

>> Interviewer: Okay. Would you tell me your complete name, please?

>> Kolender: My name is Pincus Kolender. I was born February 8, 1926, in Bochnia, Poland. Bochnia is about 40 to 50 kilometer from Kraków.

>> Interviewer: Okay, would you tell me a little bit about the city, Bochnia, that you lived in?

>> Kolender: Bochnia was about -- a population about 30,000 people. Ten thousand were Jewish. Population of Jewish, 10,000.

>> Interviewer: Okay, and how were the Jews treated in your city?

>> Kolender: Well, you're talking before the war?

>> Interviewer: Before the war.

>> Kolender: Well, there was always anti-Semitism, but we managed. Somehow, we managed. It was a very thriving city. It had a lot of synagogues, *shuls*, *shtiebel*, and schools, Hebrew schools, yeshivas. It was a very thriving city.

>> Interviewer: Did you go to a school designed just for Jewish --

>> Kolender: Yes, I went to yeshiva, and I went to school, half, divided -- in the afternoon, we went to school. In the morning, we went to the yeshiva.

>> Interviewer: How might the people in your city have treated Jews that were different from other Polish people?

>> Kolender: You mean, who --

>> Interviewer: How did they treat you, that you were prejudiced against?

>> Kolender: Well, Polish people have always been prejudiced against the Jewish people.

>> Interviewer: Were there things you were not allowed to do because you were Jewish?

>> Kolender: Well, certain businesses, Jews could not -- they couldn't get like -- I remember my father applied for a -- he was a veteran. He served in the army during world war I, and he applied for a business, and he couldn't get it because he was Jewish.

>> Interviewer: Did they state that as the reason, or you just knew?

>> Kolender: They didn't state it. They didn't state it. But we knew that was the reason.

>> Interviewer: What was your family like? What did your father do?

>> Kolender: We were a family of five; two brothers, a sister. My father was an accountant. Irony, my father-in-law was also an accountant. Renee's father was also an accountant until the war, until world war II. Yeah, he was a certified accountant.

>> Interviewer: And what kind of business did he work in?

>> Kolender: For a clothing store. A clothing store. This was still 1938. Then by 1938, the anti-Semitism was so strong -- you know, my father had a beard. He was a religious Jew. So the owner of the business required from him to shave it off, and he wouldn't do it. So I remember he lost the job, and he went into a grocery store. We opened up a grocery business in 1938.

>> Interviewer: Did he continue the grocery business until --

>> Kolender: Yeah, till the war, till 1940.

>> Interviewer: What was your family life like? What kinds of things did you do?

>> Kolender: Well, we had a good life, a very -- I can't complain. We had a good youth, and my father was very religious. We always kept Saturday. The business was closed on Saturday. We went to shul. It was a very good life, I would say, till the war. As a child, I still remember good things from before the war. It was a good family life.

>> Interviewer: When the war came to Poland, could you tell us what you remember?

>> Kolender: By 1939, everything stopped. Hell broke loose. First of all, all the schools were closed or forbidden for Jewish kids, so we couldn't go to school. All the synagogues, everything was closed. The businesses -- I remember in 1940 we had to close our business. Jews weren't allowed to have any businesses.

>> Interviewer: What did your family do once the business was closed?

>> Kolender: Well, it was tough, very rough, very, very bad. It was hard to get food, and they had no money, but somehow we managed till 1942.

>> Interviewer: Did you sell your possessions?

>> Kolender: We wouldn't sell it. You see, in 1940, they put us into a ghetto. Fortunately for us, we didn't have to move because our house, where we lived, was in the ghetto, so we didn't have to move. But all the Jews from the outside, who lived in the suburbs, they had to move into the ghetto.

>> Interviewer: Could you tell us a little bit about your life when you were in the ghetto?

>> Kolender: Well, 1940, first thing, we had to go to work. All the children -- not children -- men from 15 till 55, we had forced labor. We had to register, and we had to report for labor. So I remember we worked. The Germans came for us, several hundred people. They came with trucks. We had to leave 6:00 in the morning. We had to work and build highways, dig ditches, all this kind of hard labor. But at least we came back in the evening. We came back to our homes. So that was from '40 till '42. I was constantly on forced labor.

