

>> Gosschalk: -- officer was waylaid and shot to death, right there on the spot. However, I was not there. I was in questioning at headquarters. When I came back that night with seven or eight other men, we were the only survivors. That's how we survived one time. And then a few days later, you could hear the war coming close.

>> Interviewer: So you were the only people left then.

>> Gosschalk: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: In this camp.

>> Gosschalk: Well, it didn't last long because they started bringing more prisoners in.

>> Interviewer: And you had no contact with your wife at this point?

>> Gosschalk: None. I didn't even know where she was or whether she was there. And of course -- she, I found out later, was transported to a Dutch concentration camp. We were in prison, which is different -- there is nothing but cells -- to a concentration camp, which is a different concept entirely. And she was in that concentration camp, didn't know whether I was alive or dead, and I didn't know she was there or that she was alive or dead. However, when the war came closer, the Germans started packing up their stuff and taking their prisoners with them, and after a four-day trip of a distance of maybe 60 miles, traveling only at night so that the Allied air force couldn't see us and strafe us, they brought us to a concentration in northern Holland, in -- yeah, in northern Holland. Of course, I can't say that we were the cleanest-looking or the nicest-smelling bunch of people that ever came off a truck. It was terrible. We were dirty. We stank. We were full of lice and all

that kind of good stuff. In the camp, we were unloaded, and one of the policeman -- when I say police, these were prisoners being used as police, as order keepers. A German-Jewish prisoner had been there five years, six years, and recognized me, pulled me out and said, "Your wife is here. She's well. I'll get her for you." So after delousing and steam baths and being shaved from top to toe -- and I'll tell you something. Shaving is not the nicest experience because there was no soap, no brush, and only a very dull, 1,755 times-used Gillette was used to shave your body hair. It was very painful. We got a piece of clothes thrown to us, and that was our uniform. We got our number, not in the arm, but you got a number on the arm. So I found my wife.

>> Interviewer: So this is mid '45, and you found your wife at this camp.

>> Gosschalk: We found each other, but of course, she was in an entirely different part of the camp. Where I was kept, I had to go to work every day. She had to go to work every day. She had to work cutting things for uniforms for the German army. And first I had to work in the crematorium. Now, the crematorium there was not used -- let me rephrase that. There was a crematorium for burning corpses, obviously, but this was not a destruction camp. Only those people who died for certain reasons were being cremated there, but not cremated en masse like what happened in Bergen-Belsen or Auschwitz or the Polish and German camps. But after I worked there a few days, I was told to go to work on the farm. That meant I had to get up every morning at 5:30, which is no big deal, march for an hour and a half without food to a field, and there, under German guards, of course, we had to work all day long in the open. By 5:00 we had to march back, come back at 6:30, wash up, eat quickly -- whatever there was, if you could get something to eat -- and by 7:00, it was lights out. That was our routine, seven days a week.

>> Interviewer: You mentioned earlier, when y'all got caught, your wife was pregnant.

>> Gosschalk: Mm-hmm.

>> Interviewer: Now, was she still pregnant at this point?

>> Gosschalk: Oh, yes. She was then, I would say, in her early seventh month. We were liberated by the Canadians mid-April, April 12th, and my daughter was born in July, mid-July, so she was in her seventh month.

>> Interviewer: She was pregnant throughout this experience.

>> Gosschalk: Yeah, very much so. Was very big; all water.

>> Interviewer: Did you see her very often?

>> Gosschalk: No, very seldom, but at the end, when the end was in sight, the Germans all of a sudden turned around and became a little bit more thoughtful, a little bit more cooperative, and they knew that if the Allies would ever catch them and they heard and saw what had been going on, they wouldn't think too friendly about them, so they started giving in a little bit more.

We heard the guns going. We heard shooting in the distance, and my wife was very nervous. I got sick -- at least her messages to me. So I went to the camp management, the inside camp management, fellow Jews, and tried to get permission and got permission to spend the evening with my wife. As a matter of fact, I have here still the permit, in German, and it says -- this is on April 10, 1945 -- "The husband of Mrs. Gosschalk van Blankenstein has permission to sleep tonight" -- one night -- "with his Frau in Barrack Number 12."

>> Interviewer: Could you hold that up so we can see?

>> Gosschalk: Sure.

>> Interviewer: So that was your permission to --

>> Gosschalk: That was my permit to spend the night with my wife.

>> Interviewer: For one night.

>> Gosschalk: For one night.

>> Interviewer: What other types of things were your inside Jewish friends able to help you with?

