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Coenraad Rood oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, November 30, 2008

Coen Rood (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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Michael Hirsh: I've turned a recorder on. Let me just get some basic information. Your name is Coen Rood, C-o-e-n, R-o-o-d?

Coenraad Rood: C-o-e-n, but the pronunciation is "Coon."

MH: "Coon," okay. "Coon."

CR: C-o-e-n is an abbreviation of Coenraad. Coenraad is my full name.

MH: And how do you spell that?

CR: C-o-e-n-r-a-a-d. That is my first given name, and then my last name, my family name, is R-o-o-d. So, we have the end from the first name, a-a-d, and the following family name is o-o-d.

MH: Got it. And what is your address?

CR: ... Let me ask a question to my wife; because of my hearing, she usually assists me.

MH: Okay.

CR: (to Jani Rood) Can you follow it?

Jani Rood: Yeah, I'm here.

CR: Oh, okay. She's following it.

MH: Okay. ... And your phone is.... And what's your date of birth, please?

CR: My date of I was born?

MH: Yes.

CR: August 12, 1917.

MH: Okay. And where were you born?

CR: In Amsterdam, the Netherlands. My parents were Dutch.

MH: Okay. Could you just tell me the circumstances you were in on May 2, 1945?

CR: Yeah, but I first want to know your full quality.

MH: Um—

CR: That is for security, because I have a book published by Fischer in Germany, and they have all the rights.¹ And before I say something that I shouldn't say, I have to know your quality of asking this.

MH: The book I'm writing is going to be—

¹ *“Wenn ich es nicht erzählen kann, muss ich weinen”*: als Zwangsarbeiter in der Rüstungsindustrie, published in 2002 by Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

CR: Oh, you are a book writer?

MH: Yes. And it's going to be published by Bantam Dell Publishing, which is part of Random House, in New York. It'll be published in early 2010.

CR: Well, I don't know anything about publishers.

JR: Bantam Dell, that's—

CR: I'm so many years involved with it that I am completely buttoned up. I don't know what to think about this.

MH: But what I ask you will not conflict with your publishers. Having an agreement with a publisher doesn't—it shouldn't preclude you from telling me about what happened on one day of your life.

CR: Fisher—if you are going to publish it, you have to remember or consider that Fischer Taschenbuch Company in Frankfurt, Germany, has all the rights, because I published my book in the German language by Fischer.

MH: Right. But they have all the rights to—

CR: They have all the rights.

MH: They have all the rights to your book, but not to your life.

CR: Not to my life, no. And I can say what I want as long as I don't interfere with what I published.

MH: Okay. Well, this shouldn't be a problem.

CR: Okay.

MH: Okay. If you could just tell me, where were you on May 2, 1945?

CR: I was in Camp V in Ampfing, which is close to Mühldorf, which is close to or in the vicinity of Munich. It's a little bit in the east of Germany.

MH: How long had you been there?

(background noise)

CR: We got some other sounds in between.

MH: I hear.

CR: Do you? Repeat the last question.

MH: How long had you been in Ampfing?

CR: How long?

MH: Yes.

CR: In Ampfing, I was about five days.

MH: Where were you before that?

CR: Before that, I was in ten other camps.

MH: Where did they first pick you up?

CR: Say that again?

MH: Where were you first grabbed by the Nazis?

CR: When I was taken in?

MH: Yes.

CR: That was April 25, 1942.

MH: In Amsterdam?

CR: When they start rounding up the Jewish people. I am Jewish.

MH: Yes, so am I.

CR: Congratulations.

MH: Thank you, sir. (laughs) Mazel tov. So, why did they keep moving you?

CR: Say that again?

MH: Why did they keep moving you from camp to camp to camp?

CR: How did they move me?

MH: Yes, and why.

JR: Why?

CR: Oh, why. Well, there were several reasons, always. Mostly—the most stringent reason was that the fighting armies came too close. We were in between fighting armies

from the east and from the west, and then they moved us from camp to camp in order to keep us prisoner.

MH: Okay. You had been moved to Ampfing five days before you were liberated. What were those five days like?

