

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

STEPHANIE CLEARFIELD

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Inge Karo
Date:	November 7, 1994

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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SC - Stephanie Clearfield¹ [interviewee]

IK - Inge Karo [interviewer]

Date: November 7, 1994

Tape one, side one:

IK: This is tape one, side one of an interview with Stephanie Clearfield on November 7, 1994. Could you please tell me where you were born and a little about your family?

SC: Okay. I was born in Lodz, Poland. And I remember the street number, 13 Parynek.

IK: Do you want to spell it?

SC: And, P-A-R-Y-N-E-K.

IK: And, do you want to say when?

SC: And that's where I stayed until the war broke out, in 1939. I was there with my family.

IK: And what did you, what was your immediate family?

SC: And my, I had a sister, a brother, my mother and father. With us lived an aunt and uncle, and across the way my grandparents. And of course in the same courtyard there were other members, other aunts and uncles lived. And at that time before the war, of course I went to school, but not for too long.

IK: Did you go to a public school or...

SC: A public school. No, a public school. And I had a Jewish rabbi come to the house to tutor Hebrew, and to...

IK: Was that unusual, to have that for a girl in those days?

SC: No, it was not unusual. It was, I guess it was customary for everybody to have that, for all the Jewish people. We had a small apartment, but there was nothing else that we needed at that time. We would...

IK: In Lodz there was your father in business or...

SC: Yeah, he was in business, like most Jewish people were. He was a tailor, and he also, he made his clothing in the house. And then they took it out to the market to sell it. And of course, my mother helped out. And that's what I remember at that time. And I remember my aunt working and my uncle working, and they did that until they got married. We were very [unclear], we were, it was a happy family. And of course until Hitler came along.

IK: Now, before we go to that I, I don't know if I asked you or not, could you give me the date you were born?

SC: Yes, December the 25th, 1930.

¹nee Orenbuch.

IK: 1930?

SC: '30.

IK: Now basically...

SC: When...

IK: Before we get to when the Germans came, would you like to say anything else about what your life was like before the war, or before your life was changed?

SC: No, I was really, I don't remember that much but I remember that we were happy. We had a great life, for what it was. Not like we have here, but for what it was there, it was, it was okay. We didn't know any better. That was it. To play, we had a nice park near us, and that's where we played. And we went to school.

IK: Did your family experience any antisemitism before the Hitler period?

SC: Oh, lots of it, yes. A lot of...

IK: Would you care to give one or two...

SC: And, but I...

IK: Specific examples?

SC: What, now what did I know about antisemitism at that time? I really didn't know that much, but I know that they did. They always used to say...

IK: Now, in school...

SC: That they want to...

IK: Were you treated differently because, than the non-Jewish students? Anything like that?

SC: No, we of course, we were living like mostly in a Jewish neighborhood. So, it wasn't that we were pointed out, "You're a Jew." That came when the war broke out. *That's* when we were pointed out, [unclear], "You're a Jew." And that's when they were talking about the *Jews*, and that's where they were talking about, "Here that they lived, and this is where they are." Now some of them were very nice and they were hiding the people, but most of them were not.

IK: Now see this is why...

SC: And...

IK: Why we ask this question, because you get conflicting reports that there was always anti-, modern antisemitism in Poland before the Nazis came...

SC: Of course. But, you must remember, I was young. And when you're young...

IK: Well, I had...

SC: What do you know?

IK: I had the same.

SC: Yeah, what do you know about that? You don't know.

IK: Right. Did you--or your family belong to any Jewish organizations, and to a synagogue?

SC: The synagogue that we went to...

IK: Was it an Orthodox synagogue?

SC: I don't know. I guess so. I don't know. It was a synagogue. We went to a synagogue. But I don't know if it was Orthodox or it was Reform. That I, I don't think they had any Reformed synagogues.

IK: Probably not.

SC: I think it was Orthodox, probably. And every Saturday my grandfather came and he took me, and I used to go out with him. And after the synagogue we used to stop in to a restaurant. And that's what I remember.

IK: That sounds very warm and nice.

SC: Yeah, it was a warm, and, in fact when the war broke out, and when they did form the ghetto--they lived like across the way from us--I used to sneak food in to him all the time.

IK: That was the Lodz Ghetto?

SC: That was in Lodz, yes, until they took him out and they killed him. And that was [phone] so...

IK: Well, of course we want to get back to that, but did, as far as you know, did any of your, any of the men in your family serve in the Polish national army at all?

SC: Oh I don't know. I don't--that I don't know. I don't think so.

