HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HERBERT FINDER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Dates: February 19, 1987
March 19 & 26, 1987

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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HF - Herbert Finder [interviewee]
NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]
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Tape one, side one:

NL: ...interviewing Mr. Herbert Finder [address, phone]. This is February the 19th, 1987. Now, Mr. Finder, if you'll be good enough to start by telling me where you were born, and when, and a little about your family background.

HF: I was born in Vienna, Austria, April 22nd, 1929. My father originally came from Poland, emmigrated to Vienna during World War I and became an Austrian citizen. My mother was born in Berlin, Germany, and she moved to Vienna after marrying my father in 1928.

NL: May we have the name of your father?

HF: My father's name is Heinrich Finder, now Henry Finder. My mother's name was Gerda.

NL: Gerta? Or Gerda?

HF: Gerda.

NL: Gerda.

HF: Born Schwarz.

NL: C-?

HF: Schwarz. Born Schwarz. S-C-H-W-A-R-Z.

NL: And they were married...?

HF: They were married in Berlin in 1928.

NL: And what was Father's occupation?

HF: My father was a salesman. He would travel in the countryside, during the last few years before the occupation of Austria by Germany.

NL: Do you have any memories of Vienna?

HF: Only vaguely. I remember going to school in Vienna, public school...

NL: A public school.

HF: Which was not very far from our house. I remember going to a small synagogue with my father. And I remember the last couple years before the *Anschluss*, of my grandparents living with us, who were refugees from Berlin, and they lived with us in Vienna.

NL: Ah ha. They left Germany?

HF: They left Germany in 1937 and they came to live with us, in Vienna.

NL: They thought it would be safer, do you suppose?

HF: Yes, yes. And...

NL: And more protected. Both grandparents?

HF: Both grandparents.

NL: Now, do you remember anything about your parents' relatives? Close relatives, sisters or brothers or...

HF: Well...

NL: Cousins?

HF: On my father's side he had relatives in Poland, which we visited once in 1937.

NL: What were your memories of that visit?

HF: Well, it was a very small village in Poland where he came from, near Tarnow. And I just remember vaguely visiting with him. And then he had other relatives who lived in Krakow, and we visited there too, but I was a very young age at the time.

NL: Did you think your situation was better, more comfortable in Vienna? Or didn't you make any comparison?

HF: No.

NL: But those folks remained in Poland as far as you know?

HF: No, they survived. They live in Israel now.

NL: But they stayed in Poland.

HF: Yeah, they stayed in Poland.

NL: I see. And on Mother's side?

HF: Mother...

NL: Did she have any sisters? Brothers?

HF: Mother had a sister and a brother who both emigrated to America during the Hitler period.

NL: And...

HF: My uncle was interned in Mauthausen during *Kristallnacht*, but he was let out and then...

NL: He was?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Do you know what were the circumstances? Because that's very unusual.

HF: I think a lot of German Jews were let out after *Kristallnacht*. They had to promise to leave Germany...

NL: Ahhh!

HF: Within a very short period of time.

NL: Yes, I thought that was true just of the German concentration camps.

HF: Well it was...

NL: But obviously it was true for Mauthausen too.

HF: I believe it was Mauthausen. I'm not too, I know he was let out on the assumption that he would leave Germany...

NL: He would leave.

HF: Within a short time.

NL: Do you know if it was difficult for them to get out?

HF: They had visas to come to America and then...

NL: So they must have applied...

HF: They had already Amer-, yeah.

NL: Very early.

HF: Very early, yeah.

NL: And you had said at one point I think in our discussion, sometimes it was easier for someone who was poor to leave.

HF: Yeah, but they had...

NL: They had...

HF: They had well-to-do relatives in California, from...

NL: I see.

HF: From his side of the family, although his mother remained behind and perished in Theresienstadt.

NL: She stayed behind.

HF: Yeah. Because she had no papers. And later my grandmother also perished in Theresienstadt.

NL: Again for the same reason.

HF: Yeah. She was, everybody left and she was, she stayed behind.

NL: Do you know what their last names...

HF: Well my grandmother's name was Hedwig Schwarz. I don't know what my uncle's, what his mother's name was. I mean it was Herrscher. That was a family name. But what her first name was, I don't know.

NL: H-I-R-?

HF: H-E-R-R-S-C-H-E-R.

NL: And they both perished...

HF: In Theresienstadt.

NL: In Theresienstadt. Sometimes this is helpful in setting up registers and there is a big organization of survivors of Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, in London, and they might be interested.

HF: But this happened, I mean, this happened in, I don't know what year it happened. I really don't have the documents for that.

NL: But you know this...

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Happened.

HF: We have documents. I have an aunt, my mother's sister, who still lives in California, and she has, she knows about. There were documents sent to her.

NL: I see. About their fate.

HF: About their fate.

NL: Now about the school experience. Did you encounter any anti-semitism in this Vienna public school that you attended?

HF: Well, the time it was most obvious was in Vienna we had what you call *Religionsunterricht*, which means public religious education. And at that time the Jewish children got their *Religionsunterricht* separate from the non-Jewish children.

NL: This was after regular school or it was part of the...

HF: No, that was during, that was, yeah, yeah. That was during.

NL: Once or twice a week or more often? Do you remember?

HF: I don't recall. I believe twice a week.

NL: And what did you study?

HF: Well the Jewish children learned Jewish subjects.

NL: Including Hebrew?

HF: And, I don't believe Hebrew.

NL: The Bible?

HF: Yeah, Bible and so on.

NL: History.

HF: History. And the non-, and that started very early in grammar school.

NL: And it was taught by a Jewish teacher?

HF: Yeah, by, yeah. It was all, in Vienna everybody had to pay a *Gemein*-, a tax, like a...

NL: Membership.

HF: Membership tax to belong to the Jewish community. And basically then the government paid the salary of teachers, Jewish teachers.

NL: They came in just to teach these religious courses or...

HF: Subjects, yeah.

NL: Subjects.

HF: Subjects.

NL: Or were they regular teachers who also taught these subjects? You had a different person?

HF: It was a different person I think. And...the non-Jewish children were of course taught Christian subjects. And there was instilled all of the hatred against the Jews as being the killer of Christ. And that was the, and after this one hour was over, they was always trying to beating the Jews from the non-Jewish children. And I know I'm getting away from the subject, but my mother-in-law went to school in Stuttgart, in Germany. And we discussed this one time, she being about 30 years older than I am. She experienced exactly that same thing in Stuttgart thirty years earlier. So this was very, because you didn't have a separation of church and state of being taught.

NL: Yes. And you felt the anti-semitism particularly after these classes.

HF: Yeah. It was, that's the only type of anti-semitism that I can remember as a child.

NL: But I suppose there were comparatively few Jewish students in your pubic school. Or am I wrong? Did you have a goodly number of Jewish children?

HF: Yeah. Yeah.

NL: You did.

HF: We did not live in a Jewish neighborhood. I mean, there were...

NL: It was mixed.

HF: We lived, Vienna is divided in what, 21, they call it *Bezirk* which is sections of the city or...

NL: Neighborhoods.

HF: Neighborhoods. And most Jews, as Polish Jews and the poor Jews lived in the second district, whereas we lived in the ninth district, which was, there were Jewish stores. And everybody, it was not a...

NL: Solely Jewish.

HF: City, yeah. There was a large Jewish population before World War II in Vienna.

NL: Yes.

HF: I think it was 100 and some thousand probably.

NL: Yes, a very large population. And you, so you had non-Jewish playmates, do you remember, Mr. Finder?

HF: Now...

NL: Jewish playmates.

HF: No they, all my friends were Jewish.

NL: Jewish.

HF: But in school of course it was mixed, schooling.

NL: Non-, mixed.

HF: Right. There were more non-Jews in class than Jews.

NL: And the synagogue that your father, your family, attended...?

HF: My father attended a small...

NL: Was it Orthodox?

HF: Small Orthodox. My father was Orthodox, came from an Orthodox background. My mother not. My mother came from a German, I would say maybe Reformed or...

NL: Reformed.

HF: Reformed. But when she married my father, she kept a strictly kosher household and so on. But she really was not from a Orthodox background. There was a larger synagogue not far from us, but my father preferred to go to a smaller synagogue.

NL: Yes. And were most of their friends Jewish?

HF: Yeah.

NL: They socialized mostly with...

HF: Yes, mostly with Jewish.

NL: Jewish...

HF: [unclear] Right.

NL: Friends. Would you say that they were fairly comfortable in Vienna, that they didn't seem to be troubled by antisemitism in the early years of their marriage and in your early childhood period? Did your father suffer economically in his work because of any anti-Jewish feelings as far as you know?

HF: I don't think so. Why, I, although I believe there was always the tendency, as far as what I heard him say, that he was rather a, although he was Orthodox, modern in appearance. And when he spoke German well, he wrote German well, and he was an Austrian citizen. I mean, he came to Vienna as a young man. My mother was from a German background. And I think that the antisemitism or the antagonism against Jews was felt more among the Jews who still, you know, lived in the Jewish neighborhoods, who did not...

NL: From eastern Europe.

HF: Eastern European Jews who were still clinging mostly to the *hasidic* garbs, the beards. This was the impression that the population had of Jews, because my father would say many times that even people would say, didn't even know that he was Jewish because he just...

NL: Seems like everybody else.

HF: Yeah. Right.

NL: Yeah, yeah. The same thing of course happened in Germany, that the anger was very often directed against the Eastern European individuals...

HF: Yeah. Because I remember he would, when after Hitler, I mean, after the *Anschluss* when the Germans came into Vienna and they used to, you know, just to antagonize the Jews. They would gather them up, all of a sudden a group of Jews on the street and they made them scrub the...

NL: Pavement.

HF: Pavement...

NL: Yes.

HF: With water and lye and you would step on it. And like, people like my father, they would, someone would say to him, "Well why don't you go away? You don't belong here."

NL: Oh.

HF: Only...

NL: They made a distinction.

HF: When, yeah, in their mind these were a different Jew.

NL: A different [unclear]...

HF: Yeah. A different, yeah. They...

NL: When...as far as you can remember did you sense anti-semitism in the general population? When was there some penetration of the Nazi movement in Viennese life?

HF: The only thing I remember a little bit, and I was very young at the time, was in 1933 when they had the assassination of Dollfuss.[1]

NL: The Chancellor.

HF: The Chancellor. I remembered that yet vaguely. But otherwise I really cannot recall, except the events that happened in school with the antisemitism.

NL: These religion, after these other religious classes.

HF: After, yeah. Otherwise I really personally did not feel anything. All, the only thing I remember of course, we were aware of the, what happened in Germany due to the fact that my grandparents came to...

NL: Live with you.

HF: To live with us. But prior to that, while Hitler was already in power in Germany, we went to visit them, to Germany.

NL: Did you?

HF: And...

NL: Do you remember what they reported about their own life at the time? I guess you were too young.

HF: No. That I don't remember.

NL: But their lives were not yet changed apparently.

HF: No, no. And as a matter of fact, my uncle from Berlin, who they lived in Berlin too, before they were, they came to visit us also in Vienna nearly in 1936, '37. And there was no problem for Jews to travel. Maybe because they were German citizens. Now see, there is also a distinction between Eastern European Jews and German Jews or Austrian Jews.

NL: Yes.

HF: Now to bring it one step further, my grandfather went back to Germany in 1937, because he wanted to liquidate what he had there. And while he was there, he suffered a heart attack and died. And my mother had no problem going to Germany for his funeral, from Vienna.

NL: From Vienna.

HF: She...went to the funeral and...

NL: No restrictions.

HF: No restrictions whatsoever. And she...

NL: So, you first felt the brunt of antisemitism then after the *Anschluss*, I presume. Or, was this happening before?

[1]Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss assassinated in 1934.

HF: Yeah. Well, the knowledge we had of course through my grandparents, while my grandparents were living with us. I mean, why they left Germany. And...

NL: But you didn't anticipate a takeover? You...

HF: I don't know what my parents anticipated.

NL: You don't know. Yes, yes. You don't know.

HF: I don't know.

NL: Do you remember the *Anschluss* day?

HF: Yeah, the *Anschluss* I remember very distinctly, because it happened on Friday night. And we didn't know anything Friday night. Not even my parents knew anything Friday night. But we had school on Saturdays. And they were, all public schools were open Saturdays. And I remember going down on Saturday morning. I was nine years old at the time. I wasn't even...quite nine years old. I was just a month shy of being, I was, went to the third grade at the time. And I went down, and the first thing, we lived across [from] a girls' school, a girls' high school. And there was the German flag hanging there already. In one night there were all German flags hanging.

NL: I see.

HF: And that was...something strange because I never had seen that. And I came to school, which was only, maybe five minutes' walk from my house, and it was closed that day. And so when I came back, I told, my father even asked me, I remember him asking me, "Why do you come home from school?" And I said, "Well, there, the Germans are here and there is no school." And he was not even aware of it.

NL: Was he surprised?

HF: Yeah. Now, of course there was no, we didn't have radios and television. You did not have all that instant news.

NL: But there wasn't any uproar in the streets?

HF: Not...

NL: Or panic?

HF: Where we lived.

NL: Not where you lived.

HF: We lived, I mean we did not live on the main thoroughfare. We lived on a side street.

NL: But presumably the other Jews in the neighborhood didn't know either?

HF: To the best of my recollection my father and mother were not aware that it had happened, or whether they were aware that things were going on, I cannot, no, I don't know.

NL: Did they seem upset?

HF: At that time? I cannot, all my recollections are that I came home and I told them that the German flags were hanging all over with the *Hakenkreuz* and the school was closed. And that's all I remember really of that particular day.

NL: And then what is your next memory, following the *Anschluss*?

HF: Well, following the *Anschluss* not very long, much later rather, we were not able, the Jewish children had to go to a different school. The...

NL: Oh, then let me ask. Were you able to resume your schooling the following week, and were you able to stay in the same class?

HF: Yeah, no, we stayed in the same class for a short period of time, and then I had to go to a school which was much further away from my house, where only Jewish children went. And that was maybe April of 19-, the *Anschluss* was in March '4-, eh, '38, and this was maybe in April, 1938.

NL: Do you remember if you were upset by that? Or was it just something that as a child you accepted?

HF: Just accepted. The only thing of course, I always heard my father telling me, you know, they would, they would, as people, Jews, were walking the street, they would grab a certain amount of Jews and they would make them scrub the streets and clean the sidewalks.

NL: You saw that?

HF: I don't remember seeing. I just remember my father telling me about it, that he got caught up in these things. And he would travel a lot in the countryside and he could not pursue that any more.

NL: He wasn't able to continue his work.

HF: No, to continue his work, because he wasn't able to travel.

NL: He worked for a Jewish company or...

HF: No, he worked for a non-Jewish company.

NL: Non-Jewish company.

HF: Non-Jewish.

NL: So what sort of work, then, did he do?

HF: I guess he just traveled inside the city. He was not able to go out of the town.

NL: I see. And still able to make a living as far as you knew?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Yes.

HF: For a short time.

NL: For a short time.

HF: And then my next recollection, the, there were a lot of refugees coming to Vienna from the countryside. They were expelled almost immediately, especially around Tyrol. And we had a lot of refugees streaming into Vienna, very shortly after the *Anschluss*.

NL: And what provision was made for them, do you know?

