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Interview with

MIKE JACOBS

November 26, 1989

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Keith Rosen

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**Oral History Collection**

**Mike Jacobs**

**Interviewer: Keith Rosen** **Date: November 26, 1989**

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**Mr. Rosen:** **This is Keith Rosen interviewing Mike Jacobs for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on Sunday, November 16, 1989, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Jacobs to hear his experiences during the Holocaust and how they affected his life and why he believes he survived.**

**Mr. Jacobs, please tell me some autobiographical information about yourself. For example, state your full name, when and where you were born, your education and occupation.**

**Mr. Jacobs:** **My name is Mike Jacobs. I was born in Konin, Poland, not far from the German border. My education stopped when I was fourteen years old, in 1939, when the Nazis marched into our city. As**

an occupation, I’m in the scrap business--scrap iron and steel--Jacobs Iron and Metal Company.

Rosen: Tell me, sir, what year, month, and day were you born?

Jacobs: I was born on December 29, 1925.

Rosen: And your full name is?

Jacobs: Michael Jacobs--now.

Rosen: What was it in the old country?

Jacobs: Mendel Jakubowicz.

Rosen: How did you come to have the name Michael Jacobs?

Jacobs: I cut it in half, okay? It is because, translated, Jakubowicz is “the son of Jacob.”

Rosen: So, your last name, being the “son of Jacob,” you took the last name of Jacobs.

Jacobs: Jacobs.

Rosen: You grew up, you said, in Konin, Poland.

Jacobs: Yes. It was not far from the German border.

Rosen: About how far is it? Do you recall?

Jacobs: I was told that from our city to Berlin was 500 kilometers. Maybe it was about 200 kilometers from the German border, because Poznan was our main city.

Rosen: Do these cities still have the same name today?

Jacobs: Yes, the same name. They didn’t change.

Rosen: Tell me something about your growing up. What was life like at that time in the 1920s and 1930s--growing up?

**Jacobs:** I grew up in a big family. I had three brothers and two sisters and my mother and father. At home we practiced modern Orthodoxy. Our father was an Orthodox, so I was brought up in an Orthodox environment.

**Rosen:** When you say Orthodox, can you go into a little bit more detail about that?

**Jacobs:** My father didn't wear the black clothes, nor did he have the curls. No, he was a modern Orthodox, meaning he wore normal dress, went three times a day to our synagogue to pray. We as kids were more modern. We didn't go to the synagogue every day.

**Rosen:** What was your father's occupation?

**Jacobs:** My fathers' occupation is always very hard for me to explain. What he did is that the business people used to give him letters to go to the next city, and he'd bring back freight. He was a freightman. He used to bring them freight for their stores.

My brothers were tailors. That's the only thing, you know, you could do in those days. We couldn't get higher education.

We were not poor at home. We had always enough meat, chicken for Friday night. Not everybody had it.

**I was brought up in a very, very secure and loving family.**

**Rosen:** **You said you had how many brothers?**

**Jacobs:** **Three brothers.**

**Rosen:** **And any sisters?**

**Jacobs:** **Two sisters.**

**Rosen:** **Where do you fit in in the family?**

**Jacobs:** **I was the youngest one.**

**Rosen:** **You mentioned modern Jews. Your father was a modern Jew. He didn't dress in the traditional garb, and you said you were being brought up as a modern Orthodox Jew. Could you explain a little bit more about what you mean by modern Orthodox Jew, especially in light of what the typical Jews were like at that time?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes. We had the Hasidic in our city--the very religious people. They went to a different synagogue-*stybel*, is what we called it--a small little place. We were members of the main synagogue in our city. Saturday mornings we went to the synagogue. On Saturday afternoons we used to go to the organization, and we used to go swimming in the afternoon. We were more liberal, let's put it this way.**

**Rosen:** **When you say "go swimming in the afternoon," how can you contrast that with the traditional Jews?**

**Jacobs:** The traditional Jews would not go swimming on Saturday. They would not go to the park on Saturday. If they went to the park, they might step on and break some of the branches, which meant they were working. We used to go to the Zionist organization. We used to sing Hebrew songs; we used to dance; we used to play ping pong. We used to go swimming in the afternoon on Saturday, but it was not allowed for the Hasidics. We were the more liberal, more modern, Jews in the city.

**Rosen:** In the area that you grew up in, could you describe the neighborhood?

**Jacobs:** Yes. Our city, Konin, was one of the first twelve cities settled in Poland by Jews--first in 1397. In our city we used to have one of the biggest Jewish libraries in Poland--one of the biggest. It was a very cultural little city. Most of the people--what I can hear now after the war, what I hear about Konin--said it was a nice city. It was a nice Jewish community, with about 3,500 Jews living in the city. Most of those people were merchants with little stores--tailors, shoemakers, and whatever professions they had. We had two Jewish doctors, and we had some Jewish dentists and Jewish lawyers in the city. The Jewish people were very, very involved in the community.

I had a big family in our city--big family from my mother's side--and my father's side lived in all the surrounding cities.

Rosen: You mentioned that in this city you had approximately 3,500 Jews. Do you have any idea what the total population of the city was?

Jacobs: The total population maybe was 7,000 or 8,000 people.

Rosen: So approximately half or 40 percent of the population were Jews?

Jacobs: Yes, were Jews.

Rosen: How do you think the Jews fit in with the rest of the population?

Jacobs: What do you mean?

Rosen: Did the Jewish population have a distinctive culture or an...

Jacobs: ...integrating culture?

Rosen: ...integrating culture?

Jacobs: No, in our city we tried to integrate, but we always were different because...I don't think we were different, but I can recall as a small boy that I would know the difference. I can't tell you too much about those days because I didn't have the experience. But it was integrated--the city.

**I remember in 1937 that the anti-Semitism started to grow much stronger in our city. I went to the school where only Jewish kids went to school. In 1937 the city decided to integrate the schools. That means to take out a few boys--and I was one of the few boys, from the five boys--to go to the non-Jewish school. They put in a few kids, about five or six kids, that were non-Jewish in the Jewish school. It wasn't a Jewish school. It was a public school, but only Jewish kids went there because in Poland you have over 85 percent Catholics. We in the Jewish schools never said a prayer, and at the non-Jewish school, before the classes started, they would say their prayer. They would say the prayer in the name of Jesus. I remember like it was today, that when I was transferred as one of the Jewish kids who went to school, we used to have to get up before the class started and the kids said the prayer. And we were silent. The other students could not understand why we didn't pray together with them. The teacher tried to explain that it was because we had a different religion. That didn't sit well with the rest of my classmates because, you know, they thought we should**

all pray to their God. We were not Christians, so we were silent.

We did acclimatize ourselves very quickly, however, because we all were better students--always (chuckle). We always had to prove to the others that we were good students in school. Sometimes our friends didn't like it.

Rosen: Your Christian friends?

Jacobs: Yes. They didn't like it. That's the way I lived in our city.

Let me go back a little bit to what I'm thinking about. I don't know what year it was, whether it was 1934 or 1935--I've forgotten--that we had a principal who was an anti-Semite.

Rosen: Were you still in a Jewish school at that time?

Jacobs: Jewish school, yes.

Rosen: You had a Jewish principal?

Jacobs: No, a non-Jewish principal.

Rosen: Okay, a non-Jewish principal in a Jewish school?

Jacobs: In a Jewish school with non-Jewish teachers and Jewish teachers. We had only two Jewish teachers over there. This was a public school.

Rosen: Maybe you could go back a little bit and tell us about the education. In having segregated schools for Jews

and non-Jews, the schools for non-Jews were run by what organization?

Jacobs: It was run by the school board.

Rosen: By the public school board?

Jacobs: By the public school board, yes.

Rosen: So the Jewish schools were not run by Jews?

Jacobs: No, not at all.

Rosen: It was the government that ran them.

Jacobs: The government. That is correct. Over there they used to bring in teachers. What I can recall, what I was told, it was not like over here in the United States, where a teacher can pick the schools where he wants to go. Where I came from, I was told that the teachers first had to go to a small village and teach. Then later on, they used to be appointed to which city to go and which school. I remember we had two teachers. One teacher was born in our city, Mrs. Ryczke, and I knew her very good. I remember one day we had a strike and did not go to school. Can you imagine?

Rosen: The students had a strike?

Jacobs: Yes. The reason was because the principal said...over there you wrote with a pen, and you used to dip it in ink, and half the time you made a black spot by mistake. Always, he used to say, “Those black spots

are Jews!” This time there was a strike. The kids made a strike. I remember this was before Passover. Why was it before Passover? See, my mother--may she rest in peace--baked matzos for Passover. I remember I used to go down to the bakery over there and help because I was hiding out because of the school. I remember the Jewish teachers used to run around and say, “Go to school! Go to school, everybody!” We wanted to show Dr. Grybusz that he could not be anti-Semitic in a Jewish school. All of the Jewish kids went back to school the next day. “This mark! It’s the Jews! It’s the Jews!” Dr. Grybusz, the principal, was very anti-Semitic.

Rosen: And that was approximately what year?

Jacobs: This was in 1934 or 1935. I don’t remember. I was in the fourth grade or fifth grade then.

Rosen: At that point, when you are in fourth or fifth grade at that time...and you were approximately how old?

Jacobs: I went to school in 1931 or 1932. I guess I was nine years old.

Rosen: What did you think, at nine years of age approximately, of the experience that you were having in school with anti-Semitism? Did you understand anti-Semitism?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Sure, we did because where I came from is what used to be the cradle of anti-Semitism--Poznan. It used to be the cradle of anti-Semitism. Sure, we knew about it, but I guess we took it for granted. As a small boy, you knew that they hated Jews. They used to call me “The Christ-killer.”

**Rosen:** Who used to call you “The Christ-killer?”

**Jacobs:** My friends. Not in the school where I was the only Jewish kid, but on the outside, the neighbors. If something came up, they would call me “The Christ-killer.” They said I killed Christ.

**Rosen:** And this was as a boy.

**Jacobs:** Yes, as a boy.

**Rosen:** In the neighborhood that you lived in--I want to come back to this--was it an integrated neighborhood? Did you live beside Christian families, also, or was it segregated? Can you describe that neighborhood for me?

**Jacobs:** This neighborhood was 95 percent Jewish people because the Jewish people lived pretty close to where the synagogue used to be because we didn’t ride on Saturdays. We had to walk to the synagogue. Very few of the Jewish families lived on the outskirts. Most of the Jewish people used to live more together--not

a ghetto, but together. We had non-Jewish people living among us. Where I used to live, there were people who used to be the janitors in the same house. But not too far away, on the same street, you had beautiful villas with non-Jewish people around it. I wouldn't say it was ghettocized, because we had some non-Jewish people living among the Jewish people, but not too many, not too many.

Rosen: Did you see any difference in the way the Jews and the non-Jews lived as far as their housing or their practices when you were growing up?

Jacobs: Like I mentioned before, in my city I remember the beautiful villas, beautiful gardens.

Rosen: Who lived over there?

Jacobs: The Polish people--Polish families.

Rosen: Jews and Christians, you say?

Jacobs: Yes, yes. Where I used to live, most of the people were really Christians. They lived in the same buildings.

Rosen: There were Christians in the neighborhood.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: So, although the city itself was about half or a little less Jewish, the Jews lived for the most part separate from most of the Christian families?

**Jacobs:** That is correct, yes.

**Rosen:** In Poland, at that time, in your community, did you find that Jews could move freely, or were they restricted in what they did?

**Jacobs:** Jews could move anyplace they wanted to. They were very free to move--to build homes anyplace they wanted to if they wanted to. I don’t recall any restrictions for Jewish people in our city.

**Rosen:** What about economic opportunities--business opportunities --in your city?

**Jacobs:** Most of the businesses belonged to the Jewish people. The bank belonged to the Jewish people. But the opportunities weren’t like the opportunities over here. It was completely different. Persons growing up over there where I came from, again, most of them were merchants or tailors or shoemakers. They had horses and wagons and so forth. This was in our city.

**Rosen:** When you talk about the Jews owning the bank, are you talking about within the Jewish community, or are you referring to the whole city, too, that Jews are active in the business community in the whole city?

**Jacobs:** What I knew about. What I can remember was only one bank. But, later on, in 1938, from what I can recall, as the anti-Semitism started to grow stronger and

stronger, they started to open non-Jewish stores and apartments. They used to go around, and they used to say, “Don’t buy at a Jewish store. Don’t support the Jewish business. The Jewish are swine. They are pigs.” They called Jews all kinds of names. You could go around and hear them. All of us laughed about it. I used to call the Jewish boys the “1916 Group.” Why 1916? That’s when my brother was born, in 1916. They were all tall guys--all tall. I remember that the Poles came in with a bunch of sticks on the....

Rosen: When you say “they,” who are you referring to?

Jacobs: The Christians--the Poles--came in. The Poles came in, brought their sticks and everything. They said they were going to beat up the Jewish people.

Rosen: This is in what year?

Jacobs: In 1939. Why I called them “1916” is because all of the “1916 Group” met them and said, “Okay, this is how far you’re going to go.” When they figured out that the Jewish people could stand up against Polish people, they moved back. They never came into our city to beat up the Jewish people. That’s why I call it that. I will never forget the “1916 Gang”--the Jewish people who stopped them.

**Rosen:** The Christian Poles that came to attack the Jews, were they from your same city?

**Jacobs:** No, they were not. Maybe one or two were. The rest were from the villages around.

**Rosen:** You talked about growing up in Poland at that time. Can you give me an idea of what your religious background was at that time?

**Jacobs:** When I was four years old, my parents put me in a Hebrew school--what you call a *cheder*. I was going over there learning the Hebrew words--how to pronounce them and so forth. Then later on, when I learned, I went to a different school. It was more an Orthodox school. They were very, very religious kids.

**Rosen:** You said you went to the *cheder*. At about what age?

**Jacobs:** Four.

**Rosen:** About four. And was this privately run or publicly run?

**Jacobs:** Privately run.

**Rosen:** Do you have an idea of how many years you were there?

**Jacobs:** I was over there until I was five years old. After five years, I went to a different *cheder*.

**Rosen:** You said you started at the *cheder* when you were...

**Jacobs:** Four.

**Rosen:** And you were there until you were five.

**Jacobs:** Until I was five.

**Rosen:** For one year.

**Jacobs:** For one year, that's right. I left over there, and I went to another *cheder* where the real Orthodox, religious kids had their own school. They never went to the public school. What happened was that the time of day depended where I went to school. I went to the public school in the afternoon, and I went to the *cheder* in the morning; or I went to the public school in the morning, and in the afternoon I used to go to *cheder*. I spent the whole day in school--the whole day. That's where I got my education--secular education and religious education.

**Rosen:** When you say the whole day, could you give roughly the hours?

**Jacobs:** From 8:00 or 8:30 in the morning until 6:00 at night every day. When I was six years old, I was taken in by my brothers. My two brothers sang in the choir for the synagogue, and I had a very, very good voice, too, as did they. I started singing in the choir when I was six years old--soprano.

**Rosen:** You went to that second Orthodox *cheder* from approximately the years of five until...?

**Jacobs:** Until ten years old. I was put into a Hebrew school, what they called *javne*.

**Rosen:** This *javne* was a Hebrew school?

**Jacobs:** Right.

**Rosen:** Was this in addition to the public school?

**Jacobs:** No, it had nothing to do with the public school. It was all private.

**Rosen:** All private.

**Jacobs:** All private, yes.

**Rosen:** What were the hours there?

**Jacobs:** Same thing. When I finished the public school, I came home, and I had my lunch--whatever I had--and I went back to school in the afternoon.

**Rosen:** You were in public school from what hours?

**Jacobs:** From 8:00--it depended--until 12:00 or 12:30. It depended on how many classes we had. We had sometimes four classes, sometimes three. It depended if they had religion. If the Catholics--the Polish boys--had to have their religion for two hours, we were excused. They asked how come we didn't stay in their religious class. I remember that the priest said, "They have their own school--religious school. That's where they are going." We didn't go, but we wanted to appease them. He said, "They are going to school over there,"

**because we had to come back after the two hours. We had to come back to the public school where we had geography or Polish or arithmetic or history. Later on, we finished and went to our private Jewish school.**

**Rosen:** **So when you said you didn't go to school, you meant you didn't go to the religious service that the Christians had. At about 12:00 or 12:30, you left the public school. You then went...?**

**Jacobs:** **...to the *javne*--to the Hebrew school.**

**Rosen:** **After lunch?**

**Jacobs:** **I went home and left my books there and took a bite of what we had, and then I went to school.**

**Rosen:** **And then you went to Hebrew school until...?**

**Jacobs:** **Until 5:00 or 6:00. It depended on how many classes we had. I came home and had to do two different kinds of lessons--for the Hebrew and for the public school.**

**Rosen:** **You mentioned earlier that you felt that the Jews performed better in the public schools, once they were integrated, than their Christian colleagues. Do you have any reasons why you feel they did better?**

**Jacobs:** **What I believe is that in the Jewish family, education was very, very important. We came home, and I remember they asked me what lessons I had. They would say, "Now, remember, you have to save electricity." At**

night I still did my lessons by a kerosene lamp. Sometimes I used to get up at 3:00 in the morning because it was the best way for me to read and remember because my mind was much more relaxed.

Rosen: Mr. Jacobs, in continuing with your education, how old were you when you first began going to public school?

Jacobs: I was six years old.

Rosen: Then in addition to the public school, you also went to the private Hebrew school?

Jacobs: Private Hebrew school, yes, or religious school.

Rosen: And you said that began at about six years of age?

Jacobs: It began when I was four years old.

Rosen: So you went to the Hebrew and public school combined for how long?

Jacobs: Until 1939.

Rosen: 1939.

Jacobs: Until the Nazis marched into our city.

Rosen: In going back for a moment and talking about the Jews performing better once the schools were integrated, could you contrast how long the Christian students would go to school? You have already brought out that the Jews went to school from approximately 8:00 in

**the morning until 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. What would it be like for the Christian friends of yours?**

**Jacobs:** **They went in the morning, and when they were through, they went home. What they did later on, I have no idea at all (chuckle).**

**Rosen:** **Do you have any idea what time they left school?**

**Jacobs:** **They left at the same time I left. Sometimes it was 1:30 or 12:30 or 11:30, depending on how many classes we had. Sometimes we had three classes or four or five classes a day. I remember our classrooms had between fifty and sixty kids. It's not like over here.**

**Rosen:** **Fifty and sixty children to a classroom?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes.**

**Rosen:** **And how many teachers in that class?**

**Jacobs:** **One!**

**Rosen:** **How was the classroom conducted, then, with so many children?**

**Jacobs:** **Very, very disciplined. Very nice and quiet. When you came in that class, you respected the teacher. If you were not quiet and did something wrong, you got a paddling.**

**Rosen:** **Was the discipline any different among the Christians and the Jews?**

**Jacobs:** What I can recall, in the room where I was, there were three Jewish kids. It was A and B. In the sixth grade, we had the A and B class. We could not have 100 or 120 kids in one class. We had two rooms--two classes, A and B. I was with the three in the same class, and the other three were in the other class.

**Rosen:** I'm a little confused here, so I want to go back and ask you a question here. Could you clarify the A and B classes? You mentioned a moment ago that you had approximately fifty or so...

**Jacobs:** Sixty kids or maybe more, yes.

**Rosen:** ...sixty kids in a classroom. Now you mentioned something about 120 students.

**Jacobs:** Yes, it had to be broken up into two rooms--two classes--with different teachers. We used to have a home teacher. One teacher could teach a lot of subjects. We knew who our home teacher was, the home classroom teacher, and we used to have little tables with chairs and two of us sitting there. I can see now how long it was. The classroom was a very long classroom.

**Rosen:** When you mentioned the size of the classroom, do you have any idea of how many feet it was?

**Jacobs:** How many feet?

**Rosen:** To hold fifty or sixty students.

**Jacobs:** Oh, I'm sure it was pretty long--twenty meters or more. It was pretty long. It was a long classroom. I know it was long.

**Rosen:** You mentioned that the Christian students would get out about the same time you would--about 12:00 or 12:30.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** A little earlier I thought you had mentioned something about the Christian student having their own prayer in the public school.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** What time was that at?

**Jacobs:** This was in the morning when we started the class. It was every morning. They used to get up, and they used to cross themselves and say the prayer in Polish. We used to be silent; we didn't say the prayer. I guess once a week, if I can recall--if my mind serves me right--they used to have religious classes for two hours with a priest.

**Rosen:** In the public school.

**Jacobs:** In the public school, yes. It was not like the separation of church and state like we have over here. No, it was not. In the public school, they had Jesus

**hanging on a big cross in the front. In front on the wall over the blackboard, they used to have the president of the Polish government and the military marshal hanging over there. The Polish kids used to go over there and pray to a big cross. That's what they prayed to in the morning.**

**Rosen:** **The big cross in the public school?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, in every room.**

**Rosen:** **How did you feel about that when you began school?**

**Jacobs:** **I guess that I had no choice, and I had to live with it. I didn't want the feeling that I was different than they were. I remember the prayer very vividly. I took it as part of everyday life. You could do nothing about it.**

**Rosen:** **You mentioned that there was prayer in the morning in the integrated school.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes.**

**Rosen:** **What did you do during that prayer period?**

**Jacobs:** **I was standing still.**

**Rosen:** **Did you pray, also? Was this a silent prayer?**

**Jacobs:** **No, very loud. Oh, yes, *everybody*, all the non-Jewish kids, used to pray very loud [speaks in Polish]: "In the name of Jesus Christ...," you know.**

**Rosen:** **Did you participate in these prayers?**

**Jacobs:** No, not at all.

**Rosen:** What did you do during that time period?

**Jacobs:** I was standing still until the prayer was over and everybody stopped. Let me explain to you. When our teacher came into our classroom, all of us stood up at attention. When the teacher said, “Sit down,” we sat down. After the prayer, we sat down. We were very, very disciplined--very quiet. The classrooms on the whole in this school were very, very clean. We did not throw papers all over like over here. We didn’t have a cafeteria like we have over here. We had no cafeteria. Everybody brought their own sandwich if the person could afford it. But in the morning, the people who came the farthest used to get fresh, hot milk--the kids. As you came in to the school in the morning, before you went to the classrooms, the people who could not afford it got hot milk.

I guess, really, the Jewish kids were always quiet. We didn’t want to really show that we are better than they were. But the teacher used to always pick us out. They would call our name and say, “Okay, you tell us.”

I remember sometimes I came home tired. I will never forget. I was tired, and I didn’t want to do

the lessons. When it came to history and other things, I was listening to somebody tell the story, and my hand went up right away. You interrupt and you want to say something, but the teacher used to say, “Down!” One time the teacher said to me, “You know, I’m sure you did not read the lesson at home.” I said, “Why?” “Because you’re pretty sharp, aren’t you?” But still, at home we used to always have to be asked about our lessons--what we had to do. We had to do the lesson. The brother went through it to see if you made it right, or the sister.

Rosen: When you say the brother or sister, are you saying that your own brothers and sisters would check your work for you?

Jacobs: Yes, yes, if I made it right or I really finished the lessons. If I didn’t, I had a spanking (chuckle).

Rosen: Why do you think the teacher suspected you of not having read your lessons--singled you out?

Jacobs: She saw I listened very closely and added to what had been said. She came to me later on, not in the middle of the class. She knew we were coming home, and our parents would see to it that we did the lessons. My friends, my colleagues in school, came home. They weren’t rich, so they had to go out and work. They

didn’t have the opportunity to do the way we were doing. We were encouraged to do our homework.

Rosen: When you went to the integrated school, did you have Christian friends as well as Jewish friends?

Jacobs: Well, sure. Certainly, yes. Oh, yes. We used to play together. We used to do gymnastics together because we had to go into the gym together. I think, myself and the rest of us, we tried to prove not that we were better, but we tried to prove that we wanted to know, that we wanted knowledge. That’s the only place you could get it--in the public school--because we did not have high schools where I was over there. It was a night school, and my brothers used to go. But I was fortunate. After my grammar school, they said we had to go to high school, that they had built a high school now, so we had to go to high school.

If a person where I came from finished seventh grade, he was okay. I was the only one, I guess, in my family that finished the seventh grade, because most of the kids, when they finished five or six grades, were taken out of school to go to work to support their family. But I was the youngest one, and I really wanted to go to school. They said, “You’re

**going to finish school.” I finished and I’m glad I did.**

**Rosen:** **It sounds like you also had friends who were Christians that you played with.**

**Jacobs:** **Oh, yes. Sure, we would play, and we would sit together. My uncle’s janitor’s son and I went together to school. When we went to school, we had assemblies to go to lunch or something. We had always a few pfennigs--a few cents--in our pocket, and they had crooks like over here--no difference--to beat up the Jewish boys going home from school: “If you don’t pay us, we are going to beat you up.” They came to me, and they said, “We want ten cents!” I’d say, “I’m not going to give it to you!” They’d say, “Oh?” I’d say, “I’ll tell you something. I know that your group over here can take me on--I have no choice--but why not one-on-one?” The leader’s father used to be the janitor at my uncle’s house. The moment he said, “Okay,” I didn’t give him a chance. I hit him so hard that he keeled over, and I took off. I was a pretty good runner. I came home, and I told my uncle. My uncle called the father, and he got another spanking from his father.**

When he came to school, the principal pulled us in and said, “You had a fight yesterday, didn’t you?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “What happened?” I told him. He looked at him. (Chuckle) I remember he grabbed him by the ears. He said, “Don’t you ever do this at all! Don’t you ever stop those people over there that come to school and want some money or beat them up!” Since then, everything was quiet. We had nothing to worry about. I remember a friend of mine--his name was Baker--and they were bakers--used to bring all of them a loaf of bread for them not to beat him up. Since then he didn’t have to bring any more bread. Everything was nice and quiet.

See, our school was always separated between women and men. We were in the same school, but separated. The girls couldn’t be in the same class as the boys.

Rosen: When you describe a class with fifty or sixty students, these are all boys in the class?

Jacobs: All boys, no girls. Girls were on the other side of school.

Rosen: Did girls go to school for the same period and for the same classes as boys did?

**Jacobs:** That is correct, yes. They used to meet when they had the period outside on the playground. That's when they met. They used to be in the same school, but the door used to be closed. You couldn't go over there, and they couldn't come over to us. We were separated--segregated--you see.

**Rosen:** That's interesting.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** You talked a little bit about your family. I'd like you to tell a little bit more about it in the pre-Holocaust, prewar years. You mentioned that you came from a fairly large family, a total of six siblings and your parents.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** What about extended family?

**Jacobs:** What I can recall, going back and forth--I used to sit down with my cousin in Canada--I can recall close to eighty. That's what I can recall. I lost many in the Holocaust. That's what I can recall, going back and forth. I'm sure we had more. As I mentioned before, my family was a very, very close, loving family--close to each other. Everyone, from my sisters to my brothers, used to care about each other

and help each other. I guess that's what gave me the strength.

Rosen: When you say "the strength," what kind of strength are you talking about?

Jacobs: Love, that it was worthwhile to live. It's important. It was important. That's what really gave me the strength, looking back--the closeness, the caring about each other.

Rosen: You said you were the youngest of the six children.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: How much older was your oldest sibling?

Jacobs: My oldest brother was born in 1909; my sisters were born in 1911, and 1914. My other brothers in 1916 and 1919 respectively. It was a big spread. I had another older brother who was born around 1900. He was killed. I never met him. I never knew about it until I was maybe eleven or twelve years old--through a neighbor. He was six years old. My grandfather used to do the same thing--going from the German side to the Russian side bringing in material by wagon. Poland was occupied by Russia, Austria, and Germany until 1919. Konin was occupied by the Russians. My grandfather went to Kutno and Kolo. My brother, when the wagon came in, jumped on, and it went in a hole and threw

him off, and the wheel rolled over him, and he was killed.

Rosen: Your brother, who died at the age of six, jumped on to a...?

Jacobs: My grandfather’s wagon. My brother was like any small kid--wanted to have a ride. It went through the hole and threw him off, and the wheel went over him and killed him. I found out from a neighbor. My mother never talked about it.

Rosen: What did your mother do during those years?

Jacobs: My mother used to be a housewife--taking care of the kids. When it came to Passover--about six weeks before Passover--she used to bake matzos for Passover for the whole city. Also, Jews from the surrounding cities used to come and buy the matzos. That’s what she used to do every year.

I remember we had a small neighborhood store that sold groceries, but it didn’t work out. After that two of my brothers went to be tailors. They had to be an apprentice first. After the apprenticeship, one brother went to the military. Then he came home from the military to be a master tailor. He had to go to Lodz, not far from Konin, about 100 kilometers from Konin. He had to go take an exam to be a master tailor.

He had to have an exam to design different jackets and so forth. When he came home, he opened a little factory. Here they would call it a factory because he had some other apprentices working for him because he could teach other apprentices.

This time we did pretty good. Our standard of living was much higher already because he and my older brother, Shlomo, used to work together. My sister used to help them out, too. He had two apprentices working for him and a guy who used to get paid. See, the apprentices never got paid; yet they'd be apprentices for three years.

Rosen: Three years without pay.

Jacobs: Without pay. But my brother used to give so much. Sometime the apprentices ate lunch with us because they worked. After finishing the apprenticeship, he could go out and be a tailor. You had to have a certificate on the wall proving that you were a master tailor. We used to have pretty much a comfortable life. When I was in school, I said to my family, "When I finish school, I'm not going to work for the department stores." The department stores used to give the material, and my brother used to make up the jackets or pants or coats--so many a day--and then he

used to take them to the different department stores. I used to say, “Why work for them? We can do it ourself and compete with them.” I’m sure that’s what would have happened. We would have made our own department store and worked and sold clothing. We had a pretty nice family, looking back.

Rosen: What kind of housing did you live in at that time?

Jacobs: We lived in a house that didn’t belong to us because my mother’s four sisters took over the house of my grandfather. We couldn’t live over there because people used to live there. We used to have a kitchen and two bedrooms. One bedroom used to be converted in the day for the factory for the tailor, and at night it was another bedroom. One room was used for four people: my two sisters in one bed, my two brothers in the other bed. My older brother was with my father, and I used to sleep with my mother. It was nice. We had a basement.

Rosen: You operated the family tailor shop out of the house you lived in.

Jacobs: Oh, yes. Most of the people used to do this, but they also used to have another, what we called, group or a cooperative. Lots of tailors got together, and they used to rent a little room someplace, and they used

to work there. But most of them used to work from home. The doctors did the same thing. They didn't have offices like over here. They used to have their office, back in the old times, in their own house. People used to come there because that's all it was. The same thing with lawyers, no difference. It's not like over here--big, classy offices. No, not in our city. It was a beautiful city with a beautiful synagogue.

Rosen: Can you talk about the events that led up to the Holocaust? Can you describe what life was like in the mid-1930s, going to school now? Can you describe your experiences with the events that built up to the Holocaust?

Jacobs: I cannot recall the year, but it had to be 1937 or 1938 when Hitler ran out all the Jews who were born in Poland or whose father had been born in Poland. They used to send them out from Germany to the Polish border--back to Poland. I remember the city of Szczecin. They used to sit on the border for days--cold. The Polish government didn't want to let them in. I remember it wasn't too far. It's not like over here from Dallas going to Waco--so far. Everything was very close. I remember I used to go around with

a sack to collect blankets, sheets, anything to send to the people. They'd put it in a wagon and take it over there. Finally, they let them back into Poland.

In 1939, the war broke out--on September 1. It didn't take but a few days, and the Germans were in our city. When they came into our city, the first thing they did was to establish a curfew. Jewish people were not allowed to walk out in the city from 6:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning, and the non-Jewish from 9:00 to 6:00 in the morning. I have to go back and look at the calendar. I guess it was the Jewish New Year.

Rosen: What time of year would this be around?

Jacobs: In 1939.

Rosen: And this would be in the fall or the winter?

