

>> Interviewer: Please tell me your name.

>> Jablon: Gerald Jablon.

>> Interviewer: And tell me when and where you were born.

>> Jablon: In Breslau, which was Germany when I was born. Now it is Poland. In June 1906, I was born.

>> Interviewer: Could you tell me about your family and brothers and sisters?

>> Jablon: I am an only child. My father was a pharmacist, and my mother was a daughter of a very wealthy merchant.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me about your education?

>> Jablon: School through high school and college.

>> Interviewer: I mean, just -- yeah, everything really.

>> Jablon: Yes.

>> Interviewer: And when you were in school, was it a private school, or it was just a public school?

>> Jablon: No, were all public schools.

>> Interviewer: When you were growing up and when you were going through school, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism in the schools?

>> Jablon: Yes. Now, the school, the gymnasium, had about 300 pupils, and about 25 were Jewish, and we noticed quite a bit of anti-Semitism in school.

>> Interviewer: Can you give me an example of what form that took?

>> Jablon: Well, you just couldn't get close to the Gentile pupils, and, well, the teachers did not show it till after the war. When young teachers came back -- you see, during the war, the youngest teacher we had was about 50 years old, and the younger ones, they didn't show it direct, but the way they treated Jewish pupils, it was very evident that they didn't like them.

>> Interviewer: You're talking about world war I, between world war I and before world war II.

>> Jablon: Right.

>> Interviewer: So this was the --

>> Jablon: Well, I left school in 1924.

>> Interviewer: Right. Okay. When you were in this school, did they segregate you?

>> Jablon: The only segregation was boys' schools and girls' schools.

>> Interviewer: Okay, but within the school itself --

>> Jablon: No, no, no, no.

>> Interviewer: -- there wasn't any segregation.

>> Jablon: No.

>> Interviewer: But you felt segregated by virtue of the fact --

>> Jablon: Right.

>> Interviewer: -- you were Jewish.

>> Jablon: Right.

>> Interviewer: And your school career came to an end, you just told me, in 1924, and tell me the reason for it coming to an end.

>> Jablon: Well, you graduated from high school. That was it. And I went for two years to college, and then I became a what is called apprentice in some businesses related to my grandfather's wholesale grocer business because my grandfather, who died in 1924, left in his will that I was supposed to be a partner when I reached 27 years.

>> Interviewer: So you completed your education, then started your career.

>> Jablon: Right.

>> Interviewer: Did you continue to live in Breslau?

>> Jablon: Well, during my what's called apprentice years, I lived in Hamburg and then London. That's where I learned to speak English, because in school, we had Latin, French, and Greek and no English.

>> Interviewer: With the coming of world war II, or leading up to world war II, can you tell me about your experiences and how your life changed?

>> Jablon: Well, just a few months before World War II, I was able to leave Germany. But from 1933 till end of 1938, I had to live through the Hitler years. And one thing everybody agreed on was that it could not last a thousand years. Where everybody was wrong was that it lasted as long as it did last. Now, some people left very early, and I thought maybe I can live through it. My father was a high officer during the First World War, and he claimed nothing is going to happen to me.

I, in between, became a partner of a coffee import house in Hamburg, the owner of which was a Frenchman. And I figured nothing is going to happen to me under those circumstances. But the way it worked, one day, the director of the bank came in and said, "We like to do business with you, but as long as you have a Jewish partner, we cannot do business with you." So that was the end of my career in the coffee.

>> Interviewer: When was that? What year was that?

>> Jablon: That was end of 1937.

>> Interviewer: What did you do after that?

>> Jablon: Well, I just waited for an affidavit to come from the United States that I could come here.

>> Interviewer: And how long did that take?

>> Jablon: Well, in certain things, I was lucky. Hamburg, I was living, and Hamburg was the only place in Germany where you could find a telephone directory of New York, Manhattan. I went to the library, picked out the names of all the Jablons, and I wrote almost 100 letters. Two came back, "We can't do anything about you," and another came back, "I'll send you the

affidavit." A fellow by the same name, no relation whatsoever. Now, that's a piece of luck.

