command, whom he accepted then as associate. During inflation period my father bought ground in Wahnsee. And to build out there. And took too much money out of the combined account of the company. That he suddenly turned the table and had a severe letter written to my father by solicitors. Without first talking to him in private. Anyway, father immediately had to take up a mortgage. As he had no experience of that sort he was still there for several thousand marks. They were unpleasant times. Though we did not notice too much. As we were living in Wahnsee during the summer. And in winter in our Charlottenburg flat, near (INAUDIBLE). In Wahnsee during the summer we had our boats. I had a canoe. My brother had a paddle boat. A kayak. And I came into contact with some people whom I didn't recognise as their being communists, only later learned they were that. It was now already 1930 about, '31. And it came to a point where the Nazis started playing their role.

Can you tell me first a little bit about your home and your schooling?

I went to school - I don't know - at a preliminary infant school in Charlottenburg. And from there I went into school in (INAUDIBLE). But when our parents moved out to Wahnsee the school was changed to Zehendorf Oberreal Schule. But because of the situation between my brother and myself my parents did not know what to do and how to - and how to manage it. And balled me out to other people, which I resented very much.

You had fought with your brother quite a bit, had you?

You had got on badly with your brother?

Yeh, yeh. I remember one particular instance. I was boarded out in Zehendorf, Jewish people. And on the day that the parents were moving from their Berlin flat to Wahnsee I wanted to be there to help. I must have been 10, 11 years or so. Let me see.... If I can be that age. It was during the war, the first war. And as I didn't have money I walked from Zehendorf to Wahnsee. It was roughly two hours walk. And remember very well my brother was standing in the gateway of the property. Which was rented in those years. He saw me and ran into the house and started shouting, "Oskar comes, Oskar comes, he wants to give me a hiding". And so I was received immediately, I want to give the boy a hiding. Of course such occasions did not make things better. How he came to that idea I don't - I only learned later that one of the maids had told him that. "When Oskar comes he is giving you the hiding". Well in that moment suddenly Oskar comes unexpected, he wants to give him a hiding. Today one can laugh about such things, but in those years it was pretty serious. And this relationship between my brother and me that only started to smooth out in later years.

Do you feel that your parents played a part in all these difficulties?

Yes. Yes. By not knowing how to do it better. Today one has all these books about bringing up children, I don't remember ever having seen anything of that sort with my parents. They just didn't have the knowledge. And that's why I can't blame them. When they would have known how to treat young children, but didn't do it, then it would be different. But they just simply didn't know better.

Can you describe your parents a little bit?

My father originated from a peasant - a little village. In those years a little village, Geisweid. It became a big factory place. But from there I don't know too much.

What sort of a personality did he have?

Ah, difficult for me to say. It's difficult for me to say what personality he had. He was an honest fellow. Yes. He was an honest person. And tried for his family to get the best out of the various surroundings. He was sent - his father had a shop for house linen and bed linen. Underwear and such things. And some distant relative of his owned a departmental store in Brussels. And father was sent there to - as an apprentice. And had the opportunity to learn French. Which he spoke fluently. That was later an advantage for him because he got a travelling agency for French speaking territories of a ladies gown factory. My mother was the daughter of a Berlin - of a... My grandfather was a banking commission agent. He had acquired the sole rights to the Irashkukva factory. And all deals on the Berlin stock exchange had to go through his books. It was a pretty lucrative business. Because when my mother married she got 30,000 marks. In those years a tremendous amount. As an endowment. And then my grandfather was already dead. That was a very strange affair. There were two brothers. My grandfather and his brother. His brother became the director of the International Bank. A director for the stock exchange department. While he was on holiday there was a director's meeting and they decided to call the bank *National Bank for Deutschland*. That was before 1900. And when he came back and learnt about that he kicked up a terrific row and said, "A bank is not national, it must be international". And subsequently he quit his position and retired. He himself died in 1915. But his monies were so invested that his wife, his widow, could still get her monies through the whole of the inflation, there was nothing lost. That's quite an achievement. Anyway, that is - and my grandfather had got his job through the intervention of his brother.

Did your mother work before she was married? Have a job?

No.

And not afterwards either?

No. And grandma and grandfather with his brother and friends, had their riding horses in Berlin. I don't remember the name of the place. Near the zoological garden. And were always riding in Tiergarten. Where for one reason or another he had an accident. Was thrown from the horse and was for a time unconscious. Knocked against a tree. And then later put it down that he had retained some brain damage. Because he had an apprentice boy in this office and it was the rule that all the accounts of the week had to be in the *Berlinerbelzenverein* by 12 o'clock noon on Saturday. That boy went window shopping, played with other boys, before delivering the papers in the *Berlinverein*, and was 20 minutes late. On account of that my grandfather said people would speak about it and they won't trust me anymore and shot himself. Because the boy was 20 minutes late after 12 o'clock. They are conditions which are completely unimaginable nowadays. And by the connection of my uncle other persons, other male persons in the family got high positions in the banking world. As for instance a Mr Braunau became the director of (INAUDIBLE). He immigrated to Holland and was caught by the Nazis and - I don't know what happened to him. Anyway, coming back to my personal experience in the 30's, beginning of the 30's. In those years we were living - our house was at the *Stepchensee*. That was the last fringe of *Wahnsee*. Towards *Babersberg*. Opposite was the bathing place in *Stepchensee*. There was this bathing place where either I went over with a boat or I even swam over. And there I met a lady. I didn't recognise her as a lady. For me she was a girl. And was there with her daughter, a 9 year old girl. She was about 10 years older than I was.

How old were you then?

I must have been - in '29. 23. Roughly 23. Perhaps it was a little bit earlier. I don't exactly remember. Anyway, this person was about 10 years older than I am. Was a widow. And after a few weeks we got very much attached to each other. And this lasted for about one and a half years. And nowadays I regret that she was not more aggressive. She was a very shy person. And she ought to have taken me by the hand and told me everything. She had money from the insurance when her husband died. With that we ought to have made something out of life. My idea today is that we ought to have emigrated to Palestine. But they are dreams. I have now come into contact with her daughter, who is now a grandmother in Israel.

To what extent did your family practice the Jewish faith?

None at all. We were reading the Berlinertageblatt. I don't even remember whether any of the Jewish newspapers came into the house.

Did you live in a Jewish area?

Yes. Yes. But we only went to - the parents went to the synagogue on high holidays, but otherwise nothing was done and nothing was said.

There were no Friday nights?

No.

No sabbath kept?

No. And because parents said that they didn't want to spoil me, I did not get barmitzvah. Because they feared that when I would get all the books and presents I would be still more difficult with my brother. My brother didn't get barmitzvah either. It is a pretty sad story.

Do you think your parents were happy together?

In the first years yes. Later I learned a few little bits. But I know that my mother in later years had a boyfriend. She was a very musical person and she was playing the piano very well. And was training to become a concert pianist. But did not quite make it. And came into contact with a Dr Wohzaver(?) who was the conductor of the orchestra in the (INAUDIBLE). And through him she became a music critic of the Berliner Kreuzzeitung. Where she regularly wrote under the pseudonym Haylevy(ph).

Do you think your mother had had more education than your father?

Yes. Yes.

Do you think she was cleverer?

Very difficult to say. But she had a better education.

Did you actually feel conscious of being unhappy at that time?

No. No. It did not come into my mind. I only realised that much later. When of course everything had passed.

Do you feel your parents really didn't show you any love at all?

It was not actual love, it was - they didn't have the understanding. They didn't know what to do with a young boy. For instance, I never got any sexual education. The only - what I remember was - my father for instance only told me, "Don't come home with some venereal disease". But how to avoid it he never told me.

Did they tell you where babies came from?

No. Until many years later I only knew that the female body has three openings. I didn't know.

End of F300 Side A

F300 Side B

Anyway, this woman met, in this bathing place, a gentleman whom she had met while married, in a seaside place. And she of course immediately realised that there was something for him, he was a bachelor. And quite soon I was asked to surrender the house key. Then afterwards I came into contact with other girls there in Wahnsee. There was always a big gathering on Saturdays and Sundays in front of a boat, where an orchestra was playing. And I daresay that every crew of the canoes and kayaks and whoever was there in front listening, was changing crew during that summer. They got some VD. That was rampant. Those boats where the crew remained from spring to autumn the same, well they didn't. And there I got to know a girl - probably I got the VD from her as well. I don't know. I was - both of us had been with other people together the day before. So it's not possible to say from whom we got it. And through this girl who was jumping from one boat to the other - Anyway, from that accumulation of little boats I got to know some fellows who were very strong anti-Nazi. Something which I fancied because none of the - of those organisations with whom I had any possible contact did anything direct, but were only talking. From them I got leaflets and tried to distribute them. That was already 1933.

