00:00:04

>> Herz: ...killing of German guards of Jews or other prisoners. This was the way he ended, and for added measure, we were forced to march by the execution place slowly and were forced to look at it. We were forced like, later on in the American army, “Eyes, right.” And by golly, we had to see this sorry, sorry spectacle. I am not sure whether -- as I said before, I cannot tell you whether I feel pity. By that time, “pity” was a word that had been expunged from our dictionaries. We had no longer pity, except for ourselves.

That was Lieberose. At night -- we had a stove in the barracks, and at night, we had a bucket where we had to urinate. The urination was in the barracks because it was subzero temperature, and you could hear the prisoners utilize this bucket. It was loud and noisy, and we had to carry that outside and empty it outside. And believe me, the buckets were always overfull, and much as we tried to avoid getting splashed by urine, it never happened because we had no food, so therefore, we drank. The only thing that was available to us was water. We developed *Ödems* because the water settled in our knees. We had difficulty, all of us, except, of course, the well-fed German Kapos. We still were working on details, digging ditches, unloading cement bags, whatever it was. One of the -- it was bitterly cold, and one of our ways of trying to shield ourselves against the cold, we had exactly one small, thin jacket, our prison jacket, and one undershirt. And in the bitter cold, we had no socks. We had no gloves. We tried to steal the paper bags and place them between us, between our backs and our front, to have some insulation. That was strictly forbidden, and I was beaten severely for having this under my jacket. The only way they found it is, when we entered the camp after our work detail, they sometimes made body controls to feel whether we had secreted something, discovered that I had a cement bag, an empty

bag, the paper bag on me. That earned me no food that day and a beating and standing at the gate with several others who had the same offense, had committed the same offense.

At night, instead of going to sleep, we, the Jews, were chosen to guard a woodpile because there was very little firewood. The other barracks tended to steal this. To avoid this, we were forced to stand outside in this bitter cold in the snow and guard our woodpile. I cannot tell you what thoughts I had. I had many, many thoughts to think of. Many of them were about what religion was doing to us; what religion was doing for us; why we were not being liberated; why the entire world, and this has occurred to us many times, why we seemed to have been forgotten or why we were, indeed, forgotten by the entire world; why we had no sign of anything. The German population kept very much away from us because we were described as the lowest of the low criminal element. We had no pity or sympathy from them at all.

What else is there to say? We stayed in that camp, and one of the highlights -- you must know now how desperate we were. One of the highlights was, German civilians fleeing from the Russians made it as far as the camp, and their horse died. And our cooks went out and got the horse and carved him up and put a soup together, some stew, and we had for the first time meat. One horse didn't go very far for 8,000 prisoners, but they used everything. And I'm sure by that time, all the religious Jews decided to eat what came their way. Even if they did know there was horsemeat in there, it made no longer very much of a difference. You ate because you had to hope for the next day. You had to get through that one day.

So, again, we tried to make time go by. We tried to visualize what we would do when we got out. We had, actually, no reference point at all of when or whether we'd find -- we had hopes that we would find all of our family members again. That was how we lived from day to day.

>> Interviewer: Did you ever see your brother?

>> Herz: I did not see anyone of my family ever again until I met my brother in New York about two years after the war, or maybe one year and a half after the war. I had only one sign that he was alive because one of the people that I worked with in one of the camps said, “You look like this kid I knew from Cologne.” And I said, “What was his name?” “His name was Karl Herz.” And I said, “Well, that was -- that is my brother. Where did you see him?” This comes towards the last three months of my life in the concentration camp.

>> Interviewer: How long were you at this --

>> Herz: At this camp, I was fairly long time, from August till January, February -- January, I believe, ’45. Then something happened that, again, some of it I only heard from a German official later. I do know what happened to me. At the time, we found out -- we were working under the SS guard, and the first time that I know that there was an invasion or had been an invasion, that I found a scrap of paper saying, “Allied Troops in the Hürtgen Forest,” and the SS deigned to talk to us, the SS guard, and he said, “You don’t have to get your hopes up, you Jewish pigs, because before anything happens, we will kill you all. But nothing will happen because our Führer has the V-weapons, the *Vergeltungswaffen.* The invasion force will be annihilated, they will be driven back into the sea, and you go on until you drop dead.” That was -- I mean, this is not hearsay. I was talking to him -- or, well, he actually talked to me. We did not say anything more than “Yes, sir,” or “No, sir.” But at that time, we knew that the invasion had taken place and that there was battle in the Hürtgen Forest, the Battle of the Bulge, as it turned out later. We were still at the other end of Germany, near Frankfurt an der Oder. The Russian front was our concern. We didn’t care anymore who liberated us. We just wanted to be liberated.