>> Interviewer: Who would have been the guards in your ghetto?

>> Kolender: At the ghettos? Well, inside was the Jewish police; the Ordinance Police, what they call them. For the work, we had German civilians. At that time, there was no military, just civilians who watched us.

>> Interviewer: Now, what might the people who stayed home during the day, what was their life like in the ghetto?

>> Kolender: In the ghetto? well, the constant fear and that we never knew -- insecurity and never knew what's going to happen. We knew something's going to happen, but we couldn't go nowhere. You were trapped. You know, simple, there was nowhere to go. We just had to hope for the best.

>> Interviewer: Could you go in and out of the ghetto freely?

>> Kolender: No, I was in the ghetto, and the ghettos were sealed. If you had to go out in the Aryan neighborhood, either you had to have a pass or something, or with a policeman. But it was forbidden. As a matter of fact, if they caught you without any passport or something, you were shot on the spot.

>> Interviewer: All the food and supplies were brought in by the Germans?

>> Kolender: No, it was smuggled in. There was a lot of smuggling going on at night. That's the only way we got our food. We smuggled in through the Polish neighborhood. We paid quite a bit. They paid a big price for it.

>> Interviewer: What was the religious life like in the ghetto?

>> Kolender: well, in the ghetto, everything had to be done secretly. We still went to shul. We had the Sabbath -- not in the shul -- we had it had it at homes. We always had to watch outside because it was forbidden to assemble. More than six or eight people cannot be -- the Germans forbid to get assembled. So we had services morning and evenings, and we always had a lookout to watch if the Germans come in. So when we had some Germans come, everybody dispersed so they wouldn't see us.

>> Interviewer: Did people start disappearing from the ghetto?

>> Kolender: Yes, a lot of people, because a lot of people went out at night to get some food from the farmers and everything, and anybody who was caught were shot. I remember, every day, you used to bring in dead corpse, the people who were caught on the outside, outside the ghetto.

>> Interviewer: And you were responsible for burying them?

>> Kolender: Yeah, the Jewish community had to go bury 'em.

>> Interviewer: Where did the people who came from the smaller cities, where did they go?

>> Kolender: From the surrounding area? Yes, they all came and put 'em into the ghetto, into Bochnia. That was the main ghetto right there.

>> Interviewer: Did you have to accommodate them in your houses?

>> Kolender: Well, the Jewish community, there was a *Judenrat*, the Jewish council. They called it a Judenrat, and they were responsible for those people. They had to supply them with -- make arrangements for apartments, a way to live, and so forth. Of course, they put whole families in one room. There was very shortage of apartments, so people lived like animals, like dogs, 10-15 people to a room. Couldn't help it.

>> Interviewer: Was there quite a bit of community spirit, trying to help other people?

>> Kolender: Yes. Yeah, that's the reason -- yes, there was quite a community spirit. The wealthy, the people who had some money, helped. I remember in the ghetto, by 1940, we had to give up the grocery store. We opened up a restaurant, a small restaurant, so we helped out a lot of people who didn't have to

eat, anything. They used to come in, and we used to feed 'em 'cause we had a little bit more than they had.

>> Interviewer: Did the Jewish council exist before the ghetto was established?

>> Kolender: No. For the ghetto, in 1940, they arranged the Judenrat in 1940.

>> Interviewer: Did you see things starting to change in the ghetto as time went on?

>> Kolender: Yes. Yes. Everything was changed. First of all, there was no food available, and we didn't have the freedom. You just were cooped in a small ghetto, thousands of people in just three or four blocks, so you can imagine how crowded things were.

>> Interviewer: When did the ghetto become unestablished? When did they close it?

>> Kolender: I believe it was in 1940. I couldn't tell. I think it was in winter. I remember it was cold when the Germans came in and they gave the orders, all the people to move into the ghetto. So it was about 1940 and winter. I couldn't give you exactly the date.