>> Gosschalk: Very little. Very little. We all had to work, slave labor. The farm labor that I had to do was planting or harvesting or whatever happened to be the time of the season for the benefit of the German troops that were stationed there at the camp. Of course, if they found that I would put as much as one potato in my shirt, they would kill me.

>> Interviewer: Were you able to do that?

>> Gosschalk: I did.

>> Interviewer: Were you ever able to steal food?

>> Gosschalk: On a few occasions, but believe me, you don't walk very safely through the gate when the guards are there, watching everybody, and they're picking Number 1, picking Number 10 and Number 20 and Number 30. You never know who you are.

>> Interviewer: They were just checking at random.

>> Gosschalk: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Did you ever see people get caught?

>> Gosschalk: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: And could you describe what happened?

>> Gosschalk: Well, those that were caught were beaten mercilessly and then went into solitary confinement, and they got beaten day after day after day, oh, till four, five, six, seven days, whatever came in the mind. There was no system. It was only punishment, but no system in the punishment. They said, "Well, enough already. Let him go. Let him go to work again." He would never in his life try to steal anything again. Steal? Is

that the right word, "steal"? Something that you need in the worst way to stay alive? When I went into camp, I weighed almost 150 European pounds, which is -- well, there's only 10% difference. When I came out of camp, I weighed 94 pounds, so the food was not too healthy, and the labor was stiff.

>> Interviewer: Right. Could you tell me how you were able to secure extra food secretly?

>> Gosschalk: There was no extra food. We didn't --

>> Interviewer: I mean, whenever you would smuggle food.

>> Gosschalk: Oh, put a couple of potatoes in your shirt and hoping that you could get by.

>> Interviewer: The kind that you were harvesting.

>> Gosschalk: Yeah. Or, no, planting potatoes.

>> Interviewer: I see.

>> Gosschalk: Seedlings, if that's the right word. I don't know. I'm not a -- since then I have never put a spade anymore in a yard. I can't stand to work outside.

>> Interviewer: Well, now, you're very close to liberation at this point.

>> Gosschalk: Only two days.

>> Interviewer: Right. And how did that happen?

>> Gosschalk: Well, let me first make a statement. Maybe it's not true. People can argue with me or fight with me about it if they wish to. It's perfectly all right. There are many opinions one way or the other way, but surviving in those years was not a matter of being smart or plain luck, but it was a matter of making up your mind, I want to survive. They're not gonna get me, and they're not gonna get me down, and doing everything you possibly can to outlast. Right? People who lived strictly by a

-- well, let's say the Orthodox Jews who strictly lived by the rules of the Old Testament, the dietary laws and the observation of the Sabbath and religious matter like that. Those people were the first ones to go and the first ones to die because they didn't have the will to resist. They couldn't eat anything if it wasn't kosher, so they suffered more by not having adequate food than others. They wouldn't light a stove on the Sabbath because it was against the law, against the religious law to do so, so they would freeze over the weekend till the Sabbath was over. They wouldn't eat anything that was not kosher prepared. Well, there were no kosher butchers anymore. They didn't exist, so they wouldn't eat meat, even if it was available to them. If it wasn't kosher, they wouldn't touch it. Those were the people to die first. They also, when time was called to go to camps, were going like lambs, not that there was any resistance possible. The Germans had the weapons, and these were harmless people who were rounded up like cattle and beaten and stomped and threatened and shot. But they didn't even try to resist.

Part of survival is being able to resist, and I'm not trying to put a feather on my cap, but I had the will to survive, my wife had the will to survive, and we did. It was close sometimes, but we did, we did manage. We slept nights in the wood when the rain was pouring down all night long without any protection. Just what we had was the clothes on our backs, and we were sleeping -- sleeping. We were sitting under trees, and it was raining, and it was cold. The temperature was maybe 40 degrees, and we had to be out of the way of the Germans who were making their raids, so we went somewhere else. It is not the best thing for your health.