Jacobs: The fall, yes. The Nazis said that no rituals could be permitted in the city. No Jewish people were allowed to go into our beautiful, ancient synagogue. They took out all the prayer books, the Torahs, you know, the five books of Moses, and they piled them up on the square where I used to live, where I could look out from the window. I remember when we used to clean up. It was late in the evening, and I was standing in my grandfather's house--my grandfather had since

**passed away for a long time--and I said, “I have to save something.” I wanted to save my little prayer shawl with the big *kepah* we used to get when we used to sing in choir. The *kepah* was a Jewish ritual cap or hat. I ran in and I saved it while the rest of them were piled up on the square. After the Nazis cleaned the synagogue out, they made a horse stable from it.**

**A few days later, the SS put a match to it. They brought the rabbi to put a match to it, but he would not. The S.S. put a match to it, and it started burning. I can still see it--looking out from the window--start burning. But it started raining. For three days and three nights, it was burning; for three days and three nights, it was raining. When it stopped burning, it stopped raining.**

**The scrolls don’t burn; they will smolder because the parchment is made of lamb’s skin. I said to a friend of mine who still had a horse and wagon, “Why don’t you hitch the wagon?” In the Jewish tradition, you have to bury them in the cemetery after you cannot use the prayer books and the scrolls. He hitched the wagon, and I went to the man who sits with the dead man. I forgot his name; I used to remember.**

**In the Jewish tradition, when a person dies, before he is taken to the cemetery, a person has to sit with him. This man used to sit with the dead people. He used to get paid to sit with them. I went to him and said, "Why don't you come with us and say the prayer, the *Kaddish* [Jewish prayer for the dead]?" "Okay," he said, "you go ahead." We hitched the wagon, we came to the square, we started to load up all the prayer books and the small scrolls, and I remember one of the Gestapo said, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "We are going to clean up the street, and we are going to take this material to the River Vistula and throw it in and let it go away." We did load it up, but we didn't go to the river. We went to the cemetery.**

**Let me tell you something. I can remember--like it was today--how quick we dug a hole. Not known to us, the caretaker of the cemetery before the war was Polish, but he was a *Volksdeutcher*. We did not know. A *Volksdeutcher* means a German born in Poland. As we were digging the grave, he ran for the Gestapo--for the SS people. But we did it so fast, and we ran away, and they were looking for us. I guess they looked**

throughout the day, but they never did find us. If they ever found us, we would be dead.

We had some chickens, and we had some geese, but we couldn't slaughter them--kill them--because the cantor, the guy that used to slaughter, was afraid to do it. I remember it like today. I took a bike, and I put the chicken in the basket, put it on the back of my bicycle, and I said, "I'm going to go to Golina," a small city ten kilometers away. I went over there, and I asked a few Jewish people who would slaughter my chicken. They told me who was the cantor. I went over there, and I remember it like today. I was outside of the little room. He went in, and he quickly killed the chicken; I put it back in the basket, and I quickly was gone--bicycled back home.

These German soldiers or the SS people used to always travel on the road. I figured that when they stopped me, I would have a good excuse why the chicken got killed. No farmer was allowed to kill a chicken because they had to report how many chickens, how many geese, how many cows, how many pigs, how many horses they had. I would have a good excuse. If they stopped me and looked in the basket and said, "Hey, you killed

a chicken," I'd say, "You wouldn't like to eat him because it was a sick chicken, and I had to kill it."

Nobody stopped me, and it started to get close to 6:00. I came into Czarkow on the outskirts of the city, and I had to go over the two bridges. I remember it like today; I can still see it. People knew that I was going to come. I wasn't worrying about it; I didn't wear the armband--Star of David. I didn't wear it anyway.

Rosen: Was there a requirement to wear an armband?

Jacobs: Oh, yes, sure--the Start of David. Oh, yes, that was a directive issued to all Jews.

Rosen: You are talking about what time?

Jacobs: Right away, after the Nazis marched in. The Jewish people had to wear the Star of David to be recognized. I can remember that everybody was looking out from their windows. I was peddling quickly on the bike, and they opened the door, and I drove in and went back home. You could see the relief of my family. See, we still had tradition at home. We wouldn't eat without somebody slaughtering the chicken by ritual. That's what I did most days.

Rosen: Let me go back here for a minute. Could someone in your own family have slaughtered the chicken?

**Jacobs:** We wouldn’t eat it.

**Rosen:** You needed to have...

**Jacobs:** ...a cantor or rabbi--special people who know how to slaughter a chicken.

**Rosen:** There is a proper way to...

**Jacobs:** ...a proper way to slaughter it. You can cut off the head, but not this way. There’s a proper way how to cut it in the vein so that the blood will come out very fast so it will not stay too long in the body of the chicken or the geese.

**Rosen:** In describing your going from one town to another, you said you were not wearing the required Star of David on your arm. What would have been the punishment for you if caught and identified as a Jew and you not wearing it?

**Jacobs:** Get killed or beaten, tortured. It depended on the assessment of the police or the Gestapo. It depended how they felt about it. I used to be blond.

**Rosen:** You used to have blond hair.

**Jacobs:** Yes, and they never could recognize if I was Jewish or not. The only way they would recognize that I was Jewish was if some of the Polish people would point a finger: “He’s a Jew!” The German people very seldom could recognize Jewish people--very seldom. The only

**way was when we were pointed out or didn't have the identification that you are not Jewish. The Jewish people had to have identification--the "J" for *Jude*, the "P" for *Polak*.**

**Rosen:** **Were you concerned that someone might point you out--any of your neighbors--that you were a Jew?**

**Jacobs:** **I didn't think about it. You don't think about this kind of thing. Sure, maybe I was concerned subconscientiously, but I never thought about it.**

**I remember that I used to go...let's go back. The Nazis marched in, and I used to go to school with the boys, my friends. We used to play together after school on the square. I said, "Let's go play." They said, "I don't play with Jews." I said, "What do you mean?" I took a look at his arm, and he had an armband with a swastika. I never knew that he was a *Volksdeutcher*. He was part-German. I never knew. Right away, when they marched in, they also took out the intelligentsia, the teachers--non-Jewish teachers, not the Jewish teachers. They took them to the Jewish cemetery, and every one was shot.**

**Rosen:** **The non-Jewish teachers?**

**Jacobs:** **That is correct, yes.**

**Rosen:** **Why do you think they did that?**

**Jacobs:** My explanation would be that they did not want to have educators to educate the Polish people. They wanted them to be illiterate. If a person is illiterate, doesn’t know how to read, he has to depend on the next guy for what’s going on.

**Rosen:** How did that affect the life in the school? You have fewer teachers now, and there are only Jewish teachers.

**Jacobs:** We didn’t go to school. The Jewish kids were not allowed to go to school at all.

**Rosen:** And this is when?

**Jacobs:** When the Nazis marched in in 1939.

**Rosen:** Immediately after?

**Jacobs:** Immediately, no school. I never went to school anymore.

**Rosen:** For Jews or for everyone?

**Jacobs:** No, for Jews.

**Rosen:** What did you do at that time, then?

**Jacobs:** Nothing. See what’s going to happen. Two months later they came into our home, and they said we were going to be resettled. We walked out to the square with our belongings under our arms, and they took us to the outskirts of the city, what used to be a Polish military school before the war, and they kept us over

there. I remember it like today. They said, “You know you are going to be resettled. If you have some valuables or money, please deposit them with us.” Very nice, very gentle. “When you come to your destination, you are going to get it back. We are going to give you a receipt.”

I remember that I was sitting on the floor with my three brothers and two sisters and mother and father and a lot of my relatives and friends. People would go up, and I’d say to my mother, “Uh-uh, we are not going to give nothing!” She said, “What do you mean?” I said, “We can take care of it on our own because I don’t believe that those people are going to get back their money or the gold or valuables.”

I remember that the Ukrainians used to watch us over there, and I remember that I took a ring from my mother, and I gave it to one of them. I said, “Here’s ring. Let me walk out.” I want to walk out and get some food. I said, “When I come back, you are going to give me back the ring. It’s to be sure I return.” I gave it to him, and I came back, and I wanted the ring back. He said, “What ring?” He tried to hit me with his rifle, so I thought I’d better walk away from him: “They can kill me. Nothing to it.” At nighttime,

if you walked out of the barracks, and if you walked to the railroad station where the railroad cars used to wait for us...I always used to be very fast. I said, “I better travel with my family.” Some kids were separated from their families and didn’t know what had happened to their family. We traveled with the cars closed up. How many boxcars were used for our disposition depended on how many people had to be transported, because they didn’t take out the whole Jewish population in our city to be transported. They picked homes to take out families.

Rosen: Jewish families?

Jacobs: Jewish families. They picked Jewish families. We traveled in that manner for three days and three nights--no water, no food. We came into Warsaw. The city of Warsaw did not accept us.

Rosen: Before you go on here, I just want to make sure I have this in context. The Germans invaded in early September, and you are resettled around what time?

Jacobs: Two months later--November.

Rosen: And the weather at this time is...?

Jacobs: Cold. Poland is cold.

Rosen: When you say cold, could you give us maybe a...?

Jacobs: Let’s say thirty to thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit.

**Rosen:** About freezing.

**Jacobs:** Yes, about freezing. It depends on which part of the country you are in in Poland. It's cold. It's very cold. It's a different cold weather than here in Texas. I remember when we came into Warsaw, and we said, "Oh, we are in Warsaw!"

**Rosen:** And you are in boxcars?

**Jacobs:** Boxcars, yes.

**Rosen:** And you made this trip for how many days?

**Jacobs:** So far we were traveling about two days, I guess.

**Rosen:** In this boxcar, how many people would you say there were?

**Jacobs:** In this boxcar maybe there were fifty or sixty people.

**Rosen:** During these two days, what did you do for when you needed to use the bathroom?

**Jacobs:** You did it where you were standing. They never opened the boxcars to go out. What I remember, you did it where you were. See, the boxcars used to be our living room, our dining room, our cemetery, and our toilets over there. They counted us. Before we went in the boxcar they counted us. They'd say, "If you come to the destination and anybody's missing from the boxcar [I can still hear the voice in German.], the whole boxcar is going to be taken out and killed!" This

boxcar where I was traveling had open windows with barbed wire. You could always cut away the barbed wire, and at night when the train was going slow, you could jump out. But every boxcar was different. They had a small little room attached to the boxcar. On every boxcar they had the Ukrainians watching us.

Rosen: They had Ukrainians watching you?

Jacobs: From Konin, traveling.

Rosen: Were these Ukrainians inside the boxcar, too?

Jacobs: No, outside. On every boxcar was a little house.

Rosen: Would this be adjacent to the roof of boxcar or...?

Jacobs: In the front of the boxcars, between the boxcars.

Rosen: What did you eat during this two-day period?

Jacobs: Just what we had taken with us.

Rosen: They didn’t feed you at all?

Jacobs: No.

Rosen: And they didn’t have any washrooms inside the boxcars.

Jacobs: No, not at all! These were for cattle!

Rosen: You mentioned ventilation, that there were windows. Was there any heat in these boxcars?

Jacobs: The boxcars were for cows or horses. It made no difference for traveling. We were lucky we had cars with open windows. We could have lots of air come in and could breathe.

I remember we came to Warsaw, and we stopped in the outskirts of Warsaw. We found out they didn't want us--in Warsaw. They said they had too many people over there. We tried to travel up to Kielce and Radom until we come up to Ostrowiec. We stopped over there, and the city accepted us. They opened the doors, we stepped out, and we marched into the city. There used to be a big Jewish community in Ostrowiec. It's a steel mill city, and they used to make steel plates or build railroad cars. They put us in a room--three families, sixteen people. My kitchen is bigger.

Rosen: Sixteen people in one room?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Approximately how big a room was this?

Jacobs: Sixteen feet-by-sixteen feet?

Jacobs: Maybe it was smaller than I figure. I can visualize it now. Sixteen-by-sixteen is a big room, isn't it? (Chuckle) I guess.

The biggest killer was typhus, starvation, and torture. It was a ghetto. I remember that as a small boy I used to walk the ghetto streets, and I could see people dying, people screaming. There was no food, especially for the people that had no money. The business people still could sell something. I could

see mothers sitting on the steps or by the steps raising up their small, little children. I can still hear the voices: “Save the child!” I can still hear them say, “The child might die! I have lived a long life! The child has a longer life to live! Save the child!” Sometimes the child for whom she was screaming was dead already.

Rosen: You are talking about mothers.

Jacobs: The mothers, yes. Both were alive. The mother’s breasts were dry of milk. She couldn’t feed her child. That’s the way I lived day in and day out.

I never gave up hope; I never gave up belief. I was always positive: “I will survive!” I was always positive. People could not understand that that’s what kept me going--to be positive, to look at the next day as going to be a nicer day.

Rosen: Why do you think you were so positive that you would survive?

Jacobs: Because I believe in being positive. If I would be negative, I would always look back. But by being positive, I look always ahead of me; I always looked for a better day the next day.

What I’m talking about...I remember I was in Ostrowiec in the ghetto. At 6:00 we were not allowed

to walk out from the ghetto. My mother was standing in front of the window and looking out. In Ostrowiec, in the ghetto, Polish people lived in the ghetto, too.

Rosen: It was a combination of Polish and Jewish.

Jacobs: Yes, but the Polish people could walk out because they had identification as Poles. I used to say to my mother, “How come I can’t go out and play with them?” At 6:00 all the Jewish people have to be inside. She looked at me, “Mendel, I’m not worrying about you.” I said, “What do you mean?” “When they throw you in the fire,” she said, and I remember it like today, “you will never burn. You will always walk out alive.” She looked at me with the sad eyes. She said, “Someday we are going to part.” She said she was going to go her way, and I was going to go my way. I said, “What are you talking about?” She said, “You will find out. But I want to tell you one thing. When you walk the street and a man is approaching you, and he says he is hungry....” I said, “Mother, if he’s hungry, he’s hungry.” She says, “He has no food to eat. He will die.” I said, “Mother, what can I do? If he is going to die, he is going to die. I can do nothing about it.” She said, “Your stomach is full?” I said, “Yes.” “Do you have a penny in your pocket?” I said, “Yes,

Mother, I have a penny in my pocket." "Give him the penny." I said, "Mother, how can I give away my last penny? Tomorrow I have to buy a slice of bread to survive!" "Do you remember what I said?" I said, "Yes, you told me that when he had no food to eat, he is going to die." "Give him the penny now. This penny will save a life today. Don't you worry about tomorrow."

My brother was a tailor, as I mentioned before. He used to make jackets and pants. I went out from the ghetto to the farmers and traded for flour or potatoes, and come home and feed my family, my relatives, friends. That's what I used to do. We cannot be silent or complacent. At the moment we get silent or complacent, it can happen again.

Rosen: At the time, when you were taken away to the ghetto, did you have any idea how long this might last?

Jacobs: No. We thought it was going to be over quickly. We never thought that families were going to be separated, to be sent away, or whole families sent away to be destroyed. None of that ever crossed our minds. We never believed in it.

Rosen: You didn't believe that this would lead to death.

Jacobs: No.

**Rosen:** How much time did you have in advance to prepare for the deportation?

**Jacobs:** We never had time. They came in without giving you time or without telling you. You went to bed at night, and in the morning they came in and knocked on the door, and they said, “Arouse! Out you go!” Everybody grabbed the little bit that they could grab and a little bit of food if they had the chance and go into the square. They never gave you time or told you when you were going to be resettled. That’s what they did in the ghetto.

I remember it like today. We had a big, tremendous outbreak of typhus in Ostrowiec in the ghetto. We had a head typhus and a stomach typhus. We had a fourteen-day quarantine. I used to hear, “If they can have Vitamin C--oranges--maybe we can save lots of lives.” I used to get around.

**Rosen:** Who did you hear this from?

**Jacobs:** The doctors and nurses and Jewish people. I used to go around, and I remember where the brewery used to be over there in Ostrowiec. It was inside the ghetto, and they used to unload lots of oranges in the basement. I said, “Maybe I can get into the basement--not through the front door, but the little openings

where the air comes into it." I figured, "If my head is going to go through, my body will go through." I said to my brother, "I want some wide pants with a big coat, but in the coat don't make pockets." Okay, I went through the little window. I came out with lots of oranges. I remember it like today. I felt good about it. I took them to the hospital.

Rosen: You took what to the hospital?

Jacobs: The oranges. I took the oranges to the hospital, and I gave them to the doctors, and they said, "How much do you want to be paid for them?" I said, "Nothing." They couldn't believe it. In those days to get oranges, forget about it. I think I saved lives. My friend was over there, too, with stomach typhus. He now lives in New Jersey. That's what I used to do. I never stole in my life because stealing was a dirty word. Organizing was more sophisticated.

Rosen: You were an organizer, not a thief.

Jacobs: An organizer, not a thief. That's what I used to do. I used to go in to help them make salami.

Rosen: Help who make salami?

Jacobs: The Germans, at their places. I used to clean up everything, and I (chuckle) remember there were rings of salami. "How can I get them out without them

**catching me?" My pants were big pants. I used to slide them up my legs, and I took them home with them in my pant legs. I'd do these things. I helped a lot. My cousin--may he rest in peace--in Canada used to always tell the story: "Mike was helping the family."**

**Rosen:** **I want to back up here for a moment. You've already talked about how the Nazis came in in early September. In the time building up to the invasion by Hitler, did you see any change in the way Jews were treated in Poland? You mentioned something about the integration of the schools in 1937. But I'm curious to know if you saw any changes in Poland with regards to the treatment of Jews during the years preceding Hitler's invasion? Secondly, what did you know about what was going on in Germany and Hitler's rise in those years before he actually came into Poland.**

**Jacobs:** **Do you mean how things changed between the Poles and the Jews?**

**Rosen:** **Did you see any changes?**

**Jacobs:** **No changes at all.**

**Rosen:** **So, other than the integration of the school, life went on fairly normal?**

**Jacobs:** **That's right, until the Nazis marched into the city.**

**Rosen:** In the meantime, what did you know about Hitler and the goings on in Germany during those years?

**Jacobs:** We heard a lot of things about Hitler and what was going on in Germany, but we did not believe that he would commit this kind of atrocities and genocide. We knew that the Jewish people who were not German--Jewish people not born in Germany, such as those born in Poland or Russia--would have to leave. I heard about this as a small boy--what I could remember. I still was a small boy; I could not grasp this. I knew what was going on; but to this extent, I couldn't believe it. We knew that the Jewish people could not inter-marry with non-Jews. We knew about the ***Kristalnacht***. They were going into the synagogues and burning the synagogues. We knew that they put signs up--it came back to us--such as, "Don't buy at a Jewish store." Jewish stores had to display the Star of David. We knew about it, but we did not know to what kind of extent it was going to happen. I did not know to what extent it was really going to happen because people could not believe what one human could do to another. Nobody would believe it until it really happened. It still was hard to believe.

**Rosen:** Did you see any change perhaps in your parents' attitude? You said that you were pretty young at the time and didn't understand everything, but did you see any change in their behavior?

**Jacobs:** I didn't see too much because I guess they wanted to go on with a normal life. Of course, under all the circumstances that they were living in, they wanted to, I guess, not face it. I think so. We were sleeping in very small rooms and everything--no food, no nothing. We used to get very little rations. But still, again, I was young. I knew what was going on. That's understandable. I knew exactly what was going on because I inscribed day by day in my mind what was going on--day by day. When I speak to you, I can see the houses; I can see the streets; I can see the people; I can see my brothers and sisters. Of course, they start to fade away. Most every day I try to picture my parents in my memory. I don't want to lose the picture because I have no pictures of them.

**Rosen:** When you said you had small rations, were you referring to once you were in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in the ghetto.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** But in the ghetto, we always had lots of food.

**Rosen:** You had lots of food in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** I mean, in my family, because, as I mentioned to you, I was a good organizer. I used to help people load bread--*Wehrmacht*, the army. They used to have a bakery over there, and I used to help them load bread. Now, again, I used to hide it and bring home bread and give it all to my family and relatives. I always organized. I always organized food for the family. I always did.

**Rosen:** Mr. Jacobs, how long did you live in this ghetto?

**Jacobs:** From 1939 to 1942.

**Rosen:** Do you remember when in 1942?

**Jacobs:** It was in the fall, again. I don't remember what month. It was in the fall. It had to be in the fall.

**Rosen:** Why did it have to be in the fall?

**Jacobs:** Because it was cold. I guess it was August or September. I don't remember. I would have to look it up someplace. Okay, again, they came in for resettlement.

**Rosen:** Before we go on to your next resettlement, can you describe life a little bit more in this first ghetto? For example, how many people were in this ghetto?

**Jacobs:** In this ghetto there had to be maybe 10,000 or more people.

**Rosen:** In about how large an area?

**Jacobs:** About two or three square blocks.

**Rosen:** Two or three square blocks...

**Jacobs:** Yes, it was very small.

**Rosen:** ...for 10,000 people?

**Jacobs:** Oh, sure, because you had people living with five, ten or fifteen people in a room--sometimes ten or twelve.

**Rosen:** Talk a little bit more about that, as far as what your living accommodations were like in the ghetto.

**Jacobs:** As I mentioned, about sixteen people would be in a small little room. We used to sleep on the floor, or we used to put some planks on the bed and make bunks and slept on them. Nobody was allowed to go out from the ghetto. The only people that were allowed to go out from the ghetto were the people that went to work, under the watch of the SS people or the police. People used to come home beaten.

**Rosen:** You said sixteen people in a room, and you made planks to sleep on. What did you sleep on?

**Jacobs:** Sometimes on the floor. Sometimes three or four people slept in one bed.

**Rosen:** What did you do during those three years in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** I used to go around organizing food.

**Rosen:** So that’s what you did for the most part?

**Jacobs:** Yes. Also, in the city where I came from was a guy named Green. He used to make soda water from oranges--somewhat like Coca-Cola over here--or other different flavors. When he came to Ostrowiec, with one non-Jewish guy he opened a business. Also, as I mentioned, the Jewish people and Polish people used to live together. He opened an establishment to make different kinds of flavors. I figured with the Germans not knowing I’m Jewish, I was going to get these different flavors. I had a wagon with a cross bar in front and two big wheels. I put it on the wagon, and I used to go out and sell to the stores--the Polish stores outside the ghetto. I was selling ice to get some other fruit to bring into the ghetto.

I remember I had to go up a hill. I could never push it up a hill. My father helped me and my brothers helped me up the hill. On the other side of the hill was the Gestapo headquarters, and I used to sell not too far from the SS headquarters. I can still see the store on my right. I used to sell them the drinks, and the guy knew I was Jewish. The SS and Gestapo people used to come to the store and drink over there--alcohol, soft drinks, and other things. I never paid

no attention. I used to come inside and sell it, and he used to say, “Mike, why do you come in when they’re over here?” I said, “Why? If I do not come in, they’ll think something would be fishy. Don’t worry about it. They will never know who I am.”

I used to go around and sell soft drinks, make a few cents, and buy things to bring home to my parents. They used to go to the Russian Front--the soldiers. They stopped over on the hill. On the right side used to be a big school grounds, and they had lots of room to park their horses and the wagons--they used to go by horse and wagon--and some motorcycles. It was summer--hot--and I used to approach the wagons and sell soft drinks for marks. It was pretty good.

Rosen: For the German...

Jacobs: German money, yes.

Rosen: ...money?

Jacobs: But knowing how to get around, I made a very good acquaintance with the lieutenant. I said, “You can have any drinks you want. You don’t have to pay nothing.” I used to sell it quickly. They used to give me some bread. They used to give me some other things. I used to come back again and again.

**I remember one day...I used to sell soft drinks, and I got competition--non-Jewish. They were non-Jewish; I knew that. They started to sell, too. "Okay, fine." But people used to know me much better and buy mostly from me because I used to say, "If you buy two, you'll get it cheaper." (Chuckle)**

**My older brother, Shlomo, brought me another wagon to take home my empty containers. When he came up with the wagon, I saw it. I was selling over there on the side, and I saw a big group standing around, and I heard, "*Jude*! *Jude*!" The polish family pointed at my brother: "He's Jewish!"**

**Rosen:** **You're saying *Jude*?**

**Jacobs:** ***Jude* means Jewish.**

**Rosen:** **In what language?**

**Jacobs:** **In German. *Jude*, yes, in German. I saw this, and I thought, "Uh-oh, he's going to be in trouble!" I said to the lieutenant, "Lieutenant, what's going on over there?" He said, "A Jewish person dares to come up over here and sell us some soft drinks." I said, "Where?" I went over there, and I said, "Lieutenant, he's not Jewish!" He said, "How do you know?" I said, "Because I know! They are Jewish."**

**Rosen:** **And you were pointing to...?**

**Jacobs:** To the non-Jewish people, to the mother and son. He said, “You say so?” I said, “Yes, I know for sure they are Jewish!” They grabbed them and took them across to the Gestapo, and I said to my brother, “Leave everything, go.” I left everything and went, because I knew that when they went into the Gestapo headquarters over there, they were going to interview them, and they would have their Polish identification. They were going to let them go.

We were gone. I went back to the ghetto. I said to myself, “I’m not going to leave the bottles over there because it’s money to me, because I have to pay for them.” The next day, I went back. I started to pick up all my bottles and everything. That’s what the story was about--selling the soft drinks to the Germans.

**Rosen:** How old were you at that time?

**Jacobs:** In 1941, that’s when I did business with soldiers going to the Russian Front. I was sixteen years old, I guess. Yes, sixteen, I guess. It depends on which year I was born (chuckle). On finding my birth certificate on a trip to Poland, I learned that I was born in 1924.

I was going to Czmielow, a little place on the outskirts of Ostrowiec. I went over there, and I wanted to...the thing I wanted to tell you is what I used to do--my experiences. I was sitting over there on the front where they have the big rest area for the German soldiers going to the Russian Front. I was sitting over there, and a sergeant, I guess, came out, and we had a long conversation. He says to me, “Do you know where I can get onions?” I said, “I don’t know.” I said, “How are you going to pay?” He said, “Oats.” I said, “How come oats?” I remember it like today. He said, “See, I can give you money, and I can give you other things; but if I give you the oats, the horses can go so far but cannot make it to the Russian Front because of the lack of oats.” I said, “Okay, fine. Let me see what I can do.”

The next day I came back, and I said, “Yes, I can get you some onions.” I went to the ghetto. I didn’t know who the people were that had some onions, but I got some onions. And my mother and my father and brothers got some onions. I came back and said, “Yes, I can get the onions. I can get you so many bags. How many bags of oats are you going to give me?

**But you have to come into the ghetto." He said, "No problem. I'll go into the ghetto."**

**We were sitting there talking. I don't know if he knew if I was Jewish or not. I'll never know. The sergeant says to me, "You know, Hitler made a big mistake." I said, "What?" He said, "He started killing the Jews." I said, "What do you mean?" I'm playing, you know. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He should learn from history." I'm listening. He says, "You know, nations have come and gone, but the Jewish people are still over here. It doesn't make any difference how many Jews he's going to kill. The Jewish people are going to be here, but Hitler is not going to be over." I didn't say another word.**

**I came home, and I told the story. They couldn't believe it. Nighttime, he comes with a full wagon of oats in the ghetto. I went out, and my brothers...I'll tell you something. My brother used to carry two bags or more. This is 400 pounds. He carried them up in the attic. I gave him the onions, and he drove away. I sold it to the Polish people and made pretty good money and got other things by exchanging around.**

**That's what I used to do in the ghetto. My mother was right--I could never be afraid. That's what I used**

to do in the ghetto. That's how we used to live. I can still see people sitting on the sidewalks dying because they didn't have enough food, or begging for food. You'd pass by. You only could shake your head and feel sorry for the person.

Rosen: As you were describing, you and your family had food in the ghetto, but it appears that there were a lot of other people who went hungry there in the ghetto.

Jacobs: That is correct, yes.

Rosen: You said that you remember seeing people lying dead in the street.

Jacobs: Right.

Rosen: How did that make you feel?

Jacobs: You see, you lived with it day in and day out. You looked at it, and maybe you made a face and then walked away. That's all that I can tell you from my experience. You looked at it, and maybe I said to myself, "I hope that never happens to me." Okay? That's what you did day in and day out. There were people getting tortured. The German Shepherd dogs were trained for it, and they'd rip people apart or something.

Rosen: The German Shepherd dogs?

Jacobs: Yes.

**Rosen:** Are you saying dogs would...

**Jacobs:** Yes. The police would say, "*Jude*!" and the dogs knew exactly what to do, and they went after you. They'd grab you and pull a piece of meat out.

**Rosen:** Can you describe, perhaps, an incident?

**Jacobs:** I saw it once. There was one Gestapo man, and he had a white shepherd. It was white. I remember it like today. He used to hold the shepherd by the leash, and he'd walk on the street. All of a sudden, he says, "*Jude*!" The dog jumped at him and grabbed him. He ripped the person apart until the Gestapo man called him away. The person bled to death. Lots of times, they used to jump at the throat. That's the way they used to train them. That's what was going on. That's the way I had to live. But again and again, hope and belief and always being positive helped me to survive.

**Rosen:** Mr. Jacobs, what did your family do in the meantime? You've talked about your role as an organizer of food. What about your parents and your brothers and sisters?

**Jacobs:** Some of my brothers had to go to work often because they were forced to go to work--some of them.

**Rosen:** What kind of work?

**Jacobs:** Any kind of jobs, what the Nazis told them to do. They worked in the fields, or they built fish hatcheries

or built other things. They'd go to the steel mills--work in the steel mills--or on the roads.

Rosen: They worked for the Nazis?

Jacobs: Yes, for the Nazis. That's is correct. My mother and father were home to cook a little bit and do other things. I remember my older brother was supposed to go to work. He did not. They came to arrest him. In the ghetto we had Jewish police.

Rosen: Jewish police within the ghetto...

Jacobs: Within the ghetto, right.

Rosen: ...who worked for the Gestapo?

Jacobs: No, they took care of the Jewish people. The Jewish police were responsible for order, to deliver workers. They used to take care of the things that the Nazis would tell them to do. My brother didn't want to be a policeman. They came to him, and they asked him to be a policeman because he was in the military during the war--he fought.

Rosen: During World War I?

Jacobs: World War II.

Rosen: Your brother?

Jacobs: My brother was in the army. In Poland you had to go in the army when you were twenty or twenty-one years old.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** And he was in the army when the war broke out. I got a picture coming to me. When I speak to you, I'm there; I can see everything. They called him to be a policeman in the ghetto.

**Rosen:** Who called him in?

**Jacobs:** The Jewish Committee.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** We had a special committee--Jewish Committee--that used to be in charge of all the activities in the ghetto, but the SS people--the Gestapo--told them what they had to do. He said, "Why?" It was because they found out he was in the military. He fought in Warsaw until they surrendered in Warsaw. They promised him that if he surrendered, he could come home. Maybe if he would have been sent back to Germany as a prisoner-of-war, he would be alive today. I don't know. I'll never know. But he didn't want to be a policeman. He came home, and we asked him, "What did they call you there for? We were scared." He said, "They want me to be a policeman," and he refused to be one. I said, "Why? If you are a policeman, we have nothing to worry about. You can get all the food and everything." He said...and I'm very proud of him. Of

course, I lost him, but I’m very proud of him because he said that if he were to be a policeman, he would have to hurt other people. The police would come with these big wooden clubs and hit Jewish people when they wanted them to work or something. So, my other brother was supposed to go to work, but he didn’t go to work, and they came to arrest him. I said, “Why are you going to arrest him? Arrest me!” They said, “Fine!” They took me to jail. I was in jail over there. They put me in jail, but it was not like jails over here. It was in a basement. It’s wet, and it stinks. You had a bucket to use like an outhouse. I was a mere young boy, and they put me in with a criminal. I was lucky this guy didn’t bother me.

Rosen: The criminal who was in there?

Jacobs: Yes, in jail. I remember I used to look out because they had bars on the window. I was in the basement, and I looked out, and I could see my mother--may she rest in peace--walking up and down worrying about me.

Rosen: How long did you spend in the jail?

Jacobs: About three days, I guess.

Rosen: How did they treat you in the jail?

Jacobs: We used to go out during the day for an hour and walk around the courtyard. That’s all. They didn’t beat

me. They didn’t beat me over there. She was worrying about me.