IK: Well, I think you've covered your life in Poland in the early years.

SC: Up to the, yeah, in the nine years, till 1939. I don't know.

IK: Do you have any idea of about how many Jews lived in your town or city?

SC: Oh no, no, I don't.

IK: Do you know if there was a *Kehillah*?

SC: A what?

IK: A *Kehillah*.

SC: What is that?

IK: I don't [unclear] know. I don't, I think it's a...

SC: What is a *Kehillah*?

IK: You know, I'm embarrassed to say I don't know. I think it's a Jewish communi-, organization, that sort of, you know, like a self-governing...

SC: Well, yeah, I don't know about that. A *Kehillah*, what is that? I wouldn't know.

IK: I should have looked this up before I came. I'm sorry. Okay, well, do you want to talk about now what happened to you and your families during the weeks right after the German invasion, as much as you can recall?

SC: What I recall about that, when they first came in, that everybody used to run away. And of course we did too. We ran.

IK: Where did--where did you run to?

SC: We went to Warsaw, until they told us that things were calming down and to go back. And so we went back home. But they did not calm down, of course not. And that's when they started with "the Jews." And we had to wear stars.

IK: David's star.

SC: And a band, a yellow band. And then they started to form the ghetto. And we lived in a section where the ghetto was, so we did not have to move. We stayed... [coughing]

IK: And they let you stay in your own apartment?

SC: We stayed in our apartment. And...

IK: Do you know what time this, what year this was, when they started the ghetto in Lodz?

SC: 1940? It must have been in 1940, yeah, sure, right after. And they, of course it was this wired off, with bridges that they built, to cross over the streets. And there was a curfew. And I don't remember, I think it must have been like about 5 o'clock curfew that we had to be in. And food, they rationed with food. There was not much food. And to this day I would not touch saccharin, because this is what they gave us.

IK: It's all you had. Was the, at the time, do you know, was the rationing just for the Jews in the ghetto or also for the non-Jewish people?

SC: Oh I only know about, I, that I don't know. I only know about the Jews in the ghetto. I remember they closed the schools and we had to go to work. And I do remember I went to work to a factory where they made rugs, carpeting.

IK: And was that in the ghetto or outside of the ghetto?

SC: I think it's, I don't know, they took us to some place. I don't, that I don't remember. But I do remember standing on a stool because I was so little, and making, weaving, carpet. And shortly after, and this was, I think my parents went, and this was...

IK: Do you know what year that was, when you were working?

SC: Maybe 1941.

IK: And was it a?

SC: And then in 1942, that's when they started to come around, and taking people out of their homes. And my mother was so afraid that they're gonna take us away that she used to hide us. So, well, we lived like on a third floor, and there was an attic. And every time they used to come around. And to get up to the attic we had to climb up on a ladder. She used to put us up there and take the ladder away. And when the Germans left she, we came down. And this one day she put us up there, but she nev--but they took her away.

IK: And how did you know finally to come, when did you finally decide to come down?

SC: And my father came for us, and he told us that they took her away.

IK: And that was what, and you were around...

SC: In 1942.

IK: Ten or eleven years old?

SC: Yeah. In--this was 1942.

IK: And were your siblings up there with you?

SC: They were with us, because we were hiding. All, every time that they used to come around we were hiding. Now I might, other families that lived across the way from us, they didn't have that chance to hide. And I'll never forget my cousins. And there was a little boy that they threw out the window.

IK: Who, the Nazis?

SC: Yeah. For everybody to see. We did not, I didn't see this. We didn't know it until afterwards. And this is what they, when we saw the child on the pavement, and the Stormtroopers used to come around and yell and scream. And we used to, I used to hear this because I was in the attic. But they never got to us there. And they just used to come, every time they used to come around and we used to hide up there, until 19-, after they took my mother away, of course. We were all by ourselves and still working and still going until 1944. And in '44 they came around unexpectedly, and they chased us out. They told us we were gonna go to a working camp. And that's where we all went.

IK: Do you know the name of the camp?

SC: Oh yeah, Auschwitz.

IK: Oh, to Auschwitz.

SC: Yeah. That was the "working" camp. And that's when they took us on the train. And that train ride, I will never forget. They shoved us in like cattles.

IK: Now when you say *they*, were they?

SC: The Germans.

IK: Yeah, I know, but was?

SC: The Germans.

IK: It the German Army or was it the S.S. or?