Anyway, on April 11th, the sound of the war came closer and closer. What was going on, we didn't know. We had no idea. Here we are in a camp in northeastern Holland, away from, quote, "the civilized world," no communications. The only thing we know is, we hear, we hear sound, sound like we didn't hear last week. I was, as I said, not one that would meekly sit back and let other

people rule me. One morning, the morning of April 12th, I got up early, and I didn't see any of the German soldiers that normally walk through the camp and out of the camp. I didn't see any. So I walked to the gate. At the gate, there was no German soldier. So what can they do if they're sitting somewhere in hiding, waiting for me? They'll shoot me. But I thought -- I dared anyway, and I went through the gate, and I went outside the camp. Here, now, I was already free. "Free," quote, unquote. The German officers had all homes, beautiful living quarters -- not beautiful, but very -- to us they were beautiful, with real beds and with real blankets and with real stoves and with electricity and with all the human comforts, and with liquor and with beer and with food and everything that you could -- they all had it there. I walked first in the first one, and I didn't see anybody there. Then I walked in the second one. It was the same thing. Then I walked to the field office, the camp office, and I saw that their radio installation was smashed. Not seeing a German, I went back in the camp, and I --

>> Interviewer: You did all this by yourself?

>> Gosschalk: -- alerted those -- yeah. I alerted the -- oh, I stole a bicycle too. In one of the houses, I found a bicycle, and I brought it back with me in the camp. So I alerted the people in the camp that there were no Germans -- *pyip-pyip-pyip pyip-pyip* -- and we were free. But we didn't know what to do with our freedom. At about 10:00 in the morning, I had sent somebody up the road to the farm where we were working every day, except that day. That day was Sunday. I sent somebody up there -- there is a canal and a bridge over the canal -- to see what was happening there, if he could find out something. He came back running, tongue out of his mouth. "The Yankees are coming! The Yankees are coming!" well, to us, every soldier that was Allied was a Yankee. It so happened that, indeed, the Canadians -- I think it was the 1st Canadian Army was pulling up. Now, I was about halfway to the farm by then to tell them that there was a camp and what that was and that there were no

Germans, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So I rode into the camp on the 1st Canadian tank. Hey, I found myself a big hero. That was fantastic.

So 12:00, the war has to stop. It's bean time. All the Canadians -- it's the same everywhere. Twelve o'clock, you have to go eat. So Canadian soldiers, in the meantime, they had been walking all over the camp, and all those guys, we were sitting there, admiring all their mess kits and their uniforms and their good shoes and the good clothes that they wear. You know, it was fantastic. And there were six, seven men were sitting there in the sun against the side of a barrack, and it was all dirty dirt that was there dust. And they were sitting there, eating their food. They had gone to the kitchen and gotten their food and their mess kits, stuff about food and potatoes. My mouth was watering. I was so hungry. Amongst other things, they got bread, and some of them looked at it, and they threw it away in the sand. I was only waiting for them to get up and leave at 12:30 when the whistle goes. They left, and I got three pieces of white bread, and I brushed it off and all the dirt off, and I put it in my coveralls, and I brought them to my wife. That was like cake. That was the best cake I've ever eaten in my life.

And a couple of hours later, unfortunately, we saw, all of a sudden -- in the meantime, they had raised the American flag and the Canadian flag and the Dutch flag on the three flagpoles in front of the camp, and the American flag went down. I learned then that President Roosevelt had died. Excuse me. I told you I'm not emotional, but I -- Roosevelt was the man that we looked up to as the great liberator, the man that came to our rescue, that gave us our life back, and the day he did, he died.

well, the next day, I was in the back, somewhere in the camp. Now we were running all over the camp. There was no restriction anymore. We could go out and in and come and go, but we didn't know where to go. We had no transportation anyway. We had no place to go to. So that evening, somebody comes to me and says,

“Hey, Bert, there is somebody over at barrack number so-and-so who wants to see you.” I said, “who wants to see me?” He said, “It’s a Canadian officer.” So I went with him there, and there is a guy in Canadian uniform, said, “Bert!” He was a captain in the Dutch regiment that served under the Canadian command. He recognized me. He and I had grown up together as kids in school and in playing soccer and things like that. And he said, “why stay in this camp any longer?” He said, “Come on. I’ll take you out.” Now, my mother-in-law was in a nearby insane asylum in hiding. I didn’t know where it was, but I but I knew it was in that general vicinity, within 30, 40 miles from there. He said, “where do you want to go?” I said, “I don’t know, but I have a wife here who is very pregnant.” He said, “I don’t care. I have a jeep here.” And he had his aide with him. “Get in the jeep. we’ll put a blanket over you.” And we rode out of the camp like that.