>> Interviewer: And when did they close that ghetto?

>> Kolender: Right when they -- once they got all the people into the ghetto, then they closed it. They had gates, and Jewish police, the Judenrat were inside, and they had German -- I think it was Polish police, were outside watching the ghettos.

>> Interviewer: And then eventually you left the ghetto?

>> Kolender: We went -- what do you mean? We went to work. We had to go out through the gate, yeah. I was there till 1942, in the ghetto.

>> Interviewer: What happened in 1942?

>> Kolender: In 1942, the Germans, they came in and took out for Auschwitz -- the first group, I think, went to Treblinka. I remember that, and they got my sister at that time. I was still in there. They had to quarter so many people, so they grabbed so many people. By the end of 1942, I was taken with my brother to Auschwitz.

>> Interviewer: What became of your parents?

>> Kolender: My mother was shot right in the ghetto. It was 1942, and as a matter of fact, it was September the 1st or the 2nd. All the elderly people, they didn't want. Only the young ones. They picked the young ones, and the older ones -- it was a few hundred people -- they couldn't use them, so they just executed them right there in front of us. So my mother was shot right then on the spot, and my brother and myself, we went to Auschwitz. I was with my brother the whole time, till 1945.

>> Interviewer: What happened to your brother?

>> Kolender: Unfortunately, in 1945 in January, when the Russian offensive started -- I know you're familiar with the history? And when the Russians came close to Auschwitz, the Germans came, and they took us all out. We marched farther west, away from the Russians. We marched the whole night. I remember, we marched from Auschwitz to Gliwice. It's about 70 miles. And my brother kept saying to me, "Let's escape," and I kept telling him, "Do not escape; this is not the time," because I knew it's still German territory. And I said, "If you escape, where are you going to hide? The population, they're not friendly; they're all

Germans." But something -- I don't know. He just kept constantly, and suddenly, I didn't see him anymore. And since then, I lost him. I was there the whole time in Auschwitz.

>> Interviewer: When you left the ghetto, how did you leave from the ghetto?

>> Kolender: They put us on trains. They put us on trains, cattle trains, packed us 100-120 people into a wagon, sealed. And fortunately, we weren't too far from Auschwitz, so it took us only about two days. So most people -- but I know some trains farther east took seven or eight days, so you can imagine, a closed wagon, most of them didn't make it even to Auschwitz. But for us, it was only two days' of a trip to Auschwitz.

>> Interviewer: Was any food or --

>> Kolender: No -- I mean, on the train? No, nothing. No, no food.

>> Interviewer: When you got to the camp, what --

>> Kolender: When we got to Auschwitz, I remember we had to undress completely naked, and they put us -- here is -- I remember, this is that -- if you can see this, this is the gate before Auschwitz. Sorry, this -- and you see here? Right there, this is before the gate. We had to line up there before that gate, and I remember Mengele was there. You heard of the famous doctor? And we had to line up in five, and then he was pointing left, right, right, left, right left. And I was fortunate. I went to the right. And going to the left, they went to the crematorium. Going to the right went into the camp, into Auschwitz.

>> Interviewer: Was that your only encounter with Mengele?

>> Kolender: Yes, that's the only one. I didn't even know the name, but later on, when I heard about him, I remember the looks of him. That was him.

>> Interviewer: Once you went in the line that said you were going to live, then --

>> Kolender: We didn't know that. We didn't know that. But I had an idea when I could see -- it was dark, but I could see the people to the left were mostly elderly people and young children. So I had an inkling that we're going into the camp. And they put us into the camp when we got there. First of all, they shaved our hair. We were stark naked, and they tattooed us. You see it right now? I have 161253, the number.

And they took us and they gave us showers, cold showers. It was winter, bitter cold. It was in November when we got there, and then the showers, and they put us this striped -- they gave us striped clothes, and they took us into Birkenau. This is that camp. And the Birkenau, actually, it was a camp -- it was -- it was not a labor camp. You couldn't live there longer than four weeks. Fortunately for us, we been there only four weeks. It was a transition camp. That's what it is.