CR: Well, they were not too bad compared with what I already experienced. Ampfing, where I was, it was close to—how do you call that again? That big POW camp, and it was Patton with his army that was traveling to get to that prisoner camp, that big POW camp, in order to open it up.

MH: Moosberg?

CR: What?

MH: Was it Moosberg?

CR: No.

MH: You don't mean Dachau?

CR: Yeah, Moosberg, M-o-s-s [*sic*]. Yeah. Later on, I heard that Patton tried to get there because his son-in-law was there as a POW.

MH: Right. So, what were the conditions in Ampfing?

CR: We lived practically on the ground, in holes in the ground, with a movable roof over it, and we lived ten to twenty in a ditch, you could say. In order to—you see, I'm born Dutch, and I had to learn English myself, so I cannot always exactly say what I have to say.

MH: I understand.

CR: But what we lived in were ditches in the ground covered by movable roofs. And we lived there for ten to twenty people in a hole like that. We came there together from several camps where the people were removed from, and they just put them somewhere where they had a little room. And Ampfing was one of those rooms, was one of these places where they could place us.

In our situations, we had two camps next to each other that I remember. In between, I remember I had to work in Camp VI, but I was located—I belonged to Camp V, Ampfing V. VI was already evacuated because here in this case, the Americans came too close. Ampfing was still in place; we were waiting to be evacuated and at the last moment, that all went into smoke, you can say, because the American Army was faster.

MH: Did you know the American Army was coming?

CR: No, but that was the talk in the camp.

MH: Did the German guards talk about it?

CR: Yeah, but that's part of my book.

MH: Oh.

CR: That is published, how we got to know that. I'll be glad to tell you that, if you don't publish that as of I give you the right to publish it. But I'll be glad to tell you how it went.

MH: Well, tell me how it went, then.

CR: Can you say that last?

MH: I said I would be interested to have you tell me how it went, yes.

CR: Well, the fifth day, my buddy and me and another Dutch old friend of mine, which I have known before the war, and we saw each other during the evacuations, and we stuck together. His name is Maupy from Maurits, but for short we called him Maupy. And at

the last minute, when we are together, we were together in Camp VI where we had to paint empty huts, where also prisoners used to be that they were evacuated already; VI was evacuated before Camp V. And we had to paint some of these—we called them “buda.” These were pre-fabricated huts above ground, and we had—the both of us, we had to wash them white. The camp commander thought that when the Americans come, which they expected, they would think that was a hospital if the color was right. So, they could not be accused from putting prisoners not in hospitals when they needed. Did I make that understandable?

MH: Yes, I understand that perfectly.

CR: So, we were the whitewashers, the two of us. We had to walk from Ampfing V along a potato field, not too long, and then there was Camp VI, also in the woods.

MH: You walked without a guard?

CR: Yeah. Where should we go anyway? We were prisoners, we wore prisoner clothes, we were tattooed, we had numbers, so there was always a way to find out that we were prisoners. The danger outside the camps was very great that we should be detected as prisoners—especially if you were a Jewish prisoner, you know, that’s the end of the day for you.

MH: What was your uniform?

CR: I had the striped jacket, black pants, and a black cap.

MH: And you were tattooed on your arm?

CR: On my left arm. I still have that tattoo.

MH: When was that done and where?

CR: That was done in April 1944. In April 1944, I was already—I had already two years of prisonship behind my back.

MH: What camp were you in when they tattooed your arm?

CR: I was in Gleiwitz.

MH: I'm not familiar with that.

CR: Gleiwitz is in Poland, just over the border. You have heard of Katowice?

MH: Yes.

CR: You have an idea where Katowice is? Upper Silesia?

MH: Yes.

CR: Well, there is where Gliwice is, not too far from there.

MH: At the end, before you were liberated, what was your weight?

CR: After the liberations, there was a French Red Cross commando, *militaire*, that took care of us. And when they weighed me, I was about sixty pounds.

MH: How tall are you?

CR: My height?

MH: Yes.

CR: My height is about the same as now, 5'7", 5'8".

MH: Do you recall what your weight was the first time, when you were first arrested?

CR: My usual weight was in kilos, about sixty-five. No, that was in pounds.

MH: That's in pounds.

CR: In pounds, yeah. You have to translate that into English, into English pounds.