Had you become involved with the communists by then?

Not that I knew. But later I learnt that they were from the communist party. And this girl with whom I was together, as I said, she jumped into all sorts of places and boats. And one of the fellows was a secret agent of the Gestapo and had a closer look with whom she was together. And in December '34 we all were arrested.

What was the reason for your arrest. Was it for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets?

Yes. Yes.

What signs of Naziism had you seen by that time? By 1933. What were the Nazis doing? That you could see?

Well - breaking shop windows in Berlin. My father had his office in Kurstrasse. That was near Spitzmarkt. And there we saw all the Jewish shop windows smashed.

Already in 1933?

April. 1st of April 1933. Or they were dubbed with white or black - And I still remember on the 30th of January '33 father and I went on a bus from our place to the station. And stepped out. There was ice on the streets. And I made the remark "Hitler... (SPOKEN IN GERMAN)". And father took me by the shoulder and said, "Are you crazy to say such things?"

Can you translate that into English?

"Hitler has guided us onto an icy patch".

And your father was worried about your saying that out on the street?

Yes. Yes. And - well, between us - and in the office and between - in the office and when I went out to see customers - we had a textile agency as I said before - there was no difficulty. Anyway I didn't see any.

You worked in your father's office?

Yes. Then father handed me two agencies, or three agencies, that I should work them directly. But I couldn't say any more properly how that chronologically has been - has been conducted. Anyway, when I was arrested I was sub-agent with a gentleman who had the agency for ladies stockings. From Saxony, for Berlin. Yeh. And there I was arrested on the 12th of December 1934, in my private lodgings, near Boviarischeplatz.

Was it the SS who arrested you?

Gestapo. A Gestapo agent came along, arrested me. And - handed me to the local police station from where the next day I was collected into Alexandra platz. I have been speaking with the other fellows who were arrested with me together. I had contact later with them and they were of the belief that our group was only a very small one. And - and just only taken up when they had nothing else to do. When the Gestapo had nothing else to do. Anyway, what I resented was that for many months I was 6 weeks in Alexandra platz. Then I was transferred to Pletsensee(ph).

How were you treated in that first period of custody?

Well - not at all. I just was - I just was given my food and a blanket. And every day one hour exercise in the yard. And that was it.

Did you share a cell with others?

No. No. The first - six to nine months I was in solitary confinement. Though they did not know that by chance one of the fellows with whom I was arrested came together with me on the same exercise. And we could talk to each other. In Pletsensee? I was together with two fellows. First in solitary. And then in a cell with two other fellows together. One was Hoffman. I believe Manfred Hoffman. Who as a telephone engineer was working in the - in that hotel which the Israelis bombed in 1948, and was killed at that occasion. Anyway, I resented very much - today anyway I resent very much that I never had any personal contact until I was handed the indictment papers. Then only I could have a visit of my parents and a solicitor. Until then I didn't see any outside person. We were - we were four of us. Two other boys, that girl and I. We were sentenced. One boy got three years, the others got two years - penal servitude. With five years loss of - loss of - voting rights. And the time of trial - the time of - before the - before the - judgement was taken into account, that the two years was counting from the 12th of December '34. And then I was sent out to Brandenburg.

What type of jail was that?

That was one of the most modern in Germany.

So at that point you weren't singled out as a Jew for a special type of a jail?

No. No. No. But altogether - one day I - one day I - calculated it out. And within those two years I was altogether fifteen months in solitary confinement. I remember that for quite a while my next door neighbour - was Ernst Furstenberg. He had got five years for his activities against Nazis. And constantly complained for years he has been in Spain and worked against Franco. And in Germany the Gestapo had to catch him. He was very resentful of that. I met someone else, Herbert Sandberg, who today is a well known cartoonist in East Germany. He had been ordered by the communist party to marry a Polish girl in order that she could not be deported. And on the day - they married at the registrars office and when they went - and the last time he saw her was downstairs on the street. Then she - she disappeared out of his sight.

How did you occupy yourself during this period of solitary confinement?

I was reading. I was reading the Nazi books. As far as I could get them. I tried to indoctrinate myself with the Nazi philosophy in order to know against whom I was fighting.

Who gave you the books?

They were in the library. In the prison library.

What range of books was in the library?

We political prisoners were not permitted to receive - to get any educational books. Neither language nor mathematics. Novels we could read and - geographical texts. But no educational books.

Could you see any newspapers?

No. Only the newspaper which was - which was - published by the prison authorities for all German jails. All German prisons. And there I occupied myself by - composing - crossword puzzles. Chess puzzles and such things.

You didn't tell me how much education you had. What was your school leaving status?

I left - I left school with a so-called (INAUDIBLE). That is - when I was 18 years old I had the educational standard of a 15 year.

Why was that?

That was today - today I believe that was the result of my - of the conditions at home. That I did not - nobody ever urged me to do homework and such things. They allowed me to go my own ways and didn't guide me. In no way. Whereas my brother was heavily guided by my father.

At what stage did you become frustrated about that?

I did not realise it at the time. I did not realise why I was so poor - why I got so poor results in school. That I only realised many years later.

In prison did you make a conscious effort to educate yourself in general at all?

Yes, as much as that I wanted to get to know the Nazi doctrine. And these books were readily available for me. I read Mein Kampf and Untergang des Abendlandes of Rosenberg. Anyway, I read a number of these - of these Nazi books.

What did you feel?

Well - it is difficult to say what I felt. But at times I was surprised that nobody had realised the fallacies which were expressed in these books. For instance I still today believe that the author of the pamphlet - After reading the book by Austin Stewart Chamberlain I got hold of the pamphlet 'The Secrets of the Wise Men of Sion'. That I nowadays believe that Chamberlain was the author of this pamphlet. As in some respects there are equalities in language between - between his book and this pamphlet. I have of course no proper proof of it. But that's my belief. People may come perhaps and accuse me of all sorts of things. That is - well in addition I - I tried to keep fit. And tried to pass the time as good as possible. But we got work into the cell which was most monotonous.

What did you do?

From - harvesting string. Straw bales were tied together. And when the straw or the hay was used, these strings were cut open. And we got now the ends with the knots, to undo and make it into proper fibres again. It was a dusty and, as I say, most monotonous affair. But there was a second work which I don't know anymore what it was.

Did you get adequate food?

Yes. The food was adequate in prison. You mustn't forget that was '35, '36.

And nobody beat you up at that time?

Not in prison, no. No. I made one particular mistake. When we were called out for our daily exercise there was a few cells away an old man. And we very often came to stand next to each other and we'd get friendly. And so one day I told him if he had anything to say to - to say to friends outside, I shall be leaving in a few days or a few weeks, he can give it to me and I shall do that. And he had nothing else to do but to go to the head warden and tell him that I intend to do such things. And that head warden of course gave his report. And subsequently when on the 12th of December '36 I was out for release, a policeman was standing there in order to take me along. My mother had to come to collect

me. He allowed us to be together. But he said he has to take me to the police headquarters in Neupanborg? And mother had to go. That was the last time that I have seen mother - there.

Have you any idea why this man reported you?

Yes. To make a good impression for himself.

He was a Nazi do you think?

No. No. No. No. That was the - I was not a criminal, he was a criminal. And that was just the feeling between the two groups of prisoners.

Do you know if he was Jewish or not?

No, he wasn't. I was sent to Alexanderplatz where I was in a big community cell for several weeks. Father came there to visit me. He could give me money. We could - in Alexanderplatz it was possible to buy everything. With the tacit knowledge of the warders. Of the police warders. Because there we were under the supervision of the police.

And you still weren't singled out as a Jew at this point?

No. No. I know that for instance tobacco was sent - came into the - into the cells by the broken spyhole. A 50 gramme of tobacco was rolled into - was put into a long roll and then pushed through the broken spyhole. And the police warden knew that, probably had seen that from outside. That never was my affair. I had a little bit of money and could buy cigarettes and so - I didn't care. And one day I was called out and sent on transport to Lichtenberg concentration camp. Lichtenberg is an old cloister near Turgav, on the Elba in Saxony. High on a rock. Occasionally one could have - could view over the landscape and one could see pretty far out.

And was this all because you had offered to take a message for another prisoner?