SC: It must have been the S.S. Do I--did I know the difference between the army or the S.S.? I didn't know. And it was my father and my brother and my sister. But prior to that people used to die of starv--my aunt that used to live with us, she died of starvation. My cousin, my uncle, they all, they just like flies.

IK: While they were still in the ghetto.

SC: While we were still in the ghetto. And the train ride to Auschwitz, of course, it was a nightmare. Whatever you see on the news, on the television, you had to go through to really realize.

IK: And this was--you were, it was just you and your?

SC: My, and I guess it must have been our, yeah, there were other people there.

IK: I know, but I mean from your immediate family?

SC: From my family.

IK: It was just you and your brother and?

SC: I think so. I, yeah. Yeah, I think so. I don't remember. But I think that was it.

IK: You didn't have any adult members of your family with you at that time?

SC: I don't think so. Most of them died. And we were riding and riding and riding. It seemed like forever. There were no bathroom facilities. Everybody had to defect themselves the way, where we were standing. And you couldn't see anything. There was nothing there, you see. And then we were finally, when we arrived, when they, after they took us off the train they separated us. And they...

IK: It was a selection.

SC: Male and female.

IK: The selection it was.

SC: Right. They took my sister and my brother away, and they told, "We're gonna see you afterwards." We'll see them. And then they took us to some kind of a barrack. And that, there they shaved, they took the clothes off, and they gave me, of course, some kind of a rag to wear, and these wooden shoes, and sent us to a barrack. And that was the last time I saw my brother and my sister. [unclear] they went, then afterwards we found out they went to the gas chambers. My father, I saw in Auschwitz. When I was in Auschwitz I saw him through the, they had barbed wires. And I saw him. And he waved to me. And that was, that was the last time. And of course he was killed.

IK: And how old were you at the time?

SC: I was there in 1944, I guess about 14. And [pause] I have to wait a minute. I want to, [pause; tape off then on] beat us if you weren't...

IK: Well that's important.

SC: Fast enough.

IK: That's important. Now when you say *they*...

SC: I...

IK: Was this the factory owners?

SC: The factory--I guess they must have gotten some people, the people there at the factory. Now whether they were Germans or they were Polish, I don't know. I don't remember. But I do remember they, we have to be very fast. And we had to be on time--that we were. Because they used to pick us up. And then they took us there.

IK: Were, was the whole...?

SC: And a lot of trucks.

IK: Labor force Jews or did they have regular workers also?

SC: Well that I don't know. I really don't know. Oh, how would I remember that?

IK: But it was, it had nothing to do, like some people they put to work in factories that had to do with the war effort. This was just making rugs for?

SC: This was just making carpets. And those big frames that they had, and we used to--we couldn't reach it and I had to stand on stools to be able to reach those frames.

But I guess I must have been very lucky to be working there than being left at home, to suffer.

IK: And did a lot of people from your ghetto go to that factory?

SC: Yeah, yes, a lot of them went.

IK: You don't remember the name of it.

SC: Oh no, no, not at all. I, you know, I must have blocked a lot of things out of my mind, because I really don't want to remember. And it's so very hard for me.

IK: [unclear] Sure.

SC: To talk about this.

IK: Sure, I can see that.

SC: That I just told my husband I really can't do it. I just can't do it. That's why for so long people kept silent.

IK: I know. We have that very frequently. And you know, as I said before, if it gets to be too painful, you know, either talk about something else for a while or we'll come back another time. I don't want to upset you too much. When you were talking earlier, before you went to the ghetto, that you went to Warsaw. Did you stay in Warsaw with relatives or...?

SC: Yeah, we stayed with relatives, with, also with an uncle. But we didn't stay there too long, maybe a couple days. They had no room for anybody, and we went back home. And...

IK: And was there any, did you, during that time, did you, did anybody receive any help from non-Jews, before the ghetto was closed?

SC: No, not with us. Nobody received any help.

IK: And?

SC: In fact if anybody went in the apartment complex that we lived in, the maintenance people were Gentiles, and if they knew that anybody was hiding, they told the Germans about it. That wasn't, wasn't very pleasant.

IK: No.

SC: And we tried, I guess that's why nobody knew about, they knew about the attic but they didn't know that we were hiding up there. Because they were, the only access to it is to climb up on a separate ladder. It wasn't a ladder that was connected that you could pull down.

IK: No.

SC: It was a separate one that we got up there. And this is where we were hiding almost every day. Every day they came to select. Every day they came to take people out.

IK: And at that time did you know that these were extermination camps, or did you just think they were jail?