So after that time, then we were given, all of a sudden, two loaves of bread in the morning. Instead of going to work, we

were given two loaves of bread, take your blankets from your bed and assembled by barracks. And then came one thing that you have heard of many, many times. I probably have no idea -- I cannot tell whether the other people, the survivors that you have interviewed, know about this. I know that Mr. Ben Stern related something similar. Then came something that we called -- that is then later on called the death march, and it was truly a death march because of the 8,000 people that left Lieberose, barely 1,500 arrived at the main camp. What I tell you now, the section, upon leaving the camp, I did not know until I called a German official for finding out whether one could visit Lieberose and see the ancient sites of the camps. As he said -- he says, "There is hardly anything left of Lieberose. Lieberose is still there." I said, "Did you know about it?" "Yes," he said, "we know about it because we have made them into memorial places for our East German population." These were still the East German Communists that we are talking about, but he was an official in the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. I said, "What do you know about it?" "Well," he said, "when you left, all the prisoners that were not able to move or looked sick were assembled in sick bay, and the building was set afire; was doused with gasoline and was set afire. After you had left, in the afternoon, the building was set afire, and the SS shot everyone that tried to come out of the building or to try and save himself out of the building." None of the people that was in the building died, and there were some 700 people in the two barracks that were declared sick bays. That was the one group of people that had actually nothing to do with me, but because it was Lieberose, and because I was there, it may have been that some friends also perished there.

We marched. It was snowing. We were exhausted by the time we were reaching our first destination. People already started to break down after seven, eight hours of marching, and we were told, "If you cannot march any further, sit down by the side of the road. A wagon will come, and we'll pick you up." The wagon

that came and picked them up? There was no such thing. I knew this because when we had marched about 10, 15 minutes later and the end of the column had passed by there -- the end of the column had the kitchen utensils and some favorite Kapos. It was drawn by human beings, this wagon. The camp records, whatever was on there, I don't recall. We would hear a few shots, you know, and then of course, you know it could be partisans, it could be anything, the battle coming closer. But anyway, what it was, it was the end of those people that could no longer make it.

The second day was worse than the first. We had no place to rest. The German guards made themselves huge bonfires where they sat around and were at least warm. We had no such thing. We froze. And this, I mean all, including me. I was no better. We had no clothing, no protective clothing, no coats. Our shoes were nothing, wooden clogs. No socks. We froze, and our bread, I think we had eaten after the second day, or if we had some, I do not recall. We were getting weaker and weaker, and, again, I must related something that was told to me by the German official later, that a large group of people, mostly Russians and Poles, were assembled out of this march. This march was at least a mile to 2 mile along the road. It was 8,000 people. That they had simply gotten together because they could no longer figure what to do with these people. They grabbed together anyone that was weak and pulled them out of the rank and said, "There will be trucks coming to pick you up." And they massacred -- again, we heard these volleys, but we did not know whether it was battle or something. The war was coming closer. That they had massacred, and they found the mass grave there of some 700 Russian and Polish prisoners, Jews, whatever it was, that could no longer make it.

We marched -- I cannot tell you what it was. We dragged. We marched. We finally -- it would be only a repetition of what I have said. Bread? We had nothing. Water? We dipped up some snow. The guards had these Schmeisser machine pistols and were walking

alongside. They were not happy because they had to march on foot to guide us. They had also no beds to sleep in, and they were surly, and the slightest infraction was a beating with these hard Schmeisser guns. I did not receive any beatings. I kept to the German Kapos because I could talk with them in German. Perhaps that was my salvation. In one of the places, we had some Norwegian prisoners. In one of these places was a large barn. I found in the straw something that did save my life. A Norwegian prisoner had lost a bottle nearly full of cod liver oil. I still had some bread left. I had never had a great liking for cod liver oil. I relished this cod liver oil and shared it with my friend, the one who had saved my life. We ate cod liver oil on bread with salt. It tasted like the finest delicacy you had ever had because it sustained us. Our body was able to absorb it. I don't know whether it means anything, but in retrospect, I know it saved my life. I finished that bottle. It gave me the strength to hold out till I got finally to the main camp in Sachsenhausen.