HF: Well, the Jewish community tried to provide for them in every way. I remember we had some who would come to our house for dinner. And we would take them in. They would eat and so on.

NL: So they were somehow absorbed.

HF: They were, yeah.

NL: Do you have any recollection of Jews leaving, or trying to leave the city? Or do you remember your parents discussing it?

HF: Well I remember we all discussed, right away we discussed where to go.

NL: Did you?

HF: Yeah. And one of the things we discussed was, we thought about Uganda. A lot of them were trying to flee to Uganda.

NL: Your parents discussing that too?

HF: Yeah. They were discussing, looking up on the map, where was Uganda and so on. And within...a very short time, I mean, my father made every effort to try to leave Vienna.

NL: So he applied for papers?

HF: Well we, our, actually, we left already in August...1938 we left Vienna.

NL: Oh, you left then, oh.

HF: Yeah.

NL: And where did you go?

HF: Well, we, I don't know, well he was, wanted to leave, and I guess my mother wanted to leave. I remember them selling everything we had. And he had to stand in long lines to get all the necessary exit papers I know. One time he got kicked in his kidneys and he had to be hospitalized for a short time.

NL: Kicked by one of the guards?

HF: Yeah, because he had to stand in line, for days. He had to stand in line just to get all the documentation, permission to leave. Because you could get permission to leave, even if you had no where to go. That did not really matter that much to the Germans.

NL: Well Eichmann was already in charge [unclear]

HF: I mean, that, yeah. I mean, this is not some, certain, some of the things that I recollect. But I recollect that he was standing in line, he would come home late, he had to stand like all day in line, until he got all his papers together. And we left Vienna around the middle of August of 1938.

NL: And did your grandparents leave with you?

HF: My grandfather died.

NL: Oh, your grandfather died.

HF: And my grandmother, she, through the *Anschluss* was, she did not want to stay in Vienna any longer, and she returned to Berlin. She said that within a very short time things happened in Vienna that took many years to develop in Germany, in Berlin. So she decided that's what she wanted to go, she didn't want to stay with us. She insisted on going back to Berlin.

NL: And did she have any place to go to?

HF: Well my, my mother's sister, they lived in Berlin.

NL: I see.

HF: They had, because they left for America in 1939. And my mother had a brother who still was, who left in 1939 for America. So she went back. She just said she, "This is much worse than Germany." She just did not want to stay there. They, so she left for Berlin.

NL: Yes, apparently Eichmann speeded up all of these processes that as you said, had taken years in Germany.

HF: Yes.

NL: Did you hear from her after that, do you know?

HF: Yeah, well, while we were still in Vienna we heard from her. And...

NL: But after you left...

HF: Later we...

NL: Vienna.

HF: Well, when we, we left Vienna in August, 1938.

NL: And where did you go?

HF: Well, we went to Köln, Germany.

NL: Cologne.

HF: Cologne, yeah. Cologne, Germany. And...

NL: Why did you...

HF: Well, it was known at this time, I mean I found out, I mean, that's how we went. Now how my father got the hint of it, I don't remember. That if you bought a ticket, a ship board ticket, to England, you could leave Germany into Holland—even if you had no visa to go into England. As long as you had a ticket to go to England, you could leave Germany. I mean, Germany would let you out. There was no question. And Holland would let you in.

NL: With a ship ticket to England.

HF: With a ship ticket to England.

NL: Interesting.

HF: So, we left. We went to Köln. As far as I remember we stayed a few days in Köln. We went from Köln to Aachen. Aachen?

NL: Right.

HF: And from Aachen we stayed I believe another day or so. And then we crossed the border, I mean, by train, into Holland. And we ended up in Breda. Breda is Holland.

NL: Breda. Holland, yes.

HF: Of course we got, we couldn't take any money out, except ten *Marks*, I believe. And we were all searched on the border. Even though it was a charter it was searched. Everybody was searched. And we just took some, had some hand luggage. That's all we had. And we went into Breda. Now it was known, for some reason, that if you smuggled yourself from Breda—I mean there's no chance of getting to England if you had

no papers—if you smuggled yourself illegally across the border, into Belgium, Belgium did not deport anybody to Germany. Now we could not stay in Holland.

NL: You couldn't.

HF: No. Holland did not absorb anybody, illegally.

NL: That was because of the government restrictions?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: So...

HF: But Belgium...

NL: Belgium?

HF: We ended up in Breda. We spent one night in Breda. And then, I don't know, my father must have made some arrangements with the Jewish committee or somewhere. And we traveled to the border with Holland, with Belgium. Belgium to Holland. And I think, I believe it was by car. We got out of the car and there was a group of people. And we crossed the border on foot, from Holland into Belgium. And soon we were on the other side of the border. That same car picked us up again, and took us to Antwerp.

NL: Antwerp. And...

HF: And we were...

NL: You weren't searched on the Belgian side?

HF: No, we're illegal. We're illegal immigrants.

NL: You were illegal immigrants.

HF: Yeah, well we crossed the border illegally.

NL: But there were no guards.

HF: There were only, there was no guards, I don't...

NL: That you could...

HF: Yeah, we even heard a patrol further away were some soldiers marching. but we just, I mean they were all official smugglers. I know "official," I mean they were paid smugglers...

NL: Paid smugglers.

HF: Who smuggled people from Holland to...

NL: Were you frightened during that time, do you remember?

HF: No, I don't remember.

NL: You had your parents around you.

HF: We had the parents and it was not such a big...

NL: Not so risky. And...

HF: I mean nobody was shot. If they would have caught them they would have sent them back across the border. I mean it wasn't...

NL: But you knew there was no deportation, from Belgium.

HF: People apparently knew, back to Germany.

NL: Back to Germany.

HF: Now you could not go directly from Germany into Belgium, but you could get [unclear] the other way.

NL: And you had to be wise to all that.

HF: Well, I mean, and so we ended up in Antwerp. And once we got to Antwerp, the Jewish Committee or the, would help the people there.

NL: Were there many other Jews from...

HF: Refugee Jews? Yeah.

NL: Who were refugees, yes.

HF: And we could, then you could go to the police in Belgium and get official identification cards, and reside in Belgium, and they would not send anybody back, providing they did not catch you working. You were not allowed to take a job. Because they had high unemployment.

NL: But the Jewish community...

HF: Helped, right.

NL: Provided for you. They provided you with some housing?

HF: Well, they provided with housing the first couple days. But they provided with money.

NL: Money.

HF: People rented their own apartments and...

NL: You found...

HF: The population, yeah.

NL: You found a place to live.

HF: Yeah. People did some odd work or...

NL: Sure.

HF: But not official work.

NL: Not official. And what did Father do?

HF: He was not able to do very much. My mother was able to do more than...

NL: What did she do?

HF: Well, she worked. She did a little, some domestic work for rich, there were a lot of rich Jews in Belgium. She did some baking. She was, she did some, [unclear] she would go and bake cakes, something like that, and then she would do a lot of handy work, like belts and stuff. And my father would sell it, would go out and peddle it like.

NL: Embroidery?

HF: Not, yeah, some sort of embroidery.

NL: Dressmaking?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Dressmaking. Hand, handiwork.

HF: Yeah, handiwork.

NL: And what happened to you? Did you go to school?

HF: Well I thought, yeah, when it, a matter of fact, we went to a very religious school there. They had a very good Jewish day school in Antwerp. And I did not actually lose any...

NL: Any time.

HF: Any time. I went up to the third grade in Vienna, and I picked up right away to the fourth grade.

NL: But you had to speak a new language.

HF: Well, we learned Dutch, which was not that, Dutch is not...

NL: Not too hard for you.

HF: Not too hard, yeah.

NL: And that was the language of instruction in the Jewish school?

HF: Well, half a day was Dutch, and half a day was Hebrew. Of course my Hebrew was not as strong as the children there either, but I had learned some Hebrew in Vienna. But I was able to master that.

NL: And you made some friends at school?

HF: Yeah, yeah. Well, it was a very active Jewish community. They were very helpful to the Jews.

NL: Helpful.

HF: Yeah. A matter of fact I always recall they were, there were women who would work in the kitchen, in soup kitchens—they had maids at home—would come and work in the soup kitchens for the refugees.

Tape one, side two:

NL: ...of our interview with Mr. Herbert Finder. You were saying that the maids of some of the wealthy Jewish families came and cooked?

HF: No, no, the women came.

NL: The women themselves.

HF: The women themselves came who had maids at home.

NL: Who had maids at home.

HF: Maids at home.

NL: Yeah.

HF: They would help then. But most refugees within a very short time had their own apartments and where [unclear], to live somehow and manage.

NL: And did you hear from your grandmother in Berlin during this time, do you know?

HF: I don't really recall, I, whether we did or not. Of course later we had a visit from one, from my mother's brother who left for America to Antwerp. And he, a matter of fact he spent a couple days with us in Antwerp before he came to America. And while we were in Antwerp we applied for visas to come to the United States too, and we actually did receive visas in April, 1940, after we were already in Antwerp for two years.

NL: For America.

HF: Yeah. We had our visas, but we didn't have any money for the ticket, because we were refugees. And...

NL: Your parents couldn't save enough.

HF: No, we couldn't save anything.

NL: They couldn't save anything.

HF: And the way it was done in Antwerp, the HIAS would give people tickets, pay for the tickets to come to America. But visas for America were good for a period of four months.

NL: O.K.

HF: And due that we received our visas in April, 1940, we were like on the list to come to America maybe around July of 1940. But in the meantime, on May 10, 1940, Hitler invaded Belgium, Holland, and France. So that's why we got caught up in that dilemma.

NL: You were saying that you learned Dutch. Was that a language of instruction in the Belgian schools?

HF: Well, Belgium actually divided in two halves. The Flemish section, and the French section.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: Now Antwerp is part of the Flemish section, the northern part of the country, where the official language is Dutch.

NL: I see.

HF: And the southern part of the country, the official language is French. But most people speak both languages there.

NL: So you stayed in the school for several years, then...

HF: Two years.

NL: Until...

HF: Two years. I went there in fourth grade and...

NL: The spring of '40.

HF: The fifth grade, until May 10, 1940.

NL: Now, do you remember any discussions either with your playmates or with your parents about what was happening to Jews in Germany or elsewhere? Or do you think your parents knew?

HF: Well, I believe they knew. I mean, by that time I was getting ten and eleven-year old. The only thing that I remember and which was very misleading to many Jews, the Jews in Belgium would always say, "Well, what happened in Poland and what happened in Germany will never happen here, and can never happen." And that, they had such a lull in them that I don't think any Jews from those countries really made an effort to leave Belgium or felt a threat to themselves due to what's happening in Germany or Poland.

NL: Also, well, I'm wondering, I know in America there was this myth about the invulnerability of the *Maginot* line. Did...of course that wouldn't have protected Belgium.

HF: No, because that's one of the reasons why Hitler invaded the low country...

NL: Right.

HF: Because the *Maginot* line stopped.

NL: Stopped. And so you didn't feel any protection from that. And you didn't obviously expect an invasion [unclear] ?

HF: As a child I don't remember.

NL: But, I think that's true also of the adults.

HF: Yeah, as a child I don't remember that. But that, I only remember that, always the saying by the Jews living there. Now most Jews in Belgium were Polish Jews, that I remember.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: Because in Belgium, unlike other countries, you never really became a Belgian citizen.

NL: Oh, I see.

HF: Because the Jews could have, there were many Jews who lived in Belgium were Polish Jews from twenty years, and even their children, and they never became citizens.

NL: Was it because they didn't want to or they couldn't? You don't know.

HF: I believe they probably could not.

NL: They couldn't.

HF: And...

NL: My understanding is that about half the Jewish population was foreign, those who were Polish, and the other half Belgian born. I didn't, but your impression was that most Jews...

HF: Well, it's hard for me. I mean, the impressions were half...

NL: But that was your impression.

HF: But I only remember it that the difference was, you had different ID cards. They had different ID cards and they were allowed to work and had businesses. But they still were not citizens of Belgium. Now, maybe there were some, but most Jews that I remember meeting were Jews that really came from Poland. Although we had friends that came from Holland. There were Jews who came from Holland and lived in Belgium. They were in the diamond business.

NL: Who emigrated? Oh, oh, who just emigrated.

HF: Yeah, emigrated. But not, I mean it had nothing to do with the Hitler period.

NL: Not...

HF: They emigrated for...

NL: Not out of any urgency.

HF: It must have been economic reasons or what. Or they lived in...

NL: Now, Mr. Finder, did conditions for your father improve within those two years so that he could earn a living a little more easily? Or was work still barred?

HF: Well...

NL: Work was barred.

HF: Work was always barred, I mean officially work was barred.

NL: Officially. So, then he and Mother just had to improvise in order to make it.

HF: Yeah. Yeah, they'd improvise. And of course everything was being temporary because with the hope of leaving for United States and...

NL: Yes.

HF: And you had the visa applied and all of that. So...

NL: Now, what happened to your family at the time of the invasion? Do you remember? You must remember that, sure.

HF: Yeah. Well, at the time of the invasion I remember distinct. The Jews that were German citizens, or Austrian citizens, had to report. And they were all arrested. They probably were con-, the Belgium government was afraid that there were some fifth column among them. So my father of course, being that he had a, [unclear] had a German passport, because when Austria was, after the *Anschluss*, I believe he had, he, from the Austrian passport he became, he got a German passport.

NL: What became part of the greater *Reich*.

HF: Yeah, right.

NL: The greater German *Reich.*

HF: So therefore he was arrested. And he was sent immediately to France, to southern France. All those Ger-, all Germans, he was classified, as far as Belgium was concerned, he was classified as German, and he was sent to southern France.

NL: And he was sent by the Belgians?

HF: Yes.

NL: To work in a work battalion or was it just a deportation?

HF: No, no, it was not a question of work battalion. It was a question of removing all German...

NL: All German Jews. [unclear]

HF: Citizens. Not Ger-, he was then really not classified as Jew, but Jews, but German.

NL: German.

HF: And to remove them from the front, or to remove them any contact. So that he ended up way, way in southern France in a camp, near the Pyrénees. Now I don't remember the name of the camp.

NL: But by himself?

HF: Yeah, by him, all men.

NL: All men.

HF: All men, who were German. Now, with the refugees who came from Germany, like my uncle, my father's brother was there, and he was stateless. He was never an Austrian citizen.

NL: I see.

HF: He was what they called stateless. He was not interned.

NL: He was not.

HF: No, only...

NL: He was allowed to remain in Belgium?

HF: Well, we all left. In other words...

NL: When your father left?

HF: Well, after my father was left, two, three days later, before even the German occupied Antwerp, we fled. My mother, with me and my uncle, my father's, we fled together.

NL: To?

HF: And we ended also up in southern France, within a few days.

NL: I see.

HF: We were never under German occupation in Belgium. We fled to southern France.

NL: So this would have been about May 8th or so?

HF: No, this, no, May 10th was the, this was like May 14th, 15th.

NL: Oh, after the invasion.

HF: Yeah, after the invasion.

NL: After the invasion.

HF: After the invasion, but before...

NL: Before...

HF: The German troops reached Antwerp.

NL: I see. Did you know where your father was?

HF: No. No, we had no idea where he was.

NL: And what made you go to southern France?

HF: Well, we just fled Ger-, we fled the German advance.

NL: But, why not...

HF: And it was...

NL: Why not an effort to get to Paris? Was there something in...

HF: Well...