SC: No, we had, we didn't know about extermination camps. We knew that they did something. We didn't know what it, what it was. But you know, you have

premonitions. You have feelings. And you do know that things are gonna happen. I had a lot of premonitions, a lot of them. In fact when they came to the barracks in Auschwitz, the last time that they, I used to hide. I used to hide under the bunk beds. And the last time they came I was hiding under the bunk beds. And a little friend of mine was with me. And I used to tell her, "Come on, come on under. They're gonna kill us anyway." You just feel that. She says no, she's afraid. I said, "What are you afraid of?" I says, "You're gonna, they're gonna kill us." And she didn't go. Then I heard the head of the barrack say to somebody, "Run out the back door, because they're coming to search." And when I heard that, I ran out the back door to a different barrack. And this is how, what I did time and time again. And that's how I saved myself.

IK: They didn't count to make sure that no prisoners were missing in the barrack?

SC: I don't know.

IK: And the person who called out the warning, when you said the head of the barracks warned you?

SC: Yeah, they were...

IK: Was that a Jewish person?

SC: Yes, yeah, because a lot of Jewish people they made the head of whatever they were organizing there. In fact, when we were, I went to Bergen-Belsen after Auschwitz. And I see like girls were running around. And so I asked them what they were doing and they said they were a *Läuferin*. Now that means a messenger.

IK: Oh, it's L-A-...

SC: I said...

IK: L-A-U-F-, like *Läufen*?

SC: Yeah, yeah. And I said, "Well, I can be a messenger." And I went up to the head of this--whoever headed the barracks, and I said, "I would, I'm gonna become a messenger." "Oh," she said, "Okay," and gave me a band, and I became a messenger. But with it I found out that I can go to the kitchen, without being stopped, and bring food back, without being caught. And this is what I did. I used to carry those big, I guess, what was it, it was like a, it's not a pitcher, but a...

IK: A casserole?

SC: A can, it's like a can. And I used to put food in to, from the kitchen. They gave me the food, put it in there, and brought it back for the people to eat.

IK: And who, when you say, "They gave me the food," who gave you the food? Were these Jewish?

SC: The kitchen, yeah the Jewish...

IK: The Jewish kitchen help.

SC: Yeah, the kitchen help.

IK: And was this, if they would have been caught giving you food, then they would have been punished.

SC: Uh, they would have killed me. Sure they would have.

IK: No, but I'm talking about also the people who gave it to you were in danger, weren't they?

SC: Right, right. But being--I was a messenger, the only thing I had to do is stop at the gate and say, "I'm going to such-and-such a place and I'll be back."

IK: And who were you carrying messages for? Between...

SC: I never carried a message!

IK: Oh.

SC: I just had a band.

IK: But the ones who were carrying messages, was that from one German office to the other or...

SC: I don't even know what they were doing, but I never carried a message. I never carried anything, except food that I used to bring back for the people. And I did this for as long as I stayed there. And afterwards, they, and that too saved me. And then they started to ship us from, no, to transfer us from one camp to another. And...

IK: This was when you were in Bergen-Belsen?

SC: In Berg-, yeah, after Bergen-Belsen.

IK: Do you know approximately when you left from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen?

SC: You know what, it must have, no, it was from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, because I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. From Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen that they, that we walked, in the snow. And we walked. And we walked.

IK: All the inmates or only selected ones?

SC: Selected. And if you couldn't walk, they killed you. And how many times did we stop? They made us rest, and we stopped to rest, in the snow. And the next thing you knew, when you woke up, you don't see anybody. And we didn't know where, I didn't know what had happened. But everything was covered with snow. And then you see heads coming up.

IK: In other words while you were sleeping you were covered with snow.

SC: Sure, yeah. And there were no clothes and no shoes.

IK: And I guess a lot of people.

SC: Just whatever you got.

IK: Froze to death on that march.

SC: Oh yeah. To this day I have, my legs are swollen. And it's from that. I can not get rid of the swelling. And...

IK: During the march...

SC: March, how many times did I want to run away? A lot of people...

IK: Yeah, I was gonna ask.

SC: Ran away.

IK: Were they on the loose, did the...?

SC: People ran away.

IK: People who lived there see that, see this march?

SC: They didn't want to see it.

IK: No.

SC: They didn't want to see it. And many times, a lot of people ran away.

IK: I mean did you go, was it like all on an open road or was it going through communities or...

SC: I don't even remember. It was going through communities. It was going on open roads. And many times I thought myself, *I should run away*. But I thought, *If anybody sees me, they're gonna report me and they're gonna kill me. I better stay*.