As I was walking around in the courtyard, I heard the Nazis--the Germans--talking about taking us out the next day to be shot. I said, “Oh, my God! I’ll be shot too!” I was pretty fast on the uptake. The next day we walked around, and I walked to the guard at the front of the gate: “What am I doing over here? I’m in the wrong place. I’m supposed to go to the other gate.” I didn’t have no armband or nothing. I was in my own clothes. I said this to him in a very, very, nice voice--you know, positive--and in a very loud voice he said, “Get out from over here! What are you doing over here?” And I walked away. The next day, they took out all the people in the jail. I’m over here in the U. S. today, but always when I go back, I just stop over there and look.

Rosen: Everyone was killed? All the people incarcerated were killed?

Jacobs: Yes, everybody.

Rosen: In the meantime, when you went up to the gate guard and pretended that you were in the wrong place...

Jacobs: The wrong place.

Rosen: ...he sent you where?

**Jacobs:** He kicked me out!

**Rosen:** And that’s how you got out of jail?

**Jacobs:** Yes (chuckle)! He kicked me out from it! I walked home.

**Rosen:** He didn’t know who you were?

**Jacobs:** No, no. I was a young boy. What was a young boy doing over there in jail? He kicked me out, and I walked away. I came home, and my mother was worried. You could see it in her eyes. They knew something was going to happen on the outside, but I did not know what was going to happen. That’s what I went through over there, day in and day out.

**Rosen:** How were the spirits of you and your family as this three-year period went on? For example, you’ve said that you were optimistic during your time there. What about its effect on the personalities of the people you were living with? You talked about sixteen people in one room. That’s a lot of people, and you are spending a lot of time with them. How did you and the others get along?

**Jacobs:** What I can see, they were very separate from each other. Some people took it very much in stride; some of them did not. You could see it on their faces--their sad faces--all the time. There were people who

looked out only for themselves, but we tried not to. We used to sing. We used to sing melodies. We used to sing what we sang in choir during the religious holidays in the synagogue. We used to try to entertain ourselves. People could not understand: “Why are you singing? Stop singing!” We’d say, “Why not? Why show our sorrows and our worries? We cannot help it, but at least we can sing.” People tried to stay away from each other. We didn’t--never did.

Rosen: When you say “we,” are you talking about your family?

Jacobs: My family.

Rosen: What about the other families?

Jacobs: It was hard to get close to people. If you got close, they would think you wanted something from them. I used to say, “We don’t want nothing from you! We want to keep up everybody’s humor. Why do you go around and keep everything inside of you?” That’s how it was. Lots of people were this way. We always were entertaining ourselves.

Rosen: You mentioned that you were in this first ghetto for approximately three years until the fall of...

Jacobs: 1942.

Rosen: Did you notice any changes during that three-year period?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, there was lots of changes. In what way, do you mean?

**Rosen:** I'm curious about any changes.

**Jacobs:** In the ghetto the daily living was going on the same way day in and day out. Maybe it was a little bit different because it depended on how much food you had or something happened to your family or to your friend or something. The daily living was the same thing, no difference. You'd get up in the morning, go to work. Everything was the same way, no difference. You could see changes in the behavior of the people.

**Rosen:** How so?

**Jacobs:** They'd say, "What's going to happen tomorrow?" or "Why should I live?" or "What's the point of torturing myself?" This may have been the changes in the people, the changes in their behavior.

**Rosen:** You mentioned there were a number of people who died in the streets of starvation.

**Jacobs:** Right.

**Rosen:** And you talked about some Nazi attacks, using German shepherds on Jews. I'm curious, also...did you see or were you aware of any difference in the number of, perhaps, suicides?

**Jacobs:** I can’t recall any. Maybe people committed suicide without us knowing about it. Maybe they died in a normal death. I had my eyes pretty open. I wanted to know really what was going on, and the people would think, maybe, “What’s the matter with Mike?” You see, I knew I would survive. I knew I would share my experience. In those days in the ghetto, I would know every little bit of what was going on.

Let me go back to our city. When they came in, they took out hostages, too.

**Rosen:** When you mention your city...?

**Jacobs:** Konin. In 1939 they took out hostages--Jewish and non-Jewish hostages--and put them in jail. That Friday afternoon, I remember it like today.

**Rosen:** When you mention hostages, are you talking about German Jews?

**Jacobs:** Hostages in Poland--Polish Jews and Polish people.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** They took hostages and put them into jail. One Friday afternoon they told people to go to the big square. Where I came from, from my city, Konin, they had a big square. Before the war, on a Polish holiday, the soldiers and the Scouts used to march over there. The politicians used to go on the balcony and give a

political speech. So on this one day, I said, “Why not? Let me go over there, because the orchestra is going to play, and I’m going to see the German soldiers march.” I went over there. Very few people were over there. The only people that were over there were the farmers who used to come in on Friday to sell their goods to the Jewish people, like, chickens and butter and eggs and other things--before Saturday.

I was standing and waiting, and they brought out two hostages, one Jewish hostage and one non-Jewish hostage. The names are very familiar to me because the city was a small city, and I knew most of them, Mr. Slodky and Mr. Kurowski. Slodky was a Jewish guy, and Kurowski was a Polish guy. They put them to the wall. That wall before the war used to be part of a gymnasium or European school, like, a high school or college. They stood over there, and I said, “Oh, my! They are going to tell us something--say something or give some speech!”

All of a sudden, half a dozen soldiers came with rifles. I could hear the command, and I still couldn’t believe what was going to happen. All of a sudden, I heard shots. Both were shot. It was the first time in my life I saw human blood and people getting shot,

and I ran home. I told my parents and my neighbors what happened. They couldn’t believe it. They didn’t do nothing. We knew they couldn’t do nothing.

Of course, my father was a hostage, too. The excuse was given by the Nazis that a German was killed on the outskirts of the city. They had to take out two hostages to put a fear in the population of the city so that nothing should ever happen to a German. That’s what happened over there.

Now, let me go back to Ostrowiec. I jumped around. That’s the way I had to live day in and day out, not knowing for one second that I will survive, that I would get killed or caught. But I figured I had to do this--for survival.

In 1942 they came back again, and there was to be another resettlement. Everybody went now--the whole city. The whole ghetto went to the square.

Rosen: The whole ghetto? We’re talking about in...?

Jacobs: ...Ostrowiec.

Rosen: In Ostrowiec.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: In 1942 in the...?

Jacobs: I guess it was the fall, end of summer.

**Rosen:** And the population of Ostrowiec during this time period, would you say it has been about the same? Has it increased or decreased? Are we still talking...you mentioned about 10,000 people.

**Jacobs:** I guess. I don’t want to quote, but there was a lot over there. It decreased, surely, because people died.

**Rosen:** I was wondering if more people were also being brought in or if you saw declining numbers.

**Jacobs:** People from the small little cities around there were brought in--the small villages with maybe three or four families.

**Rosen:** Jews and non-Jewish?

**Jacobs:** Jewish. There were only Jews. We walked to the square. I’m walking, now again, with my three brothers and two sisters.

**Rosen:** And your parents?

**Jacobs:** And my parents, yes. My mother and father and lots of my relatives. But my oldest sister, most of the time she lived out of the ghetto. She was blonde and tall. She lived with a friend, a non-Jewish friend. She came in the night before we had to gather in the big square. We asked her to go out from the ghetto: “Go back to your friend.” She didn’t want to go. She said,

**“Why?” She wanted to stay with her parents, with her family. We said, “Go!” She didn’t want to go. In the meantime, they surrounded the ghetto, and she couldn’t leave. She could maybe have walked out because she had the Polish papers. You would never know she was Jewish--blonde, tall.**

**As we walked to the big square--my whole family--I saw on my left that they were selecting people. I said to my older brother--five years older than I--”Let’s not go to the big square. Let’s go over there.” He said, “Oh, no, we’ll go with our parents.” I said, “Why with our parents? The family? Look, we can always follow them. We’ll find out where they went, and we’ll go over there. Let’s go over there.” He didn’t want to go. I grabbed him by the arm, and I waved goodbye to my parents and my brothers and sisters.**

**I went over there to the selecting area over there. They took my brother, too, because he was tall--taller than I was--and older. Myself, because I was young and skinny, they tried to push me back into the big square. I walked away a few steps, and when they looked away, I sneaked through, and I met my brother in the smaller square in Ostrowiec.**

**Rosen: Are you talking about two different squares?**

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** One big one where the rest of your family went and one small one where you and your brother went.

**Jacobs:** Yes, the whole ghetto. The people were selected and put in the smaller square across from where I was in jail--the little square over there. We were waiting for nightfall.

**Rosen:** Out in the square?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, in the small square. We walked out from the small square, and we passed through the big square. It was completely empty, and we didn't know where they went. They put us into a small ghetto. Until today, when I go back to Ostrowiec, I always stop and I say to myself, "How quick they could build a big fence around a small ghetto." Very quick. I don't know who did it until today. They put us over there in the small ghetto, and we were waiting over there. They fed us, and we didn't know what was going to happen to us. At this time, my brother says, "No!" He's not going to wait. He escaped the ghetto with some other friends to the forest, to the underground, to the partisans.

**Rosen:** Polish partisans.

**Jacobs:** It was a group of thirteen people, all Jewish--living with the underground. You know what underground means?

**Rosen:** Were these all Jews?

**Jacobs:** Yes, all Jews. Do you know what underground means?

**Rosen:** Go ahead and tell me.

**Jacobs:** They took away a bush, and they built, physically, an underground room. At night they put the bush over it, and they lived underground.

**Rosen:** It’s like a tunnel they dug under the ground.

**Jacobs:** That’s right. Tunnel, that’s correct. They lived over there. They used to go out from time to time and do their job. We had two partisan organizations in Poland. One was anti-Semitic, and one was not.

My brother used to be very poetic. He used to write poems, and I wish I could get one. I went back two years ago to the place where he was killed, but I could not find the bunker--the underground. Nobody knows about it. If they knew, they wouldn’t say, because he wasn’t killed by the Nazis. He was killed by the anti-Semitic partisans.

**Rosen:** If I understand you correctly, there are two different partisan groups who were united in their dislike for

the Nazis but opposed to each other as far as one being anti-Semitic and the other being Jewish?

Jacobs: That's correct.

Rosen: So they were fighting...?

Jacobs: They were seeking Jewish partisans. They were looking for Jewish partisans, and I guess found out they were over there, and I guess they knew the password. Who knows? They went in and they machine-gunned everybody except three of them. They thought they all were dead. The survivors came out, and they told me. They saw my brother fall in February of 1943. I don't know the date.

Rosen: So it was just a few months later?

Jacobs: Yes, a few months later. That's how my brother was killed.

Rosen: Okay, at this point we are going to take a break, and I'm going to switch it over to side two of the tape.

Jacobs: Okay.

Rosen: Mr. Jacobs, you were about to tell us about...you were resettled again. Before you get into describing that, I'm curious...at this point, you'd spent three years in the first resettlement camp--the first ghetto. What expectations did you have at this point? What did you expect in the future?

**Jacobs:** I don’t know if I had any expectations but survival. That’s all. I can summarize it in one word. It’s survival.

**Rosen:** You saw other people dying.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** You talked about them in the first ghetto. Do you have any expectation of death for you?

**Jacobs:** No, it never crossed my mind.

**Rosen:** How come?

**Jacobs:** Because, as I mentioned before, my thinking was always positive, and by thinking positive it never crossed my mind. I never wanted to think about that. I was thinking about life all the time--survival.

**Rosen:** Being split up between two different squares, a large square and a small square, with most of your family going into the large square and an older brother and you going into the small square...this was at what point? This was in what ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Ostrowiec. I’m talking about Ostrowiec, yes.

**Rosen:** Okay. You made a conscious decision not to follow your parents.

**Jacobs:** That’s correct.

**Rosen:** Why do you think you made that decision?

**Jacobs:** An instinct not to go with the mass of people--with all the people going over there. And going through my mind...when I looked to my left, they were selecting people, and I knew they were selecting for something. I didn't know what, but I took a chance that maybe--it went through my mind--they would keep people to work, to clean out the ghetto--what the people left behind because everybody could not take everything with them. That was a quick decision to be made: "Don't go over there; go over here."

**Rosen:** You made this quick decision, and I was wondering if you felt you had a better chance of survival in one group or the other.

**Jacobs:** I figured that if I went over there, I would have a better chance of survival. This was going in my mind.

**Rosen:** You said you pulled your brother over with you.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** What about the rest of your family?

**Jacobs:** They went over there to the big square without realizing where they were going to go. Nobody knew about it. They didn't tell us.

**Rosen:** Earlier in this interview, you talked about feeling that your strength came from the support of your family--from the love of your family that you grew up

with--and everyone looking out for each other. At this point we see a break in this in that you're separated from your family, and you actually made a conscious decision to make that break, and fortunately for you. What happened to the strength now because it's being tested?

Jacobs: It didn't change the strength. See, my strength still was with them because in my mind I thought I would follow them: "We can be separated for a few days or a week or two, but I'm going to follow them." The separation didn't weaken my strength at all. In my mind, still, I would see them: "We will get together again. We are going to laugh; we are going to sing." That's what my strength was.

Rosen: So you and your brother went into the smaller square, and you pointed out that your brother escaped that evening?

Jacobs: No, no, we worked. They took us from the small square and put us in another ghetto, a smaller ghetto. It was very small.

Rosen: And this is where?

Jacobs: In Ostrowiec. Not too far away from where I used to live and not too far away from the big square.

Rosen: So within the city of Ostrowiec...

**Jacobs:** Ostrowiec, yes, a ghetto.

**Rosen:** ...there was more than one ghetto.

**Jacobs:** There was one ghetto--one big one. In 1942, after the people were taken away, like, my family, in the big ghetto, they built a small ghetto around the cemetery. At this time they put us in the small ghetto.

During a few days or maybe a week, my brother didn't want to wait, or he had a feeling that something was going to happen. He didn't know. He just decided with another group of people to go to the underground--to the partisans.

**Rosen:** How did that feel when he left? How did you feel about that? Did he discuss it with you?

**Jacobs:** Yes, he wanted me to go. I said, "No, you go ahead. If everything works out, I will come see you. I will go."

**Rosen:** How did he know about partisans or what was going on in the outside? What kind of news did you have coming in?

**Jacobs:** We had some partisans before, outside. It was going around that in this forest were partisans, Jewish partisans and non-Jewish partisans fighting against the Nazis.

**Rosen:** You said you had some partisans before. Do you mean within the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Out of the ghetto. They used to come in and need some money. People used to give them money.

**Rosen:** So you actually had free partisans who would enter the ghetto...

**Jacobs:** ...and come out from the ghetto.

**Rosen:** ...and come out from the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Right, right.

**Rosen:** So your brother left, and you thought you might join him, if things worked out, at some other point.

**Jacobs:** Right, correct.

**Rosen:** At this point, you are in this small ghetto by yourself.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** How do you feel about that?

**Jacobs:** I know I am alone, and I have to fight for my own survival. I have to see to it that I survive. That's all that could go through my mind. All that went through my mind, being in the ghetto, was, "Where did my parents go? Where did my brothers and sisters go?" I didn't know where they went.

**Rosen:** I want to come back to that. You talked about how the people in the small square were put into a smaller

ghetto within the original ghetto. In the meantime, what did you see or what did you know about the mass of people, including your family, who went into the larger square.

Jacobs: Absolutely nothing. In my mind I thought they had been taken to someplace else in Poland and put in another ghetto--big ghetto. Who knows?

Rosen: Did you see them taken away?

Jacobs: No, I didn't see them because I was in this small square, and I couldn't see them. And after my brother left, they finally came into the ghetto--the SS people--and they started to select people to go to work. I was selected to go out from the small ghetto to the big ghetto to clean out all the belongings people left behind. I was working under a sergeant, Sergeant Holtzer. I'll never forget his name. I used to carry heavy furniture, and my back was breaking. But I would never show my weakness; I would never show fear that I was weak. If I did, he wouldn't hesitate to kill me.

Rosen: Now this is in the fall of 1942.

Jacobs: Yes, 1942.

Rosen: At this point you are about eighteen years old.

**Jacobs:** Yes, pretty close to eighteen. I would be seventeen-going-on-eighteen. I was still seventeen.

**Rosen:** Depending on what year you were born in.

**Jacobs:** I was born on December 29. I was still seventeen. I was working very hard. I was working very hard not to show that I was weak. I remember like it was today. I used to come into the rooms, and I used to knock on the wall. When the wall was hollow, I didn't bother. If it was not hollow, I knocked away the wall because people had left some of their belongings--their valuables--hoping some day they were going to come back.

**Rosen:** You're referring to the rooms that the sergeant took you into to search for belongings, that the walls had interior areas where people hid items?

**Jacobs:** Right, valuables, because they were afraid they were going to be taken away. People used to hide in the basement between the floors--in Poland, we have big spaces between the ceilings and floors--and in the attics. If anybody was caught, they were taken out in front of their home, and they were shot.

**Rosen:** When you say caught, are you talking about people who not only hid items, but hid themselves?

**Jacobs:** Hid themselves, yes.

**Rosen:** Between floors or inside walls?

**Jacobs:** No, between floors and ceilings in the basement and between the ceilings, floors, and in the attics.

**Rosen:** How much space was there between the...?

**Jacobs:** A foot.

**Rosen:** About a foot between the ceiling and the attic?

**Jacobs:** That’s right, because people could hide. If you have to, you can get in a very small space. That’s what I mentioned before. I figured that if my head was going to go through, my whole body was going to go through--the opening for the oranges.

Daily I could see dozens of people being shot. That’s the way I had to live day in and day out--not knowing from one second to the other that I’m going to be alive. I always knew that I would survive.

I remember it like today. I used to come into rooms where the mother had grabbed the child but couldn’t grab the doll because they were pushed out very quickly, and she left the doll. Some of the dolls were on the floor or the kid dropped it on the bed or someplace else. I remember I came into a room, and there was a doll on the floor. Sergeant Holtzer looked at it and said, “Isn’t that a beautiful doll?” I said, “Yes, sir, that’s beautiful.” I looked at the doll,

and in my mind I was thinking, “The mother couldn’t take the doll for the kids to play with.” And he said again, “Isn’t that a beautiful doll?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “You better be careful with this doll.”

You see, the mothers didn’t go out from the ghetto to buy dolls. They were not allowed, and maybe they didn’t have no money to buy one. So they made the dolls. Their dresses were a beautiful white. They took embroidered sheets or pillows and made beautiful dresses for the dolls. When I mentally look at the face of the doll I picked up, I can still see it like it was today. The dolls had happy faces--clowns. When the child picked up the little doll and looked at the face, it was a happy face, and the child could play with it. If you looked at the parents or their brothers and sisters, there were all sad faces. Holtzer said, “When you pick up this doll, you better be careful. When you put it on the truck, you keep it separate.” I can hear his words: “When you come into the warehouse, you put it separate.” My friends did the same thing. The Gestapo and S.S. men were going to take the dolls home. Some of the SS people--the Gestapo--used to live in the same city, some of them not. They would give the dolls to their own children.

I was going on with my work, and one day I came into a room, and Sergeant Holtzer didn't want to go in. He said, "It stinks!"

Rosen: Sergeant Holtzer wouldn't go in.

Jacobs: Yes, Sergeant Holtzer said he would not go in: "It stinks!"

Rosen: But he sent you in?

Jacobs: Sure. I had to go in any way! I went in even though it smelled. But I could hear a small child screaming off the top of its head. See, the mother left the little child in the crib, hoping that the neighbor, the Polish neighbor, would save it. When I walked in, my body was trembling. I said, "Why do I, a teenager, have to be part of it?" because I knew exactly what was going to happen. I walked to the crib, I picked up the little child, and I was carrying it in my arms. Every time I speak about it, I can still feel the warmth in my hands. I can still see the little head. I can still see the tears falling. As I was walking, the little child started to cuddle to my body. It thought I was the mother. God knows how long the diapers were not changed, how long the milk was sour. You could see the bottle, and I saw that the kid could not pick it up.

When I was carrying it and I came outside, I went to put it on the pavement, but Sergeant Holtzer said, “Oh, no, don’t you put it on the pavement! Take it to the tall building.” I took it to the tall building. My friends also took children to the tall building.

Rosen: How tall a building is this?

Jacobs: About three stories. I can still see the building. When I walked down to the building, I said to myself that I was the happiest teenager in my life, because I thought those children were going to be sent back to Germany, and they would grow up as Germans. They would not know who their parents were. That’s what was going on in my mind as I was going on with my work.

A couple of hours later, the same day, I looked up to the tall building, and I said to myself, “Those children are not going to be taken home or sent back to their own families!” A bunch of SS people were standing downstairs with their rifles, smiling and laughing. I can still see the guy--the SS man--standing upstairs by the window saying, “Are you ready?” in German. They said, “Yes.” And he starts to throw them out, and they are taking pot shots.

**Rosen:** They are throwing children off the side of the building?

**Jacobs:** I thought they were the dolls.

**Rosen:** They are throwing dolls off the side of the building?

**Jacobs:** I thought so. I said to myself, “Those dolls that we carried in and they said to be very careful, they are not going to be sent back to Germany or taken home to their own children to play with.” Then I looked a little bit closer. They were not those dolls. They were those children that we carried to the tall building. They were throwing them out through the windows. I can still see it. They were full with amusement, all smiling and laughing and talking about who had a better aim. That’s what one human could do to the other if we are silent and complacent.

The second episode...I have lots of episodes, but this one is so inscribed in my mind that when I speak I will always tell this story. It makes no difference whether they are young or old. The next day, a day later, I tried to walk into a house, and a small child was left outside, wrapped in lots of blankets. I guess the Polish family was holding this child, and was scared they would be caught hiding a Jewish child. They were afraid they were going to get

caught and shot. We stopped and I said, “Sergeant Holtzer, can you imagine Polish people always leaving small children outside to get used to the cold weather when it comes winter.” I tried to, maybe, talk him out of it. He stopped and looked at it. I said, “Sergeant Holtzer, you’re not going to do it, are you?” And he said to me--I can hear his voice--and if I say one more word, I will get the same thing. I don’t know what came over me. I said, “Sergeant Holtzer, every day you come to work....” Every day he came to work, and he took out his own picture--seven children and his wife. He always said, “Aren’t they beautiful?” He’d say, “Take a look.” His wife was beautiful. I’d say, “Oh, yes, she’s gorgeous.” He said, “Wouldn’t it be nice to go home to play with my children, to take them to movies, to make love to my wife?” And I’m talking to him. See, I could have been shot. I took a chance.

As I was talking to him about the picture, he took out a sandwich and took a bite. I thought, “This means trouble.” He took a bite to give him strength. I guess that’s the way they used to do. He took out his gun and put six shots in the little child. I can still see the little child screaming off the top of

his head. I don’t know how he did it with the child looking at him with its bright eyes. To me the child is telling him, “You couldn’t kill me, could you?” When he looked at this child still screaming, he was so outraged and so mad that he ran to it and grabbed it by the feet and hit its head against the wall and silently walked away.

You see, during the day they were killing mothers, fathers, children. At night they went home with their bloody hands, playing with their own children, making love to their own wives. That’s the way they lived day in and day out.

Rosen: How old was that child?

Jacobs: God knows. The child that I picked up maybe was a year old to three-and-a-half years old. The child at the wall, I don’t think was two years old. That’s the way I lived day in and day out.

The third episode is another one. I took, again, my life in my own hands. We were going into the house, taking out all the furniture. I’m knocking at the walls. I carried utensils, clothing, and furniture. I heard something crawling upstairs. I tried to make noise so that the sergeant didn’t hear. He said, “Why don’t you go upstairs and see what’s going on up

there?” I went upstairs, I came down, and I said, “Sergeant Holtzer, there are a bunch of rats running around.” “Oh, go upstairs and count them.” I said, “There are too many of them,” when I came back. I could have been shot--I told a lie. He said, “Let’s go upstairs and see.” We went upstairs, and he went exactly to the spot where I could hear crawling. He said, “Rip away the floor!” I ripped away the floor, and a man is under there--an old man--hiding. He did not know something was going on downstairs, and that’s why he was moving around.

Rosen: He was hiding in the space between the...

Jacobs: ...between the floor and the ceiling.

Rosen: Were there any rats at all, or did you just make all of that up?

Jacobs: I made it up. As I think back, he could have taken out the gun--I lied to him--and he could have killed me at the same time. I picked the man out of his hiding place, and he hardly could walk.

Rosen: About how old a man was he?

Jacobs: To me, who knows? Maybe fifty or sixty years old. Who knows? I was young. To me, you never know. He was an old man with a long beard. He had to be maybe sixty years old or more. He hardly could walk. Only God

knows how long he was over there hiding and how many times he walked out maybe for water or food. Who knows? As I was walking over, he held a book in his hand, close to his face--I remember it like today. And I was speaking to him in any language I could master. He never answered me. As I was walking with him down the steps, I was curious what he was praying about. As I came down the steps, holding him--he's a big man, and I'm a small boy--I looked at it, and I figured out why he was praying. It was Psalm Twenty-three: "The Psalm of David." "God is my shepherd, I shall not want. I shall lie down in green pastures..." He knew that was going to be his last walk, that no rabbi would say a prayer after him. As I walked downstairs, I stopped and I said, "Sergeant Holtzer, let me take this old man to the ghetto. He's an old man; he can hardly walk. You can see he is going to die, anyway, in the ghetto." He didn't say a word as he walked behind me. I thought maybe I am going to take him to the ghetto, when all of a sudden he started to get heavy. I said to myself, "How come he gets heavy?"

Rosen: Now you were carrying him on your...

**Jacobs:** No, I was walking with him, holding him. He was walking, and I was holding him around his waist--supporting him to walk.

**Rosen:** Okay, so the old man is to your...

**Jacobs:** My right.

**Rosen:** To your right.

**Jacobs:** That’s right.

**Rosen:** And you’re holding him around his waist as he is walking along, and he’s becoming heavy.

**Jacobs:** That’s correct.

**Rosen:** Sergeant Holtzer is behind you?

**Jacobs:** Behind me. And he got heavy. I said to myself, “How come? What’s going on?” My face started to get wet. I said, “I cannot sweat.” I wiped my face. It wasn’t my sweat; it was his blood! Holtzer shot him with a silencer.

**Rosen:** Sergeant Holtzer shot the old man with a silencer.

**Jacobs:** Yes, with a silencer! I couldn’t hear because maybe I was so busy thinking about it that I couldn’t hear. I wouldn’t believe it, anyway. If I could have heard a shot, I wouldn’t have believed that he had been shot. I dropped him.

**Rosen:** The old man?

**Jacobs:** The old man. I dropped the old man--I remember it like today--and Sergeant Holtzer walked in front of me and looked in my face to see what kind of expression I was making or the sorrow I was feeling. I didn't give him the satisfaction. It was like nothing happened. I walked away like nothing happened. Those were the three episodes that I will never forget.

**Rosen:** You said you walked away. Where did you walk away to? Did you go to the next building?

**Jacobs:** I went to the next building to do the job.

**Rosen:** Did the sergeant say anything to you?

**Jacobs:** He didn't say a word. He only looked in my face.

**Rosen:** How did you feel about all of this?

**Jacobs:** I felt sorry, but I could do nothing about it.

**Rosen:** How did you feel toward the sergeant?

**Jacobs:** How did I feel? I did not think nothing about it. I lived day in and day out. Every day I came to work, and I lived the same way, thinking about, "I hope he doesn't point the gun at me." That's all. I knew he was a murderer, a sadist. For him to kill somebody didn't mean anything.

**Rosen:** Well, you point out it didn't mean anything for the Nazis to kill people and have babies killed or to use them, as you described it, almost like clay pigeons

and throwing them off buildings for them to shoot at--little children in the street, old men. Why do you think he never shot you? I mean, here you had lied about rats, and you had stood up for these children. Why was your life spared?

Jacobs: Somebody upstairs looked over me. I believe in it. I found out where my parents went. I knew that.

Rosen: During this time period?

Jacobs: Yes. They went to Treblinka.

Rosen: The group that was in the large square went to Treblinka?

Jacobs: That's right, yes. It was a camp of no return. I call it that because they went straight to the gas chambers and the crematoria. That was a death camp. In a period of thirteen months, over 800,000 people were murdered over there in the gas chambers and the crematoria.

Rosen: What about your other two brothers and two sisters?

Jacobs: They went to Treblinka, and so did my relatives. They went to Treblinka. That's where I found out they went. When I lecture or I speak about it, I say, "Someday when I go to Treblinka, I will find a stone inscribed 'Ostrowiec.'" If people ask me why Ostrowiec, I will say, "I have a dream--fantasy--that it's going to be one inscribed because Ostrowiec was one of the first

cities in 1942 from which Jews were sent to Treblinka." But I found out where they went.

Rosen: How did you find out that they had ended up in Treblinka?

Jacobs: From some of them who escaped before they went to Treblinka--they jumped the train--and from the Polish people.

Rosen: So some of them escaped and ended up going back to the small ghetto?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: And then, also, from the Polish people?

Jacobs: I don't know if they came back to the small ghetto, but they used to tell the Polish people, and the Polish people that used to live right close to Treblinka knew what was going on.

Rosen: How were you coming in contact with Polish people, as you were within the ghetto?

Jacobs: I worked outside. They lived in the same ghetto before. I used to go out and walk in the big ghetto where Polish people used to live.

Rosen: So these are people you would have come across perhaps as you were cleaning out the houses?

Jacobs: That's correct.

**Rosen:** From them you found out the group in the large square went to Treblinka.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** At that point, in 1942...you've referred to that as a "place of no return," but did you know that then? Had you ever heard of Treblinka in 1942?

**Jacobs:** No, I had never heard of it. Nobody had heard about Treblinka. In 1943, in the spring, they had an uprising over there--the few prisoners that were left over to clean everything out over there. In 1943 the transports started to get slower and slower coming to Treblinka. They used to transfer them to Auschwitz-Birkenau on the transports then.

**Rosen:** The transport of people there.

**Jacobs:** Yes. They went to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I'm looking ahead of my story. After the uprising some of them escaped, some of them didn't. The Nazis went in with their bulldozers. They bulldozed down the whole camp.

**Rosen:** Treblinka?

**Jacobs:** Treblinka. And they put around trees. If you go to Treblinka, you won't know what it is. You'd never know it was a camp because they have a nice forest around it. But the government put up 17,000 stones representing the 800,000 people who died over there.

**They got monuments over there. They still have the pits where the people used to be burned. They have nice fields around, and people are growing *truskawki*.**

**Rosen:** **What?**

**Jacobs:** ***Truskawki*. I'm forgetting to say it in English! You know, the big red fruit that grows on the ground? You dip it in sugar. What do you call it? Strawberries! I have to think. I have to translate it in a few languages to get it right. They are now growing them over there on the ashes and bones.**

**Rosen:** **When, in 1942, you heard about your family and the rest of them going to Treblinka...well, you had your one brother who you now knew was with the partisans.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes.**

**Rosen:** **Then you found out that the rest of your family had gone to Treblinka, but you didn't know that this was going to be the end of them. Did you still think that you were going to see them again at that point?**

**Jacobs:** **Until I found out, yes, I still had hope that I would see them, and we were going to meet together.**

**Rosen:** **How long were you working for Sergeant Holtzer?**

**Jacobs:** **I was working over there until 1943, I guess. I guess I worked for six months.**

**Rosen:** **For Sergeant Holtzer?**

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** So this is from fall of 1942 until...?

**Jacobs:** Until 1943, maybe May.

**Rosen:** This whole time you were going through the homes in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** The homes, correct.

**Rosen:** What were your living conditions like during this time period?

**Jacobs:** I had a little room with another roommate--two roommates. I had another roommate over there. I don’t think the roommate was Jewish.

**Rosen:** So there were at least some non-Jews?

**Jacobs:** He was sent in over there to spy on me!

**Rosen:** Oh.

**Jacobs:** I believe it. He spoke Yiddish, but I don’t think that he was Jewish because he could come and go.

**Rosen:** He had more freedom, you mean?

**Jacobs:** Yes, he could come and go. He used to ask me questions, because somebody knew, or somebody happened to know, that I was involved with the partisans. They wanted to find out and tell the SS people--the Gestapo--where the partisans were. He was staying in the same room. He asked me lots of questions, but I never answered them. I was listening

to what he had to say. That’s the sad thing. When I found out about my parents--their being gone--this was after my brother was killed.