NL: The southern part that...

HF: That the Ger-, we were, first we were, we were fleeing gradually towards the border of France, from Belgium we crossed into France.

NL: Yes.

HF: But then they just gathered those refugees and put them on trains and just shipped them south. The French...

NL: The French did that?

HF: Shipped all the refugees south.

NL: I see.

HF: Yeah.

NL: I see.

HF: And we, we ended up in a small village near Toulouse.

NL: Do you remember the name of it?

HF: Not where we ended up first, no. No. And there we were the, all the refugees were distributed among the farmers. Each farmer had to take in some, now just, not just Jewish refugees. We were, all refugees were like distributed among the...

NL: Ah, you were mixed, then.

HF: Yeah.

NL: The Jewish and non-Jewish refugees.

HF: Yeah, among the farmers in that area.

NL: And who...did that diversion, the French?

HF: The French government. That was all before actually the..

NL: Before the occupation.

HF: Yeah, before even Hitler reached Paris.

NL: [unclear]

HF: He hadn't even, I mean, we're talking about the very early period.

NL: Is it possible that this was a French resistance movement or do you think it was official government action?

HF: No, this was before. This was while the war was actually still, while the fighting was still going on.

NL: Yes. But not the resistance.

HF: It was just to...have, no, it was just a question of something to accommodate the refugees, what to do with refugees who came from Belgium and Holland.

NL: And what happened...

HF: And northern France.

NL: To you and Mother?

HF: Well...

NL: You went into the home of a farmer?

HF: So we were there, yeah, we were there a few days. And then it was announced that all refugees that were stateless, all the men that were even like stateless, had, were interned in camps. And that's when my uncle, who was with us, my father's younger brother, he was then interned in a camp. And he ended up in the same camp as my father later.

NL: Oh my.

HF: And...

NL: Just a coincidence.

HF: Yeah, well this I guess this maybe was the only camp, which, as far as I remember.

NL: Oh, and you...

HF: And my mother decided she did not want to stay there. And she went to Toulouse. We ended up in Toulouse.

NL: Were you hearing from Father at all?

HF: No. At that time we didn't even know anything yet.

NL: No. So you and Mother went to Toulouse.

HF: Yeah. This was maybe, we were on the farm for a very few days.

NL: I see. Were you treated fairly well by the French?

HF: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course we had, there was a language barrier. We didn't speak French and they didn't speak anything else. But we didn't, she didn't like it and she thought it would be better if we ended up in Toulouse.

NL: She was a city lady.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Yeah. And did you know anyone in Toulouse? Did she know anyone who took care of you?

HF: No, it was just...there again the Jewish Committees started to take care of...

NL: There were other refugees.

HF: Oh yeah, a lot of refugees ending up in Toulouse. And then it was very hard for her to take care of me. I remember we lived in a hotel room. It was with four other women, you know, who also their husbands were in camps. And we got to know this French Jewish farmer. He was actually not French. He came originally from Russia. And he had emigrated from Russia to Palestine, in the '20s. And he contracted there malaria. And after he had malaria he could not stay in Palestine. He married also a woman who was from Odessa, a Jewish woman, and they came then from Palestine to southern France, in the very early '30s, and they established a farm, 25 kilometers from Toulouse. And they took refugees to their farm—part to work, part to take care of them. They were very, they had no children. They were very benevolent people, very. And they took me as a...I was 11 years at this time. And I went...

NL: Mother stayed in Toulouse?

HF: My mother stayed because she wanted to find out what happened to my father and be more in contact. And that was already in May, 1940, that I went to live with these Jewish, Russian-Jewish farmers in France, in a small village in, 25 kilometers from Toulouse.

NL: Did you work on the farm?

HF: Well, we went to school. [unclear] by that...

NL: You went to school.

HF: And when the next school semester started, that was May, the next school semester started in September, I went to school there. And during the, after school hours, I helped on the farm.

NL: What were they growing?

HF: Well, they were growing wheat. But I at the time had to take more care of the cattle. They had cows. I mean, cattle, and I was with them. And then later my mother...

NL: Were there any other children there?

HF: They had no children.

NL: I mean...

HF: No, no. I was the only...

NL: You were the only young person.

HF: I was the only young person there.

NL: And how many other families were there?

HF: Well, he took in people, they would come and stay for a week or two weeks, and they would leave.

NL: Oh, transients.

HF: Yeah, always. Whoever needed a home temporarily, he would take, he would go to the city and pick up people that had no place to go and he would bring them to the farm.

NL: So how long did you stay there?

HF: Well I was actually there for two years.

NL: And you went to school.

HF: I went to school.

NL: A public school?

HF: To public school, a village school.

NL: A village school.

HF: A very, very small village school.

NL: How were you treated there by the other children? Because you didn't know any French.

HF: Well, I learned, you know, children learn the language rather quickly and I learned...

NL: Were they fairly cordial to you?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: They were. They knew you were Jewish.

HF: Yeah, but in the first village we lived, the name was Pigeodran [phonetic], in the department of *Haute Gar* [probably *Haute Garonne*] I think it was. There was actually no other Jews and they didn't know what a Jew was. Those people really did not, there were no French Jews ever lived in those areas, except for the refugees. So for them Jews were something that they had no concept what it actually meant.

NL: But you didn't feel any hostility?

HF: No. Oh no no no. And then...my father was able to leave the camp.

NL: Did Mother finally...

HF: Yeah, she found...

NL: Find out where he was?

HF: Yeah, she found out where he was, and she...was able, she went to where that camp was, and she found out. And...

NL: He was able to be released?

HF: He was released. After. After the war was over they released a lot of those people.

NL: But we're still talking about '40, aren't we?

HF: I mean after the fighting between France and Germany.

NL: Ah, Germany.

HF: That's what we're talking about. That was over. So then there was no more the threat of the German. And I think she had this farmer promise that he would give him employment. So they released him, and he came to live then with me on that farm, with those...

NL: With that family.

HF: With that family.

NL: And what happened to Mother?

HF: Well she decided she wanted to go back to Belgium, if she could salvage maybe our visas, because, with the American Consulate. Because there was still an American Consulate. We're talking before America entered.

NL: Oh, you still had your visa papers.

HF: We had our visa, which was still valid for several months. So she went back to Belgium and a little bit later, and then we never, we still heard from her, but we never saw her again. Which, she got caught up there. And we were in southern France, and she was in Antwerp.

NL: She was in Antwerp. So the last you heard of, or you said your heard from her.

HF: We heard from her because I had a cousin who lived in Switzerland. We could not correspond from Belgium, from Antwerp to France, although it was all, because we were not in the occupied zone yet.

NL: You were in Vichy...

HF: Vichy France. That was still Vichy France at the time. But she could write to...

NL: Switzerland.

HF: Switzerland, and my cousin would forward that mail to us to...

NL: So you heard from her...

HF: Yeah.

NL: In the early, still in early '41 you heard from her?

HF: Oh yeah, yeah. We, I know, we know exactly when she was deported. She was deported in, almost in September, 1942.

NL: Oh. Oh, and you heard from her?

HF: We, and up until about that time.

NL: How did she manage? Was she able to find work?

HF: I have very little recollection of what really happened to her while she was in Antwerp. We got only very sporadic postcards and they couldn't write, it was all symbols and she really couldn't write well. We lost really, we knew she was alive, and...

NL: But you don't know any details. And so you and Father stayed on the farm.

HF: Yeah, until...

NL: Until?

HF: We stayed on the farm until late August, 1942.

NL: August, 1942. And did Father work on the farm?

HF: Yeah, yeah, he worked on the farm.

NL: So he was able to support you.

HF: Yeah, he worked on the farm.

NL: So...

HF: And for what we worked we got room and board and a little money.

NL: A little money. And you were still in school.

HF: And I was still in school.

NL: And by now you're what, 12?

HF: 13.

NL: 13.

HF: Til 1942. And I helped a little bit. I earned a little money. There were some, children were allowed to travel, whereas adults had restrictions, if you know they are not French. So with, we were on the farm and it was, the city already, like in Toulouse, food was scarce.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: So they would send the children to the city, with eggs.

NL: To sell.

HF: Eggs and chicken.

NL: And you sold those things.

HF: Yeah. I mean we knew where to go. And like 11, 12-year-old children would, it was only like an hour's ride by bus. And they would go into the city and then bring money back.

NL: For the farmers. Or...

HF: For the farmers.

NL: For the farmers. I guess you got a little tip or something like that. Was there any entertainment for you? Any swimming?

HF: No, we lived in a very, very tiny village.

NL: A small village.

HF: Yeah, it was maybe 100, 200 inhabitants there. There was some Jewish, a little Jewish refugees there. But it was a very, very, very...

NL: Small.

HF: Small.

NL: Do you remember reading, or Father reading any newspapers there? No. And he was restricted. He couldn't leave the area.

HF: He was not either, he needed travel papers already to leave, to even go from, into the city or anything. That's why they sent children to do those things, because children didn't then need anything.

NL: Didn't need the papers.

HF: Were not examined or...

NL: Now we know that as of October, 1940, there were already anti-Jewish laws passed by Vichy. Do you remember if you or Father were affected by those?

HF: No.

NL: Since you were able to [unclear], your father was [unclear] you worked on the farm?

HF: Well, he worked on the, for the Jewish farmer. So I mean...

NL: But, and you weren't, you didn't feel anything at school particularly.

HF: No, we were, it was such a small school that one classroom took care of six grades, from the first grade to the sixth. That just gives you a picture of the size of the town we lived in.

NL: Did I hear a click? No, it's still going.

HF: And it was very, very tiny, in other words.

NL: But, I suppose you were getting the same instruction that the children elsewhere in France were getting, since...

HF: I suppose, yeah. Yeah.

NL: They had a very centralized school system.

HF: Yeah, it was very centralized, but I mean one teacher took care of...

NL: Six classes.

HF: Of six classes.

NL: And that continued, then, until Septem-, August, '42.

HF: August, '42.

NL: And then what happened?

HF: Well in August '42 now, of course I don't know how much my father knew. I mean, I can't judge it. I didn't, I mean, I just didn't know. One night there was knocking on our door. And we lived...

NL: On the farm.

HF: On the, we lived, we...lived in an isolated, small farm house. Though my father worked on the main farm, we did not live on this main farm. And my father must have had some inkling because he did not open the door so account that he knew something. And he told me to stay. And he fled to the back. And he, still he had two, the farmer had two farms. And he went two, different *arrondissements*. France is divided into...

NL: Neighborhoods.

HF: No, not neighborhoods. Like states here.

NL: Regions.

HF: Yeah, regions.

NL: Arrondissements, yes, regions.

HF: Regions. And where we were we were only like maybe two kilometers from the next region. For, so the people that came after us was the local gendarme. This was not, there were no Germans yet in that...

NL: It was the local Vichy police.

HF: The local Vichy police. And so he did not open the door and they left. I don't know if they knew, they weren't sure whether anybody lived there or not.

NL: Ah, you didn't open the door.

HF: No.

NL: And no one came in.

HF: Nobody came in and he went out through the back and went, and fled into the, apparently there were already, he must have been aware of what was going on.

NL: There were roundups already.

HF: Yeah, roundups. But he left me behind, I guess thinking that they would not bother...

NL: A child.

HF: A child. And then they came back with a warning. And he was not there any more, but they got me.

NL: They took you.

HF: They took me back to the village. We lived like a couple kilometers outside the village.

NL: Did they man handle you?

HF: No, no, no, no.

NL: What did they say they wanted?

HF: They just wanted me to come along. And as a matter of fact they did like, the farmer we lived with, he was in France longer. They didn't arrest him. They only arrested the recent refugees that came.

NL: The foreign, foreign Jews.

HF: Foreign. Even Jews who had fled to southern France from northern France, like there was Jews in the village that came from Paris. They did not arrest them neither. Only foreign Jews they arrested in those days. And so what they said was to us, if my father wasn't going to come back, they just would take me.

NL: They, did they ask if you were Jewish?

HF: Oh they knew.

NL: How did they know?

HF: I guess everybody in the village knew who was who.

NL: Do you remember if Father ever registered? Did he wear a...

HF: No, no.

NL: A yellow star?

HF: Oh no, we, that didn't...exist then.

NL: Oh. But they knew you were Jewish even though.

HF: Oh yeah, but they knew we were Jewish.

NL: They didn't round up non-Jews.

HF: No, no.

NL: Just Jews.

HF: They just, they had a certain specific people. Now I don't know if we were registered in the...what do you call it...

NL: Precinct.

HF: City hall, their precinct, or how they knew. But...

NL: They knew.

HF: I mean, the knew everybody who lived there. I mean, it was such a small area that everybody knew that.

NL: Father must have had you registered at some point.

HF: Maybe he had to register. I don't, that I don't know. But anyway, they said that they would not take me, that they would take me instead of him, if he wouldn't come back. And then somebody from these Jews knew where he was, because they knew he would be on the other farm, and they sent somebody after him and he came back. And then of course they took both of us. But I think one more Jewish family, they were also from Vienna, who lived there. As a matter of fact, he was a rabbi in Vienna.

NL: Where did they take you?

HF: They took us to a camp in southern France.

NL: Called? Gurs?

HF: No, I don't, it started with a V. And I have to...

NL: Viviers.

HF: Viviers. That was Viviers. We were there two days.

NL: There were other Jews there?

HF: Oh yeah, they were strictly, the Germans called it *Sammellager*, collection camps.

NL: Collection camps, yes.

HF: Collection camps. And we were there for a few days and then were sent from there by train to Drancy. So that's, now we're going back to the beginning of the [unclear].

NL: Oh, the terrible times. Where did they tell you you were going? Or did anybody say where you were going when they sent you to Drancy?

HF: I have no recollection.

NL: You don't remember. But were you on the train for a long time?

HF: No, I think that only took like one day.

NL: From Viviers.

HF: From, maybe, I think we left in the evening and probably got there the next morning. It was not that far.

NL: Were you in a very crowded train?

HF: No, there were not, they were still...

NL: Passenger trains?

HF: Passenger transports.

NL: And there, on the train of course you met many other Jews of course.

HF: They were all Jews.

NL: All Jews.

HF: The whole train was all Jews and all refugees.

NL: All refugees.

HF: And like that other family was with us all from that same little village. And they came with us. And don't know if they took another family from that same village or not. I don't remember. [unclear]

NL: Did you get some food at Viviers?

HF: Oh yeah.

NL: Yes.

HF: Yeah, that was, the conditions there were not...

NL: Not too bad.

HF: No, that was a, I wouldn't say bad at all. I don't remember whether we were there maybe one day or two days. I mean there were still no Germans there.

NL: All French personnel.

HF: All French personnel.

NL: And at Drancy too?

HF: At Drancy I would say was strictly, also strictly...

NL: French?

HF: French, yes. Now that was already then in the occupied. Drancy's right outside of Paris.

NL: Yes, outside of Paris. I think we'll stop there, because it's a whole new...

HF: That's a whole new period.

NL: Chapter, yes. And

Tape two, side one:

NL: This is Nora Levin interviewing Mr. Herbert Finder, tape two, side one, continuing our discussion of March 19, 1987. Now, Herbert, would you be good enough to tell us a little about the conditions under which you were taken to Drancy? You were taken from...

HF: Well...

NL: Did we go over that in the last tape?

HF: Yeah, we went. Yeah.

NL: All right. And you arrived in Drancy...