So we went to the hospital, and it was, as I said, an insane asylum. My mother-in-law had stayed there for two years. How she could ever manage to stay sane herself, I don’t know, but she was there amongst the patients as an insane person. I lasted two days. I couldn’t handle it any longer than that. That was enough for me. I got clean clothes, a few, and I got a shave and a haircut. The nearby city was the provincial capital, and I went up there and presented myself to the commanding general there. So the war was still going on, and we were just this close behind the lines. So he ordered me for the next day to take 12 men with me with guns and start combing through one of the woods in the neighborhood. There were German snipers. So we caught two German snipers after a week of traipsing through the woods and came back, saw my wife, saw my mother-in-law, and they were all well taken care of. But they couldn’t leave because they couldn’t go anywhere either. Their hometown was still in German hands.

>> Interviewer: Now, what’s the name of this town?

>> Gosschalk: Groningen. That's the provincial capital of the utmost northern province. So they couldn't go there, so they stayed in the hospital, but now not anymore as a patient. Now they were free to come and go and do as they pleased and being treated like normal human beings. The next day I had to go back to headquarters, and I must be a stupid idiot. I think I am. I know I am. There were six of us officers called in by the general, and he asked the question, "Is any one of you familiar with Camp Westerbork?" That is the camp where we had just come from. And I opened my big mouth and said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, how do you know it?" I said, "I've been a prisoner there, and I just escaped last week." I said, "I couldn't leave, but I got out." So he said, "Well, then you take 40 men and you go back to Westerbork, and you are in charge because we are going to organize that camp and bring all the Dutch Nazi prisoners there, and you will have to make the arrangements to make that a prison for the quislings, for the Dutch Nazis." I protested, but an order is an order.

>> Interviewer: Were you physically able to do this?

>> Gosschalk: I was healthy. I was thin, but I was healthy otherwise. Except I was insane; I should never have opened my mouth. Well, I went back to the camp and started organizing, and I'll tell you this. If it hadn't been for that experience, I think I might have lost my insanity at one time or another. But the fact that I stayed busy immediately and was able to take my wrath out on the German Nazis -- the Dutch Nazis that were coming into that camp, by seeing them now as prisoners and making them work, doing them all the dirty work that they had made us do, that was a salvation. Well, that lasted only three months, and then the Dutch civil prison authorities took over, and I was then free to leave. In the meantime, the baby was born, and we moved back to where we came from originally, and -- end of the story.

>> Interviewer: Well, now, did all the other prisoners leave between the time you had left -- the prisoners at the camp -- and the time that the Germans started coming there?

>> Gosschalk: No. No. When the liberation took place of the camp, there were 900 prisoners, of which were about a little over 500 Jews and a little less -- a little -- about 400 non-Jews, political prisoners, Communists -- anything that the Germans wanted, they put in that camp at that time because the other camps were not available or accessible anymore to them. The camp originally, in the mid-'30's, was built by the Dutch government to house German Jewish refugees who did not have a home or a place to stay in Holland till they found where they could go, and then -- it was not a prison camp. It was just a place put up where people could stay. It had a roof, it had food, it had clothing till they were able to take care of themselves, either to go to relatives or to leave the country or find jobs or do whatever they pleased to do.

>> Interviewer: So they were both there while you were there. The three months that you were there, there were leftover prisoners --

>> Gosschalk: There were still quite a few of those original prisoners left over who had survived, somehow or another, only by seniority, the war. They had no place to go. They had no place to go before the war. They had no place to go now. Germany was still in war. They were Germans. Most of them were Germans. The political prisoners, most of them came from the west or the south. They couldn't go back home. The south, they couldn't go into because of the war. The west was still not liberated. It was at least, oh, about a month later before the rest of the country was liberated, before peace came and the Germans surrendered. So they stayed in the camp, but they were now free to come and go. They had a pass that they could get in and out of the camp within certain hours, and they had little barracks, little places to stay for their own with their own bedrooms and

their own living room. If they wanted to plant flowers, they could plant flowers. There were no rules and regulations for them anymore, except be in the camp at certain times. They were not anymore governed by camp rules.

Now, that is not true for the prisoners that came to in the camp then. Mind you, this is 1945, the worst hunger winter the country ever went through. The country was plundered. There was not anything in the country anymore. Food, clothing, shoes, bedding, soap, nothing existed anymore. It wasn't there. Now, all those Nazis had -- not all of them, but many of them had been able to accumulate quite some nice things in all those years that other people were going hungry, that were subsisting. Now the prisoners start coming in. They have been lifted off their bed or arrested in their home, whatever the case may be, and transported to the camp. They had suitcases full of clothing, silk underwear, soap, towels, blankets; all kinds of good stuff they had with them. And here are, at the same time, a large number of people without anything. So the only democratic thing I think to do was confiscate everything that was brought in and then divide it equally unto those that were there and needed it. So that's what we did. You should have heard the moaning of those people whose soap we took or whose underwear was needed to give to somebody else. When they had four pieces of underwear and somebody else had nothing, what do you want? That, I think, make me keep my sanity, being able to rule, be fair, be honest, but I was harsh.