After four weeks, I was fortunate -- they picked several hundred men to a next camp, to Buna, which was about 10 miles farther, and that was a little better camp. It was more a labor camp, which we worked, and they gave us a little bit of food. And the barracks were a little nicer and so on.

>> Interviewer: Would you describe the living conditions there, what the barracks were like?

>> Kolender: Okay, the barracks, I would say there was about 300 or 400 men to a barrack. We had double, triple bunks that looked like this. I brought a picture when I was after the war. See the

bunks? Triple bunks. And that's what really -- each one had his assignment. The bunks were actually single bunks, and two people had to sleep on it. It was bitter cold in the barracks, and we had to get up 5:00 in the morning.

And the way they came in, the Kapos -- you know what a Kapo is? Kapos were like the -- they were in charge of the barracks. Most of them were criminals. They weren't Jews. They were mostly Germans, Poles -- and some Jews, but mostly criminals, and they gave them the assignment to take care of us, and they used to beat us. That's the way -- in the morning, in the evening, in order, you know, to scare us not to break any rules or, you know, to be quiet. And that's the way they treated us there.

>> Interviewer: And what did you have to eat?

>> Kolender: In the morning, used to give us one portion of bread. It was mostly mixed with sawdust. It was very heavy. But it was flours mixed with sawdust. You wouldn't believe it. with sawdust. And a piece of margarine and a cup of coffee. The coffee was not really coffee. It was a substitute coffee. No sugar. And this is what you got in the morning.

You had to work till the evening. In the evening, you got a quart of soup. If you were fortunate, sometimes you had a few potatoes and a piece of meat, if you were lucky, if you mixed it up good. Most of the time, it was just hot water and a few potatoes. And for that, you had to work almost nine to ten hours a day.

>> Interviewer: What kind of work did you do?

>> Kolender: The first time when we come there, we had to unload gravel from trains and coals. This I remember the first few weeks, this kind of work. And they used to assign four men to a wagon, and they gave you so much -- you had to finish it by

then, and if you didn't finish it, you got a beating. So it was -- you couldn't just sit out and say, "well, I'm not going to do it," because if you didn't do it, didn't finish your job, you got a terrible beating from the Kapos.

>> Interviewer: And then did you continue with that the whole time you were there?

>> Kolender: I continued it for quite a while. I do remember in Auschwitz -- you know, to survive in Auschwitz, you had to get a break. My break came -- I remember the first few months was -- I knew I just wouldn't make it. It was bitter cold. You know, the hunger, you can survive. You can with hunger for a long time, but the worst thing was the cold. It was bitter cold, and you had one striped jacket, no sweater, just an undershirt and an overcoat, a striped overcoat which was very thin. And with that, you had to stay outside, which was often 10 to 15 below zero and bitter cold. People just froze to death. And that was actually the main culprit. I find at Auschwitz the main thing, the worst enemy, was the cold. Then, naturally, was the hunger, and then was the beating.

But my break came -- I remember, I met a friend of mine. He was from my hometown, and we discussed it, so he told me, "You know, there's --" he gave me the name he used to -- he was a friend of my family. He happened to be in Auschwitz, one of the first one. He was arrested in 1940. He was one of the intelligentsia. You know, when the Germans came into Poland, the first few months, they arrested all the intelligentsia because they figured, got to get rid of the intelligentsia first 'cause they can start a revolution, or, you know. And he was a professor or something, so they had his name. He was a good friend of my family.

Fortunately, that man, he was sent to Auschwitz, and he survived the first few months, and he was assigned in Auschwitz in the administration. And he told me about them, and he said he is in

charge of -- you know, the inmates in Auschwitz, they had everything -- the administration, everything, it was on -- they did all the work, and he happened to be a very high position in Auschwitz. So I went there, and when I met him, he recognized me. And I told him I was in a situation, how bad it is, and so if he can give me a different job. Lucky for me, he assigned me to another job, which was indoors, and my brother. And I think was the first break I got in Auschwitz because I didn't think I would have survived the winter with this kind of work we did before, and that was my first break. You see, that's -- I survived. I had a better job that was indoors, which it wasn't so cold, and it wasn't so hard. And I think he saved my life.