I may have left something unsaid in Lieberose. I don't know what it was. Religious services? Yes. Some of the Jews did some prayer. Some Jews still kept the holidays, fasted on Yom Kippur, jealously guarding their piece of bread till the fast was over. The rabbis told them all rules are -- how shall I say -- are voided for this time in your life. No Jewish rules, no ritual applies. You are in danger of your life. But many of them did anyhow. They felt it was -- it sustained them. Me, the only thing that sustained me was my hope that I wanted to see the end. I may have had feeling of vengeance, but it didn't even carry that far. I believe that I could not even conceive of slitting the throat of a German or putting him up against the wall and shooting him. Number one, this is not how German Jews or even Polish Jews or any kind of Jews -- this is not how we think. We couldn't do that. Vengeance is mine. Well, it wasn't mine. I only hoped that I would get out alive and see my family again.

So from day to day, I lived with the hope of getting out. It sustained us. We performed whatever was required of us. We suffered. Or should I say -- if you wish me to, I'll say I suffered. But I cannot, I cannot divorce myself from the group of people in whose midst I was. We tried to steal each other's bread. My friend and I, I'm sorry to say that we tried. We tried to steal another prisoner's bread. Our plight was so desperate that we stole from each other. I am a law-abiding citizen now. I ran for the House of Representatives of the -- for the House of Representatives in South Carolina. Should I say I'm ashamed that I did it? Would you say that I should be ashamed that I did? We were reduced. Our humanity was gone.

Anyhow, we arrived in Berlin, and we were given a luxury that I never had: a ride first-class on the German subway. Beautiful. We saw the stations flash by: Friedrichstraße, Augustenhof, Tiergarten, all the German stations. The reason for that was because many of the roads were bombed out. There is only one more incident that I would like to mention. In this case, we were, one night -- "sheltered" is perhaps too much of a place. We were put into a huge building that was a boat dock, and there was a large boat in there, and one of the Jewish inmates, a prisoner of another Jewish concentration camp, inmate, was from that area, from Berlin. I said, "I haven't got the slightest idea where I am." I only knew that there were large tower, a radio tower, which I knew was the German *Sender,* Königs Wusterhausen. I said, "I saw a radio tower a while back, but this here area with lakes, I don't know at all." "Well," he said, "if I'm not mistaken, I've been here before. This is Wannsee." And Wannsee, I found out later on, was the infamous conference of all German officials, SS, *Reichssicherheitshauptamt,* the *vier B,* where the Final Solution was debated. So I got to that place, too, where the origin of my misery and the deaths of my family was planned and where the organizational talent was displayed to do this.

Anyhow, we got -- this was just on the outskirts of Berlin and, as I said, very shortly thereafter, we took this ride, and Oranienburg was a station where we were let off and marched to the main camp, Sachsenhausen. We marched by -- this was one of the suburbs of Berlin that you will probably have heard of, Potsdam, because Truman held -- there was a conference there at which Truman took place. And one of the ironies, again, of my life was that I was able to read the inscription, "Come, all ye who are laden." And you may be more familiar with it. It was a Catholic church, or maybe a Protestant church. Would you know the entire, the entire verse? "Come, all ye who are laden. I shall give you sustenance," or something like that. It may have been a Psalm. It was engraved in there. And I thought even that is not, is not for us.

We came into the camp, which was another march. I don't know how long it was. We dragged one foot before the other. We finally did no longer watch the neighborhood. The one thing we did see, we saw the destruction that the Allied forces had wrought. When we came into the camp, the camp barracks were arranged in a semicircle, and they had this wonderful, wonderful inscription, and I will say it to you first in German. It said, *"Es gibt nur einen Weg in die Freiheit. Seine Meilensteine sind Treue, Fleiß Gefühl"* -- half a dozen more things like that -- *"und Liebe zum Vaterland."* And then I'll try to translate it. It said, "There is only one way to liberty" -- to freedom, yeah. That's better. It's freedom. "There is only one way to freedom, and its mileposts are duty, *Gehorsam"* -- obedience. They had a half a dozen. It was in cast iron -- not in cast iron. In ornamental ironworks. Duty, obeyance, whatever it is that the Germans called what we must do, and the last sentence was *"und Liebe zum Vaterland,"* "love of country." So that is what greeted us there.