Yes. For that I was sent to a concentration camp.

And that was not because you were Jewish? Is that right?

I don't think so. No, I never of course could - could verify that. The strange coincidence is that the head warden in Brandenburg was a Mr Vieth. And now I have come into contact, through my stamp collecting, with the secretary of a big stamp collecting society whose name is Vieth as well. Very strange. A very rare name. Probably he is the son of him. I never have met him. And I never intend to meet him. But it is a strange coincidence. In Lichtenberg - arrival in Lichtenberg. There I learned why I was in a concentration camp. But another remark was made. "Why is that Jew here?"

End of F300 Side B

F301 Side A

In Lichtenberg I was kept in solitary confinement. Because a fortnight earlier all Jewish prisoners had been sent over to Dachau. And the other prisoners there were pretty friendly to me. Offered me cigarettes. And otherwise. But I was kept - also for exercise I was kept completely on my own. No other prisoner was taken into the yard with me.

Were you the only Jewish person at the time?

At that time I fancy, yes. Look here, that is Hans Litern. A fellow who was walking with a stick. And that was the former lawyer, Dr Hans Litern. Whose mother had written the well known book 'A Mother Defies Hitler'. He was by Nazi definition a quarter Jew. And a week later I was called out again and sent over to Dachau. On the transport. For lunch the - roughly 8 or 10 prisoners who were transferred from one to the other. We stopped in Quinbach(ph) And marched with handcuffs through the street to the police headquarters. I was curiously looking round watching all the nice old timbered houses on cobblestone and plaster. And then in the evening we arrived in Munich.

What kind of transport did you travel on?

Rail.

Were you very crowded?

3 to 4 in one compartment.

It was a normal train?

It was a normal prisoner carriage. Nothing particular. I don't know where it was that we arrived in Munich. I believe it was the headquarters. But I wouldn't know. I mean main station. I wouldn't know. I only know that next morning, pretty early, we were called out and SS men were there. And started shouting at us like mad. In order to impress upon us that the good times under police supervision had passed.

Do you remember the date. What year was it?

We went to Dachau between the 20th and 25th of February 1937. Yes, that must have been. '34 I was arrested. December '34 I was arrested. December '35, '36 I was released. December '36. So that must have been January, February 1937. We were - I don't know how many, quite a number, pressed into a van. With SS men. With their guns in their hands. Shouting at us constantly. And went out into Dachau. The first was that we were put into the bath - into the bathroom and had to undress completely. And we were given their prison garbs. In Dachau we first had military - old military uniforms. Two types. In summer light - type. In winter the heavy woollen type. Later we had them both in our - in our own cupboards. And had to keep them constantly in order. Something which I remember nowadays, when I was on transport through Nuremberg - I don't know where that was - yes, from Lichtenberg we were kept overnight in Nuremberg. A police prison. And where we had to undress and the fellow looked - looked - stretched our shirts in front of a light to see whether we had lice in the seams of the shirt. I asked him, "What are you looking for?" And he said, "Well, when you have lice they are showing there".

Can you describe how Dachau was?

Well, when we arrived then we had the first bath. And I have been told that fellows have arrived there and were scrubbed with wire brushes. But I only was told about it, I haven't met anyone. In Dachau. When I arrived in Dachau that was still the old camp. Of which not a single stone is left. That was the old munitions factory from the first war. Heavy brick buildings with light timber roofs. That in case of explosion it goes up and not sideways. All Jews were in block number 6. And altogether 3 rooms were occupied at that time. There were 150 to 180 prisoners. No more. They were all Jews in German concentration camps. In February '37.

What kind of building were you in. The Jews?

Well, in these - in brick barracks. They were divided into one, two, three, four, five rooms. Each could hold 50 to 60 men. The men were housed in bunks, 3 on top of each other. The youngest had to climb up to the third floor.

How many on each level? Just one person?

One person per bunk. And there was space left for the table with benches for us, for our meals. There was in the centre of each room a tiled oven. Or was it - no, the tiled ovens were in the new camp. There were ordinary iron ovens. Iron boilers. Between each room there was a toilet. Toilet facilities.

And were they adequate modern toilets?

No. Not at all. In the Jewish quarters - the blockelteste was Heinz Eshen(ph) Who was a very efficient fellow. He had been the leader of the communist youth in Munich. And he knew quite a number of the Bavarian prisoners who came there and had managed - one of them had put piping into the lavatories, overhead piping, to which perforated tin was attached so we had a shower. And we always liked to shower in the evening after the heavy work. At least in summer.

What work did you do?

Everyone had - the Jewish fellows were not permitted to do any indoor work, except with medical certificate. We only were employed for outdoor work, mainly transport. That meant that we had to pull and push old lorries which were converted for such a purpose. And the motor was taken out. And there was a wooden beam in front by which these lorries were directed. That was already in Estervagen. Where they were called 'the moor express'. And this word and name had been taken over to Dachau, because those Jewish prisoners who first had been in Estervagen - that was a camp near the Dutch border - where they had to cut turf in the moors of the district. And these had been transferred from Estervagen(ph) to Sachsenhausen or Langenburg, I don't know which one. From there they had been sent over to Dachau. Because all the Jewish prisoners were concentrated in Dachau, because the old camp of Dachau with these old barracks, were to be pulled down and a new camp Dachau was to be built. This new camp Dachau was started on Whitsun Saturday 1938. When the first digging of the trench around the new camp was started. It was one of the most gruelling works I can remember. The Jewish prisoners were - in the morning we were - Saturday morning we had gone out, but a number of the Aryan prisoners had laid a rail link between the digging of the trench and an old gravel pit, which was at that time outside the old perimeter fence. And so - and then after lunch we were called out - so and so many Aryan prisoners were called out as well. There was the railway. Four Jews were put to each of the carriages which the Aryan prisoners filled with gravel. And we had to push these filled lorries, running in order to fill up old gravel pit. The SS on bicycles next to us with willow twigs over our naked bodies, in order to drive us to run quicker. Well the SS did that first, but soon stopped because the weather was too hot even for them.

What did you have to eat?

In general quite decent. Nothing extraordinary. Extraordinary became in November '38 I believe it was. No. It must have been November '37. When there was disease amongst the cattle of the district and had to be slaughtered. And we were - I remember that once we got pea soup with so much pork in it that I had to pick it out and leave it for evening. It was too much for me. We had - as we had to work and work heavy, we got an adequate - pretty adequate meals. Though I got 5 mark sent from my father every week and bought every day a quarter of a pound of butter. Through the canteen. In the canteen - that is another story which is not too well known. The canteen in Dachau was run by a Nazi sublieutenant, who was the son of a grocer in Dachau. Bought everything from his father. And in the course of time - during the war I have read in one of the books, he got a contract with the concentration camp administration, and that he was supplying all - that he got the order to supply all the concentration camp in all of Germany. An immense order of course. But I must say that the canteen in Dachau was kept in perfect condition. And was a very good advertisement for efficiency. Anyway, when Rudi Ount(ph), another Jewish prisoner, when he made remarks in (INAUDIBLE) about this contract, he was ordered into the quarry and killed there. He was a very fine boy. I had met him in

Brandenberg. And then one day he was sent over to Dachau. While we were pushing these lorries that was such a strain that finally only - on our lorry only two of them were really pushing. The other two we told them "keep your hands on it and run along". That was very often such a job that the stronger ones were doing the work for the weaker ones together.

Did you take turns, or was this all the time?