HF: Well, I arrived in Drancy approximately August 31st, 1942.

NL: August 31st, 1942.

HF: 1942.

NL: And...

HF: From...

NL: You were with your father.

HF: I was going with my father, and we came from camp Duvernay.

NL: Duvernay.

HF: Duvernay, in southern France, which was not very far from where we were arrested by the French *gendarmarie*. We lived in France 25 kilometers from Toulouse, in a small village, which is not very far from Duvernay. We were two, and from Duvernay to Drancy, we were transported in regular passenger trains. And if I recall it was like an overnight journey. We left in the afternoon. We were [there] the next day, we arrived in Drancy.

NL: Where did any officials who might have been around tell you you were going, if they told you anything?

HF: At Duvernay?

NL: On the train.

HF: No, I don't recall.

NL: You don't recall.

HF: I don't recall.

NL: And were there many people, many Jews on the train?

HF: On the train? There was only, there was a special, it was not a, it was a special train from Duvernay to Drancy. There was no other passengers on the train except people that were...

NL: In the camp.

HF: Jews, yeah, Jews from that camp.

NL: Were there several dozen? Several hundred?

HF: Oh no, there were no thousands. There were hundreds of people.

NL: Hundreds. So there were several.

HF: Yes.

NL: Many cars.

HF: Oh yeah, there were many cars.

NL: Many cars.

HF: Some passenger cars.

NL: And were you given any food? Do you remember? Or something to drink?

HF: Oh, I don't remember. I don't remember. But there were, I mean the conditions were not...

NL: Not too bad.

HF: Bad. No, there were, I mean, there were no exceptional conditions.

NL: And the conductors were French, the trainmen?

HF: Yeah.

NL: The trainmen were French.

HF: Yeah, were all French, yes.

NL: And so no one as far as you remember told you where you were going, or why you were leaving the camp? Or did your father, do you remember?

HF: I mean, I can't remember exactly what happened...

NL: You can't remember.

HF: At that time.

NL: So you arrived at Drancy and...

HF: I arrived at Drancy August 31st, 1942. And there we were assigned a room and with the other people. And we were there until September 4, 1942.

NL: Just a few days?

HF: Just a few days.

NL: Just a few days.

HF: Yeah.

NL: I see.

HF: Yeah, just a few days.

NL: Just a few days. And you were with your father all that time?

HF: Yeah, I was with my father all that time. A matter of fact, we were together with other people that were arrested at the same time. There was only one family in the village that was arrested that were also Jews from Vienna. The man was a rabbi and he was arrested with his wife and two small children. I remember his name. His name was Hedro. And we were together on the train from Duvernay to Drancy and we were also then shipped together from Drancy to the east.

NL: To the east. Now, do you remember any experiences you had at Drancy?

HF: Well, the only experience I remember at Drancy is we were given food at Drancy and...

NL: By French staff?

HF: It was all French.

NL: All French.

HF: French staff, yeah. French and Jewish staff.

NL: Jewish staff were there too.

HF: I mean, Jewish, yeah. And we were given food and we had a bed to sleep in. And on the last day, I only remember the last day before we left, they cut everybody's hair.

NL: Did they tell you why?

HF: Just to, in order to, for cleanliness.

NL: Sanitary reasons.

HF: Sanitary reasons.

NL: Was the treatment pretty decent in those few days? You don't remember being...

HF: Yeah, there was nothing exceptionally...

NL: Scolded or beaten?

HF: No, no, no.

NL: Something like that?

HF: Nothing like that.

NL: No.

HF: Nothing like that whatsoever.

NL: And you were put on a train at Drancy?

HF: Yeah. And we were actually, we left on September 4th, 1942, and it was the 28th convoy of deported Jews leaving, I mean, of Jews leaving there for the east.

NL: Convoy?

HF: 28th.

NL: From France or...

HF: From France.

NL: From France, the 28th.

HF: Yes.

NL: So presumably there had been 23 others leaving?

HF: 28, 27 others.

NL: 27 that were leaving Drancy.

HF: Before.

NL: From Drancy before.

HF: Yeah, before September 4th.

NL: 4th. Ah ha. And how long were you on the train to the east?

HF: I don't remember exactly whether it was two days or three days. I don't remember exactly.

NL: Did you have a place to sit down?

HF: Yes. Then we were strictly in what the French called cattle cars. I mean there was no more passenger cars. We had, there were cattle cars, and we were together,

not separated. I mean, men, women, children in the same car. There was enough room in each car for, and people still had luggage. And I mean everybody had a suitcase, clothing. Nothing was yet taken away from anybody. Everybody was still allowed to have their personal belongings with them.

NL: Excuse me, I'm going to close the [tape off then on] And you had been told that you were going "to the east"...

HF: Yes.

NL: By people at Drancy?

HF: Yes.

NL: Do you remember any anxiety on the part of your father or any other adults at the time?

HF: Not really. I can't really, all that stands vividly in my mind was I mean not so much my personal reaction, but the children of that family who were with us. And there were small children there. The boy was maybe five or six and the girl was eight or nine then. I remember them being very upset when they cut their hair off, in Drancy before. And I remember the children were more, and it stands vividly in my mind that they were very upset. Personally I don't remember...

NL: Did you see those children on the train?

HF: Yes. We were toge-, a matter of fact we were in the same...

NL: They were still upset.

HF: Yeah, they were in the same car.

NL: They were still upset, yes. And so after two or three days you arrived...

HF: After two or three days, the train had stopped. Although there were several stops in between. But the train just stopped and the doors were opened on the train, from the outside. I mean you could not open the doors from the inside. The doors were opened. And we heard a German voice calling. And in German, a soldier calling all men from the age of 16 to the age of 45, to get off the train. And this was at a, not really at the railroad station. It was rather in a rather deserted railroad siding. And...

NL: Were you in Poland yet, do you think?

HF: Yes. Yes, it was in Poland.

NL: You were in Poland.

HF: And it was in Poland. It was, actually it was what in Germany was called *Oberschlesien Osten*, East Ober...

NL: East, yes.

HF: Yeah. It was not very far from Katowice. And it was, according to records I have, the name of the place was Kosel.

NL: How would that be spelled?

HF: K-O-S-E-L.

NL: K-O-S-E-L. Was this the place that you were looking for on the map?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Did you happen to find that?

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: So anyway, well the name of the place is not that important because it was not really a station. And so all the men, whoever wanted to—nobody was really forced to leave the train. No German soldier went up on the train to check if people got off or not. Whoever went got off the train and had to line up in front of the train. And opposite us was a row of German soldiers, one next to the other, holding up the trains. And we were told to line up one next to the other, and a few minutes later passed by a German S.S. We called him a *Sturmbann-führer*, and he selected the men and told them to, either to go on the other side a little bit away from the train—there was like a little area, assembly area, to go over there—or he told them to go back on the train. And my, I was standing next to my father, and next to that other man who, from that family who was with us. And my father and that other man, a Mr. Hager, he told to go to the assembly area. To me he told to go back up on the train. Because I was only 13 years at the time. Of course I had not told him that, but, I mean, according to...

NL: You weren't very big.

HF: I was not as big or as a sixteen-year-old although I was rather tall for my age all along. I was always tall for my age. But anyway he had told me to go back up on the train. But I mean he did not stop and wait for anybody whether they followed his orders or not. He just kept on going from one car to the other. And so my father immediately left for the assembly area and I just stood on the bottom without...

NL: Going back.

HF: Going anywhere. So then the German soldier standing opposite me, it was maybe a distance of I would say maybe ten feet, fifteen feet, I mean the distance was not very great, and he asked me, in German, "Why don't you go back on the train?" Now I answered him in German because I was, German was my native tongue, that my father went over there in the other area and I would like to go there too in order to be together with my father. I mean, not knowing really why he was sent there.

NL: But you wanted to be with him.

HF: I just, because although more, on the train most of the people were families, my father and I were just the two of us. There was no question of family. So I wanted to just be together with my father. So the German soldier told me then in German, "When the *Ober Sturmbannführer* will come back again, because he had to come back the same way, just tell him, stop him and tell him that you are 16 years old and that you want to go to work." And a few minutes later, after the *Sturmbannführer* returned from, after he had gone all the way to the end of the train he returned. And I stopped him and said, "*Herr Ober Sturmbannführer*, I am 16 years old and I want to go to work." So he said, "Go to work."

And this is how I rejoined my father, who was only a short, I mean a short distance, a few hundred feet away. And then they closed the cars, the doors of the train, and the train just pulled away. And we were just almost like left stranded there.

NL: About how many do you think there were?

HF: I would say probably about maybe 100 people, 100, 150 people.

NL: But most...

HF: Maybe 200.

NL: Most went back on the train?

HF: No.

NL: No?

HF: No, most of the men really, because there was only men between 16 and 50 were supposed to go to come down, so I would say most men were selected, the stronger ones were selected to go to work.

NL: To work.

HF: To work, yeah, and the others were supposed to go back on the train.

NL: And how long did you have to wait at this assembly point?

HF: Oh, I don't know if I, I think this was late in the afternoon. I think we stayed there like a few hours. And then trucks came. And we were taken away to a work, to a camp. And the name of that camp was Tarnovich, in German.

NL: Tarnovich.

HF: Tarnovich. In Polish it's called Tarnosky Gura. That's how it's listed on all maps today. Tarnosky...

NL: Gura. G-U-R-A.

HF: Yeah. Tarnosky Gura. That's a Polish name. In German it's Tarnovich. And this was a work camp under the direction of the...Germans. It was strictly, the function was to work for the German railroad. It was basically a work camp for working on the German railroad.

NL: Were you laying tracks?

HF: Yes. Now, we got to the, in the train administration on the inside was really already pretty well-established, and it was mostly in the hands of Polish Jews, who were recruited at that time from that area and they were like the, in charge of the kitchen. In charge of, there were even women, Polish Jewish women...

NL: Is that so?

HF: Young women, young. And they were in the kitchen working the kitchen and the whole camp only consisted of a few hundred people.

NL: And you were the youngest, do you suppose?

HF: I, yeah, I was the young-, I know. I was the youngest in that camp.

NL: You were the youngest.

HF: And when we went the first day from the camp to the work place, which was outside the camp—I mean every day we had to walk to the work place, which was

along the railroad, and we were building railroad siding, enlarging the railroad station and so on—the man in charge of the project wanted to know what I was doing there.

NL: A Jewish man?

HF: Yeah, the Jewish man, who was, I mean, from the inside man, who was in charge. He said to us, "What are you doing here? You cannot work as hard as the others. I'm going, "From now on you just should stay inside the camp. I don't want you on the work place. But then the German engineer, he was from Düsseldorf. He was in charge of the construction of the railroad. He said, "No. I want this boy to come every day. I want him to come here, on the work place every day, and I want him to carry my equipment." It was like engineering equipment. So that's how I worked there every day. And that...

NL: And Father was actually doing the heavy work...

HF: Yeah.

NL: Laying the tracks.

HF: Laying the tracks. Now the other man who was with us, that Rabbi Hager, he did not last very long. He died within a very short time.

NL: By the way, what happened to his children?

HF: They were...

NL: They went on that train?

HF: They were left on the train...

NL: By themselves?

HF: With everybody else. No, with his wife.

NL: Oh, the wife was there.

HF: The wife was on it.

NL: So they went straight on to Auschwitz, presumably.

HF: Presumably.

NL: Yes. So he perished quickly?

HF: Well, the people that could not work any more, that just got weakened off after, there were, we never knew what happened to them, but they, every few weeks there came a truck and they were loaded up on the truck from the camp and they were sent, the rumor was to Auschwitz to be gassed, in other words, the ones that were not able to continue.

NL: Continue.

HF: Because I remember one day during the winter of '42 I became very sick. And the Jewish camp leader told me, "Don't stay, even how no matter how sick you are, don't stay in the camp because today they will come and pick up everybody who cannot work any more."

NL: Did you get something to eat that could keep you sustained?

HF: Well, we got, actually we only really got one meal a day. We got a piece of, every evening we got a bowl of soup and a piece of, and a portion of bread. And that was our...

NL: That was your sustenance.

HF: Sustenance for the day. Now if we wanted to save part of it for the, bread for the next day, there was really...

NL: Nothing for breakfast?

HF: No, there was one allocation, one daily allocation. And during the day this became a, and breakfast we got, they called "coffee" in the morning, like a black brew, but nothing else.

NL: Nothing to eat.

HF: And the same we got at noontime also, like black brew.

NL: There was nothing in the fields that was growing that you could pick?

HF: Well we were not really working on the field. We were working on the railroad...

NL: On the railroad. No [unclear]?

HF: No. Well, occasionally, I mean, we would get sometimes, civilians would throw food at us or a Polish civilian or even sometimes even some of the German guards would give you, you know.

NL: How about this German who wanted you to carry his equipment, did he ever give you any food?

HF: No.

NL: No? Did you stay by his side most of the time?

HF: No, no, not.

NL: No.

HF: No, and then later I was, many, being that I was the youngest, so a lot of my function was to build fires for the German guards. You know...

NL: In their barracks?

HF: Because it was windy. No, outside like campfires.

NL: No, outside. To keep them warm.

HF: To keep them warm, because I mean we were not inside a camp. In other words we were really outside and it was their function to, every guard was assigned a certain amount of prisoners. We called it [unclear]**.**

NL: So they got cold.

HF: They were cold. That was more, one of my functions, either carry the equipment or to make a fire or to do all kind of different, or go for coffee. I mean, for...

NL: For them.

HF: For, and do all kinds of different chores.

NL: But you didn't get any special favors from them in the way of food?

HF: No, no. On occasion someone would give you something, but it was really nothing that...

NL: And were you near Father most of the time?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Did you see each other every day?

HF: Yeah, mmm hmm.

NL: And you slept in the same bunk?

HF: We slept in the same barrack.

NL: In the same barrack.

HF: In the same barrack. I mean, we got, in other words, food what they thought would sustain the people to do their work, because that was their function.

NL: It was not manufactured work. This was genuine work.

HF: No, no, it was strictly construction work.

NL: This was genuine work. It had a purpose.

HF: Genuine that, yeah it had a purpose for the German railroad.

NL: The German railroad.

HF: It was, no, it was not work that...

NL: Made work.

HF: No, no, it was strictly work for the German railroad to keep the...

NL: Now were the guards S.S. men? Or were the people you came in contact with army people?

HF: It changed.

NL: It changed.

HF: Some of them were S.S. men. Some of them were S.A. men. Some of them were soldiers like on leave from the army, I mean not on leave, like recuperation from the Eastern Front.

NL: The Front, mmm hmm.

HF: Sometimes our guards were very old men. It always changed.

NL: I see, ah ha.

HF: It always changed.

NL: And what about the composition of the workers? Did you, of course many just fell.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Collapsed.

HF: Yeah.

NL: So there was...

HF: Yeah.

NL: I guess a great deal of turnover.

HF: No, it was really, it just reduced itself.

NL: Reduced itself.

HF: Yeah, we did not get...

NL: No new...

HF: No new people came.

NL: Groups.

HF: No new, I don't remember any new group that came to us. Now the inside administration was strictly run by Jews. And the outside leadership, you know, this was all one Jewish *Kapo* responsible for a group than towards the...German authority.

NL: Did you have any contact with the inside Jewish...

HF: Leadership?

NL: Leadership.