>> Interviewer: What job did you do?

>> Kolender: Well, we worked inside. We made cabinets, metal cabinets, for the Germans. They just mostly carried -- you know, I was not a cabinetmaker, but we did the labor, you know, what's there. But the main thing what it was is indoors because it was bitter cold, and December, January, February, March in Auschwitz was the most unbearable. So cold it was there.

>> Interviewer: How did the people in your barracks get along with each other?

>> Kolender: Well, to be honest with you, we were like animals. People were stealing. Everybody tried to. They looked out for himself. You could not -- if you left a piece of bread, in five minutes, it was gone. So everything has to be -- you had to keep it tucked in under your shirt. Unfortunate, that is a fact of life. We were like animals, fighting, scratching, beating, and anybody we could steal from, anybody -- just like animals. We just lost our humanity. That's a fact.

>> Interviewer: Were you in barracks with only Jewish people?

>> Kolender: No, we were with Poles too, Poles and -- mostly Jews and Poles, yeah. We had a few Germans, their political prisoners.

>> Interviewer: Did they eliminate people who were in your barracks at various points? Did they take 'em to the death camps from your work details?

>> Kolender: Yes, we did have -- over a few months, we had -- they call it a selection. Mengele came in -- well, I didn't see him. He used to come in the barracks, and they used to select the people who were skinny, couldn't work anymore. So they had to undress, complete naked. We had to stand before the doctor. He looked at you, and you had to turn around. You had to stoop while he looked. If he saw too many bones on you, put down your number, and that's it. Next morning, they came with trucks and picked all the people and put 'em right in the crematorium.

>> Interviewer: Did you know what was happening?

>> Kolender: Yeah, we knew it. We knew it. Fortunately, I wasn't picked, but I can remember, it was heartbreaking when some of my friends, they knew that he put down their number, they were picked. They knew they would come for them in the morning. It's a terrible thing.

>> Interviewer: Was there any time where there was ever an attempted revolt against the Germans?

>> Kolender: Not in Buna, not where we were. As a matter of fact, there was a revolt in Birkenau. There was a Sonderkommando, you know. Sonderkommando, they're the one who did the burning, the people. They put them in the ovens. They had made a revolt. Most of them got killed, but at least they accomplish one thing. They burned down this crematorium. But that was already by the end -- by 1944, by the end of '44. We

just found out about -- we didn't know it. I found out later what happened.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember, when you were liberated, who liberated you and what happened?

>> Kolender: Okay. When we went from Auschwitz, when they moved us out on the death march and they put us on cattle trains in Gliwice -- that's the name of the city, which is about 70 miles from Auschwitz -- they put us on train. They took us farther, deeper into Germany. They took us ten days. They packed us about 150 people to a wagon. We had no food. Fortunately for us, the wagons were open, the wagons. Everybody had his utensils, you know, what you ate with, a cup, you know. And so we did, at night when the German -- we had guards and everything, but they didn't see it. I remember I used to have a string. I attached it to the plate and scooped up snow, and that kept us alive, because you can live without bread for a long time, but not without water. And that's what kept us alive.

It was so crowded, so cramped that, little by little, every day it got looser. People died. We started fighting, scratching, biting each other. We were like animals, because, you know, you can stand only one hour or two hour. You can't stand for ten days. We actually didn't have no room to sit down. You had to stand like one next to each other, so people got actually crazy. People went crazy. And then every day, I remember, at night, we'd throw 'em out over the wagons. When we got to Nordhausen after ten days, were about 20 of us in the wagon, mostly young boys like me. The elder ones, they couldn't make it. They didn't survive.

And when we got to Nordhausen -- this was also a big concentration camp. I don't know if you know -- you heard of Nordhausen? It was a concentration camp. We were there about ten days. Then they send us -- fortunately, from Nordhausen, they

sent us to another camp, and the name was Dora, D-O-R-A, which is in the mountains. And we are the one -- we had worked -- the V-1 and the V-2, you heard about with the Germans? We did the work for them. We dug tunnels into the mountains. I remember they told us that -- so we worked there for about -- that was the end of January -- February, March, till April, beginning of April.