>> Interviewer: Were you ever able to meet this man?

>> Jablon: Sure, they picked me up from the boat when we came, and we are still friends today.

>> Interviewer: That's terrific. When did you leave -- we may be getting ahead of the story, but when did the affidavit come through?

>> Jablon: The affidavit came through sometime in 1938. And naturally, the quota wasn't ready for me. So my wife had an aunt in London, poor lady, no penny to her name, but she sent us an affidavit to stay temporarily in London. And what she did, she sent an affidavit for me. Back came an affidavit from the British government for Mr. and Mrs. Jablon, so my wife came with me. When we arrived in London, they said, "what are you doing here?" to my wife. "You didn't have an affidavit." Well, my wife said she got on that affidavit you sent. "what you want to do, send me back?" "No."

>> Interviewer: Good! In the interim -- I mean, before you left London, though, you spent time in a camp.

>> Jablon: Six weeks, yes, in Sachsenhausen.

>> Interviewer: And what were the circumstances of your going into that camp, and tell me about the camp.

>> Jablon: Well, you remember the Crystal Night? well, they just picked up anybody they could get hold of, and so they picked me up, and I had to spend six weeks there. And I do not know if you get much information like that. The camps were run by inmates, not the Nazis. The Nazis just stood around with their guns and

shot anywhere they wanted to. Now, when I came in, my number was 14,000-something. But some of the inmates had numbers between 1 and 100. They were the early birds there, and they were in charge of the ones who came after Crystal Night.

>> Interviewer: How long was Sachsenhausen -- had it been going on, or do you have any recollection of that?

>> Jablon: I really do not know. But in that camp, they were building something with concrete. What, I never found out. But near the camp was a little river, and barges came there, bags with concrete, and we had to unload this concrete and bring it to the place where they were building that huge thing. And that, we had to do for eight hours a day.

>> Interviewer: How many people were in the camp with you?

>> Jablon: At least 14,000-15,000.

>> Interviewer: Now, had most of these people been gathered up Kristallnacht?

>> Jablon: Right, yes.

>> Interviewer: From all over Germany?

>> Jablon: Well, they had Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and so many other camps. We mostly came from Hamburg.

>> Interviewer: Prior to going in the camps, was the word out among the people just that these camps existed and that Jews were being rounded up?

>> Jablon: Well, we knew where there were camp, but nobody thought, well, it's going to happen to me.

>> Interviewer: So nobody else around you that you immediately knew had gone or had been taken?

>> Jablon: Well, I met some of them in camp.

>> Interviewer: So you were there simultaneously, but nobody --

>> Jablon: Yeah, yeah, sure.

>> Interviewer: So nobody that you knew had gone prior to Kristallnacht?

>> Jablon: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Did people come out of Sachsenhausen talking about what their experiences were, prior to your going in?

>> Jablon: No, no, no, no. We -- usually, what I would say mass transportation of Jews went to other camps. Sachsenhausen, you only heard the name.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Jablon: Which was about 20 minutes by subway from Berlin.

>> Interviewer: When you were in the camp, then they had you -- it was a work camp at that particular time.

>> Jablon: Yes, right.

>> Interviewer: Were there women there?

>> Jablon: No, no, no, no.

>> Interviewer: And you didn't see any children? was it all men?

>> Jablon: No, no, no, all men, and as I said, mostly Jewish then.

>> Interviewer: But they did have other people there other than Jews?

>> Jablon: Oh, yes. Well, if you don't mind a few minutes of the time to give you one description of what happened?

>> Interviewer: Oh, please.

>> Jablon: See, the first few days, at least my -- but I don't know, whatever you want to call it -- we had to dig a ditch, about 30 feet down. For what reason, nobody knows. And up on top of the ditch, one of the old-timers, with a Number 5, came and yelled down, "Is here anybody from Breslau?" Well, I knew better than to say yes. You just kept your mouth shut. And he didn't give up. Then he shouted down, "Does anybody know a Lieutenant wolfe [phonetic]?" which was a brother of my mother. I looked at him again and said, "Are you the [indistinct] power?" "Yes." So he said, "Come up here," and he asked me, "What do you know about Lieutenant wolfe?" I said, "That's my uncle."

