>> Interviewer: Definitely. We can run a little -- oops. Okay. Ready to start? Ready?

>> Herz: Mm-hmm.

>> Interviewer: Okay. If you would, please tell me your full name.

>> Herz: My name is Rudy -- Rudolph Herz. Most people call me Rudy, so I prefer to be addressed as Rudy by my friends. Others just call me Mr. Herz.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

>> Herz: I was born in a very small town on the outskirts of the town of Cologne, Cologne, Germany, a village called Stommeln, S-T-O-M-M-E-L-N, and the year was 1925. I was born on the 23rd of August, 1925.

>> Interviewer: Okay, and tell me about life growing up, before the rise of the Nazis.

>> Herz: Well, as you can count, the advent of the Nazis was about eight years after I was born, 1933. We had lived, or my family had lived in this village for -- demonstrably for about 200 years. We were well known. Most people knew that we were Jewish. There was a Jewish synagogue. My family or almost all the Jewish families were respected because most of them were tradespeople or had a profession. And I did not really feel, in those years, until I was seven, any anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism. There were occasionally a nasty word thrown by smaller children our way, like "Jew," but that was about the extent. I cannot -- I did not experience any overt anti-Semitism in the years before the Hitler advent.

In 1930, my father had purchased a grain brokerage business in an adjacent village, and we moved there, and I went to school there for the first time in 1932. And truly, my first experience with, with a new Nazi regime was at the school, in January or February 1933 where they marked the, the advent of Adolf Hitler coming to power by a very novel way, namely -- Germany at that time had one national anthem, and you have probably heard it, *"Deutschland, Deutschland über alles."* This was sung at

festivals or something like that. But on that day, I remember we were all assembled for a particular reason in the schoolyard, and unseen from us, a German national flag, the black, red, gold, was unfurled, and we sang "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," which I did not object to because I felt, myself, like most people, truly German, although of Jewish, of Jewish religion. As a matter of fact, we went so far as to say "mosaic," and that has nothing to do with the mosaics of stones. Mosaic religion meant the religion taught by Moses.

And to return back to the flag unfurling, we thought now we'd go back to class, and there came the event of our young lives. Slowly and majestically, the swastika banner was unfurled with a brand-new anthem that I had probably heard before because it was sung in the streets already previously, and that was the Storm Trooper song, *"Die Fahne hoch. Die Reihen fest geschlossen."* "Up with our flag. Close the ranks." The SA Storm Troopers are marching in steady -- with steady marching step. I can't translate more [indistinct] I could. But at any rate, that was the first experience that we had that things were going to be changed, and from there on, we experienced overt anti-Semitism, and not of a religious nature either. Before that, the Catholics were prone to holler an epithet after us, you know, like "dirty Jew" or something, but it was strictly meant as Christ-killers and had nothing to do with a racial background. From 1933 on, it became strictly *Nationalsozialismus,* or Nazi oriented.

One of the most frightening experiences that I had as a child was probably in 1934, 1935, when young Storm Troopers marched up in front of our house and sang such songs as, "When the Jews' blood drips off the knives, then our lives will be twice as good." And knowing that I was Jewish, this was a very impression -- it made a very grave impression. We talked, of course, to our parents, and our parents, of course, were just as disturbed as we were, but in order to give us a sense of security, they said, "Well, it's just hooligans, young boys who have nothing else to do." We accepted it because, well, what else could we do? We had no, no sense of history. We only knew that we were in Germany, that our people had always been Germans, and we were true Germans by being German citizens.

This changed in 1936 with the Nuremberg laws. First of all, we had a young girl, or we had some young girls come in, cleaning for us. There was nothing terrible about it. In 1936, the Nuremberg law said you can no longer have a German, or an Aryan, of child-bearing age in your house. You must have a woman over 45. Well, we thought, Well, this is strange, but they did not

want to have any younger persons have any sexual relationships with Jews. And from then on, school -- the treatment we got at school also changed somewhat. We were not permitted to join the youth groups. We were restricted, more or less, in our -- how do you call it? The textbook had the definite National Socialist slant to it, which did no longer agree with what my parents or my grandparents told us. This was, to us -- we accepted it because we, thinking of ourselves as Germans, we had the Germanic or the Teutonic attitude. We felt that we also had been fighting the Romans at -- where was this -- in Germany with, with Hermann the Great. What do children know about that? So all of these textbooks gradually acquired -- not gradually, fairly steeply. One year, the old textbook in the Weimar Republic. Next year, and this was 1934, 1935, our textbooks took a definite nationalistic slant, with emphasis on the Germanic Teutonic heritage. Well, we went along. We did not have the judgment to, to know that many of these were falsifications that glorified the matters German.