Rosen: We’ll get to that in a moment here. I want to come back to your living conditions here and your work for Sergeant Holtzer. You’ve shared a room during this time period--for six months--with how many roommates?

Jacobs: Two and later on one.

Rosen: Okay. So it sounds like....

Jacobs: It was small--a very small room. Oh, gosh, I bet you it wasn’t any more than six feet-by-six feet. It couldn’t be bigger than this over here (gestures to part of room).

Rosen: Maybe six to eight feet long.

Jacobs: That’s right.

Rosen: How was your food during this time period?

Jacobs: See, food for me was very plentiful because in coming into the homes, people had some hope they would return, so you could find something to eat. It was no problem about food. It was no problem. You came in and you had to be very careful to put it in your pockets or something or take a bite so that he didn’t see it. Sometimes he saw it and didn’t pay no

attention, and sometimes he was screaming. I was a good worker for him.

Rosen: Sergeant Holtzer?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Why do you think Sergeant Holtzer singled you out to help him?

Jacobs: I was appointed. I was picked out and given to him. He didn’t pick me. He was standing over there. He could say yes or no.

Rosen: When you say standing over there, what do you mean?

Jacobs: When they came in, they would be in a row, and they’d start to pick out people--who should go to work to clean out the big ghetto.

Rosen: Is this going back to when you were in the square?

Jacobs: No, no, no, right in the small ghetto.

Rosen: When you were...

Jacobs: The small ghetto, yes.

Rosen: It was just a matter of luck that you were picked.

Jacobs: Luck, that’s correct. Other people went to the steel mills to work. They used to go to the steel mills, and at night they used to come back to the ghetto. Later on, they used to stay at the mill. I’d have to ask my good friend in New Jersey--he used to work in

the steel mills--but I guess they later built a small camp over there.

Rosen: So it sounds like the people who were moved into the small ghetto were used as forced labor.

Jacobs: Forced labor, yes.

Rosen: Did you make any friends during that time period, either among the Germans or other Jews in the small ghetto?

Jacobs: Good question. I made a good friend with another sergeant.

Rosen: A German sergeant?

Jacobs: A German.

Rosen: Yes?

Jacobs: Yes, outside.

Rosen: Outside the small ghetto.

Jacobs: Outside the small ghetto, yes. See, when we came home from work, I used to go out a little bit to get some fresh freedom.

Rosen: You never worried about getting caught?

Jacobs: No, I never worried. It never crossed my mind to be caught. If I had been worried, I wouldn’t do these kind of things. One day, my cousin came from Radom, not far from Ostrowiec.

Rosen: This was another ghetto or another city?

**Jacobs:** That's another city, yes. She found out I'm alive and I'm in the ghetto, and she came. She had Polish papers--and was working as a domestic.

**Rosen:** So people did not know she was Jewish.

**Jacobs:** That's correct. She came to visit me, and I walked out from the ghetto. We walked across the street, you know, where Polish people used to walk. Across the street was the ghetto wall. We talked and this was the last time I saw her. I found out later on that somebody had pointed a finger at her: "She's Jewish." She was shot.

I used to walk out, and I met a sergeant, and we talked. He says, "Do you like to deal?" I said, "What?" He said he would like to sell some guns. I said to myself, "I guess he's crazy. He wants to be caught." As a small little boy, I didn't think about such things too much, and I said, "How much?" He said, "1,200 marks." I said, "Let me think about it."

I had a friend, a leader of the partisans. He used to come to the ghetto from time to time from the outside to ask people for money. He'd need some money to pay the Polish people to buy things, I guess--food. I told him I could buy guns that cost 1,200 marks, and he said, "Fine." I said, "I need some

money.” He told me to go to these and these people: “They will give you some money.”

I did and I bought guns from the sergeant. My friend came, and I gave him the guns. One time he comes back, and he says, “Mike, he sold you a gun that doesn’t work.” I said, “What’s the matter?” He said, “When you cock it, it doesn’t shoot.” I said, “Okay, leave it over here. I’ll get another one.” He said, “What are you going to do?” I said, “Don’t worry about it.” Without thinking that I was taking a risk--I remember it like today; I can still feel it--I put the gun inside my pants with part of it sticking out of my pants, and I put my coat over it. I knew where he stayed in the barracks--the barracks where the soldiers were staying. I went over there, and in front of the barracks where the soldiers used to live, they had a soldier standing in a little house to watch so nobody could go in and out. I went to go in, and he said, “Where are you going?” I looked like a little Polish peasant--little boy. I said, “I was asked to come to clean up the kitchen after the lunch is finished.” I walked in with the gun--can you imagine--and I cleaned the floor. I saw the sergeant coming, and I said, “I want to talk to you.”

**Rosen:** The sergeant who you were friends with?

**Jacobs:** Yes, from whom I was buying the guns. I said, “I want to talk to you.” He said, “Fine.” I said, “Let’s go to the latrine.” We went over there, and I said, “Sergeant, you sold me a gun that doesn’t work. You told me you hate the Gestapo and the SS people. Can you imagine a partisan with a gun, and he sees a Gestapo or SS man and wants to shoot him, but it don’t work; and the partisan gets killed, and the SS man walks away? Honest to God, I’m telling the truth!” He says to me, very nicely, “You are in trouble.” I said, “I know I am in trouble.”

I figured out everything. I knew I was going to come over there. I could figure out everything. You see, on every gun you have a number--a serial number. I said, “If you say that I came in with a gun, I will say I got the gun from you, and I can prove it. I will say you sold me more. We will both get killed.”

“What do you want?” he asked me. I said, “I want another gun.” He said, “Fine. No problem. I’ll bring you another one.” I said, “Yeah, okay.” He said, “Stay over here.” I said, “Oh, no! I’ll go with you!” I went to his room, and he gave me another gun--it was polished, beautiful--and I put it back over here

(gestures to pants leg), and I gave him the other gun. He said, “Now you can go.” I said, “Yes, but you are going to walk with me.”

Rosen: You told a sergeant that?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: That the sergeant was to walk with you?

Jacobs: Yes, walk with me. I said, “Sergeant, you are going to walk with me.” He walked out a block away, and I said, “Now you can go,” and I took off. I went back to the leader of the partisans--I knew where they were standing--and I told him the story. I was thinking they were going to kill me.

Rosen: You thought who was going to kill you?

Jacobs: The commander of the partisans--my friend! They said, “How dare you go over there with a gun! You’re crazy! We need you over here! You could have been killed!”

I bluffed it. I bluffed the guy and said, “You are going to go with me.” That’s what I used to do in going out from the ghetto.

Rosen: You said that you thought the partisans would kill you as well as...

Jacobs: No, the partisans would have killed me because I made a mistake (chuckle). I took a chance to go into their barracks to change the gun. They were mad because I

was a good courier for them for guns. I bought a few guns more from him. I said, “Are they good?” He said, “Don’t worry. They are good guns.”

Rosen: So you continued buying?

Jacobs: Another two or three guns, yes.

Rosen: How many in all would you say you bought?

Jacobs: About a dozen.

Rosen: Do you think he knew you were Jewish?

Jacobs: Sure!

Rosen: He knew you were Jewish?

Jacobs: Oh, yes, because I was in the ghetto.

Rosen: And he knew you were selling these to the partisans?

Jacobs: I gave them to the partisans, yes.

Rosen: Where did the money come from? When you were working in the ghetto, were you earning money? Well, where did the money come from for the people who are in the ghetto?

Jacobs: People who were chosen from the big square to go to the small square--lots of the Jewish people--were very well off before the war. They came into the small ghetto, and we knew they had hidden the money or gold or diamonds. They were hidden someplace so that later on they could get them out. They had money. Some of them didn’t want to share. I’d say, “Okay, the

partisans are going to come in, and they are going to take it, anyway, from you. They will put a gun to your head." So they used to give the partisans money for other things they used to get.

It's hard to explain the procedure that was going on. It's hard to believe. Sometimes I'd say, "Mike, come on! You're fantasizing! You're dreaming!" It was like a dream. It's hard to believe what a person can do for survival--to do everything--and some people did not do it. I did it.

Now the big ghetto was cleaned out. We were still in the small ghetto. At this time I found out one night that the whole ghetto was surrounded. We were in trouble now, right?

Rosen: Surrounded by...?

Jacobs: The SS, the police, and the Gestapo. I said to myself, "Uh-oh! No, I am not going! I'm going to escape." I had Polish papers--falsified papers.

Rosen: How did you get falsified Polish papers?

Jacobs: We had a guy in the ghetto, and he could forge the mayor's name so that even the mayor would not recognize his own signature. My name on the falsified papers was "Marjan Jakubowski."

**Rosen:** This guy who was in the ghetto used to forge papers...he obviously had the handwriting of the mayor down pat, but where did he get the documentation to fill in the names?

**Jacobs:** It was very easy. You can get a lot of things. You have people you can buy, and you got all the documentation over there because the mayor used to sign the thing. You went to the city hall, and you got it. If you want to get it, nobody can stop it. There's a way how to get it.

I remember I took a towel in my hand, and I went to the fence.

**Rosen:** The fence of the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Yes. And I knocked out two planks.

**Rosen:** It was a wooden fence.

**Jacobs:** Wooden fence, yes. There was an old woman...I forgot her name. I can see her face with the *babushka* over her head. I said, "I knocked down the planks. Why don't you go out?" Do you know why I wanted her to go first?

**Rosen:** Why?

**Jacobs:** Because if she goes first and I hear a shot, I cannot go. But she says, no, she is not going to go. I said, "That's what I needed to hear." I didn't hesitate a

**second. I walked out, and I'm walking (whistles), whistling on the sidewalk, and it's close to 9:00.**

**Rosen:** **It's 9:00 in the evening when you broke out of the ghetto.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes. It's curfew. Polish people cannot go outside. The guy with the white shepherd dog is looking at the papers of another guy. I say, "Oh, my God! What do I do? Should I cut across the street and go through the field?" There were Polish people over there that would hear something. The dogs would start barking, and they were going to come out and scream, "*Jude*! *Jude*!"--"Jew! Jew!" I said, "I'm going to take a chance." I still have my towel. I was smiling and whistling a song in Polish. He looked at the papers, and I walked through.**

**Rosen:** **He stopped you and looked at your papers?**

**Jacobs:** **No, the other guy's. He was checking another guy's papers. I said, "If I go up the hill, there is the Gestapo headquarters. If I go up to my right, around the Jewish cemetery [which was part of the wall], if I go to my left, up the hill, again the Polish people will scream." I said, "I'm going to go past their headquarters. I'll take a chance." I hear a voice, "*Stehen-bleiben*!" ("*Stoj*!") and I stop.**

**Rosen:** That is in what language?

**Jacobs:** Polish.

**Rosen:** Polish.

**Jacobs:** The other one was in German--”*stehen-bleiben*.” Now I have no choice. He motions for me to come across the street to the other side.

**Rosen:** Did you actually understand when he said it in German?

**Jacobs:** Sure, I understood. Certainly.

**Rosen:** Okay, so you were just feigning ignorance.

**Jacobs:** Yes, that I don’t understand German.

**Rosen:** You were pretending you didn’t.

**Jacobs:** Yes, that’s right. I walked over there, and I said, “Oh, my God!” Guess who it was.

**Rosen:** Sergeant Holtzer?

**Jacobs:** Sergeant Holtzer! He did not recognize me. I guess he would not believe it that I would be out of the ghetto. He says, “*Ausweise*!” (“Papers!”) in German. He looked at the papers, and I had a small, little gun--a Belgian luger--sitting right over here.

**Rosen:** Within your pants?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in my pants.

**Rosen:** And it’s loaded?

**Jacobs:** Loaded, yes, sir. He looked at the papers. He says, “Where are you going? Where do you work?” I said,

**“Herman Goeringwerke!” The name of the mill used to be the Herman Goering Factory. He said, “Where are you going?” I replied, “I’m going to see my aunt. I’m working with the big furnaces. My aunt’s stove is not working, and I’m going to fix it.” He looks and looks, and I say to myself, “If he closes my identification papers....” Their coats had big sleeves over here--the Germans.**

**Rosen:** **The German coats have big sleeves?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, over here. If he takes my papers and puts it in over here (gesture), I know I got trouble.**

**Rosen:** **You mean, if he took your identification papers and stuck it inside his sleeve...?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, I got trouble. I made up in my mind, “At the moment he does, he gets shot.” He says, “You had better take off quick before it’s 9:00!” I had maybe two minutes or something. I went to a small, little street. If you could see me, I bet you could see fire coming out from my soles--I went so fast.**

**I went into the field, and I was walking. As I was walking in the field, I saw a person approaching me. I don’t know why, but I said, “That has to be a Jewish guy walking.” I went in between the big weeds because I didn’t know for sure. I got my gun ready.**

When he came closer, I went out very quickly, and I said, “Where are you going?” He said he was going back to the ghetto. He was a guy from the same city where I was born. He was sent out at the same time to the big ghetto. He was hiding with Polish families. I said, “Why are you going to the ghetto?” He said he had hidden lots of money over there, and he was going to uncover it and go back. I said, “Don’t go!” He said, yes, he was going. I said, “If you go another fifty feet, you are going to be dead!” He said he was going. I took out the gun.

Rosen: You took out your gun?

Jacobs: Yes. I said, “If you go, I’m going to kill you! You better get killed by a good friend--by a Jewish guy--than from a Nazi. I’m warning you! Don’t go!” He says, “Mike, that’s our livelihood over there! If I don’t have the money....” They had to pay the Polish family so much money for every week to be hidden over there. Finally, he decided not to. I said, “You can go back later on. You know where it’s hidden.” I said, “Don’t go now. You can go a week later.” I’m walking with him, and I said to myself, “I now have a place where I can be hidden--a hiding place.” I’m walking, and I came to a path--to a place in the road.

**Rosen:** Hang on a minute. You said he came from the same village you did.

**Jacobs:** From the same city, yes.

**Rosen:** In Poland.

**Jacobs:** Yes, Konin.

**Rosen:** Did you know him in Konin?

**Jacobs:** Sure, I knew him!

**Rosen:** So you two had been old childhood friends?

**Jacobs:** No, he was much older.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** He was only a few years--maybe five--older, but I knew he was very, very Orthodox. He used to wear the little hat with the black coat. I knew him. The whole family did. I knew where they were living. I can see the house where they were living.

We came to the road, and it was not a paved road. It branched in different directions. He started to go to the right, and I was going to go to the right, too, with him. I said, “Now, I have the best opportunity. I will survive!” He says, “Mike, you cannot go.” I said, “Why can’t I? I’m going with you. You have no choice.” He said, “Mike, we’ve got twenty people over there in a small, little basement in the underground. He is hiding us, and we don’t have enough money to

pay him. Now we have you!" I said, "I'm going." He started to beg me, "Please don't." Being a nice guy, I said to him, "I'll tell you something. Why don't you give me a zloty. I will need it. I want to do something to get away from here. I'm going to buy me a bottle of vodka."

Rosen: You asked him to give you some what?

Jacobs: One zloty. It's Polish money. I went to a neighbor not too far away. I used to know them because my brother used to make clothes in the ghetto, and I used to go and sell them over there.

Rosen: Did he give you some money?

Jacobs: One zloty. I wanted a zloty. I wanted something to say, "Okay, I got something," to satisfy myself. I don't know why. I went in over there, and I was sitting. We were talking about...the lady was over there, but the old man wasn't over there. I'm glad he wasn't--he went to the neighbor's--because he was a big anti-Semite. I know. Every time I brought some clothes, he used to run me out, and his wife used to call to her husband, "Come on! What do you want from him?"

Rosen: You say every time you brought him some clothes?

Jacobs: To sell. To trade for food or potatoes or flour.

**Rosen:** This is when you were in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** In the big ghetto. Yes, in the big ghetto. All of sudden, I heard motorcycles and cars. At this time I could hear speaking in German. They were looking for Jews--for escapees. I was not a drinker. I took some vodka, and poured it over my hair, leaned with my head on the counter, and I said, “I’m drunk.” I can still feel...they raised my head.

**Rosen:** You gave the impression of being drunk, or you really were drunk?

**Jacobs:** No, the impression I’m drunk. I stink of vodka. I remember I was this way, and I could hear them speaking to her in German and asking if they saw some Jewish people around over here. She says, “No.” She wouldn’t say yes. If she says yes, she is in trouble. They raised up my head. They grabbed my hair--I got lots of hair--and they looked in my face, and they dropped it. I hit my head so hard. They again looked at me. “Who’s he?” She said, “He works on the farm. He is always getting drunk.” And they walked away.

They walked away, and at this time she says, “Mike, you better go,” because her husband would soon come. I went into another place--to a barn--and I was sleeping between the straw. You could see, going up

and down, German cars--looking for Jewish people. They came in the barn with their rifles and bayonets.

Rosen: They were using their bayonets to...?

Jacobs: To see if somebody's hiding.

Rosen: By thrusting it in...?

Jacobs: Yes, in the straw over there. But I was pretty deep down. When they walked away, in the morning I walked out, and the neighbors...they knew me, too. I used to sell over there. The neighbors said, "You were over here?" Then they started to cross themselves. "Jesus, if they had caught you over here, they would say that we had hidden you! We would all get killed!" I said, "Don't worry. I'm walking." I walked away, and I went into another place. It was the forest ranger's place.

Rosen: The forest ranger?

Jacobs: Yes. There were two of them--a duplex. I used to sell this guy pants. The two neighbors never talked to each other, but this time the other ranger started to come in. He saw me over there, and he wanted to know who I am. He couldn't recognize who I was. He said, "What are you doing over here?" I said, "I came from Krakow. I was sent by the Germans to pick trees to cut down to send back to Germany." I went back and forth. I was over there maybe two weeks. I used to go to

another village to the church. I knew all this kind of thing--the prayer, the kneeling, and everything--like I am really from Krakow (chuckle).

Rosen: So you were pretending to be Polish.

Jacobs: Yes, from Krakow. I said I was sent by the Germans to pick the trees.

Rosen: To pick trees to be cut?

Jacobs: Cut, yes.

Rosen: And where were you staying in the meantime?

Jacobs: At the forest ranger’s.

Rosen: The forest ranger’s?

Jacobs: Yes, with the forest ranger, but the neighbor--they never talked to each other--saw something suspicious. After two or three weeks--it is very hard to stay longer--he says, “Mendel, you better leave because he says he’s scared. That’s the guy who will point the finger.”

Rosen: The person who suggested you leave was who?

Jacobs: The person I was staying with.

Rosen: The forest ranger?

Jacobs: The forest ranger. He was concerned about his neighbor--the forest ranger was--because he knew something was fishy. They knew something was not right. At this time...when I escaped the ghetto, the

same guy that was staying with me, he walked out the front of the gate that we used to go to work. As he walked out from the gate, he was shot!

Rosen: Okay, let’s go back here for a moment. You said as you escaped the ghetto with another guy....

Jacobs: As I escaped the ghetto, the guy that was staying with me ...in the same room. Remember the same room? I did not believe he was Jewish. When he found out the ghetto was surrounded, he went to the front gate, and he started to walk out. As he walked out, they had the SS people with the police. They thought he was an escapee, and they shot him.

Rosen: So the one that you thought was a spy planted...?

Jacobs: That’s right, was shot. I guess he was a spy, because why would you walk out to the front gate? He didn’t have a chance to tell them who he was. They buried me. The people thought that he was me.

Rosen: So the Jewish people thought you were dead now?

Jacobs: That’s correct. Yes, they were thinking I was shot. It was at night. They buried him over there, and they were thinking it was me.

Rosen: Let me understand this correctly. Who claimed the dead person was you?

Jacobs: The people in the ghetto.

**Rosen:** The people in the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Yes, they said they buried me.

**Rosen:** When you say “the people” are you referring to the Germans or the Jewish people?

**Jacobs:** The Jewish people.

**Rosen:** The Jewish people.

**Jacobs:** Yes, he was shot, and they had to take him inside, and buried him.

**Rosen:** Did they know who it was?

**Jacobs:** Yes, because he was blonde.

**Rosen:** The Jews really believed it was you.

**Jacobs:** That’s correct. When I walked out from the forest, he wanted me to go to his brother in another village and work on his farm.

**Rosen:** Now you say “he.”

**Jacobs:** The forest ranger that I was staying with.

**Rosen:** The one who suggested that you leave?

**Jacobs:** That I leave, yes.

**Rosen:** So he also helped you in finding another place.

**Jacobs:** With his brother in another village--to work on his farm. He would see to it that I would get to work in Germany.

**Rosen:** These forest rangers are Poles?

**Jacobs:** Polish, yes.

**Rosen:** They are Christians--Catholic.

**Jacobs:** Yes, sure.

**Rosen:** But he's helping you nonetheless?

**Jacobs:** He's helping, yes.

**Rosen:** Do you think he suspected you were Jewish?

**Jacobs:** Oh, he knew I was Jewish!

**Rosen:** But he was still helping you.

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, he knew I was Jewish. Sure!

**Rosen:** Why do you think he risked his life?

**Jacobs:** You have some people--what we called the "Righteous Gentiles"--who endangered their family's lives to save Jewish people, because they knew if they were going to get caught hiding Jewish people, both families would get shot.

**Rosen:** Do you think he was trying to save you because it was the right thing to do, or do you think he was trying to save himself from getting caught for having a Jew with him?

**Jacobs:** No, he really wanted to save me. See, he was afraid because there were two forest rangers--both enemies. I don't know why. When I was walking out from the forest, his sister--a girl the same age as I was--walked me to the edge of the forest, crying and embracing me.

**Rosen:** These two forest rangers...one of them had a sister living there, also?

**Jacobs:** The person that I used to stay with had a sister living with him. She took me out to the forest's edge; and she cried, she embraced me, and she said goodbye.

As I was walking, I saw some Jewish people walking. I knew they had liquidated the small ghetto, but I didn't know they had made a camp in Ostrowiec. They took the people from the small ghetto, and they built a camp.

**Rosen:** When you say camp, what kind of camp are you referring to?

**Jacobs:** A working camp.

**Rosen:** A working camp.

**Jacobs:** Yes. I see them walk, and then I stop, and they don't say nothing to me.

**Rosen:** Now you say these were Jews?

**Jacobs:** They were Jewish coming to clean out the fish hatcheries.

**Rosen:** How did you know they were Jews?

**Jacobs:** I knew them.

**Rosen:** You knew them from the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** Sure, from the ghetto! But I passed by and started to talk, and they didn't say nothing. I figured maybe

they didn’t want to say anything because maybe the Gestapo or SS men were behind them over there and if they talk to me they’d be in trouble. I didn’t see nobody. I saw a foreman--a Polish engineer. I said, “Hey, guys, what’s the matter with you?” They looked at me: “We’ve seen a ghost!” I said, “What are you talking about?” That’s when they told me the story about me getting shot: “Mike, we were thinking we saw a ghost because we buried you in the ghetto cemetery!” I said, “No, I’m alive. What’s going on?” They said they had a camp in Ostrowiec where the steel mill was--outside the mill. All the people that were in the small ghetto were taken into this camp. Some of them worked in the steel mill; some worked in the big factories; some worked in the fish hatcheries. I said, “How is it?” They said, “It’s okay. We go to work; we get our food. It’s okay.” I said, “Can I get in the camp?”

Rosen: You asked to get into this camp?

Jacobs: Yes. They said, “I guess you can.” I went back with them to the camp. Okay, now you are getting confused (chuckle).

Rosen: Let me go back. You meet these group of Jews that you worked with in the ghetto--the small ghetto--in

Ostrowiec, and you’re out on a road. Are there any supervisors?

Jacobs: There was no supervisor, but an engineer.

Rosen: One engineer?

Jacobs: Yes, I knew the engineer.

Rosen: He didn’t say anything. He didn’t ask...?

Jacobs: No. He was an engineer to see that the fish hatcheries were all right, that they were clean, that the walls were not getting caved in.

Rosen: Was he Polish?

Jacobs: Yes, a Polish engineer.

Rosen: Was he armed?

Jacobs: No, no, no! He was a civilian Polish engineer. How did I know him? Because my brother built the fish hatcheries under him. I used to go out and watch it when I was a small boy.

Rosen: So when you were talking with your fellow Jews out on the road, at that moment you weren’t under any fear of being killed by anyone or being given away?

Jacobs: No, not at all.

Rosen: What time period are we talking about now? About what time of year is this?

Jacobs: This was May or June.

**Rosen:** Okay, so all of this, from the time you escaped to the time you decide to go back to the camp, is all within about a one-month period?

**Jacobs:** Right. About a month period, yes.

**Rosen:** Okay, we are looking now at about June of 1943?

**Jacobs:** In 1943, right.

**Rosen:** So you made this decision that rather than going to the brother's farm, you go back to a work camp.

**Jacobs:** Yes. Being outside, not to find the partisans or be in the forest, was very dangerous. The Germans could never recognize a Jew, but--not all--some of the Polish people would point the finger on you and say, "He's Jewish!" While pointing the finger on you--"He's Jewish!"--he used to get a bottle of vodka and ten pounds of sugar.

**Rosen:** So there were rewards for civilians to turn in Jews.

**Jacobs:** That's correct.

**Rosen:** You actually felt safer inside a concentration camp?

**Jacobs:** In a camp in Ostrowiec, yes. And I used to work over there. I used to go out.

**Rosen:** When you went back to the camp, what was said? You went in, and there were German authorities who saw they now had an extra person, a person they believed had been killed earlier.

**Jacobs:** It could be. The roll call was the same.

**Rosen:** When they took the roll call and they found out there was one extra person here....

**Jacobs:** I remember when I walked in, they counted us. Let’s give an example. I don’t remember how many people. Let’s say there were supposed to be fifteen people, and they counted sixteen, right? Well, they thought maybe they had made a mistake, that maybe sixteen went out. The Ukrainians were over there, anyway.

**Rosen:** The Ukrainians were over there?

**Jacobs:** Yes, they were watching us.

**Rosen:** When they counted more people than they started off with, they just...?

**Jacobs:** I don’t think, in looking back, it made too much difference. The roll call was the same. If they thought that somebody died, they never figured out the dead person. Who knows?

**Rosen:** Did you go under someone else’s name?

**Jacobs:** No, my name. Over there they did not register you, really.

**Rosen:** They did or did not?

**Jacobs:** They did not. I don’t think so.

**Rosen:** It was just like...?

**Jacobs:** You know...hats. Hats, yes.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** I went over there, and they took me out. Over there they had fish hatcheries--the same thing.

**Rosen:** The Ukrainians were taking you out.

**Jacobs:** No, we walked out with the engineer.

**Rosen:** The engineer.

**Jacobs:** He came and picked us up. He was responsible for us. It wasn’t so strict at this camp.

**Rosen:** Okay, now this camp is where?

**Jacobs:** Ostrowiec.

**Rosen:** It’s in Ostrowiec.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** It’s within the ghetto?

**Jacobs:** No, it’s outside. There is no ghetto anymore.

**Rosen:** No more ghetto.

**Jacobs:** No more ghetto. This is a camp now, and it’s outside of the steel mill.

**Rosen:** When you say outside the steel mill, how far?

**Jacobs:** I could take a stone and hit the steel mill.

**Rosen:** So it’s adjacent to the steel mill.

**Jacobs:** Adjacent. They had a big field, and they built a camp with wire.

**Rosen:** Do you have any idea how many people were in the camp?

**Jacobs:** We had two barracks of men and one barracks of women. Maybe there were 500 people.

**Rosen:** Five hundred working in various industries?

**Jacobs:** Yes. I remember that I was chosen to go to work at the fish hatcheries. I came back with the fish hatchery group, so I had to go back. I worked over there. We used to clean it out and see how the fish were, and we had to take them out. You would have bunch of fish to put into another pond. I used to go to the...the forest ranger wasn't too far away, maybe 500 feet. I used to go over there and talk. He said, "You didn't go to my brother's?" I said, No! I saw more Jewish people, and I wanted to stay with the Jews."

Later on, they took me out to work in a brick factory. This was a special brick factory to build bricks for the steel mills--high-fired bricks. Let me tell you something. It's unbelievable. We used to unload gondolas. They sent two people. I bet you it didn't take us two or three hours to unload. They said, "If you unload, you can sit down and rest." We unloaded pretty fast, and we figured, "If they cheat us, we are not going to unload so fast anymore." We were sitting in the car and everything.

**Rosen:** You say “we.” This is you and how many people?

**Jacobs:** My friend. Only two people used to be in the car--gondola. Later, we had a big warehouse over there to unload wheat. I guess it was 100-kilo sacks. Maybe not. Maybe it was 100 pounds.

**Rosen:** A hundred pounds? You were unloading 100 pounds of...

**Jacobs:** Bag of wheat.

**Rosen:** Bags of wheat?

**Jacobs:** Yes. We had to go up a big plank of wood. Somebody who was sitting there with a knife cut it, and we then used to dump it.

**Rosen:** Someone with a knife would cut the sack?

**Jacobs:** The sack, yes, and dump it out.

**Rosen:** Dump the wheat out into what?

**Jacobs:** The warehouse opening.

**Rosen:** Into the warehouse.

**Jacobs:** First, I built the floor. I’m a good cement man, too. I built the floor of cement.

**Rosen:** So you were building storehouses for wheat.

**Jacobs:** Yes, yes. I remember I used to carry two bags and would run with it. Some people tumbled to their knees. They couldn’t even take one bag; it took two guys to unload it. As I was working over there, you could move

around very freely around in the factory, and I got an order to go to the railroad train.

Rosen: An order to the railroad train?

Jacobs: To the railroad train--an armored train. Do you know what an armored train is? They have big cannons. On the side are big steel plates. They can sit and travel and shoot at cities. It had big guns going out. The people in the cars cannot be destroyed except for a grenade going inside. But shooting at the steel plate to make a hole--forget about it.

Rosen: So you had an order to go to the railway. When you say an order, do you mean an order of wheat?

Jacobs: From the partisans.

Rosen: You were given an order by the partisans.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Okay. Let’s go back here for a moment. You still had contacts with the partisans off and on.

Jacobs: My friends...anyplace I go in the world, they don’t call me Mike; they call me “Partisan.” They don’t call me Mike. They still call me “Partisan.” I said, “No problem.” I said to my friends, “If they look for me, tell them I went over there or over there.” You could move around pretty good over there.

**Rosen:** The partisans gave you an order to go to this armored rail car.

**Jacobs:** A panzer train was supposed to go through to the Russian front--a panzer train or an armored train.

**Rosen:** These are German trains going to the Russian front.

**Jacobs:** Right.

**Rosen:** The partisans gave you an order...

**Jacobs:** ...to derail it.

**Rosen:** To derail it?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** Okay. And this is while you are still working in the camp?

**Jacobs:** Yes, the brick factory. People asked me all the time, "How can you get away without them knowing you were gone?" I said, "My friends would say, 'He went to the toilet,' or 'He went over there.' When they went over there, they would say, 'He is over here.'" Everything was taken care of.

**Rosen:** Your partners there would make excuses for you?

**Jacobs:** Yes, everything was taken care of. Now, how could I go to the railroad?

**Rosen:** How far is the railroad in terms of distance from the camp?

**Jacobs:** To go over there, the rail wasn't too far. From the factory, maybe it was fifty yards.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** Okay? But I went different places. I didn't go across the factory. I said, "How can I go over there--sit over there--while the SS people and the army are walking up and down to look at the rail to make sure nothing is wrong with it?" A very important armored train was supposed to go through to the Russian front. I said, "The only thing I can do is get a cow. How will I get a cow?" I went to the farmer. I said, "I want a cow from you." He said, "You cannot get a cow." I said, "I am a partisan." He said, "You know better. If the Nazis come in over here and there was a cow and a cow is missing, we are going to get killed." Every farmer had to report how many cows, how many chickens, how many geese, how many pigs, and how many horses he had. I said, "Don't worry about it." He said, "What do you mean, don't worry about it?" I said, "I'll give you here a note that the partisans were over here, and they took away the cow. When you show them the note, I'm sure they will understand that you couldn't do nothing. You tell them that the partisans said if you don't give them a cow, your

whole family was going to be killed. You had no choice.” I said, “Give me the longest rope.” He said, “What for?” I said, “Give me the longest rope.” He gave me a long rope, and I walked with the cow to the rail. I wandered freely away from the place where I used to work. I had a small wrench...do you know where the rails come together with two plates with bolts to hold them?