We were assigned some barracks. There was nothing for us to do. There were no details. Berlin was waiting for the Russians. We are talking about January, February 1945. We are now into nearly five years of war. So food, we had watery soup, bread, one

slice. Calorie content, about 300. Nothing during -- we are talking about prisoners. I met first, for the first time in my life, in the barracks, someone who had a patch entirely different from mine. I had, meanwhile, no longer any Star of David. Mine was now all red because they had run out of yellow color in the printing system, and I had been promoted now to political prisoner. It meant nothing. We were all suffering. And for the first time, I saw a blue patch, and I defy you to determine what that was or even guess what it was: Spanish Communists who fought in the freedom brigade. You heard of the Lincoln brigade, Spanish Communists who got grabbed by the Fascists or by the Germans or whoever, however. They got caught in France. They got caught in France because they had escaped into France, and in the German sweep towards the Spanish border, they got trapped, concentration camp, and it was the first time I heard Spanish spoken and saw a blue patch.

So there was a mélange; that's what the French say. There was a press of people of all nations, Norwegians, Swedes -- not Swedes -- Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Belgian. You name it, it was there. And we spent 14 days in that in total ignorance of what they Germans would do. We knew only thing, and you have seen those signs, "The end is near." We knew only that the end is near. We knew that the end was near for the Germans. We hoped that we would survive it and not die at the -- this was a very, very dire threat to us, a very near threat, that the Germans and the German guards, the SS, would, in a fit of, a fit of losing, of having last the war, would take it out on us and just, just kill us. That is -- that is, well -- that is Sachsenhausen. There's not very much more that I can tell you about it unless you have heard something about Sachsenhausen Oranienburg that I may have not mentioned to you.

>> Interviewer: You were only in that -- Sachsenhausen, the main camp, for two weeks?

>> Herz: Fourteen days, three weeks I'm sure. It was not very much. We were starving then. One thing that is an incongruity to you is that we were issued razor blades by the Germans occasionally. When we were not issued razor blades, the Germans had straight razors, and the German inmates were selected, former barbers were selected to shave us. So each week, we were shaved. The head was shaved. The beard was shaved off. They forgot about the body hair at that time. There was no sense. But they wanted us to be -- it is a degrading thing, you know. We had, as I said, the round, stupid cap, or hat, and whenever we saw an SS guard, we must smartly grab this thing and hit our legs with it instead of a salute. That was what they required of us, and I've done it many, many times. The thing was not to be taken off. It had to be grabbed and torn off the head and slapped against the leg while we were walking, looking neither right nor left. But when we encountered a German guard, that is what we had to do to show our sign of total and abject subjugation.

So then, one day -- I'm sorry I'm doing all the talking.

>> Interviewer: That's fine.

>> Herz: One day, then came the bulletin board news, or I believe they had -- oh, the way the system worked, the block Kapo -- you must probably by now -- by now, you will know what the block Kapo was -- assembled us, and as we were outside, he said, "A transport is assembled to go to Mauthausen" -- nobody knew Mauthausen -- "to go to Mauthausen to work in a factory down there." So he read the names, and then also the names were posted on the board. And we were again marched to the railroad car. This time, the SS did not have -- the German rail stock was pretty much decimated. It was gone, and I have often wondered why or how the SS was able to commandeer, in this dire need to move German population from the warzones back, how they were able to find rolling stock to transport concentration camp inmates. Nevertheless, they did. It was the old cattle car

again, and it was a decimated bunch and dispirited bunch of prisoners, but this time, the guards were sitting in the railroad cars with us with kerosene lamps. The guard that we had had even brought his canary bird; again, an incongruity that I have not forgotten, and I will not forget it to the end of my life. Food? We had been given a half a loaf of bread this time. Destination? I knew this time approximately where I was going because I saw -- the railroad station in the larger towns were familiar. And I knew that we were going in a southerly direction because, number one, I know that the Russians were coming, and I know that the Americans were coming from that side. So the only other way we could go was to the south of Germany. I did not know that Mauthausen was in Austria, but I was guessing Dachau, another one, a camp.

At -- so I must stop saying “at any rate.” We were marched to the railroad station. We were loaded into the cattle car. The SS took up his guard position, his Schmeisser gun. He was the only one that had a seat. We had no seats. We were sitting on the floor of the railroad car. And we heard the sirens going on. It was for an air raid, air raid warnings for the Germans to go. We had no place to go. We were sitting on the railroad tracks. The rolling stock was generally halted because the Americans or whoever was bombing would generally take rolling stock and shoot it up because they would shoot the locomotives. So whenever there was a danger of an air attack, they would try and make it to the next railroad yard where there were all kinds of railroad cars, figuring they would have to shoot them all up.