This changed for us again when life became nearly unbearable for us in the small village. We had, as I said, my father had a grain business, and in this way was connected with product of the soil, of the German soil. And they -- in other words, the Nazi authorities in the village, which would be, how would I say, a Communist, commissar-type deal rather than the local authorities. The National Socialist authorities told my father it would be healthier if we moved to Cologne. This policy, the people that followed it moved away and moved into the greater Jewish communities in Cologne. Those that didn't did not have very much longer because in 1938, an edict was made by the *Reichsregierung,* the German government, that all Jews must leave villages of less than, what, 80,000 or a hundred thousand and must move to larger population centers -- in order to be able to grab us all, so to speak.

In Cologne, I went to a Jewish school, and again, the -- how shall I say -- the transition was remarkable because no longer did our textbooks speak about the Germans swinging through the branches in the pre -- not prehistoric -- yeah, prehistoric time to the time of the Roman conquest of Germany. This time, we got correct textbooks. They were approved by the German government for teaching in German schools. So we had a relatively unobstructed life with strictures. No weapons; death sentence for any Jew being caught in the possession of a firearm. Racial purity laws. The decision, Who was Jewish? Because we had such thing as Germans having married Jewish men or Jewish men -- or Jewish women having Christian partners, and it was then

determined that the offspring, if they were raised in the Jewish faith, were to be Jewish. If they were -- how do we call that -- baptized, then they were considered to be Christians. So then at that time, a strict distinction was being made as to who was Jewish.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me, was your whole family all together still in Cologne?

>> Herz: In Cologne, yes, because all -- we were -- my oldest brother was one year ahead of me, so we were a family of nine persons. My grandmother was living with us, my father, my mother, four -- five -- four brothers at that time, and one small sister was born in 1938. And since we were in Cologne at that time, we were five children in '38 in Cologne.

>> Interviewer: Now, what did -- what were your -- what was your father doing now in Cologne?

>> Herz: My father no longer could have the grain business. He took over a small cartage business. I don't know how you'd call, call it over here. You might help me -- transport business.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Herz: We had two small pickup trucks, and we did small hauling. We children helped. My father had one German chauffeur by the name of Willy von Witzenhausen (phonetic). He was of German nobility but impoverished German nobility. And we had that business until 1940, when even the -- any business activity was forbidden by the German government. What we did see that was strictly against, directly against Jews was the signs in the store windows, a swastika and a sign about this size, *Juden unerwünscht.* "Jews are not welcome here." And those that did not wish to say that on their windows said instead, "Aryan proprietors" or "Aryan business". And most of them had small flags flying in front of their establishment, swastikas. So we were -- how do we call it? We had already -- we experienced the overt treatment of Jewish people in the large cities.

>> Interviewer: So it was anti-Semitism and now totally institutionalized in all aspects.

>> Herz: That is right. Therefore, we kept to ourselves. We had our religious institutions. There were three different synagogues: orthodox, reform, and whatever the other one -- liberal, perhaps. Yeah, maybe you call it liberal. And we did go to the synagogue. My parents -- the father of my mother was a cantor in the local school in the small village that I had told

you. We were religious. We believed in a Jewish God, in contradistinction to Jesus. But we, as children, you do not make any great philosophical distinctions between those things. We just accepted that.

However, in 1939, I am sure that you have heard of something called the *Kristallnacht.* This was the out-and-out pogrom -- although Mr. Hitler wrote to a foreign correspondent, I categorically deny that there is such a thing as a pro-grom. He made this error in orthography. The word is "pogrom," and we experienced it firsthand. And I would like to tell you about it if I have the time. We had the first knowledge of this that, in the night, my, my father's sister called and told us that -- I have to go back just a little bit for those that -- the reason for this pogrom was, of course, the shooting of the legation secretary in Paris by a Jew by the name of -- by a Jewish person by the name of Grynszpan, Herschel Grynszpan. And as the legation secretary was hovering between death and -- well, life and death, the groundwork was laid for an all-out assault on the German Jewry. So when the legation secretary died then, the first inkling that we had was that my grandmother's house and where my father's sisters lived with her and had a small business was totally ruined overnight. My grandmother was pushed down the stairs into the basement. They, the Nazis, broke the water pipes at the old lady, my -- old lady. My grandmother was at that time 67, 70; nearly drowned down there. Someone helped to haul her out bodily from there, and that person was, even then -- as I had heard later on when I returned to Germany, that person was then denounced for helping a Jew. They managed to call my father. We went with our trucks to pick up both my grandmother and my father's sister, who found some refuge in Cologne.