Rosen: Okay. The railroad tracks are connected by plates with bolts in them.

Jacobs: That’s right.

Rosen: Okay.

Jacobs: I’m sitting...see, in Poland the railroad belongs to the government. The one thing people used to feed the cows over there...the poor people didn’t have a farm, but they had a cow to get milk to feed the children. That’s where they used to go--by the rail so the cow could graze. I’m sitting over there, and I could see the SS people walking up and down--looking, looking. I was thinking they were going to get....

Rosen: Walking up and down over...

Jacobs: The rail! The rail!

Rosen: ...the rail?

**Jacobs:** Sure, because they were afraid the partisans were going to do something, or something was going to happen to the important train.

**Rosen:** So the SS is already looking for, and suspecting, partisans trying to sabotage the train.

**Jacobs:** They always were expecting sabotage; they would always watch for it. Let me tell you something. If you give me a million dollars, I could never play out being a mute again. That's what I played--a mute. I didn't speak; I didn't hear. My eyes were looking at him like I was a mute. They used to scream at me in German to get away from over here, away from the rail, and they used to scream at me in Polish to get away from over there. I could hear them saying, "He is a *dummkopf*." ("He's a dummy, a dumbhead.") They were walking up and down, up and down.

As I had the opportunity, I used to unscrew the nut, and unscrew the nut, and unscrew the nut, and put some dirt and stones on it until I knew it was unscrewed on both sides. You still had the bolts a little bit on it--on it like nothing happened. I put my ear to the rail. When you put your ear to the rail, you can determine how far the train is. When I saw it

was much closer, I left the cow, and I went up the hill.

I remember it like today. I could [imitates sound of train] hear the train coming very fast, and all of a sudden, you never saw such a spaghetti of explosions.

When I saw it, I ran down the other side, and I went in the first village--the closest to the rail--and I said, “Leave everything behind you! Take your children, your wife, and go to the forest,” because I knew what was going on over there. They were going to come into the first village, and they were going to take out the whole village, and everyone was going to get killed. I’m sure that when they came into the village they couldn’t find nothing. It took them days to put it back--to repair the tracks. In the meantime, the war would slow down on the Russian Front. This came down from England--all the orders. That was part of my participating in the raid. Until today I still don’t know what happened to the cow. I bet you the cow was barbecued.

Rosen: By the explosion?

Jacobs: Sure!

**Rosen:** (Chuckle) So the orders you got from the partisans actually came from the British government or the British military?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** You had loosened the nut from the bolt on both sides of the track so that the track would easily be split and go in opposite directions?

**Jacobs:** That's correct!

**Rosen:** And the cow was there to feed.

**Jacobs:** Yes, to feed. They knew that I fed it over there. I don't speak any German. I'm a dummy; I'm a mute.

**Rosen:** So the cow was there to give you protection.

**Jacobs:** Sure. Besides, they knew this had nothing to do with the rails.

**Rosen:** You just looked like a farm hand there.

**Jacobs:** Yes, I'm mute. When I look back, sometimes I try to mimic, but I cannot mimic to this day. I could hear them. You could see a peasant--poor--and they'd say, "He's a *dummkopf*, a dumbhead, anyway. He don't know what's going on. He don't speak and don't hear. He hardly can see."

**Rosen:** I'm curious. I want to go back here for a moment. When you were out free for that month or so, you said you couldn't find the partisans--you were out alone.

**Jacobs:** I didn’t want to look for the partisans because I knew I’d be better off to be with this family if I could stay over there. When I left over there, maybe I would have gone to his brother; maybe I would get in touch again with the partisans. But at that time I didn’t have it in mind at all. I had it in mind to stay with this friend of mine.

**Rosen:** So, it sounds like you had associations with the partisans when you were in the ghetto and then when you were in the camp. But in that free time, when you were actually free, then you had no association with them.

**Jacobs:** Right. I didn’t have any contact with them. I had an association but no contact with them.

**Rosen:** Had you heard yet about the fate of your brother?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in 1943, in February.

**Rosen:** Okay. When did you find out that he had been killed?

**Jacobs:** A few days after the assassination.

**Rosen:** How did you feel when you heard that?

**Jacobs:** I really felt down: “Now, I’m alone.” I had had an older brother to look up to; I had somebody. I felt very low. I remember I was laying on the bunk in the small ghetto. I don’t remember whether I was crying

or not. I don’t think so. I didn’t cry when I heard that my parents had gone to the gas chambers.

Rosen: When did you hear that?

Jacobs: In 1942, maybe a month or two months later.

Rosen: So when you were split in the fall of 1942, it was a couple months later that you heard about their deaths.

Jacobs: Yes. News travels very fast. You would be surprised. Who I heard about it from, I cannot tell you; but the rumors went around, and the rumors were true. It was hard to believe; I couldn’t believe it.

Rosen: So, when you heard that your brother had died...just how shortly after it had happened?

Jacobs: I guess about two or three days. How did I find out? My cousin--may he rest in peace--in Canada worked for a man--the name is Jaeger. He was in charge of the resettlement. What he was doing over there, he had....

Rosen: He was a German officer?

Jacobs: Yes. He was a superior. Maybe he was an SS man, but a civilian. He was in charge in the spirits factory.

Rosen: What kind of factory?

Jacobs: To make spirits.

Rosen: Oh, liquor?

Jacobs: Liquor, spirits, yes. Vodka and other things from potatoes. My cousin worked for him over there, taking

**care of his cows and pigs and horses. He saw his wife and his child and his mother and his sisters and everything being loaded in the cars to be sent back to Treblinka. He knew about it. He knew they went to Treblinka, too. When my brother was shot and those three people came in wounded--they were wounded--they stopped at his place, and they told him the story. Always, when they needed something, they would come to him, and he used to tell them what to do and everything.**

**Rosen:** **Your cousin was Jewish?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes.**

**Rosen:** **How did he survive?**

**Jacobs:** **He was hidden by a Polish woman.**

**Rosen:** **He was hidden by a Polish woman, but the rest of his family...**

**Jacobs:** **...went to Treblinka. He saw them being loaded onto the boxcars in 1942.**

**Rosen:** **How was it that he survived but the rest did not?**

**Jacobs:** **He worked for this guy. He never went to a camp. He still was working after we were in the ghetto. He was still working, after we were in the camp in Ostrowiec, for this guy. Finally, he decided "Something is getting dangerous." He ran away, and he was hidden by**

a Polish woman. He used to send her lots of things all the time after the war.

Rosen: So, you are working at the fish hatcheries and working as a mason.

Jacobs: Yes, in the brick factory, making bricks.

Rosen: ...making bricks. This is in 1943.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: And this began around June of 1943?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: How long did that last?

Jacobs: Until 1944, August.

Rosen: Until August of 1944.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Your living condition during that time period, what were they like?

Jacobs: In Ostrowiec in the camp, there were lots of lice, typhus. The conditions were unbearable--let’s put it this way. It was not clean. We were sleeping in bunks on straw. The winter was very cold, and we had a small blanket. We had a stove in one end of the barracks. If somebody was closer to the stove, he had warmth, but I was in the upper side of the barracks when it was cold (chuckle). But I could survive.

Rosen: How many people were in a barracks?

**Jacobs:** It depended. There wasn’t too many. Maybe 200.

**Rosen:** There were 200 in this one barracks?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in one barracks because it wasn’t a big camp. It was not like in Birkenau.

**Rosen:** Did this one barracks make up the whole camp, then?

**Jacobs:** Two or three barracks were over there.

**Rosen:** Three barracks.

**Jacobs:** Three or four.

**Rosen:** Four barracks. And your barracks had about...?

**Jacobs:** About 200 people, maybe.

**Rosen:** About 200 people.

**Jacobs:** But it was a barracks built maybe for fifty horses. I would say about fifty horses.

**Rosen:** About fifty horses?

**Jacobs:** Yes. It was a horse barn.

**Rosen:** It had been a horse barn before you had been moved in with the other Jews?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** These are all men in this barracks?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in the two barracks were men. On the left side was the kitchen and the women’s barracks. They were smaller barracks, but different. They had more little living quarters, like soldiers lived. We had barracks with bunks, and they had beds.

**Rosen:** During this time period--I'm talking about the years when you were a teenager and approaching twenty years of age--did you have any opportunities to associate with the women?

**Jacobs:** Yes, you could, but, myself, I never took advantage. You could go in and sleep with them--I could--because I could always bring in some food. But I never did. I figured I didn't want to take advantage in this kind of situation. But I could have very easily taken advantage. In 1943 I was sixteen and seventeen years old. I was sixteen going on seventeen years old. I was already an adult. Yes, you talked about it. It's human. But it never crossed my mind to go in or do something. Some of them did, I'm sure. Some of them got pregnant.

**Rosen:** Do you have anything you can tell us? This is something we don't hear too much about?

**Jacobs:** Yes, I knew this one woman from the same city where I was born. I knew her. We went together to school. She got pregnant.

**Rosen:** You weren't the father?

**Jacobs:** No, I was not the father. She lives in Israel today.

**Rosen:** She survived?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, she survived. Yes, I talked to her and met her a few times in Israel. I never talk about it. She's married.

**Rosen:** She became impregnated from one of the other...

**Jacobs:** Yes, prisoners.

**Rosen:** ...prisoners? Did she have her baby in the camp?

**Jacobs:** She lost it.

**Rosen:** During the pregnancy?

**Jacobs:** No, later on. I guess they took it away. She was afraid, I'm sure.

**Rosen:** I was wondering if you knew how she was treated.

**Jacobs:** Nobody knew it was her baby.

**Rosen:** Nobody knew she had a baby?

**Jacobs:** I mean, the SS people.

**Rosen:** The SS people never knew?

**Jacobs:** No, because she was working inside. Very seldom did the SS people come into the barracks...to the camp.

**Rosen:** She worked inside the barracks?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** As opposed to being...?

**Jacobs:** In the kitchen instead of outside to work, yes. I knew her very good. I can see her. I can see her being pregnant.

**Rosen:** And none of the other members of the barracks said anything about it to the SS members or anything?

**Jacobs:** No, we were very protective of each other--very protective.

**Rosen:** Did you have any friends there in the barracks, then, during this time period in Ostrowiec?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, we were all friends. We were close. Some of them we didn't know well, but we had some close friends. We went together to school, lived together.

**Rosen:** So some of the people in there actually went back several years as being friends?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** You said you were in the camp until August of 1944. During this whole time period, you were working as a laborer.

**Jacobs:** Different jobs, yes.

**Rosen:** Did you maintain your participation with the partisans throughout this time period, too?

**Jacobs:** Yes. The thing is, I want to make a point. I lost my whole family--I lost everything--my relatives. I do not speak with hate. Hate breeds hate. That's what Hitler and his Nazi machine are all about. I'm not bitter either. When I lecture, I want people to know what one human can do to another.

**Rosen:** What did you think of the German people during this time period?

**Jacobs:** I don’t take Germans collectively.

**Rosen:** What did you think of the Nazis?

**Jacobs:** They were horrible people. They were murderers. They were bigots. That’s all I could think about. From time to time, I didn’t think about it at all.

**Rosen:** Did you ever think about, or did any of your friends in the barracks talk about, an uprising?

**Jacobs:** In Ostrowiec?

**Rosen:** Yes.

**Jacobs:** No.

**Rosen:** How come?

**Jacobs:** Good question. I have no answer. Maybe I should give you an answer, because this camp where we were was not a death camp. If people died, they died because of malnutrition or sickness. Not too many people were beaten or tortured. We went to work, came home from work. We used to sing coming home from work. We still did not realize it--the consequences.

**Rosen:** How was the morale there?

**Jacobs:** It was up and down.

**Rosen:** You said that if people died, it was due to malnutrition or disease. Did you have medical care there in the camp?

**Jacobs:** Very little. You never wanted to go to the hospital.

**Rosen:** Why?

**Jacobs:** If you went to the hospital, you were a dead person.

**Rosen:** Why?

**Jacobs:** They usually didn’t take care of you. They let you die. They did maybe an experiment without you realizing. They may have experimented on you. Who knows?

**Rosen:** Were you aware of this at the time?

**Jacobs:** No, we were not aware. I could have a headache and everything, and my head could pound, but I never went for an aspirin or something.

**Rosen:** Were the doctors Nazi doctors in there, or did you have Jewish doctors or civilian doctors?

**Jacobs:** We didn’t have any doctors. We were our own doctors.

**Rosen:** So the only medical care you had was each other helping?

**Jacobs:** That’s right. I don’t recall of having a hospital. I don’t recall, because maybe I was not involved in it or never knew because I did not have to go. When people were sick, they were laying in bed in the

**barracks and didn’t go to work. I guess that’s what happened.**

**Rosen:** **If you were sick...let’s say a morning came up where you felt ill and couldn’t go to work.**

**Jacobs:** **You went. You went to work--sick, healthy, or not. You did the best you could.**

**Rosen:** **How was the food in the barracks?**

**Jacobs:** **In Ostrowiec, if you went out from camp, you could organize. I used to buy *mana*, something like grits. You put a little bit--maybe ten ounces--in water, and it comes out very big. You put in one little cup, and you got a whole pot. I remember we used to come into camp...I remember it like today. I can see the stove. I can see my barracks over there with the pot. After it was finished, I put sugar on it. I ate sugar on it. It was delicious. That’s what we used to organize--the food. So long as you went out from camp, and you got in touch with the outside, you could do lots of things.**

**Rosen:** **You were in a favorable position to be able to get out.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, correct.**

**Rosen:** **You said in your barracks you had sort of a stove.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, in one corner.**

**Rosen:** In one corner.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** This barracks had 200 people, and you have one stove?

**Jacobs:** That’s right.

**Rosen:** And you used that to...

**Jacobs:** ...cook something or to heat or warm yourself.

**Rosen:** It was also used fit for heat?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** To heat and cook.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** Did you have any other kind of heat in this whole barracks?

**Jacobs:** Your warm body (chuckle).

**Rosen:** Did you have your own bed in these barracks?

**Jacobs:** No, I slept on this bed, and it was with two or three people. It was small.

**Rosen:** Two or three people on a...

**Jacobs:** ...on a bunk. It wasn’t any wider than this (gesture).

**Rosen:** On a bunk bed. When you say “wider than this,” are you talking about...how many feet would you say?

**Jacobs:** Maybe it was four feet.

**Rosen:** A four-foot bunk with two to three people?

**Jacobs:** Yes, because two people could sleep this way (gesture), and a third person would sleep between with

their head over there (points) and their legs between our legs.

Rosen: You're saying that people could sleep perpendicular, so next to your head there would be someone's feet and next to...?

Jacobs: No. You had two heads over here and the two legs and the other head went over there (points), and the feet were between our two feet, parallel and head to foot. It depends. That's the way we used to live in Ostrowiec.

Rosen: By this time, looking into 1944 now, the war is going on for five years for you. At this point you've been in the large concentration camp and the small one, and then you were in...

Jacobs: The ghettos.

Rosen: ...the ghettos. You were in the large ghetto and then the small ghetto. Then you were free for a month and then in the camp. Did you have an idea that this kind of life would ever be different, that your future would ever hold anything different for you than this?

Jacobs: What do you mean?

Rosen: In 1944, after having...you're a teenager.

Jacobs: Yes.

**Rosen:** You've spent a third of your life at that point in camps of some sort or another and ghettos. Did you think that life would ever be different, or would the rest of your life be like this?

**Jacobs:** No, I never thought that. I was always thinking that it was going to be better. That's what I'm saying. I was different. I was very, very strong. I was always positive. I knew it was going to be a better day. I used to stay with friends outside at night--the evenings. One night there was a beautiful full moon with stars, but one part had stars--I can remember it like today--and the other side was dark. I said to my friends, "Isn't it beautiful? The beautiful stars are shining. The full moon...you see a face over there, don't you? There is a face with a smile looking over us."

**Rosen:** In the sky?

**Jacobs:** In the sky. And I said, "Even if it's dark, you have light, and you have darkness. Tomorrow when we go out, this darkness is going to be covered with light."

**Rosen:** Your hope, your inspiration...at this point, you already know your family has been put to death.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** So the original source of your strength is gone. Was this what helped you endure during this time period, or was there something else that gave you your source of strength to carry on?

**Jacobs:** The strength they gave me would come back all the time because that's what I could only think about. What they gave me was the will of survival, the will that I would survive, that I would be the one. That's what I was thinking about in those days: "I will tell the story as a living witness." All this was going on in my mind. If I should tell my friends, they would think I'm crazy. And that gave me the strength. That's what gave me the inner strength to survive, to survive to tell the story.

**Rosen:** At that time did you think that someday you were going to be...if I understand correctly, you thought at that time that you would be free to tell people of what happened then?

**Jacobs:** Yes. In my mind I was always free. Always I was free. I'm coming to something later, and I'll tell you my thinking later on in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Obviously, in 1944 the Russians came closer to Ostrowiec.

**Rosen:** Okay, so at this point in the war the Germans are retreating, and the Russians are driving into Poland.

**Jacobs:** Right.

**Rosen:** And they are approaching Ostrowiec.

**Jacobs:** That’s right. Let me give you an example. I was working on the top in the big factories where it was very hot.

**Rosen:** You’re talking about on the roof of the factories?

**Jacobs:** No, no, in the room--in the factory.

**Rosen:** Inside the factory.

**Jacobs:** Inside. We’re on the top. On the bottom used to be the ovens to burn the bricks to make them fireproof bricks. It was so hot I always used to work in my shorts.

**Rosen:** You’re working in your shorts in the summer and the winters --both? All year long?

**Jacobs:** Yes! Because it was hot! It was very hot!

**Rosen:** Inside the factory?

**Jacobs:** Yes. I remember we used to have a form, and we used to put in the mixture of the sand and other ingredients and work it out. We would take it out and put it on the side to dry, and later on people took it away to put it into the oven to be baked.

**Rosen:** The bricks.

**Jacobs:** The bricks, yes. They were different sizes. But we could hear cannons. We knew something was close. If

I would have had pants, I don't believe I would have gone through these different camps. A friend of mine ran. One tank came into Ostrowiec--one tank drove up--and he jumped on the tank as it drove out. At this time they took everybody at work.

Rosen: You're talking about August of 1944.

Jacobs: Yes, August of 1944. They took everyone who worked in this camp and took them into the camp from the factory.

Rosen: They took them out of the factory and back into the camp.

Jacobs: Back into the camp. But over there, working in the camp was a man named Neumann--a prisoner. He was working for the guy who was in charge at the factory--a German.

Rosen: Neumann was a Jew?

Jacobs: A Jew, a prisoner. But he very seldom went to camp, too. He had golden hands. He could make furniture, beautiful furniture, by hand. It was unbelievable. They kept him over there. When I ran into him, I said, "They are taking us back to the camp. Something is wrong."

Rosen: Now you said this to Neumann?

Jacobs: Yes. He said, "Mike, let's go upstairs to the attic."

**Rosen:** The attic of the...?

**Jacobs:** Where he was staying with the German. He was living over there with the German, but he was working. He had his little place to make furniture for this German.

**Rosen:** Let’s go back here for a moment.

**Jacobs:** Okay.

**Rosen:** Neumann was a Jew who was a carpenter.

**Jacobs:** A carpenter. He was unbelievable.

**Rosen:** But he didn’t live in a barracks.

**Jacobs:** No, he was staying over there, too.

**Rosen:** He was staying where?

**Jacobs:** In the brick factory.

**Rosen:** He lived in the brick factory?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** He lived in a room in the brick factory working directly for a German.

**Jacobs:** Yes, for the guy who was in charge.

**Rosen:** So Neumann suggested that the two of you hide in the brick factory.

**Jacobs:** In the house where he was staying--where the German was staying.

**Rosen:** Okay, so he didn’t suggest that you hide in the brick factory, but in the German’s house.

**Jacobs:** In the house in the attic. We went to the attic, and we were hiding. I guess somebody knew we were over there. They were screaming for us to come down. We were very quiet.

**Rosen:** Someone from below screamed for the two of you to come down?

**Jacobs:** Yes. But maybe after five or ten minutes we had no choice. We came down, and I said to Neumann before we walked down, “Let’s say a prayer because we are going to get shot.” I remember what happened when I used to work in the big ghetto when they caught people. They took them out, and they shot them. As we were walking...you know, when I pause, I can see myself walking, and I can see the street. Behind us were two SS people with their machine guns. I said, “Now they are going to take us away someplace in the field, and we are going to get shot.” But they said, “Let’s save the bullets. Where we are going to send them, they are going to die a different way.” I was thinking maybe they were joking. They took us into camp and put us in the camp over there.

**Rosen:** In Ostrowiec?

**Jacobs:** In Ostrowiec, yes. Here, now, I’m thinking to escape.

**Rosen:** From Ostrowiec?

**Jacobs:** Yes, from the camp. One guy escaped. He was crawling out from the camp. The son-of-a-gun Ukrainians killed him.

**Rosen:** You are thinking of escaping, but you already heard of two others who died trying.

**Jacobs:** Yes. They were killed, and I said, “No.” Finally, they took us out and put us on the train, and we were traveling, again--destination unknown.

**Rosen:** In what kind of accommodations?

**Jacobs:** In cattle cars. We came into a city that was called Oswiecim--Auschwitz. Oswiecim is Polish--Auschwitz. I did not know what Oswiecim was.

**Rosen:** You had never heard of it up to then?

**Jacobs:** No. We came into Birkenau. I did not know what Birkenau was either. I didn’t know what this was all about.

**Rosen:** Auschwitz and Birkenau were connected?

**Jacobs:** Everybody hears about Auschwitz. Nobody hears about Birkenau. We had three Auschwitzes: Auschwitz I was the main camp; Auschwitz II was Birkenau, and everybody that came into Auschwitz had to come into Birkenau; and Auschwitz III was Buna Monowice, where I. G. Farben used Zyklon B.

**Rosen:** What was the name of Auschwitz III?

**Jacobs:** Buna Monowice. When I came into Birkenau--when we came to the ramp--the doors opened, and we stepped out.

**Rosen:** All three of these are attached side-by-side?

**Jacobs:** Sure, because it was not too far. Auschwitz and Birkenau were built on twenty-seven square miles.

**Rosen:** They are all adjacent.

**Jacobs:** Adjacent, that is correct. They are all satellites. There were more satellite camps, but this was the main three Auschwitzes. When I came in and we stepped out with my friends, the orchestra was playing. It was the best musician-prisoners playing. The SS people were walking up and down; prisoners were walking up and down. I asked the prisoners, “Hey, guys, what camp are we in?” The answer was a smile--I remember it like today. They wouldn’t tell us. They were not allowed, I’m sure. Across the ramp was the women’s camp. The men’s camp was over here, and the women’s camp was over there (gestures). They were separate.

**Rosen:** As the train stops, you are inside the camp?

**Jacobs:** Inside the camp at Birkenau, yes.

**Rosen:** And you exit off a ramp. On one side there are women’s barracks, and on the other side there are men’s barracks and...

**Jacobs:** Between is the ramp.

**Rosen:** ...between is the ramp. And there's an orchestra playing.

**Jacobs:** Playing for us, yes.

**Rosen:** About how many people? How big an orchestra was it?

**Jacobs:** Oh, gosh, I don't know. Maybe fifty or sixty. It was a big orchestra.

**Rosen:** Really.

**Jacobs:** It was a big-sized orchestra. From the other side, a half-dozen women came out waving--welcoming us. I looked to my right, and I saw smoke coming out from the chimneys. I said, "Hey, guys, do you see smoke coming out from the chimneys? They are big bakeries."

**Rosen:** Are these chimneys part of the barracks? Were these at the women's barracks, the men's barracks, or were these separate buildings? These were separate buildings with smoke coming out.

**Jacobs:** On my right.

**Rosen:** And your impression was that they had bakeries there.

**Jacobs:** I said, "They are bakeries!" I said, "When they ask me what profession I'm in, I will say, 'I'm a baker.'" See, if you worked in the bakeries, you always had enough food to eat. I said, "Guys, if I work over there, I will always organize and bring you some bread."

We were standing there, and the SS people were walking up and down. I stood at attention on my toes. I wanted to be taller and look them straight in the eyes. They were walking up and down, up and down. A guy walks by wearing a white coat. I said, “Hey, guys, take a look! We came into a paradise! Bakeries over there, women welcoming us, the orchestra is playing, a doctor is walking up and down! If somebody faints or if somebody gets sick, he is going to help.”

Finally, after a while, we formed up to our right and down to our left. I was chosen to the right, some of my friends to the left. After I was chosen to the right and everybody was selected, they said, “Everybody chosen to the right, go and walk down to the ramp.” I remember it like today. As we came closer to those chimneys, my friends said, “Hey, Mike, we don’t smell the aroma of bread. Bread they put out in bakeries smells so nice and sweet. It smells like skin.” I didn’t think about it too much. I said, “Hey, guys, you mustn’t worry about it. They are killing so many horses and cows. They don’t know what to do with the hides, so they are burning them.”

Rosen: Before you go on, I want to back up here for a moment. How long a trip was this from when you left the camp

to get to Birkenau? Was this, like, in the course of a day or a few days?

Jacobs: No, it was more than that. I was traveling maybe three or four days or two or three days. It may have been more. I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you, really.

Rosen: So, in contrast to having three days in a cattle car...did you have windows in the cattle cars?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: So, after a few days of not knowing where you were going to go, I’m sure this seemed like....

Jacobs: Yes, it seemed a long time.

Rosen: It seemed like a long time, and it looked like an improvement over what you had had.

Jacobs: Coming into camp, yes. I remember that I walked down the ramp, and I went into a barracks where they were waiting. They said to undress ourselves. We undressed ourselves. They gave us a towel and soap, and we crossed over to the shower house. I remember it like today. As we walked inside, they told everybody to step in and wait. It was burning you to death. It was so...I don’t know what was in it.

Rosen: What was burning you to death?

Jacobs: The disinfectant. I don’t know what it was.

Rosen: On the floor that you were standing on?

**Jacobs:** In the little pool. In the little pool before you walked in. See, on our feet there were boils and cuts. Finally, we went under the shower heads. We were waiting. Let me tell you something. If I would hold an egg, I could boil it. It was scorching, hot water. After this, we walked out, and they gave us clothes.

**Rosen:** How many people were in the shower room together?

**Jacobs:** It was packed. I don't know. I did not count. I couldn't tell you whether it was 100 or 200 or 300. I don't know. See, I can tell you only things that I know. If I don't know, I say "I don't know," because I want to be historical and authentic. It was packed. I don't know how many people.

We walked out, and they gave us the uniforms. For everybody that came in, they didn't give them back the same clothes; they gave us different clothes. I remember I got a jacket that was three times as big as I was.

We walked into the quarantine camp. That was a camp where the Gypsies used to be--a whole camp of gypsies. The night before, they took out the whole families--the kids, wives. They took them out. I was told later on that they had put up a big fight. They had put the whole camp into the gas chambers.

**Rosen:** The Gypsies?

**Jacobs:** The Gypsies, yes.

**Rosen:** Just the night before all the Gypsies had been killed.

**Jacobs:** Yes, killed--the whole camp. It was empty, and that's why they put us in over there. They made it a quarantine camp. As I walked in, they gave me a number--a tattoo number on my arm. See my fist?

**Rosen:** Yes.

**Jacobs:** Always, when I speak about it, I hold my fist so tight, because when they needled it in, it was hurting.

**Rosen:** When they needled the number...and how many numbers is that?

**Jacobs:** B4990.

**Rosen:** B4990.

**Jacobs:** That's the serial number. That's the transport initial. You have an "A" initial, and the last one was a "B" initial. They gave different numbers for different years.

**Rosen:** Do you know what those numbers represented--those numbers on there?

**Jacobs:** It stands for 1944, August, the last transport coming into Auschwitz to be selected to stay and work in Birkenau-Auschwitz.

**Rosen:** And your number, again, is?

**Jacobs:** B4990.

**Rosen:** B4990.

**Jacobs:** I remember, after it was tattooed and it was hurting, the SS man said, “Do you know what the number is all about?”

**Rosen:** When they tattooed this, you had not been put to sleep or given you any kind of anesthesia.

**Jacobs:** Nothing.

**Rosen:** ...sterilization?

**Jacobs:** Nothing. That’s what I’m saying. And he stopped me because...you see my fist? It hurts when I hold it because I’m holding it so tightly. It’s because it was really hurting. He said, “Do you know what this number is all about?” I said, “No, sir!” He said, “Now you are being dehumanized. You are not human anymore! You are a number!” He says, “You better remember the number when you are called. That’s all you are, is a number. You are not human anymore.” They gave me the same number on my shirt with a yellow stripe over here (gestures to shirt) and a yellow stripe on the back.

**Rosen:** When you say yellow stripe over here, you’re referring to over your...

**Jacobs:** Jewish, all the Jews.

**Rosen:** All the Jews received yellow stripes. This would be roughly over your right breast pocket.

**Jacobs:** Over my number, right over here (gesture). Sometimes they had a stripe in the back. My big jacket, I traded it with another guy. I had to because I was looking lousy. The non-Jewish people had a red stripe--political prisoners. The Gypsies, when they were taken out to work in the camp, had a big "Z"--*Zigeuner*.

**Rosen:** *Zigeuner*?

**Jacobs:** *Zigeuner* is a "gypsy" in German. The homosexuals had a pink stripe, and the criminals had a green stripe so they would be recognized by everybody in camp. They had all nationalities in Auschwitz-Birkenau--Jews, Germans, Poles, Yugoslavians, French, Belgians, Russians, Lithuanians. All nationalities from Europe were in the camp, although most of them were Jewish people.

I was waiting for my friends to go through, too. They went through the same procedure with the towel and soap, but they did not cross over to the shower room. They went over to a different room. It was a big room, and they pushed them in up to 1,500 or 2,000 people. The steel door was closed behind them, and

they were waiting under the shower heads for the water to come out. But there were holes in the ceiling and the walls. Water didn't come out, but Zyklon B did. See over there (pointing)? I'll show you later on. I brought it back--Zyklon B crystals. You know, poison. Over there--I'll show you later on--is the canister, and on the bottom is crystals. I brought it back. There is only one, so far, in the world with crystals.

Rosen: The one that you have.

Jacobs: Yes, but they brought in some more now for the main museum in Washington that they are going to build.

They went through the same procedure, but they went into what they called the gas chambers. They poured in between five to seven kilos of those crystals. If they put in less, they died slower.

Rosen: At this point what were you seeing? Could you see them putting in the Zyklon B?

Jacobs: No.

Rosen: This is in August of 1944.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: You come out of the shower--taking a scalding shower with hundreds of other people.

Jacobs: Yes, same thing.

Rosen: All men?

**Jacobs:** All men.

**Rosen:** You came back out, and there was another group that had been put into another room?

**Jacobs:** They were chosen to the left, not knowing what the right and left meant.

**Rosen:** So after you came out, then you saw this other group go into...

**Jacobs:** No.

**Rosen:** What happened?

**Jacobs:** I didn’t know what happened to them.

**Rosen:** They were already gone?

**Jacobs:** We were over there, and I was waiting. Maybe they were going to come, too. But they didn’t go over to the showers. I found out. I wasn’t there, but I found out.

**Rosen:** How much longer until you found out?

**Jacobs:** An hour or two hours later. They went into the big room with a towel and soap, and they were waiting for the water to come out from the shower heads. They had little holes in the ceiling and the walls where they poured in five to seven kilos--sixteen or seventeen pounds--of Zyklon B. It took them sometimes between twenty and thirty minutes to be choked to death. People used to throw up. I was told this by the ***Sonderkommandos***. The ***Sonderkommandos*** were the people

working the crematoria--prisoners. When they opened the doors to go in to get them out to be burned, they had to go in with axes because most of the people embraced themselves. Maybe the families embraced themselves. They covered the children sometimes, hoping they could breathe longer. They had to separate them with axes one by one and take them outside and put them on the ground. The ***Sonderkommandos*** looked into their mouths. If they had gold teeth, their gold teeth were knocked out. If they couldn’t knock them out, they would pull the jaw.