HF: Oh yeah, constantly, because they were in charge of distributing the food on the inside.

NL: Oh, they distributed the food.

HF: Yeah, yeah. There was no German...really involved...

NL: I see.

HF: In the administration of the camp whatsoever.

NL: Did the Jewish people inside eat better than you did, as far as you could see?

HF: Oh yeah, well, sure, they had access to the kitchen. They were over, they had...

NL: So they didn't share?

HF: No, no, they had all the food, I mean, it's, I mean if X amount of food was given for the camp, they would take whatever they wanted and distribute the, they were in authority charge.

NL: And they were mostly from Poland?

HF: Yeah, they were mostly from Poland, from that area. They were really from that area.

NL: From that area. All right, and did you get any rumors, did you hear any rumors, any reports about what was happening outside your own little area?

HF: The only...

NL: Any news or...

HF: The only thing we heard is what sometimes the German soldiers would tell us. Now we, for example, we knew about the German defeat at Stalingrad.

NL: Did you?

HF: Because the German soldier would tell us or, you know, especially when I would build a fire for them and standing and I had the advantage that I spoke German, because very few people spoke German. Because most, all the transports that came was from western Europe. So not many spoke German. So, I mean...

NL: That was an advantage for you.

HF: It was an advantage.

NL: And did you get the feeling that they realized that this was a very great defeat for them?

HF: Well, the only one recollection I have was of this German S.A. man telling me that they really feared the Russians. They did not want to be captured by the Russians, because they knew of the atrocities that the Germans committed while advancing on the

Russian front. And the example he gave me was they would tie people around the tree and then douse them with water, I mean, in the wintertime in the cold of the winter and the people would just freeze up.

NL: Freeze. Yeah.

HF: And we also suffered tremendously from the cold, because the problem was all the time that we worked outdoors all the time. And whenever we came back, we had to stand for hours in front of the barrack for the count to come out. Now...

NL: You didn't get any special clothing for the winter?

HF: No, our clothing was very, very...

NL: Did you have boots?

HF: No, our clothing was very, very minimal.

NL: Just shoes.

HF: As a matter of fact, at that time we still had our civilian clothing.

NL: I see.

HF: We were not even issued any clothing, whatever people brought with them. But eventually people died and it became that one took the clothing from another and...

NL: Did you have a coat?

HF: Yeah, we had a coat, yeah. And what I was gonna say, now there was a chance, people didn't attempt to, but we were not guarded as heavily that some people could not escape.

NL: I see.

HF: But it was made clear that for everybody that was missing, a certain amount of, would be shot on sight. I know one time really somebody was missing and every tenth person in the row that was standing, they would just pull them out and they would shoot them. So I mean there, so there was a big deterrent about escaping. And the second biggest deterrent was that there was a reason for them to send western Jews to Poland for work camp because nobody knew the lang-, people didn't know the language, didn't know the area. They didn't know where they were. So that was the other biggest deterrent. And we were in that particular camp for about six months, until the Spring of 1943. In 1943, they took everybody that was left in that camp and they liquid-, they closed that camp down. And they sent us, including the Polish Jews that were in, in autho[rity], they were in charge. And they sent everybody to a work camp in Sosnowiec. Now Sosnowiec is just outside of Katowice. Now this was not a very great distance. We, I think only, maybe an hour or two hours.

NL: May I ask, was the work on the railroad finished?

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: No, I don't know by what decision they decided all of a sudden to move.

NL: I guess the moving of the front?

HF: No, no, no, no.

NL: The victory at Stalingrad made some change?

HF: No.

NL: No? Well, all right, so you...

HF: I really don't know why they...

NL: They may not have had a good reason either. Sometimes they were just...

HF: Because the camp at Sosnowiec was basically the same thing.

NL: I see.

HF: With all that, but there we was already in established camp. Or maybe they didn't have enough people left there to do any productive work. I just don't know.

NL: So you resumed the same kind of work.

HF: We resumed the same general type of work. We were in a little camp. It was also a few hundred people, in barracks, in Sosnowiec. And every day we were taken by train to Katowice.

NL: To Katowice.

HF: Katowice, yes. And there were, we worked at the main railroad station in Katowice. And we were also building, and we worked in...

NL: Stations.

HF: Building a railroad station. There was...

NL: And then you were doing heavier work?

HF: Then we were doing heavy work, yeah.

NL: But you personally did not.

HF: Yeah, then I was already doing heavier work. And basically, the purpose of that was to build supply lines to the east for the German troops. Now we saw many, while work on the main line we saw many German troops transferred, going east.

NL: Going east.

HF: Yeah, we saw many what the Germans would call *Lazarett* trains, *Lazarett*, hospital trains.

NL: Hospital.

HF: Coming west.

NL: *Lazarett*.

HF: *Lazarett*, yeah. And we also saw many movements of *Volksdeutsche*, from Russia, moving back west.

NL: West.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Interesting, yes.

HF: So due to the fact that we worked on those main lines, we always saw that all those trains were going...

NL: Traffic...

HF: Traffic going all different directions.

NL: Did you have, did you hear any rumors or reports about Auschwitz or the fate of Jews in the east?

HF: No. Well, we were in the east, actually, but we did not...

NL: But you didn't know what that meant.

HF: No, we were...

NL: The trains going "to the east."

HF: No.

NL: You didn't know where they were going to.

HF: No, no, remember we did not see any trains of Jews going, we did not see.

NL: Oh, and you didn't hear about those?

HF: No, we did not hear about it, not to my recollection.

NL: And at Sosnowiec you also were in the company of Polish Jews? These were...

HF: A few. Yeah, but most of the Jews, they also were from the west.

NL: Ah, and how about the...

Tape two, side two:

NL: This is tape two, side two, continuing our talk with Mr. Finder. Was the food any better here, Herbert?

HF: No, it was just as bad, the same.

NL: The same thing.

HF: It was the same thing. There was not really, just that it was a different location and I think that it was more concentrated. We worked more, the whole camp more worked in one general area. So we had less contact with civilians, with Polish civilians, or German civilians, than we had in Tarnovitch. And the administration was a little bit more cruel.

NL: More cruel.

HF: Yeah, more cruel. But basically we got one ration of food a day, and that was supposed to last us until the next...

NL: The next day.

HF: Next, every evening.

NL: Did you suffer ill health besides your loss of weight?

HF: No...

NL: Were you or your father ill during any of this period?

HF: No, no.

NL: No.

HF: But many people, I mean, many people died through lack of food, but basically, I mean, the population in the camps decreased continuously.

NL: And did you get new transports to this camp or was it just a general thinning out?

HF: I, no, no, it was just a general thinning out, a continuously thinning out of people that perished. I mean they were beaten on the work if you didn't move fast enough. They were beaten continuously. And as you got weaker, as we got weaker, your condition became worse, because you could not keep up with the other people.

NL: Yes, yes.

HF: And we were there until November, 1943. And in November 1943, the camp was also dissolved and we were put on a train and shipped to Birkenau. So that was then our first experience with Birkenau.

NL: By train or again by truck?

HF: By train.

NL: By train.

HF: By train, yeah. But that was only, also only, it was only a very short distance away. Now whether at that time they dissolved all those little labor camps or not, I don't know. But from there we, when we arrived in Birkenau we arrived there at night, in the late evening at night. But there was no selection because these were already all only men,

only working men. In other words, it was not a transport that came with wives, women, children and so on. All I remember that we were transferred into Birkenau at night and were put in the barracks, and there we got our tattoo.

NL: Were you whipped off the platforms by the guards? Did you see Mengele?

HF: No, there was no selection. There was no guards. They were, yeah, we were with the dogs, guards, it was Germans with dogs mainly. And they were, chasing for barracks, where we were...

NL: Which had already been occupied? Or was it an empty...

HF: No, no, it was just an empty, another barrack not occupied. But it was a barrack where we received a tattoo on our hand. Everybody in Auschwitz, rather Birkenau, got their tattoo, their number. And I have a number 160,440, which was a consecutive number given at the time and my father had 160,441. And...

NL: Were you still with the group from Sosnowiec?

HF: Yeah, yeah.

NL: Basically.

HF: Basically we were, but then we were, split up and made into smaller groups and put into barracks, large, we had already very large barracks. [phone; tape off then on] O.K., so we arrived in Birkenau. After [unclear] tattoo. We were chased into...

NL: The very large barracks.

HF: The very large barracks and everybody just had to find an empty space. Because it was, they were, the bunks were three...high and took three people wide. We always laid in the same bunk with three people wide and three people high. And that was our first experience to...

NL: It must have been very cold by this time then.

HF: It was around the beginning of November, 1943. Now, in Birkenau we were not assigned to any work force. We were just staying there. Every morning we were chased out of the barracks and we either had to do calisthenics outside and, or we had to roll in the mud, or we had to go out and carry stones from one area to another area. Just busy work. And mostly were chased by Germans with dogs, to hurry up from one area. I mean, and then another group would pick up the stones again and this was a constant harassment and constant, I mean not like before, with work, productive work. This was mainly, like taken out of Birkenau and carry stones or...

NL: Senseless.

HF: Senseless.

NL: Senseless.

HF: Yeah, and continued with chasing with dogs, and rushing around back and forth. And this lasted for about, we were there about three weeks.

NL: Did you get any information about what was happening on the outside world from any of the prisoners?

HF: No, there we were very isolated.

NL: I see.

HF: In Birkenau nobody really worked. Too much. And I mean we saw, we saw the crematoriums.

NL: Did you.

HF: And we knew about the gas. Then we knew already about the gas chambers.

NL: Did you?

HF: From the inmates.

NL: This was the first, first time.

HF: This was our first experience.

NL: First time.

HF: Because we could see the smoke. I mean we were right in the middle of this large camp.

NL: The crematoria were close enough that you...

HF: We could, yeah...

NL: So that...

HF: We were right...there. We were right inside that area. We could see the smoke around. But we didn't see any, I never saw any trains arriving, or any selection or anything like that.

NL: Did anyone tell you where you were going or what would happen to you?

HF: In Birkenau?

NL: In Birkenau.

HF: No. Nobody really knew how long this would last or what would happen. Nobody really knew anything. And after three weeks, and we got assembled every day, every night we had. In mornings we had assembly. Night assembly. And one evening assembly they just called out that these and these names should line up on the other side. And my name and my father's name was among that list that we had to line up on that other side. And it was many people from our transport from Sosnowiec. And they were, again, they were mostly Jews that originally came from western Europe. And we didn't know why we had to line up. In other words, we had to line up there and we were not allowed back into the barracks. And then we had to walk to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was an adjoining camp to Birkenau. And we walked to Auschwitz and Auschwitz, we were given new clothing. We were given clothing. We were shaved. We were put...

NL: Your hair hadn't been shaved? It had been shaved.

HF: It had been, yeah, but I mean they shaved again, yeah.

NL: Another shave, yeah.

HF: We were shaved again, were given new clothing, and we were to go to take showers there in the shower area, to take showers. And we stayed there one night.

NL: Let me backtrack for a minute. Did you have a chance to bathe in the other places at all? Did you get any soap at any time?

HF: On occasion.

NL: On occasion.

HF: But very, very, very seldom.

NL: Seldom.

HF: Yeah. Most of the time we undressed on the outside, went in the shower. Even in the middle of winter no matter how cold it was we always undressed on the outside, left our clothes on the outside, went inside, showered, came out again, put on our clothes again.

NL: Yeah. But now at Auschwitz you got it, was it hot water?

HF: I don't remember if it was hot water or cold water. Anyway we were supposed to shower. We had to [unclear] in and, I mean it was always under a lot of commotion. And then we were given some food. And we slept there one night in the barrack. And we stayed there one night. And we were separated from the other people from that camp, except the ones, the Jews and the *Kapos* are the ones that were in charge. And we stayed there one night. And the next night, the next day, rather, we were put on trains and shipped out. And then we were shipped out to Warsaw.

NL: To?

HF: Warsaw. Warsaw.

NL: Warsaw. And now this is...

HF: This was November of 1943.

NL: Still November of '43.

HF: Yeah, we were only three weeks.

NL: Three weeks.

HF: At, it was, to the best of my recollection it was late November, 1943.

NL: Late November. And now you're part of a *Kommando* to clean up the ghetto?

HF: Yeah. Now when we arrived in Warsaw, there were already there five thousand men from Auschwitz were sent to Warsaw already earlier, that fall. And they already had set up barracks. Now this was in...

NL: In the ghetto or...

HF: We were right inside the ghetto.

NL: Inside the ghetto.

HF: Inside the ghetto.

NL: Had you heard at all about the Warsaw Ghetto?

HF: No, no, no. We didn't know.

NL: Nothing about the revolt, for instance.

HF: No, no, no.

NL: What did you find, besides the barracks?

HF: In the ghetto?

NL: In the ghetto.

HF: Well, actually, it was like two, it was a large, a small camp inside a large camp. In other words, our barracks were surrounded by walls, with barbed wire on top, with guard towers, and Ukrainian soldiers guarding them.

NL: Did you see any of the rubble of the destroyed buildings?

HF: Well, yeah...

NL: Yes.

HF: I will come, now, then, this was inside the ghetto. The ghetto, again, was around, surrounded by the other wall. So we had a small camp inside a large camp, which was really the ghetto. We never got out of the ghetto. Every morning we walked out, we were sent out or, out of...this camp, into the ghetto area...

NL: Into the ghetto area.

HF: Under supervision by...

NL: Ukrainians.

HF: No, we actually were not guarded then. Because the whole thing was one big camp. The ghetto was one big camp, but at night we had to...

NL: Go into your smaller one.

HF: Into the smaller camp. And basically it was, again the inmates themselves would had risen to higher positions, who led the people to work, who got their...

NL: Rations?

HF: Orders.

NL: Oh, orders.

HF: Who got their orders from the Germans. But all administration—I want to emphasize—all administration for all the camps up to now, and even later, was always done by inmates.

NL: And in your case, Jews.

HF: Yeah, mostly. Now the only, the first time we were exposed to non-Jews was in Birkenau, in Auschwitz and in Warsaw. In Warsaw we had a contingent of German non-Jews, who were also inmates of the camp.

NL: I see. These were political prisoners do you think, or...

HF: Some were political, yeah. We were living in the same barracks, but they were in charge. In other words, they were given the administrative positions. They were in charge of the barracks, they were in charge of the camps, they were in charge of the work details.

NL: Rations.

HF: Of the rationing, of the food, of the kitchen.

NL: And how did they treat you, Herbert?

HF: Well, they, we were almost equal except for their position. I mean they were *Kapos*. Actually, the worst *Kapos* were the Jewish *Kapos*.

NL: Is that so?

HF: The Jewish *Kapos* were responsible for many deaths and more than the Germans, from German *Kapos*.

NL: How do you account for that?

HF: We were, suffered much more viciously from Jewish.

NL: In these other labor camps?

HF: Yeah, in these other labor camps.

NL: More beatings?

HF: Yeah, well, there was no, in the other labor camps there were no non-Jews. Everything was under Jewish administration, up to the outside world, of course the engineers, the people in charge of construction were non-Jews. But everything else was done...

NL: I wonder if there was some cultural antagonism, Polish Jews against western?

HF: No, some of them really were not Polish Jews. There were some German Jews there.

NL: Who also were...

HF: Yeah, yeah, it was, you know, that they wanted to protect their status. This was their status, was guaranteed them along with survival.