Now, my uncle was a -- had a hobby that were horses, and that fellow was the guy in charge of the horses. But the way they put him away was, he just murdered somebody at some time. That's why he was in that camp. So he asked me, "Do you need anything what I can do for you?" I said, "They took everything away from me. What I could use is a pair of nail scissors and a handkerchief." A half an hour later, I had a pair of nail scissors and a handkerchief. Unfortunately, a few days later, he was transferred to another camp, and then it was just tough going for the rest of the six weeks.

>> Interviewer: What were the conditions in the camp, in terms of sleeping conditions, eating conditions?

>> Jablon: Sleeping conditions, it was a barrack, and we all lay just on the floor. There was no room to turn around. The way we laid down, we had to sleep all night long. Eating, we got something -- what looked like coffee in the morning and a big piece of dry bread. And when we came back at 5:00, we got something, what could be soup or anything but. Hard to define it any closer. I lost 25 pounds in those six weeks.

Now, there was what you could call a canteen. And whoever got some money sent from home could buy whatever was available at the canteen. My wife sent me money; it never reached me. Others did have money, and they bought whatever was available.

>> Interviewer: Were you allowed visitors?

>> Jablon: Oh --

>> Interviewer: No. But so they were allowing mail to come in or packages to come in? I mean, is that how the money was --

>> Jablon: No, no, if you got the money, you could buy something in the --

>> Interviewer: If you had brought it in with you?

>> Jablon: Or if they sent you money and it reached you.

>> Interviewer: Right, somebody didn't take it in between.

>> Jablon: Now, things which did not happen to everybody, my father-in-law, a long, long time before Hitler, had a factory, and he had one worker who stole. Daddy was a nice man. He fired him and said, "I'm not going to report you to the police, but don't come back here anymore." After Hitler came, that guy went

to Daddy and told him, "You were nice to me. If I can do anything for you, call me."

So when I came into the concentration camp, he went to that fellow. He said, "well, this and this and this and this will cost 5,000 marks, and we'll get him out." It so happened there was another Gerald Jablon, and he got out on the 5,000 marks we paid that fellow. So after I didn't come home in two weeks, Daddy went to him and said, "well, we have to start all over again," which they did, and I finally got out on the second try.

>> Interviewer: So this man did --

>> Jablon: Yes.

>> Interviewer: -- sort of work for your release?

>> Jablon: Yeah, he, he --

>> Interviewer: He got paid, but --

>> Jablon: Well, he was somebody in the Nazi Party, but he felt for Daddy because he, at that time, didn't turn him over to the authorities.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about your parents and what was happening to them during all this time.

>> Jablon: Well, my father was a high officer in First World War, and he said, "Nothing is going to happen to me." He had a pharmacy, and in 1935, he could have exchanged his pharmacy in Breslau against a pharmacy in Zurich, Switzerland, and he would have lost 20% of his capital. But he didn't do it.

You see, I mean...people can't understand mentalities like that after what did happen. So that's what happened. He disappeared.

First, my parents went to Theresienstadt, and I have records that they were there. But after a certain length of time, nobody knows what did happen. Now, a brother and sister-in-law of my father already disappeared in 1938, and nobody knows what happened to them. And...it's just...beyond reason.

>> Interviewer: Your father, what you're saying, he was banking on the fact that he'd been a loyal German in --

>> Jablon: Yes, sure.

>> Interviewer: -- and sort of a military hero, but -- and he and your mother, they disappeared at the same time?

>> Jablon: Yes, yes, yes.

>> Interviewer: When was the last time that you were with your family?

>> Jablon: January '39, a couple of days before we left Germany. My parents were living in Berlin at that time. We went to Cologne to say good-bye to my wife's parents, and off to London.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me about Kristallnacht, and can you describe what happened Kristallnacht?