We ourself were saved by a circumstance of which I was probably the cause or the origin. At one time, I found in a magazine a large picture of Hindenburg, who I'm sure you have heard of, the aging general field marshal, under whom my father fought. When they burst in, these Nazi Storm Troopers, when they burst into our apartment in Cologne, the first thing they were confronted with was the large picture of Hindenburg, and it caught them back a little bit. We were all hiding, but I could see where they were standing. So my father explained that he was the recipient of a decoration for bravery in the First World War. They asked him how the picture came to be on the wall. I had pasted it there. "Well," he said, "I was serving under Hindenburg in such-and-such army component. For four years I was in French -- as a French prisoner of war of the French, and I

did not get released until 1921." So they just smashed the front door and told my father that if he knew what was good for him and his family, to better go and move himself and his family somewhere else.

Unfortunately for us, we did want to flee. Unfortunately for us, almost all the borders were closed against us. So we stayed in Cologne. My father was forced to sell his business, and all of us then had to find menial work in Cologne.

>> Interviewer: And were you allowed to work anywhere in the city, or did you have to stay --

>> Herz: No. It was restricted too. It was either roadwork or work in a factory. My father found work in a factory that belonged to a British firm, Brown, Boveri & Cie. They were -- no. Glanzstoff-Courtaulds. Courtaulds was an English firm. My oldest brother went to work for a street-paving company, and I was still too young. I was an apprentice in a woodworking shop at that time, so I stayed there until I had graduated from the woodworking shop. And a German firm that manufactured barracks for the German *Wehrmacht* hired myself and someone else.

>> Interviewer: Were you still going to school at this time?

>> Herz: School ended for me in -- '25 -- in '39, and from there on, as I said, I had one year of instruction in woodwork, woodwork, in carpentry, cabinetmaking.

>> Interviewer: What happened -- how did things change once the war started?

>> Herz: Well, as a child, of course, I was like all children. Life was dull, and I longed for some upheaval. Well, the upheaval came, of course, on the first of September when the newspaper at the corner proclaimed loud and clear, war with Poland has started. The Polish militia had attacked a German radio station in Gliwice and was repulsed, and we were now at war with Poland. And three days later, Germany found itself at war with France and England as well. To me, this was all marvelously exciting. There was a small railroad overpass near our house, and I saw the first Wehrmacht, the first German army soldier holding -- guarding the railroad with a bayonet and rifle. I thought this was just marvelous. Don't forget, I was, at that time, what, 13, 14, so for 14-year-old boys, seeing all this -- even though I felt -- I had some uneasy feelings nevertheless.

>> Interviewer: How long -- how much longer were you in Cologne?

>> Herz: In Cologne, we had, of course, as I said, numerous family. My father had two sisters -- three sisters. One was married, and also living with us and the children -- their children, my cousins, were also there, and then in 1941, the first expulsion edicts -- actually they were resettlement orders -- came in, and since we had five children at that time, or we were five children and an aging grandmother who was being recompensed by the German government for the loss of her son in the First World War, we were spared to about the beginning of 1942. All of our other relatives were transported away. We knew only their destination. The first to go were the unmarried sisters of my father, who were transported to Lodz Ghetto, which, in German terms, was then called Litzmannstadt. We heard only from them that they wanted money because they could only write a postcard from the occupied territory. Poland, by that time, was occupied by the Germans. They wanted $500, $600 to buy a loaf of bread. This was beyond us. We did not have that kind of money. We were impoverished ourselves. With five children, we did not know what to do. We sent what we could, clothing, food. We do now know whether they, whether they ever received it. They perished in the Holocaust. The only trace I had was later on in camp when I met someone who had seen them in Litzmannstadt.

The next one to go was my father's older sister and her husband and three children. They went to Riga, now the newly liberated Democracy in the Baltic republic. I think it was called Lettland at that time. None of them returned. We only knew that the Lettish *Polizei,* or the police, the Lettish militia, was as fervent and as helpful as they possibly could, going overboard in eliminating German Jews. Of that transport, none was heard from again.