>> Interviewer: Well, you mentioned that you went back to your original town, and your daughter was born.

>> Gosschalk: Mm-hmm.

>> Interviewer: How did you adjust to the postwar period?

>> Gosschalk: Not easily. And -- but it came gradually. You have to adjust. Papers started to come again. Radio started to gradually come back. Food became a little bit more -- I won't

say abundant, but more available. And I got my job back at the company I had started with in '39. I went back to work for them in 1945 till I left to go to the States.

>> Interviewer: Well, how did you come to the States?

>> Gosschalk: I think in the beginning, I mentioned that my younger brother had come here a little before. I had an excellent position in Holland as a purchasing agent for a large pharmaceutical company. And in those days, the Dutch still had colonies, the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch West Indies. Of course, the East Indies had been governed and controlled and plundered by the Japanese during the same war. But Dutch interests were still very, very substantial in the East Indies, and one of the larger Dutch trading companies approached me and wanted to know if I might be interested in going to what is now Indonesia and go to work for them in a certain position. I told them I don't know. I would like to study it and come back to them. I was gonna go over there, look, see, come back, and decide because I had found out in the meantime that in Holland, in spite of the war, certain things had not changed; employment, for instance. You start with a company, just the same way it is in Japan, still, today. You start with them at a young age, and you stay with that same company till you retire at age 75 or whatever. Growth is only there if the man or woman ahead of you either gets promoted or dies or retires. And the guy ahead of me, my boss, was young, was never gonna leave the company, and he had no desire to die yet. But he also would not be promoted because his abilities were not of the greatest.

So I knew that even though I had a good job, it would only be a good job very, very slowly, very slowly, and I was impatient. I had lost the five best years of my life. I had lost all money, what I had, all properties that I had. It all was gone. I had to start making a living for myself and my wife and my little child. So I was seriously considering going to the East Indies, and I dropped a note to my brother, who then lived in Texas. I

didn't know what he was doing, and he sent me a telegram back, "You're a damn fool. I can understand you want to leave the country, but going to Indonesia -- or the East Indies -- whether it's next month or next week or next year or whenever, but very soon, the Dutch are going to be thrown out there. If you're lucky, you'll survive with nothing. If you're not lucky, you won't survive. If you want to leave the country, come here. You and I will go into business together." So my wife was not all that keen about going to the East Indies anyway. She said, "Well, while don't you go and see what your brother has to offer?" I said, "Okay, but I'll go by myself. You guys stay till" -- in the meantime, my second one was born. "You guys stay till I can let you know whether to come or whether I come back."

So when the time came that I went, I got the message, "If you think you're going by yourself, you have another thought coming. You're not going. We're going together, or you're not going." So we came. We went, all four. Now, the first couple of years were hard. We went -- we lived in Texas, a little town just outside of Dallas. My brother and I went in the scrap metal business together. Neither one of knew very much about it, but we had the need to feed our families and the need to make money and the need to grow. Well, we did. We worked hard. We worked like slaves or harder. And after a couple of years, we decided we had a different philosophy. My brother wanted to one thing that I didn't want to do. I wanted to do something that he didn't want to do. So we decided, in all good friendship, that we'd split up, and I went to work for a corporation out of Dallas. I went to Houston. And eventually I made -- I grew up and did well.

>> Interviewer: And eventually came to South Carolina?

>> Gosschalk: Eventually. I went from Dallas to Houston, Houston to Shreveport, Louisiana, from Shreveport to New York, and from New York, in 1962 or '63, I came to Charleston, South Carolina, and have been there since and enjoy it.

>> Interviewer: Well, thank you for sharing your story with us. Is there anything else that you would like to say that you haven't said?

>> Gosschalk: I don't know. I've passed over some of the things that you might have wanted to hear from me about that -- how bad life was and all those things. But you cannot bring into words very well, you cannot make a picture, you cannot read Anne Frank's story -- I cannot ever tell another person how bad it was, how you suffered from fear, especially fear, in those years. It is -- you cannot express it, and therefore, you might as well leave it unsaid.

>> Interviewer: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Gosschalk.

>> Gosschalk: My pleasure.

>> Interviewer: I appreciate it. Thank you, and that's all.

>> Gosschalk: Cut.

00:39:08