Well - that entirely depended on the occasion. For instance, when the trench was dug out the gravel pit was filled up. The new territory has been pine forest. We had to cut the trees down. We had to get the roots out. All that prisoners were doing. In addition we were - no, that was later. Yes, that was later. The building of the swimming pool for the SS. That was one of the finest things. And then - I don't know exactly why, but in August '37 there was suddenly an order that no Jew was permitted to write letters. No Jew was permitted to leave the barrack. I don't know exactly anymore why that was. Why the first isolation was ordered. But then - and I have given this story in pretty detail to Mr Ricardi(ph), who has written a book about Dachau. He is one of the editors of the Munchen Neveste Nachrichtung. He is living in Dachau. And has written a book about the concentration camp of Dachau '33/'34. I have given him a detailed account of this coming story. I believe it was a Saturday afternoon, I wouldn't know. One afternoon another fellow, another prisoner, Resonveldt(ph), from Breslaw and I were shovelling gravel into a sieve to get the sand out. And the rough gravel separated for concreting. And he was standing there and watched what was going on, holding his shovel in his hands. When I saw however that on the perimeter runway the oberfuhrer Lorriz came around on his motorbike. The motorbike had the registration number 2A12500. It had no police marking. And I told Resonveldt(ph), "Get a move on, Lorriz is coming". And he said, "Who is Lorriz? What has he to tell me? That he is the camp leader here, he is owning everything. Oh well I have been oberst in the German army, nobody has to tell me anything". Anyway, I noticed that Lorriz was stopping for a moment and looked over to us and of course I continued shovelling. And then Lorriz carried on. And suddenly I saw him coming through the entrance in the Jew house and walked with another SS man straight on to our group. Pointed to Resonveldt(ph) and said, "Take him away". Well, after - after a good while Resonveldt(ph) was pushed back. He had been for one hour hung on a tree. If you want me to describe what that means. The hands were tied together, the wrists were tied together behind his back. And up on a high column was hung up and left there for one hour. I have been there twice for one hour. When you come down you have lost all feel in not only arms but shoulders, everything is stiff and out of joint. It is necessary - it was necessary to hang completely still, not to move anything, then it was possible to - to stand through. Though I once tried and almost succeeded by certain gymnastics to get my body into straight hanging and knot the arms behind the body. But I left it for fear that I might get reprisals.

End of F301 Side A

F301 Side B

Did you feel ever that you would die when this happened to you?

No. I was too young. I was healthy. I was strong. And those people could manage it. Those who were old or infirm or not so young, well they went down. To some extent we could help them. But not always. For instance one day an old fellow - I don't know any name - an old fellow came in and the SS trained him by having him run round the parade ground. I don't know how long and how often. When he came in he collapsed and half an hour later he was dead.

At this time what were you feeling. Did you have any optimism at all. What did you think the outcome was going to be of all this?

I had no idea, I had no feeling, nothing. Just only we were - I was thinking from now til afterwards - til the next hour. No further.

You had read all that Nazi literature in prison. Did you feel that there was a plan to kill the Jews?

Yes. Yes. You could read that in the books. I remember that in Brandenburg on one of the Jewish holidays, I came into contact with a solicitor who was there for currency irregularities. And he as well had read this Nazi literature and he said, "Well when I would have read that book before I would be -". Because Rosenberg in his book, I believe it was entitled 'The Fundament of the 20th Century', directly has said that the Jewish race has to be eradicated.

Can you remember a feeling of fear all the time?

No, I had no - I only had fear that someone may - we were 24 hours per day from 1st January to the 31st of December under martial law. Every one of the SS men was permitted to shoot us. And no reasons were asked. Because when after we had our bath - the first day, we were paraded and Baronovski(ph), the second in command, came and gave us a little bit of a talk. "You are here in concentration camp. That is not a girls' high school. We have - severe punishment and my boys can shoot well. Don't - don't expect that they can miss you. Don't ever try to escape". That was roughly the entry into Dachau. The acceptance. No, we were - in general we were living quite a normal life. What you can call normal. Yes and this story with Resonveldt(ph). Well, he came back and of course was unable to move properly. At least not to shuffle properly. And we had there a concrete mixer. And the SS men who came with him ordered him to sit in the scoop. And had him pulled up with the scoop right to the top. And I thought good heavens, is he going to put him in the mixer. No, but he released him and the scoop dashed down. And of course the fellow banged his head against the scoop. And that was done two or three times. And when he came out he told me he had terrific headaches. But a little bit he could still use the shovel. And then soon it was finished. He was not in my room, he was in another room. But I know that next morning on parade every prisoner had to be accounted for. He could not stand straight. He was wavering. And Barenovski(ph) came and shouted at him and - then Heinz Eshen(ph) went forward and said, "Well he had had a pretty poor experience yesterday. I believe he is ill". And when Eshen(ph) said something like that the SS started listening. Anyway, he was sent into the first aid station. And after an hour or so a doctor arrived and kept him. He was then sent to Munich hospital, or Dachau hospital, I don't know. He never returned. Two days later he was dead. He had a skull fracture. And then after I don't know long, after - an article appeared in New Statesman and Nation, "A Jew, two bags of cement, a good concrete mixture". I know that that appeared in September, October '37. And that was in an article here in the New Statesman of London. And when that came - we came home from work, just starting to get our shoes off, "All Jews out". Parade. "All the Jews are ordered into the barrack. No work. No contact with anyone outside. Big lies have been put in the foreign press about the Jews in Dachau. And the Jews are being punished for that". After a few days the SS men who had had to supervise our particular barrack, came with a text for a letter which we had to send, not home, but to friends abroad. "You Jews all know someone abroad. You write to them". And the text roughly was, "We Jews in Dachau are punished for lying reports in the foreign press about our conditions. Only after that will be repudiated will our punishment be terminated". Well I sent that to friends in Paris. And someone who was there as a criminal said, "I don't know anyone outside". So I gave him the address of a lady in Newcastle. I knew that her father was the German consul in Newcastle. He was a big coal merchant. And before

we had already written home that we could receive Christmas parcels, parcels for Christmas and Chanuka. And something else. The new camp was already so far advanced, the first barracks, that in our barrack the bunks had been pulled out and we were sleeping on palliasses on the floor. Anyway, these Christmas and Chanuka parcels arrived and were heavily marauded by first the SS, who called Aryan prisoners to help them, and they helped themselves. So a number of our fellows they just got the outer packets. And nothing inside. I believe that my parents sent me a piece of soap. Yes, and that was all I got. Though a packet of chocolates was there, but I didn't get it. I don't know exactly whether that was in '37 or '38. Probably in '38. We were outside on a consignment to build a swimming pool for the SS. And that was, I believe, outside the perimeter of the SS camp. I'm not quite certain. Anyway, it was next to a small creek, a pretty fast running river. And that one was diverted to feed the swimming pool. Which was a triangular shape. There we had a very nice occasion of swimming. And transporting timber from one place to the other was the easiest to throw it in the water and push it to the other end. Well the SS didn't say anything and just as long as we did not escape. But I came into contact with a delivery fellow who was - who brought a lorry with cement, cement bags. And when I was on my own with him I asked him whether he would - whether he would be prepared to take a letter and send it to my parents. He said, "No, I don't want to get involved". All right. I was foolish enough to mention that. And two days later I was called to Loritz. No. Sorry. It was different. Two days later I was deliberately called out to get this cement from that lorry. And nobody else was there. And I spoke with that man again and he approached me, "Have you the letter?" So I said, "No, you told me that you couldn't do it, so I haven't written anything". And a day later I was called to Loritz "You intend to write private letters. You intend to write private letters". That was all. I had no chance of giving any reply. And I got my 25. When they gave me 25 I called out, "That is now 25". And Loritz said, "Oh it doesn't matter, he can stand more". They stopped at 37. That was continued with 7 days arrest. First five days only bread and water. And the first thing is that when you come into the cell you have to strip and they have a look whether your bottom is only blue or whether the skin may have broken. And the fellow who has done that was - got me this 25, was a Mr Tiobiar(ph). Who later immigrated to St Orleans in America. I have his address. He was accused by the East Germans of murder, attempted murder and asked for - and asked for extradition. But the American authorities refused extradition.

Did Simon Wiesenthal have anything to do with trying to get him?

I wouldn't know. Anyway, the East German authorities have tried. He was a cattle dealer, was proud of a whole mouth full of good teeth. We came over to the new barracks. And when our cupboards and the bunks were pulled out by the Aryan fellows while we Jews were out of the camp at work, all our belongings were strewn into the camp street. And well it was possible to find the stuff together. But I had had a set of chess figures. Which another prisoner had carved out of the handles of toothbrushes. I could find most of the them together except for one pawn. And so I just left it. I ought to have asked him to carve me that missing pawn because later I never had any control of what I took out. And I could have had it now. In summer of '38 the Jews from Vienna were sent to Dachau. I still remember one particular old man was standing there shivering for fear, clutching a string bag with some vegetables which he just had bought. And picked up in the street. And so he was sent over to Dachau. It was then only under these conditions a Jewish feeling started in me. And the hatred against the Nazis became more and more exposed. Then on the 16th of September 1938 the first batch of Jewish prisoners were sent from Dachau to Buchenwald. Altogether when I arrived in February '37 there were about 130-150 Jewish prisoners.

In Buchenwald?