The third sister and her four children and husband were transported into the neighborhood of Kiev. They did not even make any camp. From reports later on, they were shot as they left the railroad cars. None of them returned. We have counted -- it is a sad harvest, so to speak. We counted -- of the 64 immediate family members -- uncles, brothers, sisters -- of the 64 members, my brother and I are the only two survivors.

But let us return to Cologne. Our turn, our time came -- oh. One more thing that precipitated this, or perhaps it was already in the works, was a bombing raid, the greatest bombing raid that -- at the start of the war, on the 30th of May, I was still then in Cologne apparently. On the 30th of May, Cologne suffered the most devastating attack of the Allied forces, British and American bombers, and it nearly got us that time also. Cologne was made

into a rubble heap, and two days later, we received our notice to report to the railhead with 50 kilogram of personal baggage. And they had old railroad cars, wooden seats, and we were given one compartment for ourselves, and so we -- destination unknown. We did not know where we were going. The term, the word "Theresienstadt" didn't mean anything. We could not tell where we would be resettled. The only thing that I remember very vividly was an SS officer, the famous death-head brigade. They had epaulets with the death head and crossbones and pipings, silver, and green army uniforms, but they were not army. They had on their sleeves "SD," which means "security service," or *Sicherheitsdienst.* Running up and down the railroad where we were being loaded, and he had a big folder, *Geheimbefehl,* or some special orders, eyes only. I remember that, looking at that and wondering what it meant.

As I said, we were apprehensive, but the children, you know, we were still together. My grandmother was with us. We had a small baby at that time, three months old baby. We had a baby carriage. We had food. We had taken some water. I do not know that we ever stopped anywhere in Germany at all for anything, for food, for water, nothing. The train made it through in about three days. We arrived somewhere in Czechoslovakia. Nobody knew where, where we were. And from the station, which had a name "Bauschowitz" printed on it, *Bohusovice* in Czechoslovakian and in Bohemian. We were told to get out of the railroad cars, get our stuff together, and start marching. And we marched -- I mean, with 50 pounds of your baggage, you really don't march very fast. Well, we dragged us more. My grandmother was crippled. We lost her. We did not know where she was. We were told to get out of the railroad car. Whoever couldn't make it, they would take care of them, we were told. So we trudged, and I really mean trudged, some 5 miles to an old fortification where we were received by Czech militia. There were some Germans about, but Czech militia was, at that time, in charge of the ghetto, and we went through a process of getting all of our stuff gone through for valuables. And they were very thorough. Really not very many people came through with anything but the bare belongings, some food. And it was still daylight when we entered then from the outer fortification. This was a fortification where we were pushed through. They have a German word. The German word was *Schleuse.* Means -- a fish trap is called a Schleuse. You can get in. You are narrowed down. You have to go past a check point, and then there's no return for anything. So this is what we were subjected to, and then at the other end, families were still together at this point. We were separated in male and female. There was no way to avoid that. My

mother, with the two youngest children, went one way, my father and my three brothers went to another way, and we ended up in an old house, two-story house that had maybe six or seven room, a room -- I would say that the average 12 by 16 room that you can imagine. On these rooms, on the ground, we had chalk lines. This is your place. You are assigned to it. Make the best of it.

So from then on, everything was fairly well-organized. The ghetto had been established not very long, 1941. It had been in operation, well, about six months. But they had finally gotten -- the Jewish people had gotten -- the Czech Jewish people had gotten sort of organized, the way they would do it. So since this huge amount of people were coming in daily, they had decided, well, rooms where each one was assigned --

>> Interviewer: This was Theresienstadt.

>> Herz: That was Theresienstadt. The Czech word is *Terezin.* So this was Theresienstadt. We did not know that until the very next day when we saw Czech writing on old stores, and we asked, "Where are we?" "Well, you are in Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt ghetto." Surprisingly -- everything surprised us because it was so new. We did have our small assigned space, our suitcase was there, we had a few blankets that we had put on the floor, and not too much thievery was going on. We were all -- well, what did we have? We had our clothing. The food was eaten. So they -- it was a garrison city, so the garrisons, the *Kaserne.* I don't know what we would be calling the English term for Kaserne. It would probably be "barracks." But the barracks in this case were three-story, huge buildings that had kitchens in them where they cooked, and in this case, they cooked for the entire Jewish population of Theresienstadt. So next morning, we were told, "Here is your ration card for food." A man stood there and clipped your coupon off, and you were entitled to one ration: a cup of coffee, a slice of bread, I guess, and a pat of margarine and some marmalade, a teaspoonful of marmalade.