Then the English came from this side. That was already in '45. So they put us again on trains to move away from the -- we moved away. And we went to Czechoslovakia. I remember like now, it was April the 20th. It was a Friday morning. April the 20th is Hitler's birthday. I remember the SS came, and they gave us an extra piece of margarine. It was in honor of the Führer. I'll never forget it. And we were on the train. Also, we were packed about a hundred to a train.

And all of sudden, we could hear sirens blowing, and American fighter planes came and start strafing our train, because they didn't know that it's prisoners. And some like instinct told me, This is your chance now; run. Because while they were strafing us with the machine gun, the train, I remember the two SS guards, they took cover right away under the wagon. And something told me, instinct, run. And I jumped out the train...and ran and ran about 3 miles. I remember the fighter planes, they strafed us. I could see people falling. I wasn't the only one. Several of us jumped, and people fell and got killed from machine, and I could see the bullets flying practically right to my nose. But I kept going. I said, This is my only chance. I remember all I had is shorts. I didn't even have the shirt on because it was very hot in the train. It was closed in and so many people. And barefooted, but I kept running for about 3 miles. Just -- I said, Let me get away from the train.

And I met another fellow who also escaped with me, and we closed up together, and we start walking. And it was already, I remember, late in the morning. We got hungry. I said, "We've got to do something. We can't...we can't --" I mean, we were now getting cold, buck naked. So we saw from the distance a hut, farmers, so we went into the farm. And I remember the Czechoslovakian farmers, they helped us a lot. They helped us a lot. They gave us food, gave me clothes, and they kept us warm for about a day.

Unfortunately, he gave us so much food, we were so hungry, and we -- he gave us the wrong food. I remember, he gave us sauerkraut and milk and bread, and, you know, that was the wrong thing. We were skinny bones, and I remember I got so sick that night. I was spitting blood. The farmer -- and he went that night 'cause I got high -- I remember, I took so sick I knew -- I felt -- I said, "Oh, my God, here I survived Auschwitz; now I'm going to die." I was so sick. Blood from -- spitting blood, and even from, from the -- everything. I can't tell you how sick I was. I had high fever. He brought a doctor. I remember he gave me a shot. And the doctor risked his life. You know, the Germans, if they would have caught that farmer hiding us, he would have been executed too. And he gave us medicine. He gave us medicine, and that's the way I survived.

The next morning, we had to leave because the Germans were searching for us. Can you imagine? It was already almost the end of the war. They came into the village looking for the prisoners. The farmer found out about it, so that night, he took us into the woods, into the forest. It was not far from there, and he gave us a shovel. We dug a foxhole, a deep foxhole, and he gave us blankets, and we slept there for two weeks. Every night, he brought us food till the Americans came.

On May the 5th, Americans came to Czechoslovakia. The irony of it, that was the Fifth Army. Patton's army liberated us. Five

years later, I served in Patton's army. When I came to America, I was drafted. I went back. I served in the Fifth Army.

>> Interviewer: Could you back up a little bit, back to when you were rescued in the fields by the Czechoslovakian? How did the Americans get to you, and where did you go after that?

>> Kolender: Well, we found out the Americans came in, so we went to Prague. That was near Prague. And we went there, and there was several other guys we met, other fellow survivors. So we went to the American -- I remember we went to a company there that had bivouacked. It was a tank company. We went in there, and we asked him -- we're willing to work. He said KP duty. You know KP? And they were glad to take us in, and we worked for them for four weeks. And we glad to do the work, and the soldiers were happy because they didn't have to pull a KP. So we slept with the Americans. They gave us uniforms. We had a real -- and that's the way we recuperated. We surprised how quickly we recuperated. From 70, 80 pounds, in a month I was already 120, 130 pounds.