In Dachau. Now when we were sent over to Buchenwald with all the Czech and Vienna Jewish prisoners together, we were two and a half thousand. Because when - after the prisoners had been sent from Dachau to Buchenwald there was no Jew left in Dachau anymore, except one. Who by chance was at a judicial hearing. Or in prison somewhere. I don't know. I only know that he had lost one arm as an officer in the first war. Buchenwald - there is quite a lot to be said. I remember a solicitor from Vienna was in my room. And - complained about treatment by the helpers. When Richter, the camp alteste, came into the room we were just sitting on our table for our meal. And Richter asked the room alteste, "Who is that?" And was pointed out. And he went to him, grabbed him at the throat. "What do you want to complain about my men?" And banged him with a torch over the head. That went two, three times. When that fellow of course collapsed. And he was dragged out, laid into the toilet room.

Well we all were pretty much stunned. And then SS came and after a while we were told that he is dead. In all probability one of the SS men has just pressed his throat and killed him that way. No questions were asked. But the interesting thing is I was released in Buchenwald on the 24th of January 1939. And on the same day, in the afternoon, or lunchtime, the SS made a big swoop in Buchenwald. It is known that there was a second camp put up into which the Jews from the November pogrom, 5,000 of them, were put in. And of these fellows Richter and his accomplices had extracted monies. Anyway, it was found that Richter had a bank account in Weimar of 32,000 marks. When one day the bank manager enquired with Koch, the head of Buchenwald, "How is that possible?" And so it was found that two SS men had taken the money and deposited it in a Weimar bank. The one was shot and the other shot himself. Richter and his accomplices were put into the black bunker. There is not much said about it, to my knowledge, in the German literature. Black bunker was barrack number 2. Direct on the parade ground in Buchenwald. All the glass was taken out and boards were nailed on. The whole room was painted black. Electric lights were only left right in the ceiling. No bunks.

End of F301 Side B

F302 Side A

All furniture were taken out. No bunks were in there. Just only the concrete floor. And I don't know whether the toilets were left there. I couldn't say. Anyway, they were pushed into there. Had to undress. Were naked. And so they were left. Each one was allowed one spoon, only spoons. Food was - the door was opened, food in the big urns was pushed in and the door closed again. They had, I don't know exactly how many, I believe roughly a dozen or fifteen men. They shall have pushed the urns over and eaten all the food from - licked it from the floor. Anyway, after a while everyone was dead. They just pegged out. And the SS could say, "We did not kill them". After that the management of Buchenwald camp was in the hands of - more in the hands of the SS. Before it was entirely in the hands of the prisoners. When one needs to know the history that the first prisoners in Buchenwald were criminals, under Oberfuhrer Wirdle(ph). Wirdle(ph) was a Bavarian fellow with the Butorden(ph) That means he was with Hitler on the 23rd of - in November 23, when Hitler was trying the putsch in Munich. And the first prisoners had to be housed in tents. Had to cut the trees for - well out of the beechwood - they were to make the clearing for the barracks and whatever was necessary. And when we arrived barracks were already there, latrines were there. But no roads or - but everything quagmired in glue - of clay soil. Anyway, I arrived in Weimar, and we were put into one underpath, about half a dozen Jews - Jewish prisoners who were released on that day. And I asked one of the gentlemen - I had been well received by some three, four Jewish persons. I asked one of them for a piece of paper and a pen and wrote out the text of a telegram. And asked him whether it would be possible to send that to my parents. He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, my parents won't expect me to come home. Father has a poor heart condition". And then he asked, "How long have you been there?" He expected a few weeks. I said, "Four and a half years". Well I still see how he suddenly got pale in the face, tore the paper out of my hand and raced away. Came back, "The telegram has been sent". Now I sent the telegram to a friend, addressed it to a friend of the parents. Not to the parents direct. And he tried to contact them. But it was too late in the afternoon. Father was no longer in the office. And mother had left home and was by chance with her aunt in Berlin. There - Boproskowa(ph) was his name. A dentist. Contacted my mother. It was after I was home, father came with the Jewish paper and said, "There in England a refugee camp is to be established, go and see them tomorrow". Before we had tried to get the visa of the Bolivian Embassy, of whom mother had received months ago the application forms. I thought when I came and mother gave them to me that I am now out, I don't need them any more. And gave them to the brother of Selbert Sandberg(ph) who was a grave digger in Weissensee(ph). And so I mismanaged my own emigration. Anyway, my application for the Kitchener refugee camp, received from Berlin, number one. Next morning I was in Berlin in Charlottenburgen Strasse. I don't know. I know where it is, but I don't know the number. Jewish zentral verein, I believe. And I was waiting and waiting for a reply. When after - on the 14th of February, I believe. That was, by the way, on the 28th of January 1939 that my application was put in. A fortnight later I received a demand from Gestapo, Alexanderplatz, to call there. I said to mother, "I don't go. They want to know where to I am emigrating. I can't tell them anything". And so parents had - my mother had made an acquaintance with a lady for whom she wrote addresses against payment. And to that lady she had said that her son is in concentration camp. And explained what it is. And that woman said, "I never have heard of that at all. My husband is an unpaid member of the Gestapo. I must tell him". And he got very interested. Found the person in Alexanderplatz who was dealing with my affairs. Saw my papers, got my papers. For 300 mark got hold of my papers and bought them home. And I got release in Dachau. And this fellow my parents contacted and he went with me to Aachen. And tried to go over to either Belgium or Holland. Out. So he went and said, "Well quite easily I went through everywhere along there and so and so with no difficulty. You can go". And I saw someone in front of me walking and overtook him. He started talking to me. I talked to him. And in my uneducated form I told him what I wanted. He said, "Yeh, come on". He was one of the customs officers. Took me over to the customs office. Handed me over to the SS. I was sent - I was arrested and sent over to Dachau. Now comes the clue. The day after I was - after I had left for Aachen parents received information from the Jewish Zentralverein that my application for Kitchener camp was refused for political reason. Because of political sentence. Then I was arrested. First sent to Frankfurt. In Frankfurt I was - I still remember, I was in a communal cell, where each prisoner was in a wire cage of his own. But we could talk to each other. So I asked, "Is someone going to Buchenwald?" "Yes, here". "Which block and so on?" "Please, go to block number so and so, tell so and so Oskar is arrested again and on his way to Dachau". They knew in Buchenwald earlier that I am back in Dachau than I was in Dachau. Anyway, I arrived in Dachau. And the SS there was very surprised to see me again. "What do you want here?" So I said, "I tried to go over the frontier in

Aachen and was caught". "Well, all right". A little episode, we had to cart snow between the barracks away. And one of the SS men was filling the wheelbarrow. I jumped on the wheelbarrow and said, "Well that wasn't full". And he was furious. And shovelled more in. Oh no, and then the second time, "So now shovel it full". And he was furious and wanted to give me a hiding. And when I saw behind him another SS man standing laughing. He turns round and says, "Why do you laugh?" He says, "You can't tell him anything, he has been here years ago, he knows how to ... Don't come again". Anyway, on the 12th of April '39 I was released in Dachau. Through Mr Egger(ph). Who had managed to get all the papers home. And father had put them into his paper basket. All torn up. That nothing could be found.

These were your papers to release you from Germany?

Well that was already done, I was already released and then the papers arrived.

And your father threw them away?

Yes.

Why?

He didn't want - that nobody could ask "how do you come to these papers". Then he would have had to - to incriminate Mr Egger(ph). From whom he had a number of advantages. Yes, when I came back to Berlin then father took my passport and put it into the zentralverein in order that the application for Kitchener camp should be renewed. And within 48 hours information was given that the visa has been granted. And I am of the full belief that my passport never was submitted to the British Consul. But that the Jewish people in the zentralverein rejected my application out of their own hand.

You have no idea why?