IK: Nobody along the route threw food at you or tried to help you in any way?

SC: Oh no.

IK: No.

SC: No, nobody. And we were walking, and if you couldn't walk, even if you just fell down, they killed you.

IK: They--what did they do, shoot you?

SC: Oh, yeah, yeah. And that's how we walked to Bergen-Belsen. Well, we stopped at other camps, I think. I don't remember but I think we did. But we didn't stay. And we walked on to Bergen-Belsen. And then, in Bergen-Belsen was, we just stayed there until we were liberated. Also with the barracks, with all the ration, with all the, with very, very little food. When I came out of there I was 50 pounds. And you see the people dying, and they made, they accumulated the bodies, it was like a mountain of bodies. We walked over bodies. And if somebody died, and to get to these, but the, to remove the bodies they had to drag the bodies.

IK: And they?

SC: The inmates had to drag the bodies.

IK: Your fellow Jewish inmates had to do this.

SC: Oh yes. They dragged the bodies to these piles and piles of it. They didn't do anything with them. They didn't burn it. Some of them they burned. There was no, I don't think there were any ovens in Bergen-Belsen. That was only in Auschwitz that they were, they had the ovens.

IK: And they didn't bury them either. They just put them...

SC: They did not bury the bodies. They just accumulated them.

IK: And do you know the guards? Were the guards all Germans or did they have non-German guards also in the camp?

SC: Well, they were both. There were Jewish guards and there were German guards. And one of my, in fact one of my father's brothers was a guard there. I didn't know that until afterwards, after the war was over, he told me. But he did tell me that he saw my father. And he also told me that they took him to the gas chambers. But he knew about it. And...

IK: And how did you manage to, to keep going the way you did, being all alone like that and so young?

SC: I guess it must have been an inner strength. I have no idea.

IK: Did you, I mean, well did you get any?

SC: Help from anybody?

IK: Help from anybody that was there?

SC: No, nobody. Everybody was there to try to survive themselves. Who's gonna help? And I guess that's how I was liberated.

Tape one, side two:

IK: Side two of tape one. When, either in the ghetto, or in Auschwitz, or in Bergen-Belsen, as far as you know, were you aware whether there were people there from other countries than Poland, that you had contact with?

SC: Yeah, from Hungary they were there, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

IK: Where, in Auschwitz?

SC: Hungarian, in concentration camp with me, yes.

IK: In Auschwitz?

SC: In Auschwitz and Bergen-

IK: But in your ghetto it was only people from Lodz?

SC: From Lodz. I didn't know anybody else.

IK: And in your city, or in your ghetto, did you have a Jewish Council or *Judenrat*, as far as you know?

SC: No. I didn't have anybody. Who said that? Did they have that? I had -no.

IK: When you were in the ghetto, did you attend school or classes?

SC: No.

IK: Of any kind?

SC: No.

IK: Did you have religious services in the ghetto?

SC: No.

IK: No. Did you have any communication with the outside world?

SC: No.

IK: With newspapers or radio?

SC: No.

IK: And were you aware of any underground in the ghetto?

SC: No.

IK: And how did you feel about possible resistance to the Nazis, or did you even think about it because you were so young?

SC: I did not, no.

IK: Well, we've covered this a little bit, but to what extent did the Polish people help the Nazis to persecute the Jews as far as you know?

SC: By telling them if anybody was hiding.

IK: And?

SC: That was enough.

IK: And were you aware of any Poles who helped to hide Jews or who smuggled food or goods to them?

SC: I had, I was not aware of anything like that.

IK: Okay, now, I think we covered this. When were you deported from the ghetto to Auschwitz? You said in 194-

SC: Yeah, 1944.

IK: 1944 you went to Auschwitz?

SC: Yeah.

IK: And what kind of, after you were deported, what kind of work did you do? That was--the rug factory was while you were still in the ghetto. But while you were in Auschwitz, what kind of work did they make you do?

SC: I didn't do any work, no.

IK: And in Bergen-Belsen you didn't do anything.

SC: No.

IK: While you were in the concentration camps, did you have any contact with any resistance groups?

SC: No.

IK: Did you, at any time did you ever think about escaping from Auschwitz?

SC: Oh yeah.

IK: Or Bergen-Belsen?

SC: Bergen--no, I thought about it, but I never did.

IK: And did you know of any prisoners who tried to escape?

SC: No.

IK: And do you know anything about education of the Jewish children in the camps, or in the ghetto?

SC: No, no. Who would educate them?