After two or three days, we were assigned work, and I leave it to you to guess what it was. Mine was -- all of the new arrivals that were capable had one assignment: grave digger. So by virtue of being capable or young and able to lift a spade, we were marched out to the grounds before the fortifications, where they had a huge burial grounds. And there, we still dug individual graves, and since the people were dying, especially the older people, 80, 90 year olds, were dying like flies -- no food, no medical attention -- we were busy digging graves, 6 foot by 3 foot or whatever it was, all day long. And we saw, of course, the arrival of hand-drawn carts that were piled high with

coffins, and since there were -- when you believe -- when you think -- when you hear the term “coffin,” you think of this nice coffin like they have here, $3,000, $4,000. They were just what the Jewish people always have advocated, a plain pine box. And these were brought out in convoys of 15 to 20 boxes. The boxes were lowered into the graves without benefit of anybody, a rabbi or anything. Later on, when my grandmother died, we found out that they had memorial services in the town itself, but nobody was permitted out of town for the burial itself.

We did the gravedigger job just long enough for us to learn the ropes, and learning the ropes in a camp, in a ghetto anywhere where you were forced into subjugation, you learned the ropes awful fast. You know what to do where, what to trade, what for what, so I found out that there was a *Jugendwerkstatt,* or a youth workshop, and I applied for it, and I was accepted. The work there was, however, exceptionally hard because it meant constructing abodes for all those new arrivals, and then later on I heard of a true youth hostel that was more -- how do we say that -- more geared to the young people in the ghetto, and I was able to get in those youth *Herberge,* the youth hostels, with my brothers. My father arranged in the house that we were originally in. My mother was in a barracks -- in this case, it was a stone barracks -- for women with smaller children, and all I can tell you is, we made the best of it. Books were smuggled in to us. We had sort of a life. It was very much strictured and restricted in what we could do. We thought, for instance, that one of the onuses of life that we experienced in Germany was the wearing of the yellow star with the word prominently inscribed, “Jew.” This, we thought we would be able to forego in Theresienstadt, but, no, we were forced, even in the ghetto, without any external contacts to the external world, we were still forced to wear the Jew star, the yellow star with black writing on it. I don’t know what else to tell you. As I said, we made the best of it. You may have seen, perhaps, some literature children wrote of their experiences that were discovered after the war.

>> Interviewer: Did you have a lot of contact with your mother and sisters?

>> Herz: Yes, we did. We met, perhaps, once a week. My mother knew where we were. My father had a different job. He was finally promoted to *Zimmeralteste.* You know that the ghettos had their *Judenalteste,* which means “the eldest of the Jew, or the Jew elder,” so the chain of command went *Blockalteste,* “block eldest,” then to house eldest, and then to room eldest. The room

eldest was to see that nothing was stolen, the rooms were cleaned up, the windows were washed. So he progressed to that, and had, as such, a small measure of ease, let's say, anything else. My father was an avid smoker, and I still remember, since there was nothing available to smoke, that they -- all the people that were hooked or addicted collected leaves to smoke in their pipes.

>> Interviewer: About how many people were in there?

>> Herz: At the time, 60,000 in a garrison city that housed never any more or that had no more than a civilian population of 8,000. The ranks, towards the end of 1944, swelled to 120,000 people crammed into, into this space. No privacy whatsoever.

>> Interviewer: None at all. What happened after Theresienstadt?

>> Herz: Well, after Theresienstadt -- you have to get there first, you know. We -- all of a sudden, then we heard something that was very disturbing to all of us. The Jewish population had, of course, its share of mentally disturbed people, especially such a large agglomeration of people as from all walks of life. So there were mental defectives. They were housed in what the Czechs called *Cvokárna. Cvok* mean, in Czech, "nuts," or "crazy." They were housed in a -- in one of the underground fortifications. And then we heard in 1943, 1944, the crazies were -- remember, I still am, at that time, no more than, what, 16 -- that the crazies are being shipped off to be exterminated, gassed. And as a child -- I must say this in all honesty -- I could really see no reason for them to be alive. I felt a certain sort of justification. I should be ashamed of it now. I can only say that at that time, the circumstances that we were in made me feel this way. I am not trying to justify myself that I found a reason for that. I just tell you now that I felt that way, that this was for the best of them. And I could not understand my parents' and all the older people' concern that these people should be exterminated, but this is how it started. We heard then, for the first time, the term "Auschwitz" and that that is where the killing is done. That we would be ending up there and that we would share the fate, none of us knew, not even in Auschwitz itself.