NL: And if they were harsh they would last longer.

HF: Yeah, yeah, it was basically to gain the favor of the Germans. And many German soldiers were very, not very impressed with them, really did not like them too much, because of their, I mean, they did not, could not see that the Jew should, should really...

NL: Show that much power or authority?

HF: Power and authority. Now I mean I'm not talking about the S.S. who was in charge of it. I'm talking mainly about German soldiers guarding, on guard duty, not the S.S.

NL: Not the S.S.

HF: Who was in charge of the...

NL: Camp itself, yes. Now...

HF: Now...

NL: Oh, excuse me, go ahead.

HF: Now in Warsaw the Germans that were in the camp were mostly, they were different categories. There were some that were old political prisoners that had been in prison since 1933, and who also, very few had survived down the road. Then there were just...

NL: So-called anti-socials?

HF: Anti-socials, yes.

NL: Yes.

HF: They were people that were thieves on the outside, criminals.

NL: Did you encounter some homosexuals?

HF: Homosexuals, yes.

NL: And they were all mixed?

HF: All mixed.

NL: All mixed.

HF: All mixed.

NL: And of course many non-Jews.

HF: Yeah, well, they were a smaller portion of the camp. They were in, and the reason was, what some of them had told me why they were there, because that if they had gotten a prison sentence—the anti-socials; I'm not talking about the politicals...

NL: No.

HF: During Hitler's regime, if they were several years in prison, afterwards that he would not let them back out into the...

NL: Regular society.

HF: Into the society. But were sent to concentration camps. You know, some prisoners, they went to concentration camps. And they were, because they were Germans they got a little better treatment. They got a little more authoritative treatment, because they had the more food.

NL: Did they get better, they did get better food.

HF: They had, well, it was like everything else. I was like, a certain amount of food was given by the Germans for everybody. And whoever was in charge took care of himself too.

NL: It was sort of a trade-off, yeah. Was the food here at all better for you?

HF: In Warsaw?

NL: Mmm hmm.

HF: Warsaw was one of the very poorest conditions that we had.

NL: Oh my.

HF: Yeah. First of all the winter was very cold. And from 5,000 that were there in November, by January-February it was only like 1,000 left. And this was due to a typhoid epidemic.

NL: Typhus.

HF: Yeah. Of course there every, there there was not no difference whether it was German or Jews or I mean, typhus didn't...

NL: Everybody, well...

HF: Know any difference.

NL: Did you encounter any Polish civilians during this time?

HF: Yes, that was, I met, during the day it was Polish civilians were inside...

NL: In the walls?

HF: Inside the big camp. It was inside the ghetto. And they were also there for the same function of cleaning up the camp.

NL: Now was this in...

HF: And then we got some news then, but of course...

NL: News.

HF: And...

NL: What did they tell you?

HF: Well, not, see the news was that, very few of them could speak anything but Polish. And most of the...

NL: Inmates.

HF: Inmates did not speak Polish. Now, my father was one of the few who did speak Polish.

NL: Ah ha.

HF: And as a matter of fact, many of the Germans sort of...

NL: Used him.

HF: Used him to interpret, because he originally had come from Poland and migrated to Vienna. And then of course he became a western. See, the Germans for some reason did not take into consideration that among those western Jews might be some Polish Jews. Or maybe they did, maybe they just, or something. So many of the German *Kapos* used him to relate to the Polish civilization. That's when we found out what really happened in Warsaw during that time and what happened in...

NL: Some of the civilians told you about the...

HF: Yeah.

NL: Destruction of the ghetto, for instance?

HF: Yeah, they told us about it. Well, we saw the destruction because we were among the [unclear]

NL: Yes, you saw the rubble.

HF: Yeah, we were inside the rubble.

NL: And so, and then you knew that there had been some resistance.

HF: Yeah, yeah, we, then, yeah, then we knew exactly.

NL: Did any of the civilians bring any food to you?

HF: Well, they would bring if you could pay for it.

NL: And how were you supposed to pay?

HF: Well, at first the first ones that came before us, did find some things in the old ghetto yet while cleaning up, and they would trade it with them. Now later, the later one, well, it was, you, if it was early sometimes you'd find something. Sometimes you would steal something. You would always, they would bring, there was, in Warsaw itself for some reason there was plenty of food available.

NL: Is that so?

HF: Yeah, because they would bring in, I mean the Germans had money. Somehow they were, and they would trade...

NL: They would spend it.

HF: Would trade with the *Volksdeutsche*. If you had *zlotys*, well, their currency, they would bring you white bread, salami, whatever you wanted. But most of the Jewish inmates didn't have any money. They had nothing. Now one thing happened which saved my father's life and my life actually later was that he had some gold teeth. And he would, he extracted them and would sell them to the Poles.

NL: He could do that himself?

HF: Well some way that was done, you know, like you had those gold crowns. Of course, although the German had registered everybody that had gold crowns. But at that point nobody really worried that much about it.

NL: So he used that as a bargaining chip?

HF: Yeah, for...

NL: For some food.

HF: Yeah, for money, and then the money you would get...

NL: The money.

HF: But I mean, I'm really getting ahead of it, because like I said, most of the camp died of the typhus epidemic. Not most, but almost three-quarters of the camp died.

NL: And you fell ill too?

HF: I had typhus. My father had typhus.

NL: Were you able to go to any kind of clinic?

HF: Well there were barracks, but they just put the sick people. Now people did not really die from typhus. How did the typhus spread? It spread because you didn't get any change of clothes for two months. No change of clothes. No washing. There was no facilities whatsoever. And so typhus was spread by lice, and that's how it spread. Now, most people did not die from the typhus. They died afterwards. Because everybody got so weakened from it that unless you had opportunity to get some extra food, you could not get any...

NL: [unclear]

HF: So that's when my father would go with gold teeth and we got a little bit extra food and somehow you survive. And many of the Germans died.

NL: Is that so?

HF: Proportionately even more than the Jewish, because they were stronger. They were bigger, you know, because they had more. And the old saying, "The bigger you are the harder the fall," and that's exactly, it happened very truthfully because bigger people need more food. So they also, and...

NL: Also. Oh. Now, when you say you were there to clean up the ghetto, what did that mean, actually? What did you do on any given day?

HF: Well, basically we were going out there where the buildings and clean up brick by brick and we would clean the bricks, and then they would ship the bricks out somewhere. That was basically to clean the bricks, to clean the bricks.

NL: To send them to Germany, presumably.

HF: I don't know what...

NL: You don't know.

HF: And there were a lot of Poles working in the ghetto too. They worked, to tear down the walls, because it was dangerous. They had those walls of the buildings standing and just single walls. And that was basically the function.

NL: You didn't find any Jews in any bunkers?

HF: No, no.

NL: Or did you hear about any Jews who survived in bunkers?

HF: No, that was so much later. I mean the uprising was in 19-...

NL: No, I mean, presumably there were still some Jews left in the ghetto after May of '44. But you're speaking now of November.

HF: November, right. From November there.

NL: Yeah. And so you stayed in the ghetto for how long?

HF: We were there until April, '44. Not April, I'm sorry. Until July '44.

NL: July '44.

HF: July '44.

NL: Now, how long was your father sick?

HF: With typhus?

NL: Yes.

HF: Oh, we were all sick a few days, a week. I don't even remember. The time, I must have been delirious at the time because I don't even remember what happened to me.

NL: You were delirious.

HF: Yeah, during that time.

NL: Did anybody give you any kind of care?

HF: No, there was no care.

NL: There were no women around?

HF: No, there were no women.

NL: This was an all male...

HF: This was an all, there was no women in the camp at all.

NL: And no medicine.

HF: No medicine, no, no.

NL: No medicine.

HF: There were some...

NL: So...

HF: Doctors, inmate doctors. But I mean they were...

NL: They couldn't help you.

HF: No, no.

NL: So it was just your own body that fought it.

HF: You just survived it. Yeah, you survived or you didn't survive. And that's why so few survived.

NL: So you were ill probably for several months?

HF: No, no. Typhus lasts only a couple weeks.

NL: But when you recovered, your...

HF: Yeah, the recovery was, yeah.

NL: Then you were very weak.

HF: Yes, very weak.

NL: Debilitated. Were you able to somehow work after that?

HF: Well, the ones that were able to work, worked. And the others just died.

NL: So you and father eventually...

HF: We survived.

NL: Went back to work?

HF: Yeah.

NL: And stayed at this work until July, '44.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Now were you getting any news about German defeats on the fronts?

HF: Well, yes. We knew pretty much what was going on through the Poles that were, entered the camp. But there the camp was replenished. See, after we were down to a few, we got new transports from Auschwitz all the time. So the population remained fairly constant in Warsaw, I mean the camp population.

NL: The camp, yes.

HF: After a while we got Hungarian Jews. We, there we got the first transport of Hungarian Jews in '44 that came to Auschwitz, to Warsaw, from Auschwitz. And...

NL: Were you getting any more news about what was happening at Auschwitz?

HF: Well I guess by that time we pretty knew...

NL: You knew.

HF: We knew what was going on.

NL: You knew what was happening, yes. And were you able to communicate with the Hungarian Jews at all?

HF: Well, we were all in together. I mean, whoever spoke German. They spoke German and...

NL: They spoke German.

HF: German, and...

NL: Was there some sort of communication or did you keep separate from them?

HF: No, no, it was all, everything was...

NL: All together.

HF: Wherever there was room in the barracks. There was really no separation.

NL: No cultural...

HF: No, no, no.

NL: Difficulties.

HF: No difficulties.

NL: So you stayed there until July of ‘44 and then?

HF: Well, in July of ‘44, we were evacuated from, I mean they closed up this whole camp, in...

NL: Again, it was...

HF: That happened when the, we heard already the bombings from the Russians, the artillery of the Russians when they advanced towards Russia. So the Russian Army was getting very close. And they were fearing, then that’s what started the revolt of the Polish, Warsaw Revolt started at that time. One thing I just want to bring out. Before, while we were still in Warsaw, we knew about the atrocities that the Germans did in Warsaw. We heard that every time they would, that a German would be killed, for example, they would just arrest 50 Poles anywhere on the streets of Warsaw, and they would bring them next to our camp, inside the ghetto was the old Polish prison. And there they would shoot them.

NL: Was that Paviak?

HF: Paviak, yes.

NL: Paviak.

HF: It was right next, Paviak was right next to our camp. And they would, and then, well we had to dispose of the corpses. And as a matter of fact they were, at that time they were building even a crematoria in the, in our camp.

NL: Is that so?

HF: But that was never really completed. But the way we had to bury, and we had to burn all the corpses. I mean, there was a special detail that did that. They would lay a layer of wood and a layer of corpses and then just douse them and we had like a pile that would burn for days. And that was continuously burning. But that was one of the functions that all the Poles that were killed by the Nazis were brought into the, our camp. And not to the inside of the camp because it was into the ghetto area, into the larger area. And there we had to dispose of them. As a matter of fact, one time one of the Poles that worked with told my father, I mean I could not talk to him, that the day before his son was caught up in one of those...

NL: Conflagrations?

HF: Well, yeah, in one of those, where they would arrest a...

NL: Roundups?

HF: Roundups.

NL: Roundups, yes. But that was before...

HF: That’s how they terrorized. That’s how they terrorized the population against revolting.

NL: So this was of course before the Warsaw Revolt.

HF: Yeah, that was before. That was during the Spring of...

NL: The Spring.

HF: Yeah, so we, all the time that we were in Warsaw. And then when they were feared of the revolt, of the Polish Revolt, they closed up, and we walked out of, the German...guards and the prisoners, everybody just walked out, out of Warsaw. And we walked for three days.

NL: Oh my. Mmm.

HF: And we walked.

NL: West?

HF: West. We walked to Lodz.

NL: To Lodz. Did anybody tell you where you were going?

HF: No, no. We just...

NL: Did you get anything to eat on this walk?

HF: Well, no, I don't think we got anything to eat. We didn't get any water. Water was the biggest thing because it was July and it was very hot. And then we walked on the road and just, and whoever didn't keep up, they would just beat them or shoot them and I know after a day or two we arrived at the, I mean at night we didn't walk, because they were worried, you know, they just, they put us inside a big field and they just would surround the field and...

NL: Also, the German guards?

HF: The German guards. The German, I don't know whether it was S.S. at that time.

NL: Did you get any...

HF: We might have gotten some food.

NL: Some food from the civilians on the way?

HF: No, no, no. This was all pretty well isolated.

NL: Isolated.

HF: Isolated. And I remember once we came to a river. Everybody just rushed into the river.

NL: To drink from it.

HF: To drink from the river. And the ones that got too far away they would just shoot them. They got too far down in the...

NL: And I'm sure lots of people got sick from the water.

HF: And then the next night, some miracle, we camped in the field and people would start digging. There must have been very low ground water because after we dug only a few feet, there was water. And everybody could, that was the first time everybody could just drink as much as they wanted because there was just so much water. I mean, actually we dug with spoons. We had a little spoons. All we had was little spoons and we could dig holes.

NL: But no food.

HF: No food. And that lasted for about, after the third day, we arrived at the railroad station. And then we were put on trains and, big cattle trains, and shipped to Dachau. And that was a journey of several days.

NL: Several days.

HF: And that was in July 1944.

Tape three, side one:

NL: This is tape three, side one, continuing our interview with Mr. Herbert Finder. Today is March 26, 1987. So, Mr. Finder, would you be good enough now to tell us a little about this trip to Dachau?

HF: Well, the trip in the train from Lodz to Dachau lasted approximately three days. We received a little bit of food before boarding the train. But during the trip we didn't receive neither water nor food. It was in the middle of July during very hot weather. We were in very cramped conditions, in what the Germans call trains for animals, or cargo cars.

NL: Were you able to sit down? Did you have to stand?

HF: We had, we, no, we had room to sit in cramped conditions. But we, many inmates died during that trip.

NL: From thirst and exhaustion?

HF: From thirst, exhaustion, and really, but we had nothing to do with the corpses. The corpses remained inside the car. And actually, it showed how dehumanized people can get. We made benches out of the corpses, and we sat on them, just to get a little bit additional space. And this trip, like I said, lasted about three days, when we arrived.

NL: Were you able to get off from time to time to relieve yourselves?

HF: No.

NL: No.

HF: No, it was just in the corner of...

NL: The car.

HF: Of the car. No, nobody got off the train or off the car during that whole three-day period.

NL: And there were Nazi guards inside your car, during this?

HF: No. The cars were just, they were...

NL: They were sealed.

HF: Yeah, sealed.

NL: Sealed.

HF: But there were like...

NL: Openings.

HF: Two little openings, not windows. Two little openings.

NL: Did you have any idea where you were going, in what direction?

HF: We knew we were going towards Germany. We were, in other words we were heading west. I mean, by...looking out sometimes through those little portholes.

NL: Did you get any information about the, what was happening in the world from those Poles?

HF: No.

NL: Any retreating soldiers or...

HF: No.

NL: Evidence of bombing? Nothing like that?

HF: No, not at that. That was in 1944.

NL: Did you know Germany had already lost the war?

HF: No.

NL: You didn't know that either.

HF: No, we didn't know that. We came from the east towards the west. So there was no destruction. I mean there was no bombing coming from east to west. Because the Americans already, although they had just about landed, were coming from west to east. We were 1,000 miles away. I mean...miles away.