IK: Well some, well some of the survivors do tell us...

SC: Oh yeah? I have no...

IK: That they tried to set up classes and...

SC: No.

IK: As far as you know, when you were in Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen, do you know of any religious observances there?

SC: No! No way!

IK: And did you have any more contact with your family or with your friends between 1942 and 1945?

SC: Well the only ones in the ghetto I had, I was still, my father was there, and my brother and my sister.

IK: And do you remember when you first heard that Jews were being murdered or were being gassed, when you first heard about that?

SC: In Auschwitz. When I was in Auschwitz.

IK: In Auschwitz.

SC: Yeah.

IK: Well, my next...

SC: We heard it.

IK: Question here is, did you believe these reports? And I...

SC: Yes.

IK: Guess by the time you got to Auschwitz...

SC: Yes, oh yes, I believed it, yeah.

IK: Now, you were involved in selections in Auschwitz.

SC: Yeah.

IK: Why do you think that you survived these?

SC: Oh, only because I was selected to be gassed, and I just didn't like the line. And I managed to escape, and ran into a different line. And that's the only way--I just...

IK: Were you able to do that more than once?

SC: Oh yeah, yeah. I was able, maybe because I was little, and maybe because--and that, like I said before, that intuition. Nobody told me. I just had that feeling that if I stay in this line they're gonna take me away. In fact, one night they came. All the lights were on. And they fed us. They gave us food all night. I--this does not sound right. That is gonna, there's trouble. And sure enough, the next day they came--and we're talking about the Germans--and took everybody out. And this is when I was hiding. I...

IK: And why do you think they fed people before they took them out?

SC: I have no idea. I don't know why they did it.

IK: Well you had what today...

SC: Maybe.

IK: They would call street smarts.

SC: Uh huh, that's right.

IK: In the camps.

SC: Yeah. I just, I think it's, I don't know. I just, that's the way, that's how I survived.

IK: And did you, at that time, was this just sort of instinctive that you would get into another line and not get killed or did you have any, did you make any conscious decision that you wanted to survive because you...

SC: Oh, I wanted to survive.

IK: You wanted to see your family again.

SC: No, I had no, no, I knew I wasn't gonna see them. I just knew it. But maybe in the back of my mind I was hoping that I would see them. But these decisions were not made, they were like instant. I don't know. I just really don't know why. I figured there was nothing to lose. Either way I was gonna get killed. So why not take the chance?

IK: I'm glad you did. While you were in the camp, were you ever treated in one of the clinics, for, medical clinics?

SC: No, no, because if I was, believe me, I wouldn't be here today.

IK: You feel that people who had to go to the clinics...

SC: Uh huh, yeah.

IK: Were any of the guards in the camp, were any of them ever nice to the prisoners?

SC: Not that I know of.

IK: And how about the *Kapos*, the Jewish guards? How did they treat the people?

SC: Well, sometimes they were nice, and sometimes I think maybe because they were afraid, they were not so nice. They did not treat us...

IK: Do you feel they were as bad as the Germans or...?

SC: No, of course not. But I do feel that they had, to save their own lives they had to do what they did. I don't think that they really wanted to hurt people, only because they made them do it.

IK: If it's, you know, if it's not too painful, could you go into some of the specifics of the daily routine in Auschwitz, and what the food rations were like, and things like that? The conditions of the barracks?

SC: The conditions? Horrible.

IK: The daily routines?

SC: Horrible. What kind of a routine? You got up, the rations that they gave you something to eat, and with this, and you try to sleep. You try to be on your bunk bed. And...

IK: You went up because you had nothing to do all day?

SC: Nothing. No. And you just waited, and disintegrated. And you try to get up, and you try to walk around. And you were afraid. You were afraid of your own shadow. Where were you gonna go? Or they marched you around a little bit. You couldn't just lay there all day, so they marched. And we went back. And we laid again. And I don't know if anybody ever laid on a piece of wood, and that's what this was, just a piece of wood. And just some kind of a rag to cover--not to cover you--to wear.

IK: And did you find that the different nationalities, did they mingle, or was there...?

SC: There was no other choice. What are you gonna do? You had to.

IK: I mean the--they all got along with each other, when the Hungarian Jews and the Polish Jews and...

SC: Whoever. I guess they did. I don't know. You had no strength to fight. By that time you're worn out. Who are you gonna fight with?

IK: Were there a lot of other children in camp besides you? And what percentage...?

SC: There were some...

IK: Do you think...?

SC: Yeah, there were some. Yeah, there was a lot of children.