Because of political sentence. But don't ask me how many with criminal records came over. Particularly from Vienna. Otherwise - as far as I was informed, the British Consul signed every passport which was put onto his desk, without a question or anything. As long as it was a Jewish passport. That's why I believe that my passport never was placed for signature to the British Consul. Anyway, five days later with the help of our aunt, she paid my air fare to Amsterdam. I was leaving Tempelhof by Dutch airliner. And arrived in Amsterdam in the evening. Where uncle and aunt were waiting and expecting me. He has been a comparatively rich man in Berlin. And had left Germany with all his furniture in a neutral wagon. Leaving behind several hundred thousand Mark debts to the tax inspector. Well, unfortunately he was caught later in Amsterdam and sent to Auschwitz. And my aunt died there - died in Amsterdam of breast cancer. Anyway, they provided me with a small flatlet in the third floor of a house. I don't know whether it belonged to them or not. But I was there for a fortnight. And then I went over to England. When on leaving Amsterdam by - yes, by ferry. Not Amsterdam but Ostend perhaps. I don't properly remember the different stages. The official had a look at my passport and said, "What are you doing here? You had just permission to stay for 24 hours. Why didn't you go?" I said, "Well I don't know, that 24 hours - now I am going". He didn't say anymore. It was through that - oh yes, I remember now, that the immigration officer in Amsterdam, in Skipol airport, told me, "I give you 24 hours to stay because at night you can't go to England any more". There was no plane any more going. And so that became a fortnight. No further consequences. I arrived in England on the 2nd of May '39. And should have gone direct to the Kitchener camp. Which of course I didn't. But I went to London. Where a cousin of mine was living - had a little factory of artificial jewellery. And did very well. And he had taken a flat for me in the same block of flats where he was living. And again there I was staying for a fortnight. In Amsterdam as well as in London. Finding girlfriends, of which of course I was pretty hungry. And then finally, after a fortnight, I left London for Kitchener camp. When all hell was loose. "We have been searching for you everywhere. What have you been doing? Where have you been?" And so on. Well I told them I was staying with my cousin. Nobody had told me that I must immediately proceed to the Kitchener camp. But that was always spoken so casually that I didn't take it serious. Anyway, that was it. And then in Kitchener camp I made a big mistake. I ought to have volunteered for the army, but I replied to them, "You now fight against Hitler, I have done my share". But most probably with

my knowledge of English I would have finished army service as captain, or perhaps even higher. Anyway, I didn't. And so I was not granted any warm underwear. I was not granted any winter clothing. And when I found myself a job in Huddersfield as a weaver, I was ordered by the Kitchener camp authorities immediately to return because I had left the camp without permission. I gave that letter to the immigration officer at the Huddersfield police station. And he said, "Well leave that to me, I'll deal with it". Three or four days later my luggage arrived in Huddersfield and that was the end I have heard and seen of the Kitchener camp. Well I don't know what I shall tell you further.

Do you want to describe what happened to you during the war?

I was then interned in Huddersfield. And while at Doncaster camp was sent to the Isle of Man. Where I stayed. They wanted to send me off to Australia or Canada. Anyway, overseas. But on the day that I was interned, in the morning, I saw the paper and saw the heading of the Arandora Star. The torpedoing of the Arandora Star. And so I told the commander of Pebble(ph) internment camp, "Sorry sir, you can send my dead body out, but I don't go as a living". And I never was sent. But there may have been another circumstance, because when I was first in Berlin and went to the central police station for my passport, there was a young person who each time that the door opened jumped up and thought that it was for her. We had to go from one room to the other. And so I told her, "Don't get so excited and so nervous, you are directly behind me. I hear my name calling". So we remained. And then when I had finished in that one room I waited until she came out. I don't remember properly remember where she was living in Berlin. She originated from Breslaw. Anyway, I accompanied her a few days later in a taxi to Tempelhof airport, and we promised each other to keep in contact. Well I couldn't keep that up, because I was arrested. But she wrote a letter to my mother asking my mother what has happened. And when I then arrived in Kitchener camp, we came into contact, she was in Loughborough, in domestic service. And one day I was invited to stay with those people for a weekend. I believe that I even was sent the return ticket. Because we didn't earn any money. But I don't know. Anyway, from somewhere the money for the return ticket must have come. And then we decided that we wanted to marry. And that was a few - should have been on the Saturday after I got interned for the Arandora Star business. But a few days - or a day before, she was in Leicester. And an infamous judge who, hardly looking at her, immediately put her from category C to B. Which meant immediate internment. And so on that morning I received her telegram that she was in - that she was arrested.

End of F302 Side A

F302 Side B

Then we came into contact again while we were on the Isle of Man. I in Peel, she in Port Erin. And then arrangements were made that married couples and engaged couples could meet. There were meetings arranged in Douglas. We managed to come under - to be in that category. Finally - I believe it was 15 months. I made application to be released on - I only could find the ground for - as agricultural worker. And was released into the care of the Buckingham agricultural committee. About three or four months later - or a year later, I don't know anymore - she was released, I don't know on what ground. Anyway, she was released to Leicester. And in Leicester on the 21st of June 1952, - no, 1942 - we married. The longest day and the shortest night. And the farmer with whom I was working he said, "All right, I give you this day off. But the next morning you have to get the cows in for milking". That meant getting up at half past 3, 4 o'clock in order to get the cows from the field for milking. English fellows whom I told that, they replied, "Well, every Englishman who had had that put to him, he would have said do the job yourself". Ah well, it was not pleasant to work with that man. He was constantly after my wife. Because his wife was somehow crippled, I don't know why, I don't know how. She was in a wheelchair. But finally we got - no, he sacked me - after haymaking he didn't need me anymore and so he just gave notice and the agricultural committee got me another cottage round Buckingham. Where there was no water supply except on the pump in the square. And the electricity wires were running along the street, but didn't come into the house. It was oil lamps. And timber heating. And the water we had to carry from the pump. That would cost five shillings on the rates when the water tap is being put for the three houses under one roof. Then I made application to go back to weaving, which was granted. There again mistakes have been made. We ought to have stayed there, because she had got a job as cook housemaid in a pub. She was a perfect cook. And well, anyway, we could have made a little bit of money there. As it happened when we arrived in Huddersfield she went her own ways, finding acquaintances. And in '47 or '48 we finally parted. I could give still a few little stories, but that is not necessary. I know that she has died in 1976 in Bolivia. She went out to Bolivia where her brother had a furniture factory. Because her father has been professor for internal architecture at the Breslaw university. And had sent the designs for the furniture to his boy in Bolivia. Which you could do during the war. As Bolivia was not at war. And strangely enough this man whom I mentioned, Dr Alfred Lawrence Lemare, of Seven Sisters Road, St Lawrence, Isle of Wight, KO38 1MZ, is an old comrade from Dachau. He has been with UNESCO, or one of the United Nations agencies, and was heavily attacked as being an old communist. But was vindicated by the Home Secretary in the House of Commons. And this man is still friendly with the brother of my first wife. And so I came into contact with that man. This Dr Lawrence should be able to give you some first accounts from Dachau as well. He was released there in summer of '37 by immigration to America. His original name was Alfred Lomnitz. But he has left the Jewish faith and does not want to know about it any more. From weaving I went to Leeds into a government training centre. And trained as instrument maker. Went into factories first in Huddersfield, where I learnt in one of the factories to make veneer callipers. Then when I came to London I was working as toolmaker and as inspector. Then I had an accident on the road. I slipped and tore a ligament. Which didn't allow me to walk very much. In that time it must have been 1952 about. I contacted German factories for their agency in Britain. German engineering factories. And amongst others was Cartisise Yayner(ph). But that was a factory whom I could not do justice on my own, I needed capital, which I didn't have. And British factories were very keen. But on second thoughts rejected because the factory was in East Germany. And they didn't want to have anything to do with East Germany. And then when I was in Leipzig, I was accosted one day by a gentleman, Mr Kaufman, from Lugano. He was together with a young German fellow, who introduced himself as Mr so and so, secretary of Dr Eitner. Dr Eitner was the head of the department for instrument and fine mechanic export. And unfortunately it dawned to me only too late that this Mr Kaufman suddenly quoted a sentence out of a letter from me to Dr Eitner word by word. Which of course he had learned from that fellow with whom he was, who was the secretary of Dr Eitner. And I had found out that I had no money and that I was looking for capital. Gave that over to a friend of his, a Mr Kenmore, in London, who was at the time a director of Oditty International Corporation. Anyway, Kenmore conducted me and then the CZ Scientific Instruments Limited was formed. They received the agency, I handed it over to them, I didn't get any compensation or anything, I got a job as salesman, commission and salesman. I wanted a contract. And Mr Joseph, one of the directors, had told me, "Oh, you don't need a contract, you have a position for life". Two years later I had to leave. I was given notice. "We have to save expenses". I have to leave within 24 hours. So I was kicked out of that agency. When I would have been able to keep that I wouldn't live today here in that small bungalow. I would have a little bit bigger premises.