>> Jablon: Well, we lived in a part of Hamburg where we didn't see and hear anything about it because that was downtown. But the next morning at 10:00, a couple of policemen came and checked my desk, every paper, and then said, "Come with us." And that was it.

>> Interviewer: They came to your office?

>> Jablon: No, to my house.

>> Interviewer: They came to your house. Did you have papers at that time that identified you as a Jew, or how did they know where everybody -- everybody knew?

>> Jablon: Everybody knew everything. See, the German authorities always were very well organized. See, at that time, for three years, I had a passport stamped with a big red J in it.

>> Interviewer: So the actual, then, of Kristallnacht, it happened, and then they came and got you.

>> Jablon: Yes.

>> Interviewer: Did you ever see downtown Hamburg and see the damage that had been done?

>> Jablon: No, no, no, no, no.

>> Interviewer: So you just went straight away?

>> Jablon: Now, when I came home, there was a bed and a chair in my apartment. Luckily enough, my wife had sent everything to New York already. So when we came to New York, I went to the warehouse, and they said, "well, we sure are lucky to see you. Here is a bill for \$250. If it's not paid within one week, we are going to auction the stuff off."

>> Interviewer: Did you have the \$250?

>> Jablon: We didn't even have 25 cents! But here is, again, one of the lucky turns. We went from one committee to another, "We have no money." Finally, we went to the HIAS, if you know what that is, Hebrew Immigration Assistance Society. There was an old fellow sitting. He said, "Money, we do not have. But we can give you some advice. Did I understand you right that some relatives

of your wife had dealing with a Baron de Hirsch?" "Yes." "Well, on this-and-this address is a Baron de Hirsch Fund. Go there."

We went, told our story. The fellow listened and said, "well, go back home. You will hear from us." well, he checked the records and found out that we told him a true story. Then comes a letter, "Come and see me." We walk in. "Here's a check for \$250. Pay us back when you can."

>> Interviewer: That's good. Let's go -- I want to go back a little bit.

>> Jablon: Sure.

>> Interviewer: We'll go back to Germany. While you were in Sachsenhausen, your wife, what was she doing during this time?

>> Jablon: Well, she tried everything to get me out, and the furniture out of the country.

>> Interviewer: And she was able to do that, and then --

>> Jablon: Yes.

>> Interviewer: -- eventually, with your parents' assistance --

>> Jablon: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: -- you were able to leave. How long did you stay in London?

>> Jablon: Fifteen months.

>> Interviewer: So by that time, the war was in full swing.

>> Jablon: Oh, yes. We went through the first part in London.

>> Interviewer: And then you came to America.

>> Jablon: To New York, and I figured everybody was waiting for me in the coffee trade, and nobody was. So my first job for six months in New York was busboy in a restaurant. And I don't know if I mentioned it before. I have a sideline, which is music. I'm an oboist, and the Charlotte Symphony was looking for one. They came to New York, listened to me, and said, "Come to Charlotte." That's how we came down South. I was the first professional musician they ever hired, in 1940.

>> Interviewer: How long were you with them?

>> Jablon: About...a little over two years. You see, I mean, from music alone, you couldn't make a living.

>> Interviewer: Right.

>> Jablon: So right after we moved there, I found a job as a paymaster in a hosiery mill, which was fine till December 7th. No more silk, no more nylon. They gave me six weeks' notice. Thousands of jobs in Charlotte. Question: What are you? Enemy alien? Sorry. Couldn't find a job in Charlotte. That's how I came to South Carolina.

>> Interviewer: And you ended up settling in Spartanburg?

>> Jablon: Spartanburg, and had my own office as a public accountant and was happy ever after then.

>> Interviewer: And you have children?

>> Jablon: Yes, a daughter and a son.

>> Interviewer: If you want to take just a minute, I'd like for you to sort of collect your thoughts, or if you want to go back, if you want to add anything, I'd like for you to think of anything that you haven't told me that you want to tell me. I mean, this is sort of a very fluid kind of thing, so just think of impressions from that time in your life.