So in 1944, I believe it was in March or April, we got the dreaded yellow notice that we had been selected for resettlement further east. And still, we had hoped that our fate would lie in somewhat towards Dresden, which was just to the north and to the east of us, where they told us defense industry needed lots of able-bodied people. We -- I tried -- I made a special effort to

see the Jew eldest of Theresienstadt, Mr. Eppstein -- he was very prominent in Berlin -- to see him, to sort of gain a reprieve for us, for out large family. I was the only one, and the reason I was the only one, we were already removed to one of the barracks from which the transports were slated to go with our belongings. People that were entering the, the camp -- the barracks area had to go through a Jewish control that controlled who we were, and they had a special pass to leave that area. I -- while I was in this barracks area, I noticed that one of the Jewish officials had left his jacket lying open, and in it was one of these passes. And I stole this pass and made my way out by showing the pass. I made my way to the Jew eldest, Mr. Eppstein, but his place was besieged by people on the same mission that I was. I gained nothing.

I returned to the barracks, and the two *Kommendantes,* the two commanders, Doctor Zeiss -- Sturmbannführer Zeiss and Sturmbannführer Burger were in their -- I don't know whether they were enjoying the spectacle or whether they were keeping order. I asked them could I approach them, and they asked me what I wanted. And I said, in view of the fact that we were such a large family and my father was a World War I veteran, a distinguished veteran. Well, he says, get your family over here. So we stood there, and they looked us over, and my father explained that he had served in the infantry. It made absolutely no difference. They let us stand there, and after a while, the call to enter the trains -- they were actually cattle cars. Well, it was made, "Get into the wagons now." We had our bundles, and we entered the cars.

>> Interviewer: Your whole family was --

>> Herz: The whole family. We sat on our baggage, so there was not very much room between us and the roof of the cattle car. The windows were small open areas about this wide by this wide. I guess we could have escaped. We did not know, however. We thought, perhaps it would be best to go along with the Germans and to do what they wanted -- acquiesce, if that is the right word -- and see that -- by that time now, the war has been going on nearly five years, four years -- that the end might be in sight and that liberation might come for us. And our first experience was that at night, we hear gunshots, and yet, we did not tumble to -- "tumble" is perhaps the wrong word. We did not realize what it was. Only after the war, I learned that the SS troops were on the roof of the cattle cars, shooting past the windows to discourage anyone from sticking either his head out or getting out of the cattle cars. The trains, or the train was

moving at a fairly great speed, and we did not know what we -- what country we were going through. There were no stops. There was no stopping.

>> Interviewer: How many people were in your --

>> Herz: In our cattle car, approximately 80 to a hundred. I cannot recall. It was quite crowded. We were sitting tight on tight. We had some water. We had some food, but no comfort whatsoever. Our bodily functions, we tried to get a large cooking vessel and empty our, our -- how shall I say -- our feces and our urine, we emptied out this little window the best we could do, not in order, not to foul whatever little air was in there. The cars, by the way, were sealed. We could not open them.

>> Interviewer: How long of a trip?

>> Herz: In transit, we were a -- 6:00 in the evening, the train left Theresienstadt. At 4:00 the next day, we arrived in Auschwitz. Escape, we -- of course, we were thinking. My brother, my oldest brother and I were thinking of escape. It would not have helped us. We did not know Czech language. We knew only that no German could be trusted to do anything but to turn us over to the local authorities for a ransom or for whatever money or bonus or food or whatever it is. So in the end, in order to keep our family intact, we arrived in Auschwitz.

>> Interviewer: What happened when you got off the train?

>> Herz: Well, first, before we -- when we approached Auschwitz, we saw our first striped uniform working in the field, women working in the field in these zebra suits that you probably are familiar with from pictures. And we thought, Well, where there are vegetable fields, there is surely work for us because we are from a small community, and we knew. When we arrived, it was 4:00 in the afternoon. The doors were yanked open, and the first thing we heard, *"Raus, raus,"* which means, "out." "As soon as you can, out!" And everybody said, "Well, how about our belongings?" And they said, "Your belongings, you leave there. Your belongings, you leave there." My father asked, "Well, what can we take with us?" And I remember the one Jewish, Polish-Jewish trusty prisoner said, *"Die Beytsim."* Translated means "your testicles," meaning that, if you get out alive, you will be lucky. So we grabbed what little we could quickly. It was some foodstuffs, and all of the family was assembled outside. This was not yet the selection that other transport come

through, Men to the right, women to the left, with people beaten apart with sticks. This did not happen in our case. We were assembled in long rows, and we were marched between troops of the SS, special death head division. We were marched to the *Lagerstrasse,* which was a broad, broad -- avenue is perhaps wrong to say. It was a broad expanse running between camps, and that is where we first got a taste of what we were in. We knew we had arrived in Birkenau, which is a valley of the birch trees, a euphemism that the Germans were fond of using for "death camps."