So we went through Germany, and I remember the first dead -- I had seen dead people before. I had had people die with me -- not with me. I had had people die in front of me. I had seen about as much dead and had seen as many corpses as I needed for a lifetime. But there, the first corpse at the first place -- we needed, actually, the room to stand and to sit. We were totally -- how shall I say -- we had pain sitting because we had no longer any gluteus maximus. I don’t know what to call -- any,

any behind. We had nothing to sit on. We had bones. We were sitting on our bones, on our coccyx, and it is an extremely painful affair. So the first one that died -- the German railroad cars had a brake house at the top of the railroad car, so the first one, the dead person, was taken up there, and the second one also. We were no longer -- this trip took about five days, and we were allowed to go and eat snow when we were thirsty. Bread? There wasn't any.

From then on, it got worse. People started to die in this railroad car, and we finally stacked the people -- the corpses up. I know it's disrespectful. I can't help it. We stacked the corpses up, and we sat on them. The worst part to sit on was the face, but we were even then crowded. So sometimes we sat on a face. Most of us would try to sit on the rump portion of the deceased. I don't know who died. They didn't have anything worth stealing. They had no bread because we all had no bread. So we made it to Mauthausen. I believe out of our car of about 70, 80 people, about 20 people, 30 people got out of the car. The rest, we left in. We don't know what happened to them. Perhaps the details from the main camp came and picked them up later. We did not know.

We were let out of the car at Mauthausen. I don't know how I knew it was Mauthausen. I think I had seen the -- and we were marched towards Mauthausen, and Mauthausen was a fortress-like concentration camp overlooking the Danube River. And everybody already was speculating that our end would come. How we knew this? We may have divined it. We may have guessed that our end would be, Please, do not let us -- do not load us onto ships because we knew that the Germans were quite capable of forcing us onto a boat, running us into the middle of the Danube River, and sinking the boat or sinking the ship, whatever it was. No, this was not to be our fate. We were marched up to the top of the hill, and it was excruciating. There was water running down. We had not had water now for about a day and a half. We were wild with thirst, and there was water running down by the side

of the road, a channel or a runnel, whatever you would like to call it, and we all dipped our cup in this dirty rainwater. It was not sewer, but it was just runoff, and we drank it, and we thought it was great. I don't know why we didn't get typhus or anything like that, but anyhow, the SS didn't even want us to do that. They clubbed us back from there, but I managed to gather a half a cup, and I drank it.

So we marched up there, and we were assembled. We were told to take off our clothing in this bitter cold. I don't know whether we were feeling any -- yeah, we were feeling bitter cold. We were allowed to keep our shoes on. And something was done to us that I thought, Well, this is the end. The really mean to kill us, and I prepared nearly to die in a gas chamber. By that time, we knew gas chambers. Someone came along, and with a blue ditto pencil -- I'm not sure whether you're familiar with a ditto pencil. It makes a purple mark on you. They stenciled us -- I think I had a number 7. And none of knew whether 7 mean death and 3 meant life or 8 meant something else. We didn't know, but we were sent into the shower. All of our clothing was taken away. We were -- there was no clothing to dry us, so we were run out of the showers, which mercifully had warm water. We were run out of the showers, naked, into the yards, into the room between, into the place between the barracks, and we stood there. And then it occurred to us that what it was, we were assigned to barracks number 7, those with the 7 on their bodies. We were given some sort of ill-fitting clothing. I remember I had only a coat, a winter coat, totally naked underneath, shivering in this cold on the cobblestones until finally some of the German Kapos had pity on me and threw me a pair of underpants and an undershirt. And that was the total amount of clothing I had.

And there, again, in the barracks occurred something that I had not realized, and I'm not sure whether you can realize that. As Jews, we were even below the lowest rank of anyone. We were the outcasts of already an outcast group of people because when the

Kapo came around, he said, *"Sind da Deutschen unter euch?"* Are there Germans amongst us? A friend of mine and some other Germans says, *"Ja, wir sind Deutsch."* "We are Germans." And he looked at us, and he said, one -- he spit out a word, "Jews! I didn't mean you." So he had thought that for once, because we belonged to the great German nation, that these German Kapos at the end of the war would finally realize that we were of the group of people that had shared their culture, their aspiration, their suffering in the Versailles peace treaty. Forget it. We were treated as scum. I mean, everybody was treated as scum, but we were as treated the scum of the scum. So again, we -- I cannot even say the word -- vegetated. We starved in those barracks, and this one day they came and said, "Are there amongst you any of the following?" And he started to enumerate the craftspeople: mechanics, welders, whatever it was, carpenters, anything like that. Well, I volunteered. I said, "I am a welder." "Okay, get ready. You are going to Gusen to an airplane factory." Well, anything was better than -- although I did not know that. It could have been death, for all I know. I could have been shot on the road to Gusen.