IK: Were there a lot of children or just very few when you were there?

SC: Like my age?

IK: Well, just children.

SC: They were, yeah, there were quite a bit.

IK: And how about when you went from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, were there a lot of children on that march too?

SC: I don't even remember. I remember--that's all I remember, that. I don't even remember.

IK: Was there anybody in the camp, well, you already said you weren't aware of any religious services or praying in the camp.

SC: No, there were no religious services.

IK: No...

SC: Yeah.

IK: The holidays weren't noted at all.

SC: Yeah.

IK: Was there any figure in the camp who became prominent, that sort of rallied the prisoners or gave them hope or some kind of a spiritual . . . ?

SC: No. No.

IK: Help?

SC: Not at all.

IK: Did any past memory or hope sustain you to keep going on under these awful conditions?

SC: I didn't have time to think. I just thought of the present and what I have to do, and how to survive. This is the only thing I had to work on. You know?

IK: Now we can get to the liberation. Where were you when you were liberated?

SC: [pause] Okay, I was...

IK: We were talking about liberation. Where were you when you were liberated?

SC: Okay, I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen.

IK: Do you know the date?

SC: By the British.

IK: By the British Army.

SC: Yeah, in 1945. This must have been April. I think it was about April, in 1945. And...

IK: Did you--by that time had the German guards left or, what happened?

SC: No, they were still there. In fact they were shooting. And that little girlfriend that I had with me, they killed her. [unclear]

IK: The Germans.

SC: The Germans, yeah. And...

IK: Now was, when you say they killed her...

SC: We...

IK: Was she just hit by a random bullet or they deliberately set out to kill her?

SC: Deliberately. Yeah, there was no random bullets. No, that was done deliberately. Everything they did they...

IK: They wanted to, in other words you're telling me they wanted to kill some more people before the British came.

SC: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely. And the soldiers that came in, we were so happy to see them. And they couldn't get over, the people they could not get over what the place was like, because they did not hide, the bodies were still there. The stench of the bodies, it was a horrible, horrible experience for them, and for everybody else, to see all this.

IK: And did they give you food and medical help or...

SC: Oh, they gave us medical help. They gave us food. They took us to hospitals. I was in a hospital.

IK: Which, where did they...?

SC: For quite a few...

IK: Which hospitals did they take you to?

SC: Oh, I don't know. It must have been local hospitals. And in fact we were all there for about a week to be evaluated.

IK: And being evaluated...

SC: And what they...

IK: By the British medical staff or by...

SC: The British, oh, the British, yeah. And they started to feed us, and by the time I came here I, after 50 pounds, I was 145 pounds when I got here. That's how fat I got.

IK: Well, you're not fat now.

SC: No, not now. No, I'm not fat, no. No. Now I'm my regular weight. I went on a diet and I, it was all excess.

IK: Now after Bergen-Belsen did they send you some place to...?

SC: Yes.

IK: Recuperate after the hospital or...

SC: No, there was no recuperation, but we were sent to, we went, to Feldafing.

IK: Feldafing.

SC: Yeah. There I went to school. They sent us to school there. And...

IK: When you say *they*, again, the British?

SC: The British, yeah. And I remember.

IK: Were any Jewish organizations, did any Jewish organizations...?

SC: Yeah.

IK: Come in at that time?

SC: Oh yes.

IK: To help with survivors?

SC: The HIAS came in, yeah.

IK: The HIAS.

SC: Yeah. And this is when they tried to tell us, they asked us where we would like to go, whether we want to go to Israel or whether we want to go to United States. In fact, I had signed up to go to Israel. And this one girl that was talking, that took care of me, said, "You can always go to Israel afterwards. There is so much trouble. Why don't you go to the States?"

IK: When you say the girl who took care of you, that was somebody from HIAS?

SC: From HIAS, yeah. She said, "Go to the States, and then, if you decide to go to Israel you can always go to Israel." And that's how I came here.

IK: Now before you decided to go to the United States, what, did you, in the interim did you try to find your family or...?

SC: Oh yeah, of course we did. And this is how I found my father's brother. I found my uncle.

IK: And how did you, how did you find your family?

SC: Well they used to have like lists of people, the survivors. And this is how I found him.

IK: And this was all while you were still at Feldafing?

SC: Yeah. And from Feldafing they sent me to Munich, or was it vice-versa, I don't remember. Was it vice-versa? Whatever. It's not important. But from there, that...

IK: So did you go to the United States as an individual or as part of a group?