**Rosen:** If I understand you correctly, when they went into the gas chambers--the Nazis went in--you say they chopped through bodies with axes.

**Jacobs:** After the people were gassed, the ***Sonderkommandos***--the prisoners working in the crematoria--went in with axes to separate them.

**Rosen:** Other prisoners had to go in.

**Jacobs:** Sure, the ***Sonderkommandos*** were other prisoners. They went in, and they had to separate them because most of them embraced themselves to cover themselves or to embrace because that was going to be the last time they were going to cuddle.

**Rosen:** You are saying that they are chopping away at the bodies with axes?

**Jacobs:** That's how they were separating them inside, because when a person dies their embrace gets stiff. Their gold teeth were knocked out, or they pulled out the jaws. All the women's hair was cut off. Later on, they were burning them in the crematoria. During the last half of 1944--during the "Final Solution" of the Jewish people--they were burning and gassing daily between 10,000 and 15,000 people at Birkenau. The crematoria could not burn fast enough. They built pits, four of them, and they burned them in the pits.

**Rosen:** So, as you already pointed out, there were more than just Jews there at Birkenau. Not only were they burned in the ovens, but they were also burned in pits, too.

**Jacobs:** Right.

**Rosen:** First being gassed and then burned.

**Jacobs:** Some of the children were thrown alive in those pits to be burned.

**Rosen:** So, sometimes they didn't gas them first. They just threw them in pits alive and torched children. How long were you at Birkenau?

**Jacobs:** Until January 18, 1945.

**Rosen:** So, roughly just under half a year?

**Jacobs:** That’s right, half a year.

**Rosen:** What did you do during those months?

**Jacobs:** Okay, in Birkenau they asked who was a very agile person--quick. I raised my hand. It was instinct, again. They took me out later on--most of us--to Camp D--also in Birkenau, adjacent. That’s the working camp.

**Rosen:** You said this is Camp D?

**Jacobs:** They took me out from the quarantine camp to Camp D.

**Rosen:** Earlier you had mentioned there were three camps.

**Jacobs:** No, no, no. Birkenau had A, B, C, D, E, F. They had different camps.

**Rosen:** Within the camp?

**Jacobs:** Within the camp. Every camp had twenty barracks. The twenty barracks could hold...every barrack was built for fifty-two horses, but it could hold up to 1,500 people.

**Rosen:** There were 1,500 people per barrack, and a barrack was only made for fifty-two horses?

**Jacobs:** That’s correct. There were three bunks. You could sleep five or six people to a bunk or more.

**Rosen:** Five to six people per bunk and three levels of bunks?

**Jacobs:** Yes. It’s hard to imagine, right? I was taken over to Camp D to go to work, but I was going to be a

***Rangiermeister***. That means a person that will uncouple and couple the cars.

Rosen: The cars? Are you talking about the train cars?

Jacobs: Train cars, yes. I was chosen to work in a ***Selegetbetrieb***. A ***Selegetbetrieb*** means that shot-down planes came into this camp at Birkenau--German planes or maybe some Allied planes--and the prisoners used to separate the aluminum, separate the copper, separate the steel in the motor, and load them back on the coal cars to go back to the mills to be remelted.

Rosen: So these were repair shops?

Jacobs: No, no, no. We used to take the planes apart and send them back to the mills. They'd save the aluminum, load it in a separate car, and it went back to make new aluminum. The steel went back to the steel mill to make new steel; the copper went to another place to make new copper.

What I used to do, when the train was pushed in--the Polish engineer could only come to the edge of the camp--I took it over with an air force person--a soldier--and we used to put them on different tracks--the cars. The cars were unloaded by hand. Unbelievable. I had an easy job because I didn't have

to work physically. Always, I was lucky. I guess somebody upstairs had to look over me. I was lucky.

Russian officers were also in Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were prisoners-of-war, and I guess they brought them into Auschwitz-Birkenau so they wouldn't escape. We went to work every day with the orchestra playing; we used to come home with the orchestra playing. They were in front of the gate. People used to be tortured by the orchestra.

Rosen: When you were working at Birkenau, you were working outside the camp.

Jacobs: Outside, yes. I was inside the perimeter of the camp, but not under the electrified barbed wire--not in the barracks. It was still Birkenau.

Rosen: It was also being used not only as a concentration camp but as a POW camp, also.

Jacobs: No, it wasn't a POW camp. It was a concentration camp, but the POWs were sent over there to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Rosen: Russian POWs...

Jacobs: ...were over there, yes.

Rosen: ...were in Birkenau and Auschwitz, too?

Jacobs: Yes. Yes, I call it Auschwitz-Birkenau because the people are more familiar with Auschwitz. We went to

work every day by orchestra and came back the same way. Our group had 1,500 people, but I was actually in a group of thirty under foreman--a prisoner.

Rosen: This was a Jew.

Jacobs: He wasn’t Jewish.

Rosen: He wasn’t Jewish.

Jacobs: He was Austrian. He was a political prisoner. He was a short guy. He was an overseer or foreman of the group. He didn’t care what was going on. I was the only Jewish boy with twenty-eight Russian officers--from a lieutenant up to a general.

Rosen: All of you were grouped together.

Jacobs: Yes, in one place. Yes, we were in the same group. The Russian prisoners were all officers, not fighters, from a lieutenant up to a general. The generals didn’t go to work. You could see them in camp walking around with their big medals (chuckle). You know how the Russians wear them on their chest. As I said, there were twenty-eight Russian officers, one Jewish boy, and one Austrian foreman. I was working under a commander in a group. There were thirty of us. There was one Austrian--the leader--and there were twenty-eight Russian officers and myself, a Jew.

They always used to ask me...when the planes came in on the gondolas....

Rosen: When you say “they used to ask you...?”

Jacobs: The Russian officers.

Rosen: Okay.

Jacobs: They asked me, when the planes came in on the gondolas if they had machine guns in the wings, if they were Messerschmidt fighters. I used to tell them, “Yes! Oh, yes! On this gondola there are machine guns, on this gondola there machine guns.” I didn’t think there was too much difference because they...I’m sure they had taken out the machine guns to repair them, and they put them back in other planes. I was going on with my work.

One day it was cold outside, and the leader was in a little tent. I said, “At lunchtime I’m going to go in and eat my lunch.” There were two or three Russian prisoners in the tent, and when I looked into the tent with my head, I saw something that went by fast, and I quickly walked away. They called me back in, and they said, “What did you see?” I said, “A piece of iron. Nothing.” They said, “Is this a piece of iron?” It was a gun. I was scared to death. They said, “Now you are one of us.” I said, “What do you

mean?" They said, "You are going to be in the underground with us."

Rosen: The Russians were telling you this?

Jacobs: The Russians, yes. They said, "These guns are being prepared for an uprising." I kept my mouth shut, sealed, like nothing happened. That's what was going on day in and day out.

Rosen: Did you take the gun?

Jacobs: No, they had it. They kept the gun. One day I was (chuckle) privileged to carry a gun into camp. They put it between my legs.

Rosen: The legs of your pants?

Jacobs: Yes, right over here (gesture). From time to time, they used to have a searching. As you walked in, the orchestra was playing. Inside was a big yard, and they used to have a big line, and they used to search us. They were searching for cigarettes, for other things.

I was walking home to camp, and I was saying to myself, "Please, let there be no searching today." I walked up, and they were searching; but I wasn't worried about it. I figured something had to happen. Everybody was being searched in the line. I came within maybe two persons of being searched--I was standing in line to be searched. All of a sudden, from

**the other side--I can see it still today--people were pushing themselves to my side. The SS people were whipping people with bullwhips. They were whipping them, and people were pushing themselves back in; and they pushed me back to the other side. I turned back like nothing happened. I went through with the gun, but I really sweated (chuckle). I took a loaf of bread, we took everything out, and we put the gun in the loaf of bread.**

**Rosen:** **This is back in the barracks now?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes.**

**Rosen:** **You get to the barracks with the gun hidden in the groin of your pants...**

**Jacobs:** **That's right.**

**Rosen:** **...and there's a loaf of bread in the barracks.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, they brought a loaf of bread--the underground people. We took out everything from the bread, and we put the gun in the bread, and we threw it over to the *Sonderkommando*--the prisoners who worked in the crematoria--for the uprising. See, they were supposed to start it.**

**Rosen:** **The way the revolt or uprising was planned, the people who worked in the crematoria were going to be the leaders of it.**

**Jacobs:** That’s right. We planned to have an uprising in Auschwitz-Birkenau--a main uprising.

**Rosen:** Now when is this?

**Jacobs:** In 1944, the tenth month.

**Rosen:** In October of 1944.

**Jacobs:** We started in October or November. At Crematoria Numbers Two and Four, I guess some of them found out that they were going to go to the gas chambers, because the Nazis--the SS people--used to change people very often. The people who worked in the crematoria found out, and they said they were not going to go, and they started the uprising on October 7. They started the uprising, and I never saw an uprising like this.

**Rosen:** The people uprising are...?

**Jacobs:** Crematorium Two.

**Rosen:** They work in the crematoria?

**Jacobs:** They work in the crematoria, yes.

**Rosen:** And their function is taking out bodies?

**Jacobs:** Taking them out of the gas chambers and burning the bodies.

**Rosen:** The reason they are uprising is because the Nazis said they were going to be the next group....

**Jacobs:** ...to go into the gas chambers. That’s right.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** And you never saw an uprising like this. I remember I was working in the scrap yard, and everybody had laid down face down.

**Rosen:** Everyone in the scrap yard had to lay face down?

**Rosen:** Everyone in the scrap yard had to lay face down?

**Jacobs:** Face down. That is correct.

**Rosen:** You mean you were ordered to do this.

**Jacobs:** By the SS people, yes.

**Rosen:** By the SS people to lay face down during this uprising?

**Jacobs:** The tanks were all over. It took a while. And the machine guns...how did they get the machine guns? I found out. I wasn’t there.

**Rosen:** Who had the machine guns?

**Jacobs:** How did they get the machine guns--the crematorium people?

**Rosen:** The crematorium people who were leading the uprising had machine guns?

**Jacobs:** That’s right. They acquired some machine guns. Do you want to know how?

**Rosen:** How?

**Jacobs:** The people standing beneath the lookout towers said, “Hey, look at the beautiful gold watch I have!” I was

told; I wasn’t there. The guy says, “Throw it up!” They said, “If we throw it up and you cannot catch it, this beautiful gold watch is going to get broke. Why don’t you come down?” The SS man didn’t think too much. He came down. As he came down, they “gave him the knife,” and they cut his throat. They took the machine gun away. They went to the next tower, and they called him down, and they got another machine gun. See, they had guns and machine guns now. That’s what I was told. I wasn’t over there. I can tell you what I was told. Finally, after it quieted down....

Rosen: How much time passed during this uprising?

Jacobs: About an hour or something. It was very quick.

Rosen: Okay, it was a very short uprising.

Jacobs: An hour or two hours.

Rosen: Roughly, could you guess how many people were involved in this?

Jacobs: I don’t know. It could be fifty; it could be sixty; it could be a hundred. I don’t know. I never looked into it. I should have. I know that after the uprising we walked home. We went back to the barrack, and they were watching us very closely. We didn’t have any more uprisings. It is like cutting off the wings from your body; you can do absolutely nothing anymore.

**Always, when I go to Auschwitz-Birkenau, I go with a group, and we stop at the Crematorium Two, and I will always talk. I say, "I'm glad I was part of it. I didn't participate in it, but I was part of it."**

**That's what I used to do day in and day out. I used to organize lots of food. I used to share with my friends. I used to bring in cigarettes from the Polish engineer. I used to pay him in gold.**

**Rosen:** **The Polish engineer?**

**Jacobs:** **He was on the train. He only brought it to the border of the camp, that's all.**

**Rosen:** **This Polish engineer...is this the same engineer who led you when you were working in the camp in Ostrowiec?**

**Jacobs:** **No, that's a completely different person. This man was the engineer that was on the locomotive--the locomotive engineer. He stopped on the border of the camp, and we took it over.**

**Rosen:** **You took what over?**

**Jacobs:** **We took the whole train with the engines. We had an air force man. He knew how to run the engine, and I was the *Rangiermeister*. We used to put the railroad cars over there on different sides, and I used to**

**uncouple them--put the brakes on--and spot the boxcars in different places.**

**Rosen:** **Let’s back up here for a moment.**

**Jacobs:** **Okay.**

**Rosen:** **I’m a little confused at this point.**

**Jacobs:** **Go ahead.**

**Rosen:** **You were friends with the train engineer.**

**Jacobs:** **I made friends.**

**Rosen:** **You made friends with the train engineer. The train engineer being...**

**Jacobs:** **...a civilian.**

**Rosen:** **...a civilian who brought in...**

**Jacobs:** **...the planes--the shot down planes.**

**Rosen:** **He brought in shot down planes. Did he bring in the people, also?**

**Jacobs:** **Sometimes.**

**Rosen:** **Okay, so you became friends with him, and how is this to your advantage?**

**Jacobs:** **People came to me from the work in “Canada” under the *Sonderkommandos*. Do you know why we called it “Canada?” When people came in from the outside and left all their belongings behind, the ones working over there used to go through their belongings looking for gold, for money.**

**Rosen:** What are you calling this place?

**Jacobs:** “Canada,” the “Canadians.” Do you know why? Because we used to say, “In Canada people have it good.” They had it very good over there. They had food, and they had everything.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** They used to come to me to find out...they would say, “Mike, why don’t you speak to the Polish engineer and ask him to bring in some cigarettes, bring in some vodka, or bring in some bacon?” The engineer said, “Mendel, you’re crazy! How can I bring it in? What if I get caught?” I said, “Don’t worry about it. Put it in between the coals.” I used to also feed the engine with coal. We used to have steam engines; it wasn’t like electric. I did all kinds of jobs. I said to him, “I’ll give you good money. I’ll give you American gold dollars or diamonds or American dollars.” People used to bring them into camp. He thought about it, and he said, “Fine.” One day he came in and he said he had 1,000 cigarettes between the coals, and he had some bottles of vodka and a bunch of bacon. I said, “Fine.” I went back to the people who had the money, and I said, “Hey, he’s got cigarettes I can get. I promised him I am going to leave the money in the engine. I

**can’t get it for nothing. But we can do it only once.” He said, “Okay, for a ten-dollar gold piece.”**

**Rosen:** **When you say “he,” who do you mean?**

**Jacobs:** **The *Sonderkommando* people who worked in the crematoria--or from “Canada.”**

**Rosen:** **“Canada.” The people that worked in the crematoria.**

**Jacobs:** **The people who worked in the crematoria or in “Canada.”**

**Rosen:** **There are two different groups of people who were using you as a middleman to...**

**Jacobs:** **...deal with this guy.**

**Rosen:** **...deal with this guy, who was bringing contraband cigarettes in exchange for the belongings of those who were being gassed.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, the gold pieces or diamonds or gold teeth knocked out or all kinds of things. They said, “Yes, we’ll give you a ten-dollar American gold piece. We want a hundred cigarettes.” I went to the Polish engineer, and I told him I wanted 300 cigarettes. He said, “Fine.” I got the cigarettes, and I had 200 cigarettes left. I went into the barracks, and I used to go into the bunk, and I used to give away cigarettes to everyone. I didn’t smoke.**

**One guy came to me--I remember it like today--and he said, “Here is my ration of bread. Give me another cigarette.” I looked at him, and I said, “You will never get a cigarette from me so long as I have cigarettes!” He said, “Why?” I said, “If you can give away your life for a cigarette...a piece of bread is livelihood. You are not worth a cigarette. You will never get a cigarette from me.” We used to get in the morning a small slice of bread like this and some ersatz--synthetic--coffee.**

**Rosen:** **You have one slice of bread and synthetic coffee for breakfast?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, for breakfast. At lunchtime, we had soup--watered. At nighttime we had all soup or all bread. It depended--one or the other. That’s why I used to organize. I used to go up to the block leader, the prisoner in charge of the barrack, and every barrack used to have a prisoner in charge. We used to have a secretary and everything. Every barrack used to have a commander, an SS man, in charge of the barrack. At roll call in the morning, he would count how many people were alive, how many new people. I could go to him and say, “Here is a package of cigarettes. Give me a loaf of bread.”**

**Rosen:** This is the commander you would ask?

**Jacobs:** No, the prisoner in charge of the barrack.

**Rosen:** You would trade with the prisoner in charge of the barrack?

**Jacobs:** That's right, the head of the barrack.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** And I used to share. I would share everything with the prisoners. I never took nothing for myself. That's what was going on day in and day out.

I was beaten; I was tortured. You see my scars on my face. I was my own surgeon. I was hit with a bullwhip, and I knew that when I went into camp with an open face, I would get selected, if they had selections, to go to the gas chambers. I figured that maybe if I closed it, they would not see it: "I will hold my hand over it or do something." I remember I took some aluminum, and I made a "U." I remember it like today. I made the points very sharp, three over here and three over there (gestures). I told my friend to clamp it. I can hear this voice: "Mike, I'm not going to do it because it's going to hurt!" I said, "It's not going to hurt you; it's going to hurt me!" He didn't want to do it. I said, "How about you holding it. I cannot see it. Hold it and I will camp

it.” I clamped three over here and three over there to his scar above and below his left eye (gestures).

Rosen: You made your own needle out of a piece of aluminum that you found?

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: You rolled it up into a needle?

Jacobs: No, like a “U.”

Rosen: Like a “U.”

Jacobs: And I bent it, and I made some sharp points. They were sharp, very sharp.

Rosen: How did you make these sharp points?

Jacobs: We had some files.

Rosen: You had files?

Jacobs: Oh, yes.

Rosen: This wasn’t in any way sterile.

Jacobs: No. No (chuckle)!

Rosen: What did you use for thread?

Jacobs: No thread. I clamped it.

Rosen: You clamped it? You put the metal into your skin?

Jacobs: Yes, you can see three scars over here and three over there (gestures).

Rosen: What were the events that led up to you being bullwhipped?

Jacobs: No reason. I went to the engine--where it was waiting.

**Rosen:** The train engine?

**Jacobs:** The train engine. The SS man walked behind me. He was a killer, a murderer. He killed a lot of people. He pulled a bullwhip, and he hit me right over here on the left side of my face (gesture). I could see blood coming out, and I could feel it. I stepped on the engine ladder. I stepped on the engine, and I looked back, and he said to me, “What happened?” He asked me what happened. I had to think very fast. I said, “I slipped.” I guess he was flabbergasted or something, and he walked away. He thought he would finish me up.

**Rosen:** Had he said anything to you in advance?

**Jacobs:** No. If I would say he did it, I would not be here at this interview for you to interview me.

**Rosen:** Was this an area that you weren’t supposed to be in?

**Jacobs:** No, I was in the right area! This guy was going around and killing people every day. When I told him that I slipped--I didn’t tell him that he did it--he walked away (chuckle). It’s unbelievable. When I walked into camp, I was praying: “I hope there are no selections.” There were no selections.

**Rosen:** Now when you say walking to camp this time when you got bullwhipped, when was this?

**Jacobs:** In 1944. It was December, I guess. It was November or December. We only knew when it was holidays.

**Rosen:** Okay, this is in November or December of 1944, and you say you were entering camp.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** When you say entering camp, you mean you were coming home from work?

**Jacobs:** Coming from work, yes.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** There was no selection. I guess somebody had to be looking over me. Somebody had to look over me--there was no selection the day after and the day after that--because in the last half of 1944 the Germans began the "Final Solution" of the Jewish people. The Nazis were killing, burning, and gassing between 12,000 and 15,000 people a day.

**Rosen:** At Birkenau--this is when you are working--were you aware at this time that people were being burned to death and gassed to death?

**Jacobs:** Sure! Certainly! A few days after I came in, I found out.

**Rosen:** Okay, it was a few days later, after you came in. What did you think about all this when you were there?

**Jacobs:** I thought, “I hope I don’t get over there.” That’s all. Nothing else.

**Rosen:** Did you see any way that you could avoid being killed?

**Jacobs:** No.

**Rosen:** Any rational reasons?

**Jacobs:** No. You had to be lucky.

**Rosen:** You mentioned that when you first came in, you decided that if anyone asked you, you would tell them that you were a baker, because you saw the ovens. Did that ever come up?

**Jacobs:** No, it never come up because it was the crematoria.

**Rosen:** Okay, so you found that out within a few days.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** Did you have friends that you worked with?

**Jacobs:** Sure! Yes! I had one friend that I knew--the rest of them I don’t know where they are--and he lives in New Jersey. He went in at the same age as I did. We were from the same city--Konin. We went to the Hebrew school, to the religious school, to the public school, to the ghettos and concentration camp; and we were liberated together.

**Rosen:** When you were in the concentration camp at Birkenau, people that you worked with side by side...were they put into the gas chambers?

**Jacobs:** Some of them. Some of them were chosen--selected. You see, when they were taking roll call in the morning, the commandant who was in charge in our barrack could pick out people. I remember one day that he was choosing people. I was chosen, too, to go on the other side--step over on the other side. My friend--from New Jersey--was the same thing. I had a tremendous feeling I was on the wrong side. I stepped back and pulled my friend back. The SS man shouted, “Where were you?” I said, “This is my place! I wasn’t over there!” He believed me. If I would have stayed over there, I wouldn’t be over here today. They were taken out. At night my friend came home from work very tired, beaten, hungry. He went to the barrack, he went to the bunk, and he slept. At midnight there was a roll call, and everybody stepped down from both sides of the bunks--half asleep, very tired, don’t know what’s going on. He’s walking up and down with the block leader--the prisoner in charge of the block--with the secretary, the *Schreiber*, the barrack *Schreiber*. You’re half asleep; he takes up numbers. A couple of hours later, the numbers are called, and they walk out and never come back. The next day they will be

replaced with other prisoners. You never knew from one second to the other.

Rosen: So the prisoners who were taken to be gassed all did not come out of a particular barracks or particular work group. They could have been anyone.

Jacobs: Anyone. They had no system. There was no system. They made their own system according to how they felt. I remember that when the wind was blowing the wrong direction, you could hardly breathe.

Rosen: Why?

Jacobs: The smell of human flesh. I remember one night I heard children singing. I will never forget it. Being in the underground, a partisan, I said, “Why do they sing?” I opened the back door of the barrack a little bit. I stuck my head out very little. I couldn’t stick out my whole head because the SS. always aimed searchlights at the doors to see if people were coming out or doing something. If I stuck out my whole head, the searchlight would pick me out, and the lookout tower could pick me off with a machine gun. I heard them sing, but I also heard people screaming. While the children were singing, their mothers and fathers and their brothers and sisters were burning alive.

**Rosen:** How many hours a day would you say the crematoria operated?

**Jacobs:** Twenty-four hours a day.

**Rosen:** All day and night long they operated. Were there different shifts of people who worked at different times?

**Jacobs:** Sure, there were different shifts of people among the *Sonderkommandos*.

**Rosen:** How many hours a day would you say the gas chambers worked?

**Jacobs:** During the “Final Solution” of the Jewish people in the last half of 1944, the gas chambers were working without stopping.

**Rosen:** Again, twenty-four hours?

**Jacobs:** Yes, I guess, without stopping. They could gas and burn between 10,000 and 15,000 people a day. They were always active twenty-four hours a day. They were always gassing people. I wasn’t over there. I don’t know for sure. But we know that in the last half of 1944 they were gassing and burning between 10,000 and 15,000 people a day.

**Rosen:** When you went to sleep in the evenings, could you still hear people being taken off to the gas chambers, or could you still smell the odor of the crematoria?

**Jacobs:** Oh, if the wind was blowing the wrong direction, yes.

**Rosen:** You saw the chimneys still...

**Jacobs:** You could see smoke coming out from the chimneys all the time.

**Rosen:** Even at night?

**Jacobs:** They also burned at night when we were sleeping. You'd see them during the day, and they were burning all the time. When the pits slowed down, those children were also pushed in to be burned.

**Rosen:** You mentioned that the children were burned alive.

**Jacobs:** Small children sometimes were thrown in--young, infant children--to be burned alive. To me they wanted to save a hundredth of a penny. They wanted to see how each child would burn.

It's unbelievable. It's hard to imagine. It's hard to grasp it. Sometimes it's even hard for myself--being there--to understand what one human could do to another. It's unbelievable. It's hard to imagine. To people that weren't over there, you can tell them the story, and they look at you and say, "What are you talking about?" It's an unbelievable thing.

People start to deny today that anything happened--there were no concentration camps, no crematoria. They believe it's a big lie. They say

there was no Holocaust, that the Holocaust was a hoax. Those people have written books saying that there was no Holocaust, no Auschwitz, no crematoria, no concentration camps. They are the most dangerous people walking around in the United States because they want you or your family or your children or your grandchildren to believe nothing happened. If they don't know what really happened, they will be caught off- guard, as we were caught off-guard, because we were taking it for granted.

Rosen: Speaking of being on your guard, when you were at Birkenau, were you active in the partisan group then? Was there a partisan group there?

Jacobs: At Birkenau, yes. That's what I'm saying. I was in the underground over there. We had an underground. Let's say I was a leader of five people. Let's say you were in my group. You knew me, but you did not know the other four people. I knew them. God forbid, if something happened. Everybody's going to be destroyed. A film was given to a Polish woman to take it out to be developed and to send it to England and other places. She was caught with the two underground people giving it to her. We were coming home from work. What month, don't ask me. I wouldn't remember.

I know it was at the end of 1944. We came from work, and the orchestra was playing. Three people were standing on the gallows--they had special gallows. As you walked in, it was a big place, and behind were the twenty barracks, ten on this side and ten on that side.

Rosen: Ten on your right and ten on your left as you walked into the camp?

Jacobs: Yes, into the camp. The orchestra is playing. As we were walking in, I saw three people over there, and I knew who they were. They gave us a slice of bread. As you walked with your eyes to your right, you had to take a bite, and you saw them. I knew they didn't talk, didn't speak, didn't tell, because we promised ourselves that if any of us got caught our mouth would be sealed. It made no difference how we were going to be tortured. But under torture, under stress, sometimes people will talk about things, right? They did not. As I walked by, I could see they were tortured to death. Their fingernails had been pulled off, their ears were hanging down, and their tongues were hanging out.

Rosen: You mean, their ears had been sliced?

**Jacobs:** Yes. As we walked by, the chairs were pulled away from them.

**Rosen:** They were hung?

**Jacobs:** Yes. They didn’t talk. Thank God, they didn’t talk.

**Rosen:** Did you live in fear of dying or being caught at this time?

**Jacobs:** Never! I never lived in fear. It never crossed my mind. Again and again, I was always jolly, happy-go-lucky. I used to dream. I used to be a fantasizer. I used to dream things--make believe. I remember I stood with a group of my friends outside before we went into the barrack. We wanted to stay outside to catch some nice, fresh air. All of a sudden, birds are flying in and out. I looked at them, and I said, “Guys, do you see the birds flying in and flying out? They stop over here to pick. What can they pick that we cannot see?” I had my little slice of bread, and I put it close to my mouth. I didn’t want to lose a crumb because it was so precious, so valuable. Nobody asked them for identification--what are they doing over here flying out. I said, “Guys, do you know what? I’m leaving you right now. I’m going to go in and change myself to a bird.” When I walked away, I could hear them say, “Mike is getting crazy.” They were afraid I was

**getting crazy. I walked into my barrack--I remember it like today--and I lay down on my bed, closed my eyes, and I started to fantasize that I was a bird and I flew up. I was flying all over. When I opened my eyes, I was back in the same surroundings, but for the few moments I was happy and free. I was outside.**

**A few days later, we were standing outside the barracks, and we saw the railroad cars driving back and forth. I said, "Guys, take a look. The cars are driving so nice and peacefully. Nobody stops them. Do you know why--what's going to happen?" They looked at me. I said, "I'm going to change myself to a plank of wood, and I'm going to be part of a boxcar." When I walked away, I could hear them saying, "Mike is going off his rocker. Now we know he has gone crazy. I feel sorry for this guy." I walked into my barrack, I lay down on my bunk, I changed myself into a plank of wood, and I was part of the boxcar; but this time I closed my eyes, I was traveling all over the world. I didn't want to open my eyes. It was so beautiful. I was all over the world--the United States, South Africa, America, and the Middle East. I was all over. I didn't want to open my eyes. But I had to open my eyes. When I opened my eyes, my friends were standing**

over me. They said, “Why are you so happy? Why do you have that happy grin on your face?” I said, “Guys, I heard you say that I’m off my rocker--I’m crazy--but you would not believe it. I was traveling. I was part of the boxcar, and I was traveling all over the world. It was so beautiful! It was tremendous! I was free! I was a free person! They looked at me, and they were thinking I’m crazy. I said, “I’m not. Try it. You will feel the same way.” I felt so good inside.

In 1945...I’m skipping a few things. I was tortured; I was beaten. On January 18, 1945, the Russians came closer again and stopped twenty-seven miles away from Auschwitz. They didn’t come in. They gathered us together from Auschwitz-Birkenau--the main camp. On January 18, we were going out with about 60,000 people who were left over. I’m sure people went before us.

Rosen: You’re saying that on January 18, 1945, about 60,000 prisoners from the concentration camps were leaving. Did this include POWs?

Jacobs: Right.

Rosen: Why were you leaving?

Jacobs: On a death march.

Rosen: You’re under German officers.

**Jacobs:** That’s right. On January 23 or 24, the Russians marched into Auschwitz. They could have marched in, I believe, with one tank and liberated us.

**Rosen:** So, five days later, the Germans...

**Jacobs:** Five or six days. I think it was five, but people say six days later. I don’t know.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** I walked out...I had some discussions. I say, “I walked out on the 19th.” They say, “Mendel, you couldn’t. It had to be the 18th.” I reply, “Maybe you walked out on the 18th, but in the group I was, I walked out on the 19th because it was 1:00 in the morning. It was the 19th.” Let’s say it was January 18. We marched thirty-five kilometers a day with no water and no food. We had plenty of water--snow. It was eighteen degrees below zero, and we were walking.

**Rosen:** What were you dressed in?

**Jacobs:** The same uniform--a shirt and pants.

**Rosen:** No coat?

**Jacobs:** No, no coat.

**Rosen:** A hat?

**Jacobs:** A hat, yes. I had a civilian jacket.

**Rosen:** You said a jacket?

**Jacobs:** Yes, a civilian jacket with a yellow strip on the back.

**Rosen:** To show you were Jewish.

**Jacobs:** Jewish, yes.

**Rosen:** You had a shirt, pants, a civilian jacket...

**Jacobs:** ...and shoes.

**Rosen:** ...shoes, and a cap.

**Jacobs:** A cap, yes. I had, like, civilian shoes.

**Rosen:** No boots?

**Jacobs:** No, no. I was lucky that I had civilian shoes. Some of them had Holland shoes to walk in--wooden shoes. They'd get stuck in the snow, and they had to push them. If they left you, you were a goner. If people could not make it and they fell behind, they wouldn't leave them behind. They were going to be shot. They didn't shoot them with a straight bullet; they shot them with a dumdum bullet. The head of the bullet was cut off. When the bullet hits the person's head, it will split in dozens of pieces. I remember that where I walked the side of the road was red, and the head was staring at you.

**Rosen:** The side of the road was red?

**Jacobs:** Blood. Those who couldn't make it. They were shot. They were shot with a dumdum bullet.

**Rosen:** Did you see this?

**Jacobs:** Sure! That’s what I’m saying! That’s what I saw! Finally, after a few days of walking, they put us in a barn overnight. We walked the next day. Finally, we came to a city. I don’t know what city it was. There were coal cars--open gondolas waiting for us. I remember we were sitting on planks of wood beside each other. Looking back, I say, “Thank God, they did!” because we were very close. It would keep us warm.

**Rosen:** Can you go back there for a moment?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** Define gondola for me.