We were next to a women's camp in Mauthausen. It was separated from us by a tall wall, but we were able to talk, and we tried to talk to them and find out where they had been, where they came from, how they were treated. They were treated as -- they were as ill-treated as we were. They were starving. "Do you have a piece of bread? I am such-and-such. I am Malka [phonetic] from Lorsch. Is there anyone from Lorsch in there?" "Yes, I'm from Lorsch." He says, "Would you have a piece of bread?" begging. This went on continuously, and nobody in a well-fed nation like this can possibly understand. When we fast nowadays for Yom Kippur, we almost die. We fasted for four years or three years, and to me, it is inconceivable how any American, in the land of the hot dog and "Mc-hamburger," could possibly feel what hunger pangs are except coming from school and not getting fast enough to the refrigerator. I laugh at it now. It was bitter. So we

heard these anguished voices from the other side, women's voices. "I'm from" -- well, wherever -- "Bialystok. Is anyone there from Bialystok?" "Yes." "Did you know my father?" Or did you know such-and-such? And in the end, always the same thing. *"Hobn ir [indistinct] a shtik [indistinct] broyt?"* This happens to be Yiddish, and I'm not sure whether you understand it. "Have you perhaps a small piece of bread?" We would say, "Have you got a crust of bread?" I can't shake -- I can't shake this.

At any rate, we made it to Gusen in a, in a, in a covered -- again, in a truck, and we came there, and we were assigned work. By this time, we were so emaciated that three of us were assigned a bunk of about this size. I'm not sure whether the camera can pick it up. What is it? About 3 feet wide. We laid by accommodation, not because we wanted to lay next to each other. We laid one with the head to the -- two people with their heads at the foot end and one person in the middle. We did not stir. We could not stir because it was that close. We transmitted freely a disease called *Skabies.* Would you know what the English word is? It is scabies.

>> Interviewer: Scabies.

>> Herz: Scabies. What is the --

>> Interviewer: Scabies?

>> Herz: Yeah, but what is the common word for it?

>> Interviewer: I'm not sure. It's just like sores or --

>> Herz: No, well, it is caused by an insect, by a parasite, a parasitic insect. We all had it then. We had very little to eat, and yet we were forced to work. The work was 12 hours per day. In our emaciated condition, we just dragged ourselves through that. And the Germans had an ingenious way of doing this. Rather than having us to load into this underground tunnel where the work was performed, to go there from our barracks, the Germans had a small spur railroad. Well, fairly large wagons in there.

Wagons were open. They had open doors. We were assembled on the platform, a huge, long platform, maybe 300, 400 feet long and very wide, a wooden platform. And this is the ingenious thing. The Germans ran their cars at a fast pace past this platform. We were to jump on while the cars were moving. There wasn't luckily much room between there, so most of us made it into this moving railroad car, and we were standing up in there, something like about 150 to 100 people in a car. And that car took us underground where the manufacture of the Messerschmitts was being done, and I was assigned an old German prisoner who was the master welder. And of course, I didn't do any welding whatever. I dragged those heavy aluminum wingspans, whatever it is, body parts to him, and we had to hold them, and another party held another wing part, and he would run his spot-welding machine on there.

It was excruciating work. My number in there -- we were given a piece of a piece of stamped-out material like the backside of a tomato can. It was fastened with two wires, and it had our numbers stamped on. My number was 134,314, which I took to be an omen of some sort. We were already believing in anything that might save us from perdition. So my number was pi -- or "pee," "pie" [phonetic]?

>> Interviewer: "Pie."

>> Herz: "Pie." My number was pi: 134,314. I believed that -- I don't know. Since I did not believe in a merciful, just God any longer, I believed that that would save me. I don't know why, but it was sort of an anchor to hang onto. And while I was in this airplane factor, sometimes they didn't have the parts and would take scrap pieces of aluminum, and the first thing I did was get rid of that. I polished a small piece of aluminum, and I engraved in there with a chisel my camp number. It was permitted to do that. I had some airplane fasteners, and I fastened this in a real fine-looking identification bracelet. As you know, Auschwitz had this number, but Sachsenhausen had the tag. But

there, we had two methods of showing that we were prisoners. Our hair was permitted to grow out, I would say, an inch. And through this middle ran a stripe of shorn scalp. Here in American it would be a novelty that high school boys would do just to be different. Over there it was one of the most degrading things that we had to submit to. To have had hair -- you have hair. We comb our hair. We wash our hair. Over there, hair were permitted only in a short crew cut by the Kapos. Everyone else was either shorn, as in Sachsenhausen, or in Auschwitz was shorn, or, as in Mauthausen, with this stripe of about 3 inches wide of naked scalp showing amongst it. Can you visualize a thing like that? So that and the bracelet identified us as prisoners. I think we'd also have sometimes a number. The clothing we had were no longer prison clothing because the German prison factory, weaving factory, could no longer keep up. The factories were destroyed, so whatever old piece of garment there was, we got it holey. It didn't make any difference.