SC: Oh no, as an individual, yeah. All the children that signed up, we all got here at the same time.

IK: And how old were you at that time, do you know?

SC: 16. We all came here and on the *Marine Perch*. See, I remember the boat. That was the ship that took us--for two weeks we were on this ship--to come here.

IK: And where did you, what harbor did you leave from, from the *Marine Perch*?

SC: The *Marine Perch* was the ship. What?

IK: P-E-R-C-H?

SC: Now I forgot. I forgot.

IK: Do you know what harbor you left from?

SC: I should remember but I don't. I'll find out. I can get it for you.

IK: All right.

SC: I'll look it up.

IK: All right.

SC: It was...

[Husband's voice] Was it in Germany or was it in Holland?

SC: No it must have--no, from Munich.

IK: Munich is in Germany.
SC: Yeah, Munich.
IK: I don't even know whether Munich's a port or not.
SC: Munich? No, Munich. And then Feldafing it was. Or was it Feldafing and then Munich? I don't know.
IK: Well, it's all right.
SC: But it doesn't matter. But while I was there I met another relative, cousins of ours, that I spent the summer with them. It was in Bad Reichenhaus. [Reichenhall]
IK: R-E-I-...
SC: That's not...
IK: C-H-E-N-H-A-U-S? Is that about right?
SC: Right. Bad Reichenhaus. [Reichenhall]
IK: Yes.
SC: I don't know how to spell it.
IK: That's all right.
SC: And...
IK: And was that where you sent to, that was a resort. So were you sent there by any organization or you just went to...?
SC: No, but I have, no, I went to visit my cousins, and I, to spend the summer there. And that was a nice summer. And then I came.
IK: And that was in 1944?
SC: No, that was already, no, in '44 I was still in Auschwitz.
IK: Oh.
SC: It was now '45, it must have been '46, yeah.
IK: And when did you actually...?
SC: Because...
IK: Emigrate to the United States?
SC: In 1947 I came to the States.
IK: In '47.
SC: Yeah, in February.
IK: And did you have anybody to meet you when you got here?
SC: When we got here? Oh no, no.
IK: So what did you do?
SC: So we went, we were in a home. And from there we were supposed to be dispersed, adopted.
IK: Do you remember the name of the home?
SC: No. That I don't. But I, it was a...
IK: But was it run by Jewish...
SC: In...
IK: Was it Jewish?

SC: In New York, yeah, in New York, in Brooklyn or the Bronx, some place. I was there for two weeks. But there I found out I had relatives living in the States, my father's uncle. And in the home they wrote to them. They lived in Reading. Well, when he wrote, when they wrote to Reading, I came in February. My uncle had passed away in December. But his, they have other relatives in Philadelphia. They got in touch with them, and they all came to see me, in New York, at that time.

IK: And you had not known them before.

SC: Oh no. I never knew them. They were all my father's uncles. And he came, and he said to me when he came to visit me, that no way will I go to a foster home, that he is gonna take me in. And that was another story, how I got here. Well, he took me in. Well, when I got here--that's how I got to Philadelphia--his daughter took me in. And I stayed with her until I got married.

IK: Well that's wonderful that you at least didn't have to be all alone.

SC: Right, that's right. Well, a lot of people that we, I met, a lot of kids I met on the way over here, they were adopted. I've grown out of touch with them. When I do, I am in touch with a very dear friend all these years. They live in New York. Now she had relatives that met her, and they took her in. And to this day we are friends. So that was a...

IK: Yeah, I think you mentioned something about an uncle. But of the relatives in Poland, did, that your family in Poland, after the war...

SC: Yeah?

IK: Did any of them survive except you?

SC: Yes, yeah. My father's brothers. The one that was in Auschw-, the one that worked in Auschwitz, he survived. He lives in Israel. Then I had another uncle, in Belgium, and one who's in Australia. [doorbell; to someone else: okay, tell her to wait there for a minute.] And so, the one in Belgium passed away but they are all living.

IK: But they survived the...

SC: They did, yeah.

IK: War, yeah.

SC: Yeah. But my close relatives, I don't...

IK: Well if, unless there's something else you wanted to add about, you know...

SC: Well it's...

IK: Either your experiences or how you survived, or anything like that.

SC: Well, whatever I mentioned it, and these were the important ones, and other than that, then it's so hard.

IK: I know. It's very diff-, I really...

SC: Yeah.

IK: Appreciate it.

SC: It's very hard.

IK: It's so difficult to talk about it.

SC: Yeah. Oh yeah.