NL: But a good part of Germany had been bombed earlier. You didn't see any evidence of that?

HF: No, that was, well I don't recall, no.

NL: It must have been dreadful, three days in July.

HF: So when we arrived in Dachau, everybody arrived in a very, really a very weak and weary condition and even the German administration of Dachau themselves were almost appalled by the conditions that was, we arrived. Because just the so-called labor working groups that had arrived, they were themselves appalled by the condition that we arrived in.

NL: How did you know that?

HF: We heard remarks by the guards that took over our trains.

NL: Did they give you something to drink right away?

HF: Yeah, when we, well yeah, when we arrived in Dachau, they gave us new clothing. They gave us food and water. And we stayed in Dachau for approximately three weeks, in Dachau itself, in the concentration camp of Dachau.

NL: And these were now German guards.

HF: Yeah.

NL: German supervision.

HF: German.

NL: No longer Jewish.

HF: No, this was...

NL: No, this was German. And did you see non-Jews there too?

HF: In Dachau? We, well, yeah, there were non-Jews in Dachau, but in the area where we were in Dachau, there was mostly Jewish, except the supervision was non-Jewish, I mean the in-camp supervision. And we were in Dachau approximately three weeks when we were told again to get ready and to walk out. And we were sent to a camp by the name of Allach, A-L-L-A-C-H, which is really a, or was, rather, a satellite camp of Dachau. I mean, it was only maybe between ten and fifteen kilometers away from Dachau.

NL: Did you do any work at Dachau?

HF: In Dachau? No.

NL: No.

HF: In Dachau we basically did not do anything.

NL: Did you recoup some of your strength there?

HF: Yes, yeah, in Dachau.

NL: And were you with Father?

HF: We were in Dachau together, but he somehow got an infection in his foot while we were on the transportation from Warsaw to Dachau. And he was put into what they call in German *Lazarett*, like a...

NL: Clinic.

HF: Clinic.

NL: Did you get any care or was...

HF: Yeah, he got some care there.

NL: You got some care.

HF: But while he was there I was sent away and, from Dachau, to that camp in Allach.

NL: So you went alone.

HF: I went alone, while he remained in Dachau. There were other satellite camps to Dachau besides Allach.

NL: Did you think you would see him again? You didn't know.

HF: No, we did not know.

NL: And where, what did they tell you when they sent you to Allach? What did they say?

HF: Well, Allach was strictly a labor camp again.

NL: Oh.

HF: It was a large labor camp where there were Jews and non-Jews. In the camp the Jews were separated from the non-Jews. But on the labor part it was together. And we worked mostly there on, again on railroad, and on the construction. We were building a large underground factory for engines, airplane engines. It actually was part of what they called BMW aircraft. It's today they manufacture the...

NL: Automobiles.

HF: Automobiles.

NL: And did you get some decent food there or was it again the same?

HF: No, it was again that same.

NL: Same.

HF: Same story. Very meager rationing and...

NL: Did you sleep in this camp or did you come back to Dachau?

HF: No, no, no. No we were permanently in that camp, yeah.

NL: You were at that camp.

HF: Yeah, there was...

NL: They had barracks.

HF: We had our own barracks and we worked there permanently in that camp.

NL: And did you learn from the other prisoners anything at all about what was happening outside?

HF: Well...

NL: The progress of the war?

HF: We learned a little bit, what we heard from the prisoners, we heard from, I mean, sometimes we heard on the outside. Civilians would talk to us, some German civilians.

NL: Did you realize that Germany was losing the war?

HF: They never admitted to that fact.

NL: You didn't have any inkling?

HF: No, no, no, no.

NL: Any signs of Allied activity?

HF: Oh yeah, we...

NL: Were reported?

HF: Where we were then there, we were bombed.

NL: You were bombed.

HF: We were bombed many times. Our camp was never bombed, but we were very close to Munich. And every day, at noon time, an American bomber would fly over us, and we could see the bombing of Munich.

NL: Did that give some spurt to the morale of the prisoners?

HF: Well, I want to talk about the morale a little later after we finish this chronological thing.

NL: O.K.

HF: So we were there in, so we arrived there in, it was early, late August, early September. And we were in that Allach camp, actually until the last week of April, 1945. And we worked either on railroad construction or we worked on the factory. We had to work day shifts, night shifts, seven days a week. And so people died again. But it was not really a extermination camp. It was mostly a labor camp. People just died out of poor food, lack of food and...

NL: Exhaustion.

HF: Exhaustion. I mean, and all that. But it was...

NL: Were you maltreated there? Do you remember being beaten?

HF: Well, the only maltreatment was mainly on the job site. I mean constantly [unclear] but no, but that was about the extent of it.

NL: And about how many men in...

HF: In this camp?

NL: In this camp.

HF: It was a rather large camp. I would say there were several thousand men.

NL: I see. And most of them worked in this underground operation?

HF: Either there or the railroad. There were different job sites in that general area where, yeah, a matter of fact we got, we were, also worked people like French forced laborers, which were Germans in the army who were, German Army, not deserters, but rather people who...

NL: Asocials?

HF: Yeah, asocials who did things not...

NL: According to regulation.

HF: According to regulations and were punished and had to be in forced labor. So there was a strong urgency to complete this underground. It was not really though underground. It really was built above ground. It's out of concrete and they were going to cover the whole thing with that [unclear].

NL: I see.

HF: And it was like a hill from the air.

NL: It was going to be a hangar, or like an airfield?

HF: No, not a hangar. Not an airfield. A manufacturing.

NL: Oh.

HF: A manufacturing. A manufacturing of engines. So we was really right inside the...

NL: How did you manage? You were alone. That is you were no longer with Father.

HF: Well...

NL: Did you have any friends there or...

HF: Well, as I was, to going back to that, yes, the surprising thing was after three weeks there came another transport of Dachau and my father was just among. And he could just have easily have ended up somewheres else but he came, he ended up right in this same camp. And I remember distinctly it was the second day of Rosh Hashanah in 1944. And just out of pure coincidence we ended up together again, after about three weeks.

NL: And was he, was his foot better?

HF: Yeah.

NL: He had recovered.

HF: Yeah.

NL: And he worked with you...

HF: He worked with me.

NL: In the...

HF: Yeah, sometimes together. Sometimes together, sometimes separate.

NL: And were there any people your age at this point?

HF: By that time there were already some among the, by that time we, the western Jews and the Polish Jews were really a minority in the camp. The majority of the camp were the Hungarian Jews who would come all again in the camp for a very short

duration. And among them were, from other towns, some were like 16 years old. And by that time they already were some they were like sixteen, sixteen years old.

NL: Did you have anything in common with them or was there a language, a serious language barrier?

HF: Between the Hungarian Jews? I, there, I wouldn't say there was a language barrier. There was a certain, I would say hostility between the old timers and the...

NL: The newcomers.

HF: Yeah, because for some reason old timers had a tendency to survive a little longer, after they had survived a certain, I would say the death toll among the Hungarian Jews probably was higher in that particular camp.

NL: They were not yet conditioned.

HF: Seasoned.

NL: Seasoned.

HF: Usually they...

NL: They were already hardened.

HF: Yeah, hardened, yeah, after, I mean, after we had, after two years or so, for some reason, the ones that survived, unless they were really, they mostly had a tendency to just always survive a little bit longer. And basically we were in that camp until about the very last week of April, 1945. So we heard when Roosevelt died. News could get through somehow.

NL: I see. That news came through.

HF: That news came through. And when the, I guess again when the Germans came closer towards Dachau, I mean the, when the American troops came closer towards Dachau, they tried to evacuate us towards Austria, further back. And we were...

NL: But you didn't have any real hard news about the progress of the war.

HF: No, no. Oh, well, we knew that American troops were coming closer.

NL: Did you know that this was the end of the war? Or...

HF: Well, partly we knew it was the end. And we really feared the end also, because we always feared that they would kill everybody.

NL: Yes.

HF: And...

NL: They did in some cases.

HF: Yeah. And how we also knew, for example, there were many, the Germans that were in the camp, the non-Jewish Germans just tried to recruit them into the army. In other words they prom-, the Germans promised them that if they would volunteer for the army, they could not, they would not force them because they were really like inmates. I mean, prisoner inmates they considered. But if they volunteered, that if they would come back from the war and survive, then they would pardon them.

NL: Did some volunteer?

HF: I don't, see most of them I heard their comments, I remember their comments that they would not volunteer.

NL: They would not volunteer.

HF: It was not worth it...

NL: Not worth it. [unclear]

HF: Anymore to volunteer and to fight the Russians than...

NL: And the Americans.

HF: And the Americans. And we figured this way was a better way. And so we would, and then they put us on flats. They didn't even have any boxcars any more. They put us on flat cars. And we really never moved very far, because by that time the railroads were really bombed out. So we just almost like in one location sitting for a couple days. And then we had no more food at all, once we got on the train. But we could get off the train. They were guarded yet by Germans, but these people got off the train and would pluck grass and stuff and eat that.

NL: What did you have?

HF: Grass.

NL: Grass.

HF: Grasses, for the last few days.

NL: Father too?

HF: And...

NL: Civilians did not come out?

HF: No, there were no, no.

NL: There were no civilians.

HF: No civilians.

NL: So you were just on a siding.

HF: On a, yeah, Just standing there.

NL: And the guards waited?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Did they shoot any one?

HF: Not in our outfit. Now, so we were there two days until, oh that was on Saturday, between the night of Saturday April 29th and Sunday April 30th the German guards just disappeared.

NL: Ah ha, without any...

HF: Without any...

NL: Explanation.

HF: Explanation. Just disappeared. And then we didn't know which way to go. We just stood there. And then on Sunday, April 30th, around noontime, the first American tanks approached us. And everybody just started walking away from the trains.

NL: Train. Ah ha. And...

HF: That was Patton's Army, Patton's Third Army.

NL: Patton's Third Army. Were the American soldiers solicitous? Did they have any food or water for you?

HF: Well, the thing is they did not really have, they didn't have any food either. I mean, they had food and they shared but they only had their K rations. They were advanced combat troops.

NL: They were on their way east.

HF: Yeah, well yes, they were. And so therefore we were there again it was just fetching for ourselves. You know, [unclear]. I mean they shared their little bit that they had but all, really they did not have it. They were not...

NL: They were not equipped.

HF: Equipped to handle anything. They were not occupying troops. They were strictly...

NL: Did they looked shocked when they saw you? Or could you tell that they had had some experience with other prisoners?

HF: Well, they, the ones where the, see we were not in a camp. We were really on a siding.

NL: But you must have been very thin.

HF: Yeah, but they just kept on moving. I mean it was not an occupying...

NL: Force.

HF: It came but only like a week or so later that, you know, these people were not an occupying force. They were strictly a tank unit that passed through and...

NL: That happened to meet you there.

HF: Happened to meet up with us.

NL: So how longer did you have to stay on this siding? Or did you just leave? You left.

HF: No, we just, everybody just, we just left. We were in the Starnberger See, which is in Bavaria. And we just walked south towards Starnberg, which was a little bigger city and people would just go to the farms and just get food from the German farmers and...

NL: You took it or were they, did they give it to you?

HF: Oh they was, yeah, they gave it, yeah.

NL: They did.

HF: Now, and this was basically the end of the war for us. Now to say many things about it, in retrospect, all what happened to all those people during the war by the Germans, there was no atrocity committed by anybody towards any German civilian that I could remember, or that I saw, no force, forcing of, keep out of the houses. Because we, even the liberated, the Jews, the non-Jews, they would sleep in the...

NL: Sheds.

HF: In the sheds and they would not chase any Germans out. I mean the Germans would give them, give us food. Actually, later the American troops that entered when we came like within the next few days when you get more occupying troops, as they progress,

were much more hostile than the inmates. So I guess everybody was so exhausted they just did not have any...

NL: Energy left.

HF: Energy left to do more. I mean I remember somebody, they got a cow. They killed it and made, they cooked it and stuff and everybody organized a little bit. But basically no...

NL: I suppose partly you were just so stunned to be free.

HF: Yeah.

NL: Wasn't that part of it?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Stunned.

HF: Now...

NL: You didn't know really how to react because you had been enslaved for such a long time.

HF: Yeah, we just walked and then we stayed in different places every night and...

NL: Farms, mostly?

HF: Farms, yeah.

NL: And you were able to eat.

HF: Yeah.

NL: You could find a way, yes. And how long did that go on then, a few days?

HF: Well, it went on. Eventually the German occu-, eh, the American occupying forces came more like over, but Germany was in a total chaos at that time. I mean there was no government, no German government. There were no German railroads. There was nothing. And when the whole country was just at a standstill. There was really nothing operating at that time. The war was not over yet. The war lasted another actually another seven days, until May 7. But the American soldiers were telling, you know, would come, by that time they would get more food. Whoever they would find. Then the whole country was nothing but a movement of people. The Germans would move. Everybody would just be on the roads going somewheres. And we just, my father and I just did not want to stay in Germany. Germany, you know, we made an effort to basically just walk out of Germany. After a few days we walked from Munich to Augsburg, which is 120 kilometers, over several days, stopping every night. And from there we got already on some trucks with some American soldiers. They were going from Augsburg to Stuttgart. And then from Stuttgart we, there were already trains going. And so they were already packed with people, bringing back French prisoners of war to France. And so we got on with them and they came from western Europe. We got on with them to France. And from France we went back to Belgium because we never really knew what happened to my mother. We didn't know if she survived or if she did not survive.

NL: Yes.

HF: So we didn't...

NL: Did you get any information in Belgium?

HF: I showed it to you last week. Remember that document paper...

NL: The document...

HF: Yeah.

NL: That, you got that in Belgium?

HF: In Belgium.

NL: In Belgium. I see. And what was the agency now?

HF: That was a Jewish...

NL: A Jewish...

HF: By that time Belgium was already in normal conditions because Belgium was already liberated like six or eight months before or even maybe ten months. But things were already pretty normal in Belgium at that time.

NL: Was it Antwerp?

HF: Antwerp, yeah.

NL: And did you see many Jews returning?

HF: Yeah. There...by that time Jews were returning to Antwerp or to their places. See, all the, like the DP camps in Germany and all that, we never saw them, because we had actually left Germany before these DP camps were even formed.

NL: Right, right.

HF: Because we just had such a desire to get that behind us.

NL: Sure.

HF: So we left there and then we...

NL: Did you meet up with any people you knew, old neighbors or old friends?

HF: No.

NL: *Landsman*.

HF: [unclear] No.

NL: And were you helped economically? Did the Jewish Agency...

HF: In Belgium? Yeah.

NL: Give you any money or clothing?

HF: Yeah. When we got there, when we got to Belgium they gave us, they put us up where they had like a...

NL: Dormitories.

HF: Dormitories for the refugees to put them up and then they helped them financially and even the Belgium government and...

NL: Oh.

HF: Yeah. So within three weeks after we were liberated we were in Belgium. Now while, I mean, we were fortunate. Our train was really not attacked by American troops while we were still moving, but there was a train only a short distance from us which

we met that the Germans had parked, so to say, next to an ammunition train. And this ammunition train was bombed. And a lot of...

NL: Inmates.

HF: Inmates were...

NL: Killed.

HF: Died. And...

NL: The day of liberation.

HF: Yeah, everybody, we saw fears that day of liberation because we heard, found out later that in Dachau it was, we were only a few kilometers away, the Germans had decided to kill everybody in Dachau before the Americans came.