So we worked in this factory, and on Wednesday afternoon, we had our treat. They had a sweet noodle soup that we lived for from week to week. We worked 12 hours a day. I think I've mentioned that, and we worked 6 days a week. Sunday, we had, again, all the *Schikanen* -- I don't know how that would work -- all the petty annoyances that they could visit on us. And there also I saw something -- again, I'm not telling you this from hearsay. In the bitterest of bitter nights, there were some German Kapos, building-block Kapos that were dissatisfied with the skeletons, the living skeletons in their barracks, and they forced them -- five or six German, well-fed Kapos forced a group of about 200 of these starved skeletons out into the snow and did not let them into the barracks any longer. And there I have never heard anything like -- well, I can't say I never heard anything like it. One of the things that I have never heard like it is this, the dying of those 200 people, especially since they were right across from us. There was nothing we could do to help. We had our beds. We had our bare clothing. The barracks were kept warm

for the Kapos, not boiling warm, but warm enough for them, and there were all these poor souls sitting out there in the snow, and they died from about nine o'clock till about seven o'clock the next morning. The next morning, the last scream, the last whimper... And then they were again arranged outside the barracks, nicely in neat German rows, to be able to have counted them, and that was the end of that.

In the evening also we were treated to other things. The people that were executed while at work because they did not work very hard or couldn't work very hard, they had a very simple method of execution. The SS guard had a guardroom inside the tunnel, and they had a sturdy nail in there. And since most of these living skeletons had no longer any resistance in there, if the German Kapo, the work Kapo said this guy is not working, he simply dragged the skeleton to the SS guard chamber, where the SS -- I witnessed this once, but I was beyond caring at that time. I thought it was something -- it was an everyday occurrence where the SS guards simply took a rope, tied it around the person's neck -- the man didn't even have the strength to object to it -- and just looped it around the nail and pulled the man up. There were no women. Pulled the man up until the man was -- until the person was dead. And at night, these people were brought back into the camp, and you could see a blue mark around their neck that you knew that they had been executed, hanged by the Germans. That's one thing that the Germans did not delegate to the Kapos. They did the killing themselves.

One other thing was an act of desperation that occurred frequently in those last days that had occurred in many camps. It was a term that we called *Ich gehe an den Draht.* "I am going to the wire." In the last desperation of the soul, they wanted to make an end of it, and they couldn't make an end of it unless they did something that was totally forbidden, maybe approaching the wire and touching the wire. Touching the wire meant that you meant to escape. It was -- I wouldn't call it a euphemism. It

was a rationale that maybe the Germans used to justify killing someone in cold blood from the guard tower. I witnessed this three to four times in Mauthausen -- in Gusen rather. I had not witnessed this before. It happened. In desperation, your friend or your last acquaintance would say, “I can’t stand it anymore. I am going to the wire.” And they would go to the wire and touch the wire, and the shot would come, and the Germans were excellent marksmen, and it did take but one shot, and that was the end of the suffering for that person.

I do not know whether I have ever been driven to that extremity. I will tell you one more thing that I have not admitted to anyone that I’ve ever talked to because I still had feelings, and I still was a 20-year-old. At the time, in our camp, or in Gusen, there were a group of German prison inmates, concentration camp inmates. They were Germans. They had either deserted or had done something that merited them being in the concentration camp. One of the crimes was having sexual intercourse with an inferior; in this case, a Polack. They called them Polack. Actually, we just -- a person was a Pole. But Polack was, in German terms, a derogatory term, like Jew or nigger. Polack for a German meant inferior human beings. Nevertheless, the Polish people called themselves, *“Czy ty Polack?”* “Are you Polish?” It happens to be -- it happens just a word -- the Polish word for “Polish.” So they were in the camps for that reason. If they were not Kapos, they were spared the work details. They had sort of a privileged occupation. And one day they were issued Afrika Korps -- you heard of the term “Afrika Korps”? Afrika Korps gear, the khaki jackets and the khaki pants, khaki hats. And they were selected to be redeemed in the last stand of the German -- they were supposed to be making a -- to be re, re -- how do you call it? Rehabilitated into the German military. And when I saw that, I was at the end -- we are talking about two months before war’s end. I was so -- my humanity was so debased that I felt that would the Germans

asked me to fight in their ranks, I would have done it. Can you understand that?