**Jacobs:** A gondola is a coal car--an open car.

**Rosen:** A train car or a flatbed?

**Jacobs:** No, it had sides.

**Rosen:** It had sides to it.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** Did it have a roof?

**Jacobs:** No roof.

**Rosen:** So it’s a coal car that has walls but no roof.

**Jacobs:** That’s correct. The floor was like a plank of wood (chuckle).

**Rosen:** This is in January.

**Jacobs:** Yes, maybe January 20 or 21. When I look back and I think how we survived, I think it is because were close to each other. We had some warm bodies. Finally, we were traveling by train now bound to Vienna, Austria.

**Rosen:** Did you know where you were going at the time?

**Jacobs:** No.

**Rosen:** How long a trip is this?

**Jacobs:** I guess it was a four- or five-day trip, maybe six. I don’t know. I cannot tell you because we didn’t have a calendar. We didn’t know what day it was. We know it was January, but I never paid attention to what day it was.

**Rosen:** Was this like your other trips? Did you have any place to excrete? Did you have any bathrooms?

**Jacobs:** No, nobody did over there. Sometimes you didn’t have to go so much because you didn’t have food in your body (chuckle).

**Rosen:** Did they feed you during this time period?

**Jacobs:** Not from what I remember.

**Rosen:** For four or five days, there was no food.

**Jacobs:** I guess maybe they gave us a slice of bread. I do not remember. I don’t remember because I guess it was not important.

**Rosen:** This train took you...

**Jacobs:** We came down to Vienna, Austria. It was evening. We could hear the SS people singing, "*Wien, Wien, nur du Allein*" ("Vienna, Vienna, You're the Only One."). They were singing. We were in Vienna, and the SS people were very happy to be in Vienna, Austria.

From there, the train took us to Linz, Austria, where we were unloaded. And we walked. Nobody had heard of Mauthausen. They took us to Mauthausen. We didn't know what camp it was.

**Rosen:** So now you are being put into a new camp...

**Jacobs:** A new camp.

**Rosen:** ...Mauthausen...

**Jacobs:** Mauthausen.

**Rosen:** ...in Austria.

**Jacobs:** Yes. But you had to go up a hill--a steep hill.

**Rosen:** The train didn't go directly up this hill.

**Jacobs:** No, no, it was a steep hill. I remember--I can see it like today--that the people who had Holland shoes could not make it. The ground was frozen when they took off their shoes and went barefoot. If they slipped back, the moment they slipped back, they were machine-gunned.

I was told...I went back to Mauthausen after the war. When I went up the hill in the car, I had to go into second gear. I was told by Americans going to Mauthausen, when they go by bus, they had to step out. The bus had to go by itself, and the people had to walk up because it was so steep. We came into Mauthausen, we took the same shower, and we walked out waiting for clothes. Well, forget about clothes!

Rosen: You were standing outside, naked, after taking a shower and this is in late January of 1945?

Jacobs: Late January, 1945, that's right. We walked to the barrack.

Rosen: What would you guess the temperature was like?

Jacobs: It was eighteen or twenty below zero.

Rosen: Below zero.

Jacobs: Centigrade, not Fahrenheit--centigrade. That is below zero.

Rosen: Was there snow on the ground?

Jacobs: And how! We were walking into the barrack, and I bet you the barrack wasn't bigger than this living room. I don't think so. There were 400 people!

Rosen: In a room that you would say was roughly about how many feet?

**Jacobs:** I should know. I don’t know. It was maybe 900 square feet.

**Rosen:** So the room was roughly 900 square feet, and you had 400 people.

**Jacobs:** We were sleeping like sardines.

**Rosen:** People sleeping naked?

**Jacobs:** Naked, like sardines.

**Rosen:** Was there any heat in this room?

**Jacobs:** There was body heat. The next morning we had roll call--naked. People died, but I didn’t give them the satisfaction. The moment they came close to me, I stood at attention. When they walked away, I rubbed my feet in the snow in order to keep warm. I said to my friend, who now lived in New Jersey, “Hit me!” He said, “Mendel, I’m not going to hit you!” I said, “Hit!” I said, “If we are not moving, we will freeze like icicles, and I didn’t want to fall over like an icicle and get shot.

One day--I remember it like today--the commandant for the barrack came in and said, “Everybody get up!” I said to myself, “We’re in trouble now.” We could hear bombs explode far away. We knew somebody was close. They were going to take us out and kill us. But he says, “Everybody get up!”

He said, “You are sleeping too comfortably. I want everyone at the wall to sit down, stretch your legs, and everybody go to sleep now sitting up between the legs.”

Rosen: This is how long after you had been there?

Jacobs: Oh, a few weeks.

Rosen: Had you been given clothes?

Jacobs: No, not yet.

Rosen: You mean, you were there for weeks with no clothes.

Jacobs: For weeks without clothes.

Rosen: For a week without clothes?

Jacobs: Yes, more than a week, I guess.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: What did you do during the days?

Jacobs: We were sitting around.

Rosen: You just stayed in this one 900-square-foot room.

Jacobs: Yes, that’s right.

Rosen: There was no labor involved?

Jacobs: No labor. We did no labor. The working people who went to get the soup, the food, had clothes.

Rosen: Did they have clothing to go and get the food?

Jacobs: Let me tell you one thing. I was lucky. I knew how to organize. They gave some people clothes. I was lucky. They came in and said, “What profession do you have?”

My hand went up very fast. I said, “I am a machinist!” (Chuckle) I never was a machinist in my life, but I figured maybe they were looking for professionals. If they were looking for machinists, they were going to take me out; and if they took me out, they were going to give me some clothes. At the time that was right. They gave me some clothes. They took me down to Gusen II. It was about two miles away.

Rosen: What was Gusen II?

Jacobs: Another camp of 7,500 people to build Messerschmidt planes. I was a machinist now. They took me, and we had our factories in the mountains. No bombs could touch us. I had to build a part--a short vent--that went in the back of the fuselage. There was a frame brought to me, and they gave me some aluminum. I spot-welded it. There were three holes over here--holes (gesture). After I made it, touched it, checked it, measured it, okayed it, I put it to one side. One day, a guy passing by said, “Move!” I moved my chair. “Move!” I moved the chair back. He said, “I don’t want you to move the chair. I want you to move the holes.” I said, “You’re crazy! If I move the hole, and they check it and it’s not right, I’ll be shot over here!”

Rosen: This is a German officer?

**Jacobs:** No, a civilian.

**Rosen:** A civilian.

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** What was his role?

**Jacobs:** I didn’t know yet.

**Rosen:** Oh, okay. So a civilian comes in and tells you to move the holes in the what?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in the special frame that’s going in the back part of the fuselage.

**Rosen:** In the frame that you are building for the Messerschmidt?

**Jacobs:** Messerschmidt planes. They were very fast planes.

He walked away. The next day he came to me, and he said, “I know who you are.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “You are one of us.” I said, “I’m a prisoner.” He said, “Oh, no. News travels pretty fast.” I said, “What news is it?” He said, “You were a part of the underground, weren’t you, in Auschwitz-Birkenau?” I said, “No.” Then I decided to take a chance. I said, “Why do you want me to move the holes?” He said, “Those holes were for the cables to the back flaps. If you move the holes, the pilot will have a hard time to let down the flaps to slow down the plane.” Let me tell you something. I learned

pretty fast to be one of the best machinists, believe you me. After they measured everything and it was okay, I prepared the holes in a different direction. As I made it, I put it aside, and right away it disappeared. Some other people were taking it away.

Rosen: Picking up the frame that you were building?

Jacobs: That’s right.

Rosen: Did you move the holes?

Jacobs: Sure! Sure, I moved the holes!

Rosen: So you were working to sabotage the planes.

Jacobs: That’s right--sabotage. I’d move the holes. As I say, after the soldiers measured the right one, I had already prepared to spot-weld, and I spot-welded very quick, but not as good.

Rosen: So, you prepared one accurately measured frame and then saved it while you put together other frames that were inaccurate.

Jacobs: Yes, that’s right--the top where the holes were. But I spot-welded it. The frame was okay, but I didn’t spot-weld as good as I would spot-weld the other one. Gosh, I could see the holes go in different directions (gesture). When I put it away, right away it would disappear because I’m sure some other people knew about it. They took the good ones away very quickly,

and they installed it in the back of the fuselage. It could be that some of the prisoners did something else, too. I'm working very nicely on the plane, and the SS people, the Luftwaffe people, and the civilians were running up and down.

Rosen: You've been in Mauthausen...

Jacobs: Four months.

Rosen: ...from January to May, working as a machinist.

Jacobs: That's correct.

Rosen: On Messerschmidts.

Jacobs: Yes, I built parts for the Messerschmidt planes. Then one day, I said, "Uh-oh, now we are really in trouble." We could hear the bombing; we could hear the cannons. We could hear. I thought, "Somebody's close. The war is close. They are going to take us out, and everyone is going to get killed." We knew this because an hour before, in a lot of camps, when the Allies came close to the camp, they took out the whole camp, and the whole camp was shot. Then it quieted down.

Rosen: Did you see people killed at Mauthausen?

Jacobs: Oh, sure! Oh, yes! They were tortured. Let me finish, and I'll come back, okay? I found out from the right

**source that those planes went up and never made it down.**

**Let me go back now. When I came into Mauthausen, I was told--I didn't know why--"To be sure not to go to work in the quarries." They were in the mountains, deep down. Prisoners built 183 steps. They knocked out stones and they used to carry them up the stairs to build roads. Some of them could not make it up. They made it halfway, and then they were shot. People that went over there were 99 percent dead. I felt very good that I was not chosen to work in the quarries.**

**My friend in New Jersey woke up one morning, and I took a look at his face, and it scared me to death. His face was paralyzed. His mouth went to his eyes.**

**Rosen:** **His face is frozen?**

**Jacobs:** **He had a seizure.**

**Rosen:** **He had a seizure.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, his mouth came up this way (gestures).**

**Rosen:** **Let me see if I understand this correctly. The left side of his mouth...**

**Jacobs:** **Came up over here (gesture).**

**Rosen:** **...rose as high as his eyes?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes. I looked at his face, and his face turned up on one side to his eye like his mouth had a small little**

hole. I looked at him, and I said, “Oh, my God! He’s not going to survive! When they see him, they will kill him!” I used to get bread--I remember it like today--and I used to make small balls, and I used to push it into his mouth.

Rosen: Little ball of bread?

Jacobs: Yes. He didn’t want to eat it. He knew something was wrong. He couldn’t speak. He couldn’t. He said, “Mike, I want to die.” I said, “You’re not. You’re not going to die. So long as I’m around you, you are not going to die.” I started to rub his face. He wanted to die; he did not want to eat. I said, “Look, you’re going to eat, or I’m going to kill you! You had better start eating!” I rubbed his face, and everything was fine. They didn’t bother us. The SS people were already running in different directions--the guards. On May 5, 1945....

Rosen: Were you able to bring his face back to normal?

Jacobs: A little bit, not too much. He had half a mouth already. I didn’t know what I was doing, but I rubbed his face.

On May 5, 1945, I looked out from the window of my barrack in Gusen II. I saw tanks. I saw tanks coming with white stars. I said, “Hey, guys, take a

look! The Nazis changed from a swastika to a white star!" I didn't know what a white star was. If it was a red star, I would have known it was Russian. A couple of hours later, I saw some more tanks with white stars, but German soldiers were walking on the side without weapons.

Rosen: Without weapons?

Jacobs: Yes, without weapons! I said, "That cannot be German tanks! They are prisoners! They have no weapons!" They said, "Mendel, why don't you go out and find out who they are." I said, "Why should I go out? I don't want to get shot. I know who they are. They can't go walking over here without weapons. There could be some German and SS people, too." They said, "Mendel, you're afraid, aren't you?" I said, "Okay, I'll go out." I went out, and I remember it like today. I was waving and screaming. One guy came out from the turret, and he waved back.

He threw a bar into the camp. I picked it up, and it was a bar of chocolate. I grabbed the bar of chocolate, and I ran into the barrack, and I said, "Hey, guys, take a look! I got a bar of chocolate! You would not know what they named it." They said, "What?" "Hershel!" I said that I did not know how to

**pronounce Hershey chocolate. It's pretty close, isn't it?**

**Rosen:** **Well, it's like the Hebrew name Hershel, yes.**

**Jacobs:** **Hershey, okay. I remember it like today. In those days Hershey chocolate was very thick--a big bar. I took off the wrapper, I took a knife, I put it on the table, and I was cutting.**

**Rosen:** **You were carving off pieces as small as peanuts of the chocolate.**

**Jacobs:** **Yes, they were small. I gave everyone as many pieces as I could. I could have eaten it myself. I didn't. I always shared. The last piece I kept for myself. I said, "God, please don't melt it too fast!" I put it on my tongue. I wanted it to melt very slowly. I wanted to feel the sweet taste of chocolate. It was a small little piece, and it went away very quickly.**

**I was sitting in my barrack, just sitting and watching. I looked out, and there was a guy in front of the fence. It was a civilian from the Red Cross with a soldier who had a machine gun. He waved. Nobody wanted to go. I said, "Mike is going to go again." I went over there, and he said, "Do you speak German?" I said, "Yes, I speak German." He said, "You are free."**

**Rosen:** Who asked if you speak German?

**Jacobs:** The civilian on the other side of the fence--the other side of the barbed wire--the civilian who was with the Red Cross and the soldier with the machine gun.

**Rosen:** Okay.

**Jacobs:** He said, “Do you speak German?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You are free. The Americans are over here. Stay in this camp. We are going to take you to the main camp of Mauthausen, and we are going to give you food, we are going to give you medicine, we are going to give you uniforms, we are going to give you clothes--we are going to give you everything! Just stay in this camp.” I said, “Thank you,” in German. I tried to walk away, and the soldier calls me back.

**Rosen:** Okay, the one that had a machine gun?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** This was a soldier?

**Jacobs:** Yes.

**Rosen:** What uniform was he wearing?

**Jacobs:** A uniform like the Americans today. I didn’t know it.

**Rosen:** You didn’t know what country he was from, but he was a military man...

**Jacobs:** A military man, yes, with a machine gun.

**Rosen:** **...with a uniform from a place that you weren't familiar with?**

**Jacobs:** **Yes. He said, "The Americans are here," so I figured he was an American, too. The Americans are here, right? I walked away, and he called me back. He said, "I want to talk to you. Do you speak Polish?"**

**Rosen:** **This is the...?**

**Jacobs:** **The soldier.**

**Rosen:** **...the American soldier, who is talking to you in Polish?**

**Jacobs:** **"Do you speak Polish," he asked me. Did I speak Polish.**

**Rosen:** **What language did he ask you this in?**

**Jacobs:** **He first asked me in German. He said, "Do you speak Polish?" I said, "Yes, I speak Polish." He asked me in German if I speak Polish. I said, "Yes, I speak Polish." He said he spoke German and Polish. When he said he spoke German and Polish, I started to move. I was shaking. I said to myself, "He's not an American. He has to be a *Volksdeutcher*--a German born in Poland." When he saw me--I bet you I had turned white, scared--he said, "Come back! Don't be afraid!" I said to myself, "I have no choice. He has a machine gun." I came closer. He said, "Don't be afraid." He**

said he was from Chicago. His mother was German, and his father was Polish, and they spoke both these languages at home, and that's where he learned. He told me this story, and I walked away.

When I walked away, I said, "No, I'm not going to go to the main camp of Mauthausen. I was waiting for five-and-a-half years to hear the beautiful music, the beautiful sound, the beautiful voice that I am free. No might in the world can keep me in this camp! I'm going to walk out in a few days!"

I went back to camp and went back to the barracks. I said to the guys, "Hey, guys, we are free! The Americans are over here!" They looked at me, and you could hear, "Mike is getting crazy again." They couldn't believe it. Freedom always used to come up in stories.

A friend of mine came running to me--he was the same age, from the same city, the same school, the same ghettos, same everything. He came running, and he said, "Mike, we are free! You said we are free! We are going to go home, aren't we?" I said, "Yes, we are going to go home!" That was his last word. He fell into my arms, and he died. I picked him up and put him in the bunk and walked away.

A few days later, I said to my friend who now lives in New Jersey, “Lutek, we are going to leave.” He said, “Mendel, we have no money! We have no clothes! Where are we going to go?” I told the other two friends that were sleeping in the same bunk, “We’re leaving. If you don’t, I’m going by myself.” But Lutek said, “Mike, I was sticking with you all through the camps. You saved my life. I’m going to go.” The other two guys decided to go, too.

We walked outside from the camp, and I stopped. The first words that came out from my friend’s mouth were, “You are chicken, aren’t you?” I said, “I’m not! I’m staying over here, and nobody’s greeting me; nobody’s welcoming me. I have no home to go home to.” At the same time, I turned back to the camp. I said, “Mendel, don’t you ever turn back! Keep going and think positively!” I said, “Guys, let’s go.” I came into Linz.

Rosen: About how far was Linz from Mauthausen?

Jacobs: About ten kilometers.

Rosen: You walked into Linz.

Jacobs: Yes, we did.

Jacobs: We came into Linz. I know you want to know all the particulars. I understand. We went into a place where

they were giving out soup. They had a scale, and I looked at the scale and stepped on it. I said, “Something is wrong with this scale.” They looked at it and then said, “I see nothing wrong with the scale.” I stepped up and stepped down. I said, “It couldn’t be,” but it was. I was nineteen-and-a-half years old or a year older--it depends on how I figure--and I weighed seventy pounds.

Rosen: You were how tall?

Jacobs: I was short. I bet you I was maybe 5’2”. I grew after camp.

Rosen: At nineteen-and-a-half, approximately, you weighed seventy pounds.

Jacobs: Yes, seventy pounds. I grew after some rest. I guess I started to get all the vitamins or something. I started to grow. That’s what I weighed when I was liberated from camp.

I found the parents of this boy, my friend--Jerzyk Ber--and I told them.

Rosen: This is the boy who died in your arms?

Jacobs: My arms, yes. I told his parents. His parents never were in camp; they were hidden by a Polish family. I told them what happened. Can you imagine? To go through five-and-a-half years of torture and all

these things that had been done, on the day of liberation, the words came out, “Mike, we are free. We are going to go home.” And he died.

Rosen: What do you think he died of?

Jacobs: A heart attack. Excitement. Lots of people died. See, I knew I would speak. Did you see my memorabilia? Did I show you last night? Do you have questions? Now you can ask other questions.

Rosen: I’ve asked you a number of questions already. I have a few more.

Jacobs: Go ahead.

Rosen: When you were in the camps, did you see or know of people committing suicide?

Jacobs: No. When I used to get up in the morning, the first thing I did was to take a look at the electrified barbed wire. In Auschwitz-Birkenau all the fences were high-voltage. If anybody touched them, it took only a few seconds to electrocute them. Sometimes people went--very few--to the barbed wire. They figured what’s the point to torture themselves, or maybe they felt very sick already. They knew they are going to get shot, so they had better take suicide and touch the barbed wire.

**I was asked a lot of questions about suicide. Did I ever contemplate it? Did it ever come to my mind to try suicide? It never crossed my mind. They say, "What do you mean--it never crossed your mind? We were beaten; I saw people getting killed. People knew they were not going to survive. What's the point to torture yourself to go on living?" I say, "Look, ladies and gentlemen, why should I take my own life when life is so beautiful? It is. Life is holy. It never crossed my mind."**

**Rosen:** **You knew people who perhaps gave up on life. You described your own best friend, who now lives in New Jersey, who at one point thought of giving up. You had to massage his face and feed him--force feed him perhaps, stick balls of bread in his mouth--to make him want to live and keep him alive. Were there other people like that whom you met, who gave up on life?**

**Jacobs:** **Some of them just sat down with the dead people. They sat down and didn't want to go to work or didn't want to do anything. They would either be shot or tortured or be beaten to death. Yes, some of them did.**

**Rosen:** **You saw people that deliberately did things that would lead to their death?**

**Jacobs:** Yes. They would sit down outside with the dead people. When people died in the barracks, we used to put them outside of the barracks. Sometimes they were laying over there for two or three days. We would get the smell. Lots of people sat down with them over there and died over there.

**Rosen:** Did you carry bodies out of the barracks?

**Jacobs:** I never carried out a body. They had special people in the barracks.

**Rosen:** What did you think of those people who gave up on life--who wanted to die?

**Jacobs:** They were weak. They had no will to survive. You see, they could torture my body, but they couldn’t kill my spirit. They never could. They could torture my body as much as they wanted, but my spirit would be over there. That’s what the people lost--their spirit, the will to live. They didn’t care anymore. They gave up completely. Some of them did. They couldn’t do anymore. They were killed. They were taken out and sent to the gas chamber because of their weakness. It never happened to me.

My friend felt something was wrong with his face. He knew that he didn’t want to see himself being unable to talk or something. When I was liberated, I

took him into a doctor--a woman doctor--in Salzburg, Austria. She put him under a lamp.

Rosen: This was your friend whose face was paralyzed?

Jacobs: Yes. She put him under a lamp, and she said to me, “What did you do to him?” I said, “I used to massage him.” She said, “The best thing you could do was massage him, get warmth to his face.” Today, he is in New Jersey, and he is okay. Sometimes you can see some dead tissue. He’s okay now. He speaks and everything, but you can see sometimes where his face is paralyzed, still. He tells my kids, “I thank your daddy I’m alive.” He’s alive. I used to help lots of people.

Rosen: You described somewhat disbelief that the camp was liberated. Certainly, some of the other members, too, perhaps found it difficult to believe that you were going to be free.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: What did freedom mean to you at this point? What did you conceive it to be?

Jacobs: Oh, my! To me, I understood it. I understood it, and it had a tremendous impact because I used to think about freedom all the time. It didn’t hit me so hard. I believed that I was free because it was always my dream, my fantasy--freedom. Those people always never

thought about freedom--most of them. When I told them about being free...it's like somebody is in jail for four years, and you come in and say, "Now you can walk out." When he walks out, he sees that the outside is different from when he walked in. He does not believe that he can now walk free on the street. Those people were thinking that I was crazy again when I said it. Finally, it came to their realization that they are free. I said, "Yes, we are free. We are now free. We have nothing to worry about. We are not going to be taken out and be shot or taken to the gas chambers.

Rosen: I asked that question about being free because you told me that before the war you lived within a confined world that you described as a Jewish ghetto.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: I was wondering if you thought that life would revert to that again, or did you have a different conception of freedom?

Jacobs: No, I never thought this way. I said to myself, "Now I am free. I am as equal as the rest of the people. I'm free. I know I am human. I know I have a brain. They tried to tell me I'm not human." I knew that I was free, that I had nothing to worry about. I could walk around, not to be beaten or something, not to

see that maybe next time I was going to be selected to go to the gas chambers. To me freedom came very easily.

Rosen: What did the Americans liberating the camp mean to you? Did you have any knowledge of what Americans were or what they were like?

Jacobs: No, I didn’t. I didn’t. The only thing that I want to mention...remember the soldier?

Rosen: The one from Chicago?

Jacobs: From Chicago. Three or four years ago, I was invited to speak. I was liberated by the 11th Armored Division. I am an honorary member of the 11th Armored Division. I was made an honorary member of the 11th Armored Division when they found out where I was and what I did. I believe I saved lots of American lives, since the bombers couldn’t go out and fight.

Rosen: Oh, your sabotaging when you worked as a machinist?

Jacobs: That’s correct. I was invited to be the main speaker at their reunion. Every year they gather from all over the United States--the 11th Armored Division of the 3rd Army. I was the main speaker, and I spoke. The people were so happy to see me, a prisoner, because they didn’t meet too many of them. Not too many speak about it. They read about me in a Chicago paper. They

read about me because I'm the founder of the Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies.

Rosen: Here in Dallas.

Jacobs: In Dallas, yes. I'm the founder. It was another dream of mine. I used to tell my friends...my friends were terrified because I said, "When I get liberated, when the opportunity will come, I will build a memorial center for Holocaust studies as a reminder to people about what one human can do to another. The Memorial Center is not built for Holocaust survivors; it is built for future generations.

Rosen: When did you first have this dream?

Jacobs: In camp.

Rosen: Do you remember which camp?

Jacobs: In Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Rosen: Back in 1944?

Jacobs: In 1944, yes.

Rosen: You were already thinking of liberation.

Jacobs: Yes, that's right. When I came to the convention of the 11th Armored Division, a lady embraced me and started to cry. I'm with my wife, and I said, "What's going on over here?" Maybe she was happy, or maybe she was also in the 11th Armored Division. She said that her husband, who passed away two years before,

was always talking about it. I said, “Wouldn’t it have been nice if he could have been over here?” She said, “That’s right.” I said, “We both would cry for happiness. Thank you. At least you met me.” Can you imagine? When I came to this convention, the people didn’t know what to do with me because all the times when I speak or lecture, I used to speak about the 11th Armored Division, and that’s what they found out in the Chicago newspapers--some person from the 11th Armored Division. That’s why they invited me. Now they invite me every time. They sent me pens on a stand with a Hershey wrapper on it (chuckle).

Rosen: (Chuckle) A Hershey wrapper. That has a lot of symbolism.

Jacobs: Oh, yes, sure. That’s what it is. When the Hershey Company found out about it, they sent me a whole box of Hershey’s chocolate. I keep the pen and pencil right here on my desk. They were given to me by the 11th Armored Division with a Hershey wrapper. It says Hershey and Herschel.

Rosen: It says Herschel on it?

Jacobs: Yes, beneath the Hershey wrapper it has Herschel.

Rosen: When you were liberated, did you hold any resentment to anyone? And if so, toward whom?

**Jacobs:** No. As I mentioned before, I have no bitterness. I have no hate in my body for anyone.

**Rosen:** I'm curious and I'm asking that about, obviously, the direct oppressors, the members of the military and police; but I am also asking it with regard to the members of camp who either gave up on life or who were prisoners themselves but aided the Nazis.

**Jacobs:** The ***Kapo*** in Gusen II was a murderer. He killed lots of prisoners. Lots of prisoners were afraid to work under him. They were beaten and tortured. When we were liberated--I didn't have a hand in it--they caught him, and they killed him. They kicked him to death. They said, "Now you are going to see a bit of your own medicine." Lots of ***Kapos***, at the moment that they were liberated, they ran so fast. The prisoners couldn't run so fast because they didn't always have a lot of food to eat. But this one they caught. He tried to escape--I remember it like today--and they kicked him to death.

**Rosen:** Did you witness this?

**Jacobs:** Yes, I saw it. That's what I'm saying. I didn't have a heart to do anything like this. In camp people could not believe it; people could not understand how come I have no hatred and no bitterness. I don't because,

number one, I didn’t believe in it; number two, why should I use all my energy hating when I have to think about survival?

Rosen: In thinking about survival, I suppose the philosophical question that comes out, to me at least, is what is the meaning of life? Was that something that you ever thought about--what was the purpose of you living?

Jacobs: I was brought into life, and life to me was very important. As I mentioned before, life is very holy--so long as a person has opened their eyes and the heart is ticking. Life to me is very, very beautiful. It was then, and it is now--very beautiful. First of all, I care about myself. Secondly, I love myself. And thirdly, I said to myself, “It makes no difference how I look. I’m the most beautiful person in the world. Let anybody say no.” That’s what was always in my mind. So long as I cared about and liked myself, I knew I would survive. At the moment that I reject myself, I will have a hard time surviving.

Rosen: It sounds like you had a great deal of self-esteem.

Jacobs: That’s right.

Rosen: What do you think of Judaism during these years toward the end?

**Jacobs:** I never changed. I always knew it made no difference how I was hiding my Jewishness--it depended on which camp I was in--but inside I was always Jewish. I never lost my beliefs; I never lost where I came from. When I was liberated from camp, my name was Marian Jakubowski--a Polish name. When I came into Mauthausen, see, all the papers didn't go with us, so I was going to be a *Polak*, and maybe I would have better chance of survival. But, still, I used to mingle with all of my Jewish friends.

I remember it like today. It was in April or March that the Red Cross came in to give out packages.

**Rosen:** April or March of 1945?

**Jacobs:** The problem is that I can visualize where I am and not think of the dates. They gave out packages to the Jewish people, French people, Dutch people; but not anyone from the Eastern countries--Poles, Russians, Czechs. My friend went over there and got a package. I said, "My God, for five years I was a Jew. Now I'm a Jew but with a Polish name. I'm going to get a package, too." I went over there and got my package, because I had a feeling that they didn't check so good anymore.

**Rosen:** I need to back up here for a moment. I'm a little confused. I may have misunderstood something. When you went to Mauthausen, were you given a uniform that had yellow on it at Mauthausen to indicate that you were Jewish?

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes, sure. Every time the Jewish people received this--any camp you came into, any concentration camp.

**Rosen:** So, you had a Polish name, but you did have the Jewish insignia.

**Jacobs:** No, I did not.

**Rosen:** At Mauthausen?

**Jacobs:** At Mauthausen I did not have a Jewish insignia.

**Rosen:** You did not have a Jewish insignia?

**Jacobs:** No.

**Rosen:** That's what I was a little confused by.

**Jacobs:** No, I didn't.

**Rosen:** You had the Jewish insignia back at...

**Jacobs:** Let me explain to you. You have to take chances. They knew I was Jewish.

**Rosen:** "They" being...?

**Jacobs:** Yes, but they were so mixed up already.

**Rosen:** Who was this "they" that knew you were Jewish?

**Jacobs:** The people surrounding me. The non-Jewish people and the Jewish people.

**Rosen:** Are you talking about the other prisoners, or are you talking about the Nazis?

**Jacobs:** The other prisoners, yes. I guess the Nazis knew, too. “Marian Jakubowski” sounds like a Polish name.

**Rosen:** But they knew you were Jewish.

**Jacobs:** Sure. That’s right.

**Rosen:** But you didn’t have to have a Jewish insignia?

**Jacobs:** Sometimes I wore it, sometimes not.

**Rosen:** Did you have more than one uniform?

**Jacobs:** No. See, the stripes were sewn on.

**Rosen:** Your stripes were sewn on. So you would rip them off sometimes?

**Jacobs:** And then I would put them back, yes.

**Rosen:** And then you would sew it back on? You had a needle and thread?

**Jacobs:** Sure, we got everything we could.

**Rosen:** You used it as it would be advantageous to you.

**Jacobs:** Sure. You see, when I came into a camp that had only Germans in the barracks or around in the room, I was a German. I spoke like a German.

**Rosen:** You mentioned that there was a lot of confusion toward the end.

**Jacobs:** Yes, lots of confusion. They didn’t check it as much as they should have checked it out. And I could feel

it; I could sense it. Before the liberation, we used to go by train to work. If we were to walk to the factory, we would walk the whole day and do nothing. They took us by train, and it took us a half-hour or something. And I remember seeing this farm.

Rosen: Now this is...?

Jacobs: In Gusen II in 1945. There used to be a farm on the hill. After we were liberated, we didn't have no food over there or nothing. I said, "I'm going to take a rifle, and I'm going to go over and kill a pig." I was going to shoot a pig. I took a rifle and went over there. There was a daughter and mother over there. I went up and I said, in German, "Ladies, do you know what was over here?" They said, "Yes, it was a camp." I said, "What kind of a camp?" They said, "Well, people used to go to work for Messerschmidt and so forth." I said, "Did you know it was a crematorium, too? It was a crematorium, too." She said, "No!" I said, "I used to pass by on Christmas Day and holidays, and the SS people and the guards used to sing and dance over there. You're going to tell me you didn't know what type of camp it was." They said, "No, we never knew. It was a camp, and we know people went to work." I said, "Did you know we were

prisoners? It was a concentration camp. Do you know about Mauthausen?" They said, "No." I took a look at her and her daughter, and I said, "Lady, where's your husband?" She said, "He's gone." Maybe he was a guard or something--who knows--or an SS man.

I said, "Lady, I'm a good guy. Why don't you hitch the wagon with your daughter and take off? In another half-hour or something, when the prisoners will come over here, number one, you're going to get raped. You are a good-looking woman, and you have a good-looking daughter. I'm not going to take advantage of you. I want you to go. I want you to be alive. Hitch and go." She listened and they left. I knew that half an hour or an hour later, there would be a bunch of prisoners that hadn't seen a woman. They were going to rape her, and they were going to kill her. I didn't have the heart. I don't believe in that.