Our experience was that we were marched up and down this street for four or five hours between the pillars of barbed wire with the huge sign, *Todesgefar,* which means "extreme danger," electrical wires, and we saw the insulators along the wires, along which the wires were strung. We saw the guard towers up high above us, from each end to the other end. We could see their machine guns, and we did not need any more convictions of what was going to await us. We did not know that we were in a death camp. Even then, and I will say this much, you have a poem or saying in the United States or in English literature, "Hope springs eternal." I do not know who said it or whether it was a poet, but at that time, it was the nadir, the low point, of our lives. We were marched back and forth and back and forth, and I would say the family, we were separated, we met each other, we were separated, we met each other again. We met other people that we knew. They just kept us in motion, and one older woman that I was walking next to said in [indistinct]. She was in hearing of a German SS -- when I say SS, it means the death head brigade members -- in the hearing of the death head, "God, where are you?" He answered, "There is no God. He was drafted in the German army, and he's obeying orders." So he thought that was very cute and very funny. I found it exceedingly telling, so to speak.

As the evening grew on and it went towards 1:00 in the morning, we were more desperate and more desperate, and you could hear more and more cries for sustenance. And we were looking up. It was a perfectly clear, starry sky, no moon, and I was reminded of one thing, and you have heard it many, many times, "The Ode to Joy," and in there, it says, *"Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt/Muß ein lieber Vater Wohnen."* "Brethren, above the starry skies/There must be a loving father." And I thought this was the greatest travesty that I have ever heard to come from the pen of a German poet. And I am sorry to say, after we cried to the Lord for deliverance, we mentioned everything we could, including me.

It says -- *De profundis* is a old Psalm. It says “From the depth”...

>> Interviewer: Take your time.

>> Herz: We were not delivered. It got worse. So -- excuse me. I don’t know whether it means anything. “Lift your eyes to the mountain from where”... Even now, it affects me. I’ll just have to cut this short a little bit, that segment of it.

Finally, they had set up some corridors or corrals, chutes. “Chute” is the good word for it. They set up some corrals, mounted, or manned. Manned is a better word. Forget about the word “mounted.” Manned by the SS, and the corrals consisted of a deep box, and everybody was relieved of whatever valuables we have. Women, men were forced to strip off their wedding rings, their prized possessions, mementos, lockets of relatives no longer there. Whatever we had, we lost at that moment. Those who did not wish to give it up willingly found out what German justice, or what German thoroughness was like. Since very many people had arrived there on crutches and many Germans had walking sticks -- the SS and the German trusty prisoners or Jewish trusty prisoners all had walking sticks -- those who did not give up willingly or fast were simply beaten over the back, over the head, no matter what. We gave up everything. As a 16 year old, what did I -- I had a slide rule that was given to me, a small slide rule. I gave it up. I had nothing more to give. I had no rings, no jewelry, no watch. So as a sign of -- how shall I say -- that he was displeasured, a sign of displeasure, I got a few cuts with his walking stick and told to move on to the other group.

Well, there, we were then separated in male and female. Men and women were walked separately to what they call B *Lage,* the B Camp of Auschwitz. There was A Camp, which was for Russian prisoners at that time. C Camp was for something else; I think it was Gypsies that were just as -- looked on as disfavorably, even more so, perhaps, as the Jews are. There wasn’t anything lower than Jews anyhow. So we went, and we were assigned a barracks, and in the barracks, it was the same thing over again. The barracks elders made us walk, again, by a crate, and if we had not given up everything, we were fairly well mistreated to give up whatever we may have hidden from the SS, and the only thing that I had at that time that they wanted was, I had a leather jacket, and I told my father later on that I regretted having to give that jacket. And he said something that I’ve never forgotten. My mother, too, was at that time with us. We

still were able to communicate. He says, “Child, if we ever get out of here, I’ll buy you ten of these.”