But to this Kenmore I told, "Mr Kenmore, when I wouldn't be a Jew, you would have made me into an anti-semiter". He didn't like it. Because I told him that in front of witnesses. Oh well, there is still some more to say. When I had lost that agency of course I had given up a number of other small agencies, which meanwhile had dropped into fixed hands. They were unavailable any more. And I searched round for other factories. I found a few, but I never had really good luck. The only money which I could get was from my restitution application from Germany. Where the loss of the parents property - I had applied for compensation of - I believe it was around 70-80,000 Marks. Which I had to split with my brother. And this money I received unfortunately only in small amounts. The carpets were put onto one application and the paintings were put on another application. And the furniture was put on a third application. The linen and laundry was put on a fourth application. And these applications were all dealt with in intervals of 3,4,5,6 months. And I never had much money in hand. Only that I had some money in the end. When all that ought to have been submitted to Berlin by, I believe, 31st December 1951, then it would have been dealt with preferentially. But my application was dated in March - 3 months later. And so it was put into the pile of 50-60,000 applications and dealt with and pulled out one after the other. When I would have got that money preferentially I would have been able to buy a house. Which was the original idea. But that didn't come to it. Anyway, we then got - my wife and I - we got a little bit of money together.

This was your first wife?

No, second.

When did you marry for the second time?

Oh, '52. Yes. And we got a little bit of money together and could pool it together and bought the house in Mill Hill. At that time #6,000. No, #6,100. #5,800 plus #300 furniture. I know because the solicitor made the division. And by that we didn't need to pay the purchase tax. Or .. what is it?

Transfer tax or land tax, I can't remember.

Yes. We saved on tax. There we were living from '63 until - 20 years, about. Almost 20 years. Then we sold that for #40,000 and bought this bungalow here. Where we are quite satisfied. I don't need to climb stairs. The garden is very convenient for all sorts of purposes. Although there is a garage, but it is built so that one can get the car in, but you can't get it out. So daft.

What was your job up to the time you retired. It was still an instrument maker?

No, I didn't work - I retired roughly at 60, round about like that.

After you had this problem with being dismissed?

Yes. I had a complete breakdown. I had a complete breakdown. I just was unable to work.

Were you depressed?

That's right. And then I - I had some jobs always as a small agent. Small sales agent. And then I - more and more I concentrated on my stamp collecting. And put that to a nice - to a nice degree.

During the years you were working did you feel depressed all the time?

No. No.

What did you do inside you with all these experiences you had had?

I didn't think about them.

You just pushed them down, did you?

Yes. Yes.

Did you ever allow yourself to be angry or anything?

Occasionally. Occasionally. I can be very easily excited.

What effect do you think it had on you long term, that dreadful time in the camps?

Well, I wouldn't know. I only remember that from Dachau I wrote to mother, "When you can immigrate sell the house, immigrate and leave me here. I know the conditions here and I shall be able to cope with it". And back came the reply, "We won't leave here not a day before you are out".

What did you think of that?

Well, I couldn't think much. I only know that my mother had given me such a reply before. Because in the 20's my education - my business education was not very good. I didn't have a good fundament. So I intended to immigrate somewhere. Try to build a new life for myself. The idea was to go to South America. Which of course was crazy. And the idea could have been put into a different - onto a different level. But I spoke with father about it one night. Mother was out with her friend. When she came home we told her about this. And then she as well said, "A boy does not come out of the house not a day before I am dead", or something or other. Now that was in the middle 20's. It was long before Dachau was spoken about. And there I roughly got a similar reply. (In Dachau).

What happened to your brother and your parents during the war?

My brother left - my brother was living in Berlin with a friend together. They had rented some furnished room, I don't know, some furnished room or unfurnished room. The friend of his was the son of privileged people. Also Jewish. But I know that my brother had an Aryan girlfriend. And with his boyfriend with whom he was living together he made arrangements that when they left that light on they were out. And one day my brother came home and saw that light was out. So he thought that someone was in. And did not go home. Stayed somewhere the whole night. Anyway, then my mother said, "Finish. You have to finish with that girl. And you go to Amsterdam". He had an affidavit from a cousin of our grandmother who was the owner of the Kaiser Bazaar in Fifth Avenue. And with that affidavit he went to the American Consul in Amsterdam, Holland. And the consul said, "Yes, I give you the visa when you bring me another \$5,000". That lady is today over 75 years old. She can die every day. I have no guarantee that this affidavit would be honoured. And after - I don't know how long, he went back to the consul and said, "Well, I have here \$3,800. I can't get more". And the consul looked at him and said, "All right, I give you the visa". And so my brother went over to America. That was in '38. First through this old lady who every summer went to a certain hotel in Long Island, there he got a job as tennis trainer. And then I don't properly know what all he did. She also paid him to study agriculture - chicken farming. And then he came to Denver, Colorado and finally finished up in California, Berkely university, as a teacher for town planning. Where he got his knowledge from I haven't a clue. He is a man who never told me anything about himself. Anyway, there he is now. We visited him in (INAUDIBLE). That house however he has sold. He has now a moveable house in (INAUDIBLE), where he is during summertime. And in wintertime he has a moveable house in Desert Hot Springs. That's on the Texan border. On the Mexico border. When I recently was in Chicago I only telephoned him. We spoke. He has had a heart attack a year about ago, and the doctor has not allowed him to travel, so he says.

Did you get on better in latter years?

Well, from liking, yes. But I don't know exactly whether it is from him as well. But there it is.

And your parents?

Well, the parents in 1942 were taken over to Theresienstadt where mother died three months later. The death certificate mentions colic. But I fear, though I can't disprove it, that it was an attack of gall bladder stones. And father was then transported East to Auschwitz. I know that father met his brother-in-law, who had been in Amsterdam, he met him in Auschwitz. And in Theresienstadt the father of my first wife found and met my parents.

Do you know what the fate of your father was. How he died in Auschwitz?

No. Well, there again the German authorities put his death down on the day of his departure from Theresienstadt. That was in - roughly spring '44. Whereas in the record book of Theresienstadt

End of F302 Side B

F303 Side A

In the record book of Theresienstadt I have seen father's death registered as May '45. So the German authorities saved themselves to pay 150 Mark per month in compensation. I could perhaps have made some application, but I don't feel like it any more.

Did any of your family survive the camps?

No. Whomever I knew had gone there has been lost.

How many do you think were lost approximately?

Well I wouldn't know. I only know of my parents.

You don't know of any cousins, aunts, uncles?

Well uncle Goldstop(ph), he died there. Otherwise they had already immigrated before it came to it. The brother of Heinz Goldstop(ph) was here in London, immigrated then to Israel to his brother. The brother of my mother died in Berlin, naturally. He was 10,12,15 years older. The sister of my mother had been living in Vienna and has been transported from there to - I don't know where. We were a very small family.

Have you been back to Germany since the war?

Yes, I have been not only in Leipzig for the Leipzig fair in '54, '55, but I have been in Germany for stamp exhibitions. And have met amongst the philatelists some very interesting and nice fellows with whom I like to be in contact. But only for the purpose of philately. My friends from concentration camps, quite a number of them had to live through Buchenwald until April '45. They wrote to me "Oskar come back and help us to build up Germany again". That was East Germany. For instance Haversanberg(ph). But I refused. I said no, I couldn't do that. Because I wouldn't know whether my next door neighbour was not actively concerned in the transport or murder of my parents. And that was the main reason why I did not go back.

What do you think about the attitude of Germans since then. I know it is a generalised question?

Well I have found a number - I have come into contact with quite a number of persons. Most of them are very sympathetic. I know one or the other I would keep my hands off. But most of them are very sympathetic and don't take any advantage that I am Jewish. A fellow in Munich he is working in the Central Post Office in Munich. Or a fellow in Hanover, he is a factory - But they are persons who have only grown up during the Hitler period and not gone through their main age during the Hitler period. Then they had only grown under it. Or grown up. And when they started forming their opinion, Hitler had gone. They are not that old anymore. Well there is only one person still living whom I regard as an old Nazi. But all right, I don't have any contact with him.

Do you see any danger in a reunification of Germany?

No, I wouldn't see any danger. As far - as long as armament factories are not permitted. I had at the time - must have been '45, beginning of '45 or so, had written a letter to the Guardian, Manchester Guardian at that time, suggesting a solution for Germany, where I said, "These and these territories to be handed over to Poland, to Czechoslovakia, to Bavaria, to be reunited with Switzerland, Austria, these territories to France and Holland and only a nucleus of territory left as Germany, which would not be permitted to manufacture anything more than just small rifles. All heavy machinery, as nowadays in Viltenberg is being manufactured. I would not allow them"

Do you feel then that the Germans would always be belligerent if they had the opportunity, do you?