>> Interviewer: And where did you go once you --

>> Kolender: From there -- we worked with them, and the company, I remember, left for the United States, and we just went to Germany. We found out there's a lot of refugees going to Germany, so we went to Germany. And I lived in Germany from 1945 till 1950. I applied for the visa right then. When I get to Germany, I applied for them with the American council. It took me five years to get the visa. And I left in January of 1950 for the United States, and the same year, I was drafted in the American army.

>> Interviewer: What did you do for those five years when you were in Germany?

>> Kolender: Actually, we didn't do nothing. We didn't do nothing. Because you were -- you didn't know -- we figured, any day, they would call us to come to the United States, so we just sit and wait. So that was wasted five years for me. Often, I think about it. That was the wasted years. But I couldn't do anything.

>> Interviewer: Did you go back to the city that you grew up in?

>> Kolender: No, I never went back to Poland. I went back to Poland four years ago. I took my wife and my son and daughter. We went to Poland. That's the pictures I have here, which we took from Auschwitz and so on.

>> Interviewer: When you were waiting, were the German people antagonistic to you, or how did they treat you?

>> Kolender: You mean during the five years?

>> Interviewer: When you were waiting in '45 to '50.

>> Kolender: Well, no. First of all, they were the defeated people, you know, and so they -- well, I don't know what -- inside, in their heart, they probably still hated us, but they didn't show it to us.

>> Interviewer: And how did you eat and pay for things?

>> Kolender: Well, we received some kind of help from the German government during the years while we were waiting for the visa.

>> Interviewer: And who were you waiting with? Who did you live with?

>> Kolender: A few more fellows. We lived in a little town, and there was -- near a refugee camp. Most of the people lived in DP

camps, you know, those displaced person camps for waiting for their visas, and we lived in the little town. And every day, we were hoping to get a call, and that's the reason we couldn't do anything. We didn't want to leave because suppose you get a call from the consulate to leave.

>> Interviewer: Then in 1950, you got the call that said you could leave.

>> Kolender: Yes, 1950, I got the call from the American consulate, and we went to Bremerhaven. They took us to Bremen. From Bremerhaven, we boarded a ship. I got straight to Charleston, got from New York to Charleston.

>> Interviewer: What was it like when you came to Charleston?

>> Kolender: Well, the first few weeks -- or I would say the first few months was -- wasn't comfortable. Let's put it that way. You were lonely. I didn't know anybody in Charleston. I met my wife several months later, which we got acquainted, but I didn't know anybody. I didn't have any family and no relatives, couldn't speak the language. And even a job, we couldn't get the right -- it was a recession during the time, 1950. I was very, very despondent -- let's put it this way -- the first six months.

Then gradually, you got acquainted, made more friends. Things got a little better. Then I was drafted in the army. The Korea war broke out, I believe, in July, and I was drafted in September. And I was induced in the army in December of 1950, and I was stationed for North Carolina and Fort Bragg. I even was at Fort Jackson here, too, for a while. And then they sent me back to Germany for a tour of duty. I was stationed in Germany.

>> Interviewer: Can you relate how you felt, after dealing with German guards and soldiers for all that time, that here you were, a man in uniform, a soldier, in Germany? How did that make you feel?

>> Kolender: Well...it's two different things, you know. You try to forget about it, the way it was before. You just try to erase it from your mind. Simple, you just don't want to think about this. If you think about it, sometimes you can go crazy. It drives you nuts.

>> Interviewer: Is that one of the coping mechanisms you used to -- how did you make it through all those years in the camp?

>> Kolender: I feel it was the strong will to survive. Many boys my age didn't make it. Perhaps, they could have survived, but they lost their will to live. I've seen it. That was the main thing. You had to have the strong will to survive. You had to keep it in your mind, I am going to live, I am going to survive, and I am going to outlive. And many boys, they just often went to the fences. It was every day. You would see dozens of kids. They just went to the fences and electrocute themselves, commit suicide. It was the easiest way out. And if you lost your will, that was it. You had to have a strong will to survive.

>> Interviewer: You always felt you would survive?

>> Kolender: Yes, yes.