>> Interviewer: Not really.

>> Herz: You can't? It was the end. In order to get out, in order to have a life, to have dignity, I felt, I'll do it, even if they had been my tormentors. I must have been at the end. I said I've never admitted that, but I felt that way. It didn't come to that. About the 24th or 25th of April, the underground factory started to destroy documents, and we destroyed documents. We knew then that the end was near, and yet our death was just as near because we knew that if they assembled us underground and blasted the entrance, there was no way for us to get out. We were some 600, 700 feet under a -- the tunnel was, at level ground, into the mountain, but the mountain was raised about 800, 900 feet above us, a massive rock -- well, just a mountain. And so if they had simply dynamited that -- maybe they did not have any dynamite. I cannot tell. At the end, we were about -- about the 20th to the 23rd of April, 24th of April, the first Red Cross packages began to arrive, and one more thing happened. The SS disappeared. They folded their tents and silently stole away and were replaced by Austrian police, military police, which guarded the camp from then on. We still couldn't get out. We still were prisoners, but there was no more work. Some food came in, not very much, and we are now approaching the end of the...

Whatever it is, I don't find the word for what the end is. The odyssey. It was not even an odyssey. The odyssey was a lot easier for the Greeks than our trip through hell. On May the 5th, a tank came up to the gates -- not to the gates -- to the barbed wire area where my barracks was located, and the conversation -- I was nearby. The conversation was in Yiddish, which by that time I understood perfectly well and spoke it. And some English was spoken also, and he said, "We are the American army. Your camp is being liberated. Stay here. You will get soup. The soup

column is right behind you, but stay here. Stay here. We ask you to stay here." But he was the only one there. Behind him were some jeeps and trucks, and they collected the military police, the Austrian military police, which was not connected to the -- which was not the SS troops, and their weapons were thrown on a pile and set afire by the American troops. Somebody still had the presence of mind to ask how come he spoke Yiddish. He says, "Well, I am a Jew from Brooklyn, New York." We didn't know Brooklyn from New York, but he spoke Yiddish very badly, very poor Yiddish, but nevertheless, he says, "You are free. The American army is behind me, but stay in the camp so that there is not -- none of this confusion that might come on. We assure you you will be fed."

Well, the first adventurous Russian prisoners, when they saw the Americans, got their revenge on their German Kapos, and this time, it was corroborated by Mr. West. They hanged the German Kapos, as many German Kapos as they could get ahold of. They killed probably three or four in my barracks. It was something that I -- I was incapable of feeling any sentiments. I didn't feel any pity with them. My torment had ended. I did not care any longer. I felt truly like a bird who has flown out of a cage. I did not know what the future would bring. I did walk by the pile of burning weapons to see whether I could get a pistol out of there or a rifle or anything, but the metal was so hot that I could not touch anything. I burned myself on the fingers, and I got out. That is where the -- my story ends.

>> Interviewer: Where did you go after liberation?

>> Herz: I tried to go back to Germany. I tried to find my way back home. And there were many, many ex-concentration camp inmates plus *Flüchtlinge* or *Vertrieben,* as the Germans called them, "displaced persons," Hungarians that had been dragged into Germany to work, Polish people. The whole countryside, this was the very last countryside in Germany where everybody had concentrated to try and get away, either from the Russians or

from the Americans or from the British or whatever it is, everybody concentrated on the southern, Austrian part of Germany where I was. We knew where Linz was, a city nearby. I made my way to Linz. I went to a hospital which -- they had to take us. I don’t know whether they had room or there weren’t very many civilian casualties, and I was admitted, where they, first of all, treated the scabies, which had by now enveloped my entire body. And after I got out of there, we all tried then to make our way back into civilization, into life. We had some food. Again, I narrowly escaped from being shot by an American soldier. I had discovered a grain storage depository, and I went there and got grain, which the Germans would trade me for something else. They would grind it up and make flour out of it. The second time I did that, some black American GI started to point his rifle at me, and in my poor English, the poorest of poor English, I finally made him understand what had happened to me and --

01:03:08