I remember that I went to the barn and saw some pigs. I took the rifle, and I pulled the trigger. The gun went off, and I killed the pig. I got a sharp knife, and I cut off a big piece. It wasn't kosher, but I circumcised it before...(laughter). I'm joking.

Rosen: That's quite a contrast from the days when you were in the ghetto and you rode your bicycle from one

village to another to make sure a chicken would be cut properly by a rabbi to now when you are willing to do whatever it takes to survive.

Jacobs: Yes, that’s right. Yes, I killed it, and I took a couple of pieces. Other prisoners quickly came to cut off pieces. One was screaming. He lost his thumb.

Rosen: They were cutting the pig, and he cut his thumb off?

Jacobs: Yes, somebody cut him by mistake. I will never forget. He was screaming bloody murder. I came into the camp--to the barracks--and I said, “Guys, I got a piece of bacon.” I went to the lady at the farm, and I said, “I want bread,” and she gave me bread.

Rosen: You said you went to the lady. Are you talking about the one that you told to leave?

Jacobs: To take off, yes.

Rosen: And she gave you a piece of bread?

Jacobs: A loaf, yes. It was sourdough. It was delicious. I came in, and I also got a big pot from the farm. I didn’t eat. I cooked. It smelled from the bacon...it cooked and it smelled. They said, “Mike, let’s eat it.” I said, “Not now. It’s not ready yet. It has to get brown.” I knew what I was doing. Finally, I saw that it was very, very brown--the meat--and I took out the meat, and I put a piece of paper on the ground.

I took the big pot, and I poured it out. If they could have killed me, they would have. They said, “Mike, what are you doing?” I said, “You will thank me for it. No fat! Your stomach has shrunk. If you take the fat, God knows. You could get diarrhea, or maybe you are going to get killed.” They said, “Give us a piece of meat!” I said, “Sure.” The piece of meat wasn’t bigger than a walnut, less than a walnut.

Rosen: Less than a walnut.

Jacobs: Yes. It was a small piece.

Rosen: You parceled out pieces of the pork in sizes of less than walnuts.

Jacobs: Yes, they were small pieces. They were maybe about the size of a half of a walnut. They said, “That’s all we are going to get?” I said, “Yes, that’s all you are going to get today. Tomorrow you are going to get another piece.” I didn’t eat it. I did not. A friend of mine in the same barrack comes running. He is happy and jumping up and down. I said, “What are you so happy about? I know you are happy we are free.” He said, “Mendel, you wouldn’t believe it!” I looked at him, and I didn’t say nothing. He said he caught a chicken. I said, “What did you do with the chicken?” He cooked it. I said, “What happened to the meat?” He

said, “Who needs the meat?” He had a whole glass of chicken fat. I said, “What did you do with it?” He said, “I drank it.”

Rosen: He drank the chicken fat?

Jacobs: Yes. He walked away. He said he was tired. He was going to go to his bunk and take a nap. I was sitting around with a bunch of guys. I took a deep breath, and I said, “He’s supposed to walk out with me in a few days. He’s not going to.” They said, “Mendel, what are you? A doctor?” I said, “I’m not a doctor. When I was a young boy, I was always dreaming to be a doctor, but I knew I could never be a doctor. I would never have the opportunity in Poland to be a doctor. He’s going to die. I wish I could do something.” The next morning, we got up, and I gave everybody one slice again--smaller than the day before--and a smaller slice of bread. I said, “Let’s go over there to the barrack. Let’s take a little part of this.” We couldn’t come close to him. He busted up.

Rosen: What do you mean?

Jacobs: Diarrhea. He died. His stomach couldn’t take it.

Rosen: It dehydrated him? It caused him to have such bad diarrhea that he died?

**Jacobs:** It was the fat. His stomach couldn’t take it. His stomach busted open. He got diarrhea. That’s the reason I didn’t want the guys to have the fat.

**Rosen:** From the time that you were liberated...and what day was that?

**Jacobs:** This was the second or third day.

**Rosen:** Of May?

**Jacobs:** Of May, yes. May 7 or May 8, yes.

**Rosen:** How many more days do you spend in the camp before you leave?

**Jacobs:** I walked out on May 11 or 12.

**Rosen:** So you spent about ten more days?

**Jacobs:** No, less than a week. It was about five days that I spent in camp. That’s all.

**Rosen:** You said they came in around when?

**Jacobs:** May 5.

**Rosen:** May 5. And you left around May 10.

**Jacobs:** May 10, yes.

**Rosen:** You spent about five days in there.

**Jacobs:** Yes. Because on May 8 the Germans signed the surrender. I said, “That’s the reason I didn’t want to give you this kind of food--this kind of thing.” Do you know what we found out later on?

**Rosen:** What?

**Jacobs:** Hundreds of people died in Mauthausen. When the Americans came in and the people looking like nothing but bones and skin, they gave them everything they wanted--bread and fat and their rations and chocolate. People died like my friend died! When the medics came in a little while later--a few days later--they said, “What’s going on? How come the prisoners are dying? What are you doing to them?” They said, “We give them everything to eat that they want! If they want a loaf of bread and meat and we give it, they eat like crazy!” The medics said, “Oh! We are going to stop them from dying. Put everybody on a diet and give them a little bit and a little bit.” People survived.

I was in camp, and my cousin...I had some cousins before the war in South Africa, in Johannesburg. My cousin who went to South Africa after the war; another cousin took him to South Africa. It was my first cousin on my father’s side. We were talking about concentration camps, and I said, “Shlomo, tell me what camp you were in. What camp were you in when you were liberated?” He said he was liberated from Mauthausen. Can you imagine? I was in Mauthausen with him, too, not knowing he was over there. He was in a different

barrack, and we never went from one barrack to another.

Rosen: You mentioned that Gusen II had a crematorium.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Did it also have gas chambers?

Jacobs: Yes. There is a small crematorium and a small gas chamber that is still over there as a memorial.

Rosen: In Mauthausen?

Jacobs: No, in Gusen II.

Rosen: Yes, and also in Mauthausen?

Jacobs: I guess...see, I start to visualize the torture chambers. Yes, Mauthausen is the one. They had some, but not as...you don’t see the crematoria over there in Mauthausen, where it was, but in Gusen II you saw them. You saw the crematoria, and you saw the gas chambers. Lots of people come over there now. They put flowers and pictures inside the gas chambers for people from Austria or from Poland or from other countries that they know were killed in Gusen II. They put the pictures over there of their loved ones--the mother or cousins come over. The camps are gone.

Rosen: What do you think of the Russians at this time? I’m asking this because you mentioned that you had heard of the Russians approaching. It seems like it was a

bit of a surprise when the Americans actually liberated the camp.

Jacobs: In Auschwitz-Birkenau...I think the Russians stopped over there to come into the camp, but no prisoners were liberated because they were going to get killed before the Russians went in. That’s my humble belief.

Rosen: That the Soviets stopped their advances so that the Nazis could have time to kill the rest of the prisoners?

Jacobs: That’s correct. They say that Stalin killed his own people--between fifty and sixty million people--and he didn’t want to liberate any of the camps. I believe they could have driven in with one tank and liberated them.

I remember when they took us up from Birkenau to Auschwitz--took me out--one SS man walked with us, and he said, “When the Russians come in and they catch us, would you tell them that I wasn’t bad at all?” This SS man wasn’t bad at all, anyway. He used to watch us, and when a higher-up was coming, he used to scream, and he used to hit and everything. But later on, he would say, “I’m sorry.” He wanted to show us that he was taking care of us. He said, “I hope they are marching in right now--the Russians. We won’t have

to go on the death march." He knew we were going to go on the death march. They did not. They could march in.

Rosen: The Russians could.

Jacobs: Sure! Why did they come in five days later? Why did they stop? They had nobody to fight over there! Most of the high-caliber SS people had escaped already from the camps and went farther into Germany. It was the same thing in Gusen II. In Gusen II, when the Allies came closer, all the SS people except the commandant left. Do you know who they brought in to watch us? The sixty-five and seventy-year-old people to watch us. The rest of them ran away.

Rosen: You're saying the SS brought in senior citizens?

Jacobs: Yes, that's right, to take care of us, to watch us.

Rosen: Austrian civilians?

Jacobs: No, they put them in uniform.

Rosen: They took Austrian senior citizens and put them in charge and gave them uniforms.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: In the meantime, the SS did what?

Jacobs: The SS escaped. That's what I'm saying. I was told that, and I think I believe it's true. In the mountains we had factories that were not finished yet.

**Rosen:** Factories that were being built?

**Jacobs:** Yes, in the mountains. They were what we called *Stollen* ("dugouts") inside the mountains. We were told that two kegs of dynamite were in front of one of the unfinished factories. With two kegs over there, that meant that they were going to march all of the 7,500 people over there, blow up the entrance, and we would suffocate and choke to death. I said to myself--and there were lots of us--"If this comes to a head, we are not going to walk in. We are going to put up a fight." I was told they had an argument, a discussion, between the commandant and a leader of the senior citizens. It was about who should do it. I was told that the guy told the SS man that he was not going to do it. The commandant said, "You are going to do it." They couldn't make up their minds. While they were going back and forth, the Americans walked in, and we are alive.

**Rosen:** Otherwise, they would have...?

**Jacobs:** We could have blown up.

**Rosen:** ...been blown up by two kegs of dynamite.

**Jacobs:** Oh, yes. In the Nazi camps, before the Allies came in, half an hour before, they used to kill the whole camp.

That’s the way we had to live. I hope I was a help to you. I explained the way I lived. You went into more details than when I usually lecture about, but I’m glad.

**Rosen:** In fact, I think the fact that we were able to have this conversation...

**Jacobs:** For so many hours (chuckle).

**Rosen:** ...for so many hours...I hope my professor is hearing this (chuckle).

**Jacobs:** We went from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. because it is important to go into details.

**Rosen:** I think the fact that you said that as early as 1944 you were already planning on wanting to survive so that you could pass this story on to others so that those who died didn’t die in vain as long as someone could record it. With a project like this, I think that you’re helping make that dream possible. I thank you for your help.

**Jacobs:** Sure. If you are transcribing, and you have any questions--something maybe was left out or something--don’t hesitate to give me a call to fit it in, because, as you said, it is going to be in the library over there, and those people can read. I didn’t go into the atrocities as much because I want people to

know more that I wanted to live; and that the future generation will find out that it makes no difference what kind of horrible situation you are in, it's worthwhile fighting to survive.

Rosen: A few last thoughts come to mind before we wrap this up. When you were finally liberated and had this concept of freedom, where did you think you were going to go and do?

Jacobs: When I was liberated, my thought was to go back to school to get my further education and be a physical education teacher--to go out to the people who were in concentration camps and teach them to develop their body and bring back their bodies to how they used to be before the war. That was my dream and my goal, and when I went out from camp, that's exactly what I did. I went back to school. I got my teacher's certificate. This was a big accomplishment for me--to go into camps after the liberation or to go around to people in cities and get them together and organize sports clubs and to teach them how to teach other people. We had exercise, or aerobics, as we call it today.

Rosen: When you talk about how you were in good shape, very quick and agile as a youth, that just seems to be consistent with the way you treated your own body.

Also, it sounds like you wanted to rebuild your own physique to what it was like as a healthy youth before the war.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: Did you plan on going back to your hometown in Poland?

Jacobs: No, it never crossed my mind to go back to Poland because I had nothing to go back to in my city--Konin. But in 1975, a group of Americans from all over the United States came to Poland, and they wanted me to be the guide--the tour guide. That was the first time I went to Poland. The first time I went to Poland, I went to Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Over the next few years, 1976-1983, I used to go back with groups, but on my last trip in 1986, I took my older son. I didn't mention that, did I?

Rosen: No.

Jacobs: In 1987, I took my son number two; in 1988, I took my son number three, my youngest son. I didn't want to take any groups. I wanted to be with my son and my wife. I wanted to pay the full attention to my son, step-by-step, where I was brought up. We went step-by-step to which ghetto and camp I went in and how I was liberated. This past year I went with my wife, alone, to go back to the city. When I went back to my

city, my wife said, “Mike, why don’t you stop?” I ran around like a teenager. I was turning back the clock to when I was a young kid, a teenager running around in the streets. I looked at the homes, at the windows, at the buildings where people used to stay, and I could say who used to live where. I can call out the names. I’m going back to my old synagogue where the city of Konin has restored it to exactly how it used to be before the war. No Jewish people live in the city. They made a museum and a library for kids, but the big sign in front of the door says it used to be a synagogue.

Rosen: Was this the synagogue that the Germans made a stable out of and then burned?

Jacobs: That’s correct, but the synagogue was not burned. Can you imagine me walking inside the synagogue? There were no benches. There were tables for the kids to read and study. I can look to my right, and I can see my father and my brothers sitting. I can go up the middle to the pulpit, and I can stay over here on this side (gesture), and I can see my friend, Lutek.

Rosen: You can imagine all of this from when you were a kid growing up?

**Jacobs:** Yes, sure. But the synagogue is like before the war. All the painting is exactly like it was. They brought a special artist from Vienna to put it back like it was--from the pictures. I have slides of how it looked when I came in 1975. I have all the slides of how they started to rebuild and restore it. I look over here (gesture) and see my friend Lutek from New Jersey, and I look over here (gesture), and there is my brother and my other brother. It was so quiet. My kids said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Oh, my God, I'm singing." I looked upstairs--it used to be that the women were separate from the men--and I can see my mother looking down. I'm visualizing. I'm back home. People ask me, "Why are you going back to Poland? What for?" I say, "I go back because I want to say to myself, 'I'm back. I'm free.'" Of course, I had nothing to go back to, but I can see the house, and I can see my parents. It gives me lots of inner strength--going back.

**Rosen:** When you were released...you've already talked about how you knew your family had been put to death already. By 1942, you had heard the rumors about the deaths in Auschwitz and Treblinka and your brother's death among the partisans. You knew you didn't have

any nuclear family left. What about any cousins or property? You said you were renting a house in Poland at the time when you lived there?

Jacobs: When I went back to visit?

Rosen: I was wondering if you felt like you had a home or a place?

Jacobs: Yes, because the home that belonged to the four sisters--my mother and her three sisters--which they inherited from my grandfather, still stands across from the synagogue. It is now an office--a government office. My uncle's house still stands. The house I used to live in, the Germans destroyed the whole block. My cousin, who passed away this year in Canada, could have sold the house, but he didn't. He was afraid that somebody from the family maybe survived and would say, "How come you sold the house?" But the government took it away after five years. They turned it back to the government.

No, I wouldn't like to live in Poland. I like to go to visit. I'm going next year. I have had lots of people call me: "Mike, we want to go with you to Poland." I tell the story how it is. I don't mince nothing. When I took people to Auschwitz-Birkenau and later on to Treblinka or Majdanek, I tell how it was.

I don’t try to hide anything. When I come into Auschwitz-Birkenau, I can see every stone. I remember everything because I inscribed it into my mind. It’s hard to believe, not knowing from one second to the other whether or not I’m going to be alive, that I always inscribed in my mind every day of life--every day what I did, everyday happenings. I inscribed it into my mind. I used to tell people, my friends, and they would think I was crazy.

Rosen: You mentioned that the government took back the property that your family owned after five years.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: I was wondering if you could just explain that.

Jacobs: It was the law. It was from 1945 to 1950. If nobody claimed the property, then it will revert back to the government.

Rosen: You’ve indicated that you knew where you weren’t going to go. You weren’t going back to Poland.

Jacobs: Yes.

Rosen: And you seemed to have indicated that you weren’t going back because you didn’t feel you had reason to go back, that your family had been exterminated. Did you have any idea of where you did want to go?

Jacobs: When I was approached in 1975?

**Rosen:** What I'm asking here is, in 1945 did you know where you wanted to go?

**Jacobs:** No, not at all. I went into Linz, and I was staying in Linz for a while. At this time they said that there was a special organization to take us out from Linz, Austria, to go to Germany. They put us in boxcars on a train, and we traveled to Mittenwald--Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Bavaria, on the lower part close to Austria. They put us in barracks where the German soldiers used to be stationed. We were waiting over there for the opportunity for them to take us over the mountains over Brenner Pass to Italy.

**Rosen:** You were going to take another train down to Germany?

**Jacobs:** No, walk to the mountains.

**Rosen:** Walk to the mountains.

**Jacobs:** Walk to the mountains over to Brenner Pass, and from over there they would pick us up in Italy and take us to Israel. I was over there, and I said, "I'm not going to stay in camp and wait," so I went down to the city, in Mittenwald where the Americans used to be stationed. I went into the kitchen, and I said, "Can I work over here--clean up and everything?

**Rosen:** You said you went to a kitchen of...?

**Jacobs:** The American soldiers.

**Rosen:** So you were on an American base, or you were in an area where the Americans had set up camp.

**Jacobs:** That's correct.

**Rosen:** And you went into one of their military kitchens?

**Jacobs:** Yes, I decided to work. I said I wanted to help clean up and everything, and they said, "Sure." I was going every day, and I took my friend, Lutek, from New Jersey, and I said, "You stay in the city, and if I get some food, I'll bring it out and some other things." He said, "Fine." As I went back in the evening to the camp we were in, everybody was gone. They had to take them out very quickly to the mountains to go to Italy and from Italy to Israel.

I was stuck in Mittenwald with my friend. In the meantime, quite a few Jewish people used to already live in Mittenwald because from Dachau they had a death march back and forth. Maybe they thought they were going to die out. Seventy-five people died on the road. I was stuck in Mittenwald with my friend. The American provost marshal had confiscated the hotel in Mittenwald from a Nazi, and we used to live in the hotel over there. I organized right away. I was one of the first organizers of a sports club in Germany. It was the second sports club in Germany, in

the American zone, to be organized. We played ping-pong; we played soccer. I organized a soccer club and everything.

I said to my friends, “I’m going to go back to school.” That’s what I did. I went back to school, and I got my teacher’s certificate. That’s when I came to stay in Germany.

Rosen: From Austria, then, you went to Germany.

Jacobs: Right.

Rosen: What city in Germany?

Jacobs: Mittenwald.

Rosen: Mittenwald. So you actually ended up living in Germany.

Jacobs: From 1945 to 1951, in June.

Rosen: In June of 1951...

Jacobs: I then immigrated to the United States. I have one more story to tell you.

Rosen: Okay.

Jacobs: Then I will let you go. Being in Birkenau in 1944--October, November, December--where the quarantine camp was...that’s what camp I was in. Here is this camp over here--quarantine--and right over here were the gas chambers and the crematoria [sketches a map].

**Rosen:** You mentioned the quarantine camp at Birkenau. You're distinguishing the quarantine camp from...

**Jacobs:** ...the working camp. We had separate camps within Birkenau, A, B, C, and D. You were brought in over there, and they gave you...if they said you were going to stay and work in Auschwitz-Birkenau, they tattooed a number on a person's arm and the same number on the shirt. They sent you back to different camps. That's what they did. They quarantined you to send you to different camps.

**Rosen:** So the quarantine camp was only a temporary camp.

**Jacobs:** Correct.

**Rosen:** How long would a person typically be in the quarantine camp?

**Jacobs:** Three to five days. It depended.

**Rosen:** Until they were relocated to other camps.

**Jacobs:** That's correct, other camps, or they stayed in Birkenau-Auschwitz. If they were sent to another camp out of Auschwitz, they didn't give them a number.

**Rosen:** Okay. They would have been given another number once they got to the other camp.

**Jacobs:** That's correct. They brought in a full group of women from the women's camp who had been in the hospital. This is what I was told.

**Rosen:** The quarantine camp? They brought in a full...

**Jacobs:** ...women's camp.

**Rosen:** ...women's camp.

**Jacobs:** Yes, from the women's camp. From the hospital they brought them into the quarantine camp.

**Rosen:** How many women were there?

**Jacobs:** Oh, lots of them. Lots of them.

**Rosen:** Hundreds?

**Jacobs:** More than that. There were maybe 1,000 or 2,000 of them.

**Rosen:** Thousands of them.

**Jacobs:** Yes, it was a big camp. There were lots of them. I couldn't count them, you know (chuckle). That was a step closer to the gas chambers and the crematoria. They were pale, skinny women. Some of them could hardly walk. They emptied the place over there, and then they'd bring in some more, bring in some more.

When I came home from work, I used to walk up and down the fence. I said, "God knows, there may be a cousin, maybe a friend, maybe a sister--who knows--that went to Treblinka that I was told they were killed. But, God knows, maybe not. Maybe they were taken into Auschwitz. Who knows?" I could not find anybody, but all of a sudden I saw a girl walking,

and I stopped and said, “Hi.” She said, “Hi.” Her hair was shaved off. I said, “Where are you from?” She said, “From Poland.” I said, “Where from in Poland?” She said, “From Lodz.” I said, “We were pretty close neighbors. What are you doing over here?” I knew. She said they were in the hospital, and they took them all over here. They didn’t know why. I said, “Okay.” The time came that we should walk away. I said, “I’ll see you tomorrow.” She said, “Fine. The same place.” My barrack was over here (gesture)--Barrack 17--and we met over on the other side, because we had the barrack sitting over here, and here was strip and the other side of the barrack [marks on his map]. But the barrack used to back up to a road running along the fence.

Rosen: What would you say the distance was between your barrack and where you wanted to meet that girl the next day?

Jacobs: Fifteen feet.

Rosen: Fifteen?

Jacobs: Yes, that’s very close.

Rosen: She was in a different barrack.

Jacobs: Yes, she was on the other side of the fence. It was separated by electrified barbed wire.

**Rosen:** You were talking with each other on a different side of this electric fence?

**Jacobs:** Yes, about three feet away.

**Rosen:** About three feet.

**Jacobs:** Yes, we were three or four feet away or less. I don’t know. If I could have measured it, I would have (chuckle).

**Rosen:** She was just outside the camp?

**Jacobs:** No, she was in camp.

**Rosen:** She was in camp. Both of you are in camp?

**Jacobs:** We were both in camp, yes. We were separated by electrified barbed wire. Every camp was separated by electrified barbed wire. Camp A was separated from Camp B by barbed wire, as was C and D and so on. Every camp was separated. That’s why the barracks were over here (gesture). Here was electrified barbed wire, and here was electrified barbed wire [points to map]. They were all separated.

**Rosen:** There were two rows of electrified barbed wire?

**Jacobs:** No, there was one row...

**Rosen:** And you had already mentioned that Auschwitz-Birkenau was actually three different camps, A, B and C?

**Jacobs:** There was Auschwitz Number 1, Auschwitz Number 2, and Auschwitz Number 3. What I’m saying is, in Birkenau

was Birkenau, a camp, but in the camp were other camps, like, Camp A, Camp B...that's what we called them. We had also--I want to mention to you--"Mexico." It was not finished yet. Over there were women. I don't know. There were a couple hundred thousand or more women.

Rosen: You're saying they were building a fourth camp?

Jacobs: No, not a fourth camp. It was Birkenau.

Rosen: Birkenau.

Jacobs: Yes. Let me explain to you. We had a men's camp and the woman's camp in Birkenau. That was the camp. In this camp we have other camps--divided--A, B, C, and D. Across from the men's camp--across the street--they were finishing another camp. We named it "Mexico."

Rosen: The prisoners...?

Jacobs: ...named it, yes.

Rosen: They named it "Mexico."

Jacobs: "Mexico."

Rosen: Okay.

Jacobs: In this camp "Mexico" were some women. It was winter, and they were dressed in wedding gowns, sheer gowns--all falling apart. That's the way they were dressed.

**The next night I went over to talk to the girl that I had seen in the quarantine camp. I threw over a package of cigarettes. I said, “When you go into your barrack, give the woman in charge of your barrack only five cigarettes.” She said, “Why?” I said, “Tell her tomorrow you will have five more.” She said, “Why?” I said, “When the SS people come in for selections to take out to send you away, they won’t tell where. The barrack leader will say, ‘Don’t take her because I need her over here.’” That’s exactly what happened. All the times the SS came in to select people for the gas chambers, the block leader said, “No, don’t take her. I need her. She’s a good worker. She knows what she’s doing.”**

**One day I looked at her Holland shoes. I said, “Do you need some shoes? I went to my barrack leader and said, “Here’s a package of cigarettes. Get me some shoes for a woman.” He brought me the shoes, but they were “grandma shoes.” Do you know “grandma shoes?”**

**Rosen:** **Can you describe those?**

**Jacobs:** **Like a grandmother’s.**

**Rosen:** **Lace them?**

**Jacobs:** **Lace them up, yes. I used to call them “grandma shoes.” I threw them over, and she got the “grandma shoes.”**

**What I’m trying to tell you is that I could not wait to come back to camp and talk to this girl. We had a romance going. What was our discussion? It was our thing. We used to talk: “Tonight we are walking in the park, holding hands and sitting on a bench or sitting under a tree listening to the trees--leaves--making music. The birds are singing.” It was beautiful. We used to tell stories to each other. We used to tell that when we are free, when we are liberated, we are going to get married. We are going to have children, and we are going to build a new family. That was going on day after day after day. How can you explain two people standing separated by electrified barbed wire, not knowing whether tomorrow he’s going to see her or she’s going to see me and talking romance, talking about love, talking about caring? It was one of the most beautiful evenings in camp. This was going on day in and day out. Everything was nice.**

**On the death march, I used to look at the legs to see if I saw the “grandma shoes.” If I didn’t, I**

figured maybe she survived. In 1945, my cousin found out that I was alive. He was told that I was killed, remember?

Rosen: Yes.

Jacobs: He came to Mittenwald. When he saw me, he looked at me. He said, “It couldn’t be.” I said, “What’s the matter? You’re not looking at a ghost. You’re looking at your cousin!” He couldn’t believe it. He stopped, he looked, he couldn’t move. Finally, he jumped and he started crying and embracing me. He couldn’t stop crying--he is twenty years older than I am. I said, “Okay, cry it out if you’re going to feel better. I’m alive. You’re touching my flesh.” He lived in Munich. I had to go to Munich, anyway. It was Friday. I was a member of the National Sports Committee--on the executive committee. I was a member of it. I came to Feldafing, which used to be a military camp for the Germans. It was not far from Munich. When Eisenhower came in, he threw out all the Germans from over there and put in all the people from Dachau--the Jews from that camp. The train used to go very slowly in those days. It stopped in every village and every city. It stopped over there because the people from Feldafing wanted to go to Munich.

**I looked out, and I saw a girl walking with a man. I looked and I said, “My God! I guess that’s her!” The way she walked, I recognized her. I said, “Nah.”**

**She came into the same train, and she came into the same compartment. I said to my cousin, “Why don’t you give the girl the seat?” Usually, I’m supposed to give my seat because I’m younger. He was twenty years older than I. She sat down, and I was staring at her. I was staring at her very hard. I could see she started to move, started to get very uncomfortable: “Why is he staring at me?”**

**I said to her, “What camp were you in?” She said, “Birkenau-Auschwitz.” I said, “When?” She said, “From 1944 to 1945.” I said, “Where was your last camp?” She said they took her out from the women’s camp to the men’s camp--from the hospital over there. I said, “Do you know what? I remember when I was in Birkenau; and I knew a guy, and I guess you were the woman standing in front of the fence with that guy. I was always listening to the beautiful romance that you were discussing. That was going on day in and day out. I felt so good listening to the way you both were carrying on.”**

We talked and talked, and she said, “You know, I would like to meet this guy again.” I couldn’t hold it anymore. I said, “What would happen if the same guy that gave you cigarettes, gave you soup, gave you the ‘grandma shoes,’ gave you bread, was sitting close to you?” She took a look at me, and she made a loud scream. Everybody started to come running. They were thinking that I was a *Capo*. She said, “No, no, he’s not a *Capo*! He’s safe!”

The train stopped in Munich, and we walked off the train. My cousin walks down...oh, yes...we’re sitting over there, and she says, “Meet my husband.”

Rosen: She had already married?

Jacobs: Yes. After the war lots of boys and lots of girls married right away to find companionship, to build a family again. “Madam,” I said, “what are you going to Munich for?” She said they were going to the university to learn to be physicians. He walked on with my cousin--her husband--and I walked on with her. Believe you me, she grabbed my arm, and I was thinking she was going to break it. We walked and she said, “Do you remember what we promised ourselves?” I said, “No.” She said, “Don’t you remember? When we find ourselves, we are going to get married, and we are

**going to have children." I said, "You're married." She said, "Mendel, we promised ourselves, didn't we?" I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "We wanted to talk about beautiful things to keep us going. We promised ourselves that we were going to get married when we found ourselves." I said, "You're married." She said, "I'm going to divorce my husband." I said, "Come on, let's think about this."**

**Finally, we changed partners. She went with my cousin, I went with her husband, and he said, "Mendel, before we got married she said to me that if she finds the guy that helped her survive--saved her life--she will divorce me." He said he was thinking that this would be a one-in-a-million chance.**

**She asked me where I lived. I said, "I travel." It was true. I didn't want to tell her where I lived in Mittenwald because I didn't want to break up the marriage. I never thought I would see her again.**

**In 1951, I was sitting in Munich in June, and I was in the basement waiting for my name to come up to go to the United States. I was sitting and waiting, and somebody's hitting on my shoulders. I looked back, and it was her. She asked me what I'm doing over here. I said, "I'm waiting for a friend. If the name should**

**come up as he couldn’t make it to Munich, I’m waiting for his name to come up.” As I was watching, my name came up. She said, “Is that your name?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Where are you going?” I said, “New York.” She said, “Mendel, I’m still waiting to divorce my husband.” I said to her, “I’ll tell you something. I promised myself that I would not marry anyone in Germany. I will not marry until I come to a country where I will settle down. Then at this time I am going to marry.” She said, “When I come to New York, I will look you up, and we’ll get married.” (Chuckle)**

**But what I tried to really say is that it was so beautiful when we talked about it. Myself, I could not wait to come back to camp to see her and talk to her. In my whole mind the whole day was what I’m going to talk about this evening, what we are going to do this evening. But, I never took advantage of this girl. I could have taken advantage. I could have gone over to the women’s barracks and paid off the leader of the barracks and do what I want to. My friends used to say, “Mendel, you’re crazy. Why don’t you? You don’t know if you are going to live till tomorrow.” I said, “Look, that’s not my way to do it. If you help somebody, you help with a full heart. Don’t take**

**advantage of the circumstances.” I’m glad I did. She’s alive. Where she is, God knows. I don’t want to know. That was my romance in Auschwitz-Birkenau.**

**In 1988, when I was in Poland, a couple from Dallas went to Europe, and they met us in Krakow, and we took them to Auschwitz-Birkenau along with another guy from Dallas who works as a lawyer for the Dallas Independent School District. We walked through Birkenau, and another Polish girl...I mean, she is living in the United States, but her relatives live in Poland. They go for six months in the United States and six months in Poland. I went to the barbed wire, and I told the story as it was when I was in camp. They said later on that they could see me talking to this girl, walking while gesturing with my hands without realizing I could see her. As I looked back, they were crying. And I think that’s right. I think I spoke to her. I completely went back to 1944, and when I started talking to her, I could think; and all of a sudden, without realizing it, I was throwing imaginary cigarettes, shoes, and bread. They said, “Mike, what are you throwing?” I said, “Cigarettes.” I relived it. It was really nice.**

**Rosen:** It sounds like throughout your experiences in the camps, one thing that kept you going was the hope for a better future.

**Jacobs:** Sure. That’s what I want people to know. It makes no difference what kind of circumstances you are in, how bad it is, the ups and downs; you always can bounce back. Always say to yourself, “Tomorrow’s going to be a nicer day. I will do it.” Think positively. That’s what I believed in then, and I still believe in it. It’s a better future. Don’t let yourself down. Always say to yourself, “No, I’m not going to let myself down.” That’s what I did.

**Rosen:** That still applies today, also. Thank you for your time and patience, again, for this interview.

**Jacobs:** You can tell your professor that our interview was an eight-hour interview. It was eight-and-a-half hours (chuckle).

**Rosen:** (Chuckle) Thanks very much, Mr. Jacobs.

**Jacobs:** I thank you very much.

[End of interview]