MH: How much were you getting to eat at Ampfing?

CR: Not much.

MH: So, when you went walking to Camp VI past the potato fields, were you able to grab any food?

CR: Oh, that was—we found potato peels laying on the ground, and we ate those, both of us. Because in the camps itself, in V where we belonged to, there was no food.

MH: Okay. Do you recall how many people were in the camp when the Americans came?

CR: I don't know exactly how much, but we were a bit more than 1,000.

MH: It was men and women?

CR: I haven't seen women there. When we were liberated, there was a Russian buda across from us. We were—the ditches we lived in were in lines. We were lined up, so I was in line two. And across from us there were mostly Russians, and when we were liberated, we suddenly saw a group of women. (inaudible)

MH: Did it rain or snow when you were in these ditches?

CR: Say that again?

MH: Did it rain or snow when you were in the ditches?

CR: Well, there was a roof over it.

MH: But water didn't fill the ditches?

CR: No, there was a roof over. And in the ditches it was—the floor was, you can say, in three parts: from the door till the end till the back was the deepest part, and on the side was a little bit elevation, and there was hay in there. It was not higher than a foot. And there was hay or straw, or what you'd call [it], which was missing—what we needed was missing, let's put it that way. It was about nothing, so if you had a blanket, you rolled your blanket, and that is how you laid on that elevation, with the foot to the middle. And then there were heaters, ovens, usually from brick, in the middle.

MH: Okay. Was there fuel for the ovens?

CR: We had no profit from it, because my friend Maupy and me, we were mostly not in there. We were only there when we went to sleep. Most of the prisoners in our buda were French, and they—I have to add to it that we, the Dutch, never got any packets of food. We didn't get anything from the Red Cross. The French had Red Cross packages with food, which they ate from. It was more what we Jews would say (inaudible). It was not exactly to live by, but they had something to eat. Maupy and me, we had nothing to eat, nothing at all, not even a slug of water.

MH: So, it was the potato peels that kept you alive?

CR: The potato peels and little accidents that were in the complex, too, in VI; that helped us through the last five days.

MH: Tell me about the Americans coming. Did you hear them coming? What happened?

CR: Well, there was a roll call early in the morning. It was just daylight came through, and we had to line up along a rail track that went across the camp from one end to another, and we had to line up there. As far as I remember and as I know from the facts of day, we were about 1,100 or 1,200 men standing there. And the camp commander, which we had barely seen before, talked to us. We had to listen like an open air gathering, and he talked to us and said, "First, all the Jews from Western Europe have to stand on the side." So, we were about sixty men from Western Europe, stood on the side,

and he talked to us in German. He didn't try to talk in Russian or East European to the other people, he talked to us.

He explained that he expected that the Americans are coming, and he would leave us, the camp will be evacuated, all the people from East Europe would be removed. And he said that, "You know what's going to happen to them"—he talked openly about it. "And you stay here." And then the Americans, he talked about "the enemy." You understand that. When the enemy was coming, then we had to report that we were handled humanely, that was taken care for us. And if we should tell them how it was—and he called it, "If you start lying, we know how to get to you, so you better don't tell them what actually happens at camp."

MH: Did you believe him?

CR: We didn't know too much, Maupy and me, because we worked mostly outside the camp. And then the other more than 1,000 from Eastern Europe, who stood also on the rail track, but not mixed up with us from Western Europe. We were just about sixty or sixty-four people from Western Europe, and they're from Eastern Europe. They got the order to set up to march out. And they marched down to the gate from the inside on the camp. We were still in the camp, and they were still at the gate, and then we heard suddenly like a motor. We heard tat-tat-tat-tat-tat, and we thought, "Oh, my God, they shoot them already. They didn't even wait until they have them in the woods."

But it was a motor sound, a motorcycle, and it was the commander and officer. The German officer from the motorcycle warned us—he came into the camp and said, "Close the doors. The enemy is surrounding the camp. You cannot go nowhere." So, we got ordered to go close to the gate in a big tent that was next to the kitchen and the warehouse; there was a tent, and we had to go in there. And everybody got very upset and that worked at your innards, so it was right away—we all sat down, and it was—you could not hold out from the stench and the situation there. So, we went outside the tent, and then the order came, "Back to your budas." So, that was the ditch where we lived in. I lived in Row II on the end.