Well, I don’t know what else to say -- oh. We were then assigned to the bunks. The bunks were in three tiers: lower, middle, and upper. My brothers and my fathers were assigned an upper bunk. It had straw ticking. I am not sure whether you know -- would you know what straw ticking is?

>> Interviewer: Yes, yes, I do.

>> Herz: It was just burlap filled with straw. The bolster was burlap filled with straw. And we had not eaten at that time, and we were not to get anything to eat. And then next morning, a routine began in earnest. And I do not know whether you want to ask me anything more.

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Herz: Go ahead.

>> Interviewer: Please continue on about the routine now. What was daily life like?

>> Herz: The routine was that we had caps, or we had hats. Most of us had some sort of a covering for our heads, and the first thing we knew that the civilization had come to an end was that the barracks eldest took his stick and lifted off hat of everyone that came in there, the hat of everyone that came in there. There was a piece of scalp went along with it, it made no difference. Then we saw a big sign, *“Mützen ab im block,”* which meant, “Hats off in the barracks.” The barracks was the point where food was distributed and where things went on. In the morning, we were issued -- we had still got a few cups or spoons or whatever it was -- two slices of what the Germans called *Kommissbrot,* which means “military bread,” which was a mixture of wheat, rye, and barley perhaps. It was a very compact bread. Each one got two slices of bread, sometimes a pat of margarine, sometimes a little bit of marmalade. The coffee was, the coffee was toasted acorns ground up; tasted terrible. And at lunch, for lunch, or the midday meal, a soup with maybe a little bit of meat. Potatoes was the main thing, and beets that you normally feed the cattle here. So this was our midday meal, and we started to get -- we were already hungry in Terezin because we did not get enough to eat. In Auschwitz it was worse. We were beginning to starve. In the evening, another slice of bread and some coffee; no marmalade, no butter, no nothing.

In between -- at the beginning, before we had coffee in the morning, we had then later on what the Germans called *Appell stehen,* which means -- *Appell* means "counting," the counting of the prisoners. We were arranged in groups of five, with small distances between us. The SS trooper would come by and start counting, one, two, three, four, and five, then multiply it by five. If he miscounted, he went over it again, but meanwhile, we had stood out there already two hours because the Blockalteste, the block eldest, and the German prisoners with their striped uniforms -- we did not have striped uniforms. The German prisoners were beating us; well, not beating us at that time yet, but they're getting us into line, rough shoving, punching, just to get us in line. So we are standing there an hour, two hours, and I kept wondering why none of us would overpower this lone guard who had just a small pistol. But what could we have done? There were guard posts on either end, high tension wires between with barbed wires that curved inward towards us, and we were as vulnerable as anything. We could have been killed. They didn't need but simply to spray the entire place with machine gunfire, and they would have gotten everyone in there. So apparently, also, there was no organization. There was no underground organizations that said, Let's get together on this and let's see how we can do this." It is, I'm sure that most of the Americans have seen the Stalag series where they always overcome the Germans, but they actually did not. None of their schemes actually succeeded for very long, and I am sure that in reading -- in viewing the television series -- what is it called again?

>> Interviewer: "Hogan's Heroes"? Is that the one?

>> Herz: No, no. Yes, that I meant where they always did well, but the other one about the Holocaust, Lanzmann, Claude Lanzmann. It was called "Holocaust," wasn't it?

>> Interviewer: "Shoah."

>> Herz: "Shoah." They showed that actually only one or two people escaped out of the millions of prisoners, Jewish prisoners or prisoners in Auschwitz, and it is a very small amount. So we tried and tried schemes to think of while in Auschwitz. None of us would have worked because only later on I saw why they would not have worked. They had what they called the *großen Postenketten* or the "grand military patrol." In small holes in the ground, camouflaged SS were spaced 10 feet apart surrounding the entire camp, armed with machine pistols, with automatic rifles. Nobody would have come through. So we gave that up, and we determined, well, we'll try and make -- try and

survive. We did not yet know, and we did not know that Auschwitz was an extermination camp or that we possibly could be slated for extermination. The only thing that we did know was that there was always this sickly sweet smell and pallor in the air. We saw a crematorium belching smoke 24 hours a day. We saw Red Cross wagons ferrying back and forth, and only later we found out that they were carrying military personnel or cyanide canisters. We did not know that. Also we were not permitted that close to the entrance to the camp. So at any rate, all of a sudden, we were made acquainted with brutality, which we did not think --