>> Jablon: Something you never will forget, those six weeks in a concentration camp. Another thing you never will forget, that your parents disappeared and you don't know when and where, and that's on your mind constantly. But I mean, my first experience with the Nazis was on account of me being, among other, an organist. In '33, a rabbi in Breslau calls me up, "Gerry, I have to go to the prison to conduct a service. You want to come with me and play the organ?" I said yes. That's how I was in the prison and saw quite a few Jewish people in there.

>> Interviewer: When you had to come to America and the United States had gotten involved in World War II, how did you feel about what you knew was going on in Germany, and how were people treating you in the United States? I know you had your experience in Charlotte.

>> Jablon: Well, I mean, I have nothing to complain about here. But the stigma of enemy alien followed me for quite some time. Now, all my friends, whether they were in Florida, in Michigan, or wherever they were, they got picked up in the Army just like that. I was still of Army age. North Carolina and South Carolina, every enemy alien was automatically 4-F. They never looked at me.

>> Interviewer: And what about the -- I mean, did you have any more news from Germany about the camps or any -- you didn't know anything else that was going on?

>> Jablon: No, no, no, no.

>> Interviewer: How was that handled in the press in the United States? Was it just not addressed?

>> Jablon: Well, no, it was not addressed. You see, we had, if I remember correctly, a certain type of censorship, and...the frontiers were not very open to any aliens, whether they came from Germany or anywhere else.

>> Interviewer: During the wartime, did you come in contact with any other fellow Germans or fellow Jews that --

>> Jablon: Oh, yes, certainly. You see, living in Spartanburg, we had a military camp, and we had quite a few German-born soldiers there who were not living in North or South Carolina, so I met quite a few of them. And I didn't know him, but somebody who was made a United States citizen in Spartanburg was Kissinger.

>> Interviewer: Oh, I didn't know that!

>> Jablon: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: That's interesting.

>> Jablon: But talking about the way German Jews were treated in different countries, in London they also took them into the army. But they did not put them here and there, like in the United States. They made a special corps of them. And just after the start of the war, in September '39, if you walked along Oxford Street, in front of you were a half a dozen English soldiers in English uniform talking German. I'm telling you!

>> Interviewer: That was a little disconcerting, wasn't it?

>> Jablon: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: That's -- I didn't know that. I didn't realize that. What else can you tell me?

>> Jablon: Well, I mean, I'm more than happy that I made it here to the United States, and we have two wonderful children and four wonderful grandchildren. And...

>> Interviewer: What happened after the war? Did you ever hear from any of your extended family or uncles or aunts?

>> Jablon: Well, on my father's side, there was quite some family, but they originally settled in 1910 in Czechoslovakia. And my uncle there, he had a very good feeling about things. He had all his money in Liechtenstein, and on the day Hitler came to Czechoslovakia, he happened to be in Italy, and his wife and children all came to London, and I see my aunt sitting there, and first time in her life not in a first-class hotel, saying, "Immigration is no pleasure trip."

>> Interviewer: What about other relatives?

>> Jablon: Well, there are -- well, a sister of my mother was living in Australia, and naturally, I never saw her again, but we kept in touch. And that brother of my mother, who was running my grandfather's company, he went to Tasmania. Now, he thought he was a smart aleck. It didn't work out like that. You know, you can become honorary consul of any country if you do it the right way. In Breslau, he became honorary consul of Guatemala. He never had anything to do, but he thought that could save him. But it sure did not.

>> Interviewer: Can you think of anything else you want to add to this interview?

>> Jablon: Well, I mean, I spent a lot of time traveling around Germany as a musician because my instrument was oboe and they didn't have many oboists at that time, so I went all the way from Hamburg to southern Germany and Breslau, and, I mean, they didn't bother musicians much. But as long as you were in business, like I was in Hamburg, that's when they came after you. And naturally, we could have had -- didn't want to have children in Germany, so we waited till we came here to the United States. We sure didn't get millionaires here, but we are not complaining.

>> Interviewer: Good. Mr. Jablon, thank you for being with us today. Thank you for doing this interview.

>> Jablon: You're very welcome.

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