NL: And they did.

HF: No they did not.

NL: They didn't?

HF: They didn't, because somehow word had gotten to the Americans. And they made a special effort to...

NL: Get there early.

HF: Get there, [unclear] to get there ahead of time. But those things we found out after liberation. We did not know then. And this is, basically ends the...

NL: And so you stayed in Antwerp how long? This might have been...

HF: Well we stayed in Antwerp until we came to the United States, until December 1946. We applied for a visa to come to the United States as soon as we got to Antwerp. And we came to the United States in December of '46.

NL: And were you able to work at all during that period?

HF: Yes, exactly. By that time we could, everybody could basically do it. They could work.

NL: There was no prohibition against foreign Jews there.

HF: No, no, no, no, no, not at that time.

NL: And what did Father do, do you remember?

HF: I worked in a, although I was 16 years, I worked in a shop where there were manufacturing fur coats. And he worked somewhere where they were, in the direct like supervision for kosher bread. He was like a supervisor.

NL: A supervisor, I see. So...

HF: We knew it was temporary...

NL: Yeah.

HF: But we got help besides. And then we also got help from our relatives in the United States [unclear].

NL: Oh that was the reason you applied to live here.

HF: Yeah, because we had relatives in the United States.

NL: Cousins or...

HF: No, I had an aunt. It was my mother's sister, who left Germany...

NL: Oh, I see.

HF: In 1939 and they...

NL: She had established herself.

HF: [unclear]

NL: And you knew her address.

HF: Well, we knew her address. And they had moved in the meantime. But there was also a coincidence. I mean we met an Ame-, they had lived in San Francisco, and we met an American soldier, right, that, an American Jewish soldier, right, a couple days after our liberation. You know, we were all talking. And he said he was from San Francisco. And he wrote to, he says he's going to write his girlfriend in San Francisco to let our relatives know that we survived.

NL: Oh, oh that was nice.

HF: And he told us afterwards that they got the message.

NL: They got the message and then they communicated with you.

HF: Yeah. Well in the meantime we'd left. I mean they didn't know where we were with all the, because were still on the move. We were still in Germany.

NL: Oh.

HF: But at least they knew that we had survived.

NL: They knew that you survived.

HF: And later when we got to Belgium of course then there things already was normal because it was brighter and there, but in Germany itself when we were liberated, there was really no postal service, no transportation. There was really nothing.

NL: Did you get any sense as to what the Jews in Belgium were planning? Were a number of them planning to stay? Some going to Palestine?

HF: Well, the young ones planned to go to Palestine. And I was also part of the, then of the Jewish organization.

NL: Really? Did you want to go to Palestine?

HF: I wanted to go to Palestine, but a relative from America had come here would help me get an education and so on and so forth. But a lot, some of them, some Jews, they were already established by that time. They were most in the diamond business. And they really stayed.

NL: They stayed.

HF: They stayed.

NL: Yeah.

HF: They, the ones that were needy from Belgium that had come back. Although some, we have a cousin who left, although he was established. Because there was at that time a fear, still a fear of the Russians, that the Russians would invade.

NL: Come west.

HF: Come west. Not in '46, but later like 1948, '49, when the Cold War started.

NL: After they absorbed the east.

HF: A lot of Jews from Belgium went to America. Although they were established in Belgium...

NL: I see.

HF: And they were doing rather well, but like my cousin, they were, he was never as well established in 20 years in the States when he came here as he was in Belgium. But they just had fear that they didn't want to go through another war.

NL: It's understandable of course, yeah. Did you, you didn't go to school at all? You were working.

HF: In Belgium?

NL: Yeah.

HF: No.

NL: You were working. And so when you came here, was it in New York or...

HF: Yeah, yeah, right in New York.

NL: And did you then, were you then able to go to school?

HF: Well, when I came, no, when I came to the States...

NL: You were already 18 I guess.

HF: No, I was 17, not quite 17.

NL: Oh, O.K., 17.

HF: I was not quite 18.

NL: Not quite 18.

HF: It was 19-, O.K., so I came 19-, in December of '46. I was born in '29. I was just 17 going on 18.

NL: 17.

HF: Well I worked in the day time and went to school at night. I had never finished, actually I had never really gone to high school. I only went up to, see, I went three grades. First, second and third grade I went in Vienna. Fourth, fifth grade in Antwerp. Sixth and seventh grade in France. And we were going to a village school. And then when I came to America I started going to high school at night and worked in the day time and I went to high school at night. And I finished high school in the, in 1949. It was in a...

NL: Was it a struggle for you both?

HF: Yeah.

NL: Did you live with your relatives for a while?

HF: No, no, they lived on the west coast.

NL: Oh, oh, so you didn't...

HF: Yeah, we visited them once. But then I...

NL: Oh.

HF: No, we stayed in New York...

NL: I see.

HF: Until 1950, and then we moved to Vineland.

NL: Did you know some people there? Did Father know some people?

HF: Yeah, we met people. We knew some people from before. We knew some people from before. I didn't know anybody. He knew people from before the war who had emigrated.

NL: But did this family, the relatives, provide you with an affidavit or...

HF: Yeah, they provided us with the affidavit, yes.

NL: There were papers that you might have needed?

HF: Yeah.

NL: And so that was the...

HF: Yeah.

NL: [unclear].

HF: They provided us with the affidavit to come here. Otherwise we would not have been able to come here.

NL: Yeah. Well now, please, let's go back and go...

Tape three, side two:

NL: Continuing our interview with Mr. Finder, tape three, side two. Yes, if you could say a few words about the feeling of hope or hopefulness that kept you going from day to day, Mr. Finder.

HF: Well, I think this is one of the things that are most difficult for people to understand—what, how come people survived.

NL: Yes.

HF: And especially, I mean you learn in history books, because you learn facts, but you don't learn the question of human emotion. And basically what helped me to survive was the hope that the end or liberation would come very soon. In other words, if you had told people they would be in concentration camps for two years or three years, or, a matter of fact anywhere, people would probably...

NL: Give up.

HF: Would have given up very soon. The people that gave up really did not last. But...

NL: Well, you must have known that for quite a long time Germany was winning, or didn't you know that?

HF: Well, we knew, well, when we got into the camp it was already 1942. And so Germany was at that time already at a sort of a stalemate in Russia.

NL: In Russia, yes.

HF: And maybe the hopes were false hopes.

NL: But they...

HF: But I remember already we heard about the retreat in Stalingrad, which was '43, which was, and we were only in the camp already a short duration. And even with that, I don't know, there was always the, but I remember the hope that things cannot last, that things will sort of come to, that the, maybe the Americans would help. Maybe the Germans would collapse. The Russians were, I mean, maybe these were unrealistic things, looking back today.

NL: But they kept you going.

HF: But they kept the people going. And it is very hard for people to understand who were not in the same situation, that hope that existed, that somehow we would survive.

NL: You would survive.

HF: That as long as people lived, and no matter how weak they were and how hard they worked and how much beatings or cruelty was committed against them, that they would survive. I think this is the problem. Most people that study the Holocaust cannot come to grips with. They sort of say, "Well, why didn't people fight or why didn't they revolt or do something?" But people had the hope that if they would survive, so therefore they did not...

NL: Have to plan or...

HF: No, I wouldn't say have to plan. Did not feel, why endanger, everybody wanted to keep as low a profile...

NL: Ah, that's very important.

HF: As possible.

NL: Yeah, very important.

HF: As low a profile. And naturally you didn't go out to get out to get beatings. You didn't go out to try to...

NL: To try to provoke someone.

HF: And to, I mean, work as little as possible. And when you could, then you learn after a while to pace yourself. I mean, when the German would come, you worked harder. When they would go away, then you would walk away.

NL: You could slack off.

HF: Whenever you could you would slack off your work.

NL: Yes.

HF: And so therefore, I think this is a very hard thing. And I think it's a very harsh judgment made upon inmates or whatever you want to call us in concentration camps, why they did not resist.

NL: I agree, yeah. I think it's...

HF: Because a typical example is, here you have Jews, most of them were not trained in anything. And we came across our own workers, American prisoners of war, British prisoners of war, Russian prisoners. Now you would say, these are men who are taught to fight, who are all much stronger. And none of them resisted. They behaved just as meekly...

NL: As the Jews.

HF: As the Jews. And there is no criticism...

NL: Yes.

HF: Leveled against them.

NL: Yeah, I often bring this up. I think it's so unfair.

HF: Yeah.

NL: And four, what is it, four million Russian prisoners of war.

HF: You read about...

NL: There was no revolt of any kind among them.

HF: And you read about the, of course I didn't experience that but you sort of, the Polish officers that were, there were people you would think they were trained and, to fight and...

NL: Quite.

HF: And when they just, I know. And the first year when we were at that same labor camp in Poland, we had contacts with many American war prisoners and the British war prisoners who worked, I mean, on the work place, not on the camp.

NL: Right.

HF: They had different camps and all that.

NL: Right, right.

HF: Occasionally they would slip us some food if they could. But as far as their behavior, it was not more heroic. And there were people in all age brackets. And the Jewish inmates were not trained to fight. We were, we had no food. Because all those, those war prisoners had much food than we.

NL: Yes.

HF: First of all they got more food from the Germans and they all got packages and got clothing.

NL: The International Red Cross helped, yes.

HF: And they had, they did not...

NL: So it's a very lopsided equation and I often raise this question why people don't choose the French or the Poles or the Russians.

HF: They were, and besides this there were thousands or maybe hundreds of foreign laborers in Germany. And nobody...

NL: No.

HF: Revolted. Everybody was very meek and took...

NL: Meek. And obedient, sure.

HF: Obedient and meek and all the criticism is directed against... And the same thing, you have to bear in mind the punishment. I mean if one inmate would run away, they would kill 50 other inmates.

NL: Terrible [?]

HF: Now how can you, that responsibility? But if one American soldier ran away they did not kill 50 Americans.

NL: It wasn't the same kind of intimidation.

HF: No, no.

NL: No.

HF: I don't think there was any because they were all, I mean, there was records of how many were there and they were afraid against their own prisoners. So, and...

NL: Sure.

HF: So, but this is hard for people to...

NL: Well I think they have to recognize it as a reality and then it's not so hard to understand. But if you know that, you know, 50 people may be killed if you were, hit a German officer or soldier, you'll think a lot before you do it. Now you were also saying before something about an awareness of Jewish holidays, religious holidays. And did you depend on some rabbis or older Jews?

HF: I don't think we had, well, we had some older Jews, some Orthodox Jews.

NL: Who knew.

HF: We had alrea-, yeah, who knew, and had somehow kept track of it.

NL: Some kept track.

HF: Who knew the dates somehow.

NL: And for instance on Friday night was there...

HF: No, no.

NL: There was no Friday or *Shabbat*. You were working.

HF: We were always working. The only time would be like, I know on the first of, like we had some Jews would take a, would not eat any bread on Pesach.

NL: They knew it was Pesach.

HF: They knew it was Pesach. Or on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, they would make like a small *minyan* in the back of the barracks, although that was strictly forbidden.

NL: Is that so.

HF: But...

NL: They could have been killed for that.

HF: Oh yeah, killed or punished or beaten, you know.

NL: And people would just...

HF: Flogged.

NL: Remember the prayers, the service.

HF: Yes. Yeah, everything by heart. But that was also again in the sense of hope. I mean not all hope was strictly geared towards man. I mean a lot of hope was geared towards God. I mean, if you believe in religious beliefs, for those that believed, by the same token you can say, "Well, that hope was part messianic, hoping God would somehow, there would come an end to this thing." And basically this would sustain everybody. There was hope in God. Well, because many people will ask you today, "How come, how could you believe in God under these circumstances?" So that's not true either. You know.

NL: You do believe.

HF: You do believe. I think under those circumstances...

NL: You have to believe.

HF: You believe stronger.

NL: There's nothing else to believe in.

HF: There's nothing else to believe in. You believe strongly. You believe strongly in God and you believe strong that some miraculous thing will happen. And this is the...

NL: To take you out of this terrible...

HF: To take you out of it. And I strongly, I believe. Of course I cannot witness to that, but through my own feelings, experiences, that's [unclear]. And people say, "Why didn't people rebel when they went to the gas chambers?" Because there was always that belief, to the very end, that there will be an intervention before the final hour.

NL: And these were supposed to be showers.

HF: Yes.

NL: Where one was going to be cleaned up.

HF: But everybody, there was always a feeling they will be, that, of survival, and there would be...

NL: A better day.

HF: Better, yeah. There will come an end.

NL: An end.

HF: An end to their suffering.

NL: Do you remember any particular figures, older people, who instilled this hope in you? Political leaders or rabbis?

HF: No, it was...

NL: But just among yourselves.

HF: It was, yes, there was no political thing. It was talking and...

NL: Just talking. Did Father...

HF: People...

NL: Excuse me.

HF: There was a lot of, continually, I mean, people would talk a lot among themselves.

NL: You weren't punished for that?

HF: No, no, we could talk.

NL: But you would have to speculate because you had so little information.

HF: Yeah, but people, well, but people would talk about, well a main topic of conversation was always food.

NL: Of course.

HF: Food. People only had one, actually, they didn't even have a wish of liberation. Their biggest wish was to have one, enough food.

NL: A good meal.

HF: Once enough food to eat to be, that was one of the biggest dreams of people, to have food. More than even, see the [unclear] liberation [unclear] food and...

NL: Warm clothing or warmer [unclear].

HF: But food was really, because was more**,** was more a sporadic thing that they were moving from one camp to the other. But basically there was water around while you were in the camp.

NL: You could drink then, yes.

HF: Because there was always water, but there was not always, there was no food. But there was water.

NL: How much did you weigh at your lowest? You have no idea. Did you ever look at yourself? Did you have any mirrors?

HF: No. Nobody had...

NL: Were you shocked to see yourself at the end of the war, do you remember, or to see, was your father stunned?

HF: No, I just...

NL: I've read about such shock.

HF: No, that is, I, many people got very sick after, when they indulged themselves in...

NL: Yes.

HF: A lot of food right away.

NL: You knew not to eat too much?

HF: Yeah, we didn't, no, we did not, I would say we really did not suffer from any ill effects or...

NL: Overeating, right.

HF: Overeating or anything like that.

NL: Did you talk with Father about this period often?

HF: Now?

NL: Often, in later years?

HF: No. We never, we don't talk about it.

NL: No. You would never talk about it?

HF: Never talked. As a matter of fact, like what I told you, I guess, I really, the first time I would talk about it at all.

NL: Is that so? Do you feel as though you want to tell your children now, Herbert?

HF: Well, I guess the children talk a lot in bits and pieces, over the years. I don't think [unclear].

NL: Well we'll give you a dup. of the tapes so you can give them the tapes.

HF: Yeah, because I mean, but I think it's very important to, to make to understand people who were not there, who just study the Holocaust, that it's, that you cannot judge things on today's stan-, on today's standards or morale or whatever.

NL: Or lifestyle.

HF: Or lifestyle.

NL: Well I hope you'll say that at some point, because it's more appropriate for you than to me, but I agree with you. I think any judgments are out of order. Out of order, yes. Well thank you very much. I really appreciate this deeply.

HF: O.K. You're welcome. You're welcome.

NL: I hope it wasn't too much of a strain.

HF: No. No, I hope it was...

NL: And...