Felix Dunn was a German writer. He has quite the phrase. "The German must drink, must booze. when he does not snore or fight. When he does not snore or fight". That is very precisely said.

Do you feel yourself to be German. You give such a description of a German and yet you are a German. How do you feel belonging to such a nation?

I don't belong to them. I don't belong to them.

Did you feel German before all this happened, do you remember?

More or less yes. But not much. For instance when a friend of mine left for Israel, Palestine, beginning of '33. Middle of '33. I promised him in a years time I shall be there as well. I wanted to immigrate to Palestine. Pity that I haven't.

What do you feel about the situation in Israel?

Precarious. Because I don't trust Mr Shamir. He is putting everything up onto a pinnacle, where the descent is too steep. That's my opinion. No, we intend to go to Israel again, mainly to have the mud bath, against rheumatism.

You didn't have any children?

No.

Is there anything you'd like to add? Do you feel that the Holocaust could happen again?

At the moment, not in the form as it was. No. I believe that Gorbachev has defused the whole of the world tension by just being honest and open and told the other politicians, "We can't carry on as we do. We have to stop somewhere". And this somewhere has arrived. For Gorbachev it meant either that the USSR would go bankrupt on their immense armament factories - yeh, on their immense armanents. And then the second reason is that in case nuclear weapons would be used, there would be nowhere to live for any human being. The surface of the earth would be destroyed. And that's why I don't think that a Holocaust can, at least during the lifetime of the present generation, occur again.

Do you think some lessons were learned?

That I wouldn't know. I have been doing too little research into all these questions. I said so right in the beginning that soon after war finished I only read two books about concentration camps, and no other books. And so I kept away from it. I found it far more entertaining to occupy myself with stamp collecting.

Are you aware of what a large subject of study it has become?

Yeh, well that I am aware, yes. But in my age I just - I don't take too much notice anymore.

But are you glad that people have studied it and taken serious note?

Yes, and one must accept that Mr Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher have studied that as well. But in their utterances one doesn't notice much.

Do you feel at home in England?

Yes and no. It depends with whom I am coming into contact. Here our next door neighbour, he doesn't speak a word. Hardly that he says good morning or good evening. For him I am a bloody foreigner. All right, let him have that pleasure. I am like a duck.

Do you mix much with Jewish people here?

No, not too much. All right - no, not too much.

You don't take part in any Jewish activities at all?

Not Jewish activities, no. We are going to bridge lessons, where by chance there are quite a number of Jewish people. But that is quite coincidental. No, we are living a pretty secluded life.

End of F303 Side A

F303 Side B is blank

End of interview

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NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Ref. No.: C410/068 Playback Nos: F300-303 inc.

Collection Title: Living Memory of the Jewish Community

Interviewee's surname: WINTER Title: Mr

Interviewee's forenames: OSKAR

Date of Birth: 19th July 1906 Sex: Male

Date(s) of recording: 16th January 1990

Location of interview: Interviewee's home

Name of interviewer: Milenka Jackson

Type of recorder:

Total no. of tapes: 4 Speed:

Type of tape: Noise Reduction:

Mono or stereo: Original or copy:

Additional material:

Copyright/clearance:

F300 Side A

Born at home in Berlin 19.7.1906, of middle class family. First of two boys. Mother injured at birth, and always felt unloved. Only brother born six years later, who he felt was much preferred. No sexual information then or later. Father agent for textile companies. Family impoverished by father's business naivete and being swindled. Schooling in Berlin and Wahnsee. Neglect at home included no encouragement at school. Severe antagonism between brothers. Parents knew nothing of psychology. Mother was daughter of Berling banking commission agent, and was well endowed. Better educated and more cultured than father. Grandfather shot himself over trivial point of honour. At age of 14 Oskar met friends who later became communists. Left school feeling ignorant due to neglect, not anti-semitism. Had important relationship with older woman and regrets they did not emigrate to Palestine. Family lived in Jewish area but did not practice religion. Neither brother barmitzvahed. Parents marriage good at first but deteriorated.

F300 Side B

Lost his lady friend to an adventuror. Mixed with other girls and got VD which was rampant. Became friendly with strong anti-Nazis who gave him leaflets to distribute (communist). Caught and arrested in '34 by Gestapo for distributing these. Had been working in father's textile agency. Nazis had already been breaking Jew's windows and arresting Jews. Arrested as part of small group and kept six weeks in ordinary prison as a political prisoner. Sentenced to two years penal servitude and five years loss of voting rights. Allowed to read Nazi books in prison. Read Mein Kampf. Tried to educate self in prison. Food in prison adequate. Not beaten or tortured; spent many months in solitary confinement. In 1936, prior to discharge, rearrested for offering to take message for another prisoner. Betrayed by fellow prisoner because of rivalry between criminal and political prisoners. Sent to local prison again. Father allowed to visit and send comforts. Sent to Lichtenberg concentration camp on Elbe in Saxony for offering to send message. Did not think that was because he was Jewish, but had no proof.

F301 Side A

Solitary confinement in Lichtenberg concentration camp. Two weeks earlier all Jews had been sent to Dachau. He travelled to Dachau with eight to ten others in normal prison train, each man had a seat. Entered Dachau February 1937. Loud, rough treatment from new guards. All prisoners wore military uniforms, varied according to weather. This was the old camp of which nothing remains; was a munition factory. All Jews segregated in block 3. Numbered about 105 to 180. Brick walls, wood roofs, 50 to 60 per large room. One man per level of bunk. All Jews did outdoor work, building new Dachau, pulling and pushing lorries. Whit Saturday 1938 he dug first trench for new camp. Food adequate and canteen efficiently run. Helped build swimming pool for SS. Some torture of prisoners when punished.

F301 Side B

Survived torture due to youth and strength. Living with possibility of being shot at any time. Thought only one hour at a time. Had to follow rules or die. Witnessed torture and killings. Was told "one Jew and two bags of cement makes a good concrete mixture". Article about Dachau published in English New Statesman, prisoners punished as reprisal. Xmas parcels marauded by SS. Started working with family to get visa to leave Germany for England. Beaten 37 lashes for attempting to send out letter. Summer '38, Jews sent from Vienna to Dachau. Witnessed tragic scenes. Hatred of Nazis grew from this point. 16th September 1938, first prisoners sent from Dachau to Buchenwald. Czech Jews began arriving. Two and a half thousand sent to Buchenwald. Barrack number 2.

F302 Side A

Buchenwald in brutal hands of SS. Whereas formerly criminals had run it. Lived in tents at first. After four and a half years a prison telegram sent to parents announcing his imminent release. Tried to get visa from Bolivian Embassy. Did not realise he should use his forms at once, and gave them away. Put in application to leave Germany on 28.1.1938. Gestapo called him two weeks later, so he disappeared. Was helped out of the country by a member of the Gestapo, but arrested at Dutch border.

Sent back to Dachau. Released April 1939. Found father had destroyed his exit papers for fear of being incriminated. After release from Dachau father renewed application for Kitchener camp in England. Refused on political grounds, despite criminals being allowed out from Vienna. Aunt then paid for his passage to Holland, and British Consul allowed exit. Travelled to England May 1939, arriving at Kitchener camp after two weeks; meeting girls in London. Feels he made mistake of refusing to go into army. Also refused to go to Canada or Australia. Interned first in Huddersfield, then Isle of Man. Met first wife who was from Breslau.

F302 Side B

Courted first wife. Both doing agricultural work for Buckingham Agricultural College. Married June 1942. Unpleasant boss. Allowed to change over to weaving work. Marriage ended in 1948. Trained at Government Training Centre as instrument maker. Worked for many years at this, also as salesman with several agencies. Finally made redundant. Kept going as agent but did not make much money. Got some restitution from Germany for loss of property. Shared it with his brother. Second marriage 1952. Had breakdown after job difficulties. Emotionally dealt with experiences by trying to ignore them. Has found solace and acquaintances through stamp collecting. Brother lives in America. They are not in dispute, but not close. Parents sent to Theresienstadt. Mother died of ? gall bladder disease. Father sent to Auschwitz where he is said to have died on the way ("To save the Germans a pension").

F303 Side A

All relations in concentration camps died. Feels that father's death registered as having been at Theresienstadt to save the Germans paying him a pension of 150 marks. Oskar has visited Germany since the war. Feels that not all Germans were Nazis. Discusses attitude towards Germany, Israel, and prospects for peace. Has read very little about the Holocaust. Is not really at home in England. Takes no part in Jewish activities. Plays bridge, collects stamps, but does not mix much.

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