>> Interviewer: Did you give up ever and your brother pulled you through, or another friend pulled you through, in times of desperation?

>> Kolender: Oh, yeah, there were times you tried to give up. But in the last minute, I said, No, I'll make it; I will make it. And so I -- especially when my brother -- when I knew he was

gone. I had a feeling that he must have either -- when he escaped, he must have been shot. I said, I'm the only survivor; I've got to live.

>> Interviewer: After you came back from the service in the United States Army, what did you do then?

>> Kolender: After I came back from the army, of course I met my wife here, and we dated. I didn't have a profession. I never had the chance to learn anything. I was a travel -- a salesman. I became a house-to-house salesman, and that's what I did for about five or six years. We got married, and I was selling from house to house. And then I decide -- after five, six years, I went into furniture and appliance business. I opened up a little store, and it grew little by little. And that's what I've been doing all the time. For about 30 years, I had a furniture and appliance store.

Last December, I just retired. I sold the business, the building, and retired. I'm 65 now, so I figured -- I have now continuity. I have three children, and all of them are professionals. They don't need me, they don't need my business, so I said, well -- a good offer came up. I sold it, and I enjoy life now.

>> Interviewer: You mentioned that you took a trip back to see where you had been with your children.

>> Kolender: Yeah, we went. That's right. I wanted to see Auschwitz. I wanted to see my hometown. And it was very painful, very traumatic, but I felt a tremendous relief when I could see the -- go to the cemeteries. I have a picture here. I saw my father's mass grave, my mother's grave. I know they're buried there. There was hundreds of them. And we say a prayer. I said Kaddish, and it's a tremendous relief. And as a matter of fact, my wife and myself decided to go again. A lot of friends of mine

tell me, "why do you want to go? There's nothing there, and Polish people are anti-Semitic." But I don't go to see those people. I don't care about those people. What I want to see is go to see -- I just want to go again to the cemetery and to visit all those places, even though it's very painful, but I just feel a relief. I can't explain.

>> Interviewer: When your children were growing up, how could you communicate the experiences you had with them?

>> Kolender: Well, when they were little, we didn't, but we did when they got a little older. We sat down with them, and we talked to them and told them our experience and so on. They felt it because they never had any grandparents. They always used to ask, "How come people have a grandfather, a grandmother? We don't have any." So we explained to them. So they understood. They understood.

>> Interviewer: When you think back on all of your experiences and all the wisdom you've gained since then, what message do you have to the world?

>> Kolender: Oh, the message, often I think about it. They say people forget. They forget what happened already. It's not even quite 50 years. That's the reason I -- even though it's painful to come here and talk about it, I really want, because I feel we contribute something for the future generation. People should see it, should hear it, should know what happened. Only by education and learning what happened, maybe you could avoid from it happen again, such a tragedy for Jewish people.

>> Interviewer: What brought back your humanity? You said that you had felt so inhuman. What is it that brought you back to your obvious humanity?

>> Kolender: Frankly, I -- it's a good question. I believe -- I don't know. Maybe it's the depression and -- after -- you mean after the war once we felt more like human beings. It comes back to you. But when you're with animals, you become an animal, and that's what actually it was. We were animals. Everybody was only for himself to survive. I mean, you can't blame people. People would kill for a piece of bread. We used to search and often pick up potato peels, and we used to fight over it.

I can't describe it because you don't know what it means, day and day hunger. Hunger, it's, it's -- you were constantly, 24 hours a day, you were always hungry. Hungry, and you just think about it. You dream about it. And your mind, you're going crazy, especially when you see some other guy, when you see a man eat something. You were willing just to kill him just to grab the piece of bread. I know people who weren't there can't understand it, but it is a fact.

>> Interviewer: So getting back to a regular life brings --

>> Kolender: Yeah, we get back to regular life. We come back. After all, we are human, and a human being can become animal.

>> Interviewer: Can you forgive?

>> Kolender: I don't know. I've been thinking about it. It's hard to forgive. You can forgive to some degree, but you can't forget it. You can forgive something, but you can't forget it.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Thank you very much.

>> Kolender: Okay.

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