MH: Okay. What is the word you're saying? It sounds like "Buddha."

CR: A buda; that is another room for "room."

MH: Okay.

CR: Our places where we have to live, where we belonged to, and where we always had to report. Where we lived, I sat with mostly French people. We lived in one room, a room that was a ditch with a roof over it.

MH: How big was it? Is it enough to put a car in? Is it bigger than that?

CR: No, you barely could move a car in there. It was not bigger than one carport.

MH: Okay. All right, so they sent you back to your room.

CR: And we went back, and I lay down. A few days before, I had lost a very good friend in the camp, and that was tremendous on my mind. In my book, he is called Nico. We were very close. We took always care that if there was any kind of choosing to go to another job, we took care that we were together always. We helped each other, with food and with friendship, mostly. With food, we have barely any. But we were always there, to try to help each other or talk for each other.

I had lost him in Mühldorf, the camp before we reached Ampfing, where we stayed two and a half days. During an attack from Americans—we know it was American airplanes. They had American signs on it. And they attacked us while we were—we were just rid of any protection, the prisoners. Most of the prisoners, we were transported because there were always sick people. We were transported by truck, so most of us, we were laying on the truck. And as far as I still know, I'm the only one not wounded on that truck, although I felt like I was wounded. And that's when I lost my last friend, who I was together with more than two years.

And that was still on my mind, so that morning, when the commander talked to us and we had to go back to the budas and I lay down, and I thought, "Well, this is the end of it. They are shooting, they are fighting." And I was very sick, also. So, this is the end of it. And I felt I was dying. And in that situation, I was liberated.

MH: What happened at liberation?

CR: My friend, my new friend Maupy, who spoke English—I didn't, but I could catch what he was saying outside. I was laying down, losing my conscious[ness]. I had the feeling that I was floating through the air, and I knew that this was the end. It was my turn, now, to go, to leave everything.

And then I heard him suddenly in the middle, from all the cabal and the rumors. The East Europeans were yelling, “*Amerikanskii are kommen, Amerikanskii are kommen, Amerikanskii are kommen!* They’re here, they’re there, they opened the gates!” They were yelling and screaming, and I was too total out of my conscious. I had a feeling I was floating through the air, looking at myself lying down, and I was yelling at myself. I thought I was yelling, but I don’t think I made any sound. It was like a séance that I float through the air, that I saw myself laying and yelling at myself, “Stand up! Go by the people outside.” And I couldn’t, I couldn’t move, I just was laying there.

And suddenly I heard outside the buda my friend Maupy. I heard him talking English. I heard him saying, “Will you go in there? My friend is dying. He should know that he is free now.” And then there was a little trap door on the entrance of the buda with a hole in it, like a window, and that got dark, and then it opened up, and there was an American soldier there. I describe that in the book, so I don’t feel that I can tell you exactly what I wrote down in my book, because that has to do with Fischer, the publisher. They may take action if you use—

MH: They won’t take action.

CR: They won’t?

MH: No.

CR: Well, I would be happy to hear that.

MH: I promise you, they will not take action.

CR: Well, if you’re in the business, you know better than I.

MH: Yes, they will not take action.

CR: Yes, well—

MH: So, you saw—

CR: An American put his head into the door, he opened it up, and it got lighter inside. I was laying in the dark, in the dirt, and he told me, "Come, comrade. You are free now." And then I start crying. I know that, and then I try to get to him, but I was, like, paralyzed, so I remember I was crawling over the ground, trying to get to the door. And then he picked me up by the collar of my little jacket, and he (inaudible). (inaudible) is—you would say "hurt me." And he was holding me, and I know that I remember I thought, "Man, is the man strong." And then he looked so clean and well taken care of, and he was full of weapons. And he told me, "You are free now, it's over." I was just laying against him. He was holding me, took me outside, and then he repeated again, "You are free now. You understand? You are free."

I was dirty, but unusual dirty, because that had to do with the kind of work that we had to do in a camp where I was for two years, where we fabricated soot out of earth oil. And the soot stuck with us through the rest of all the camps I went through, and people were afraid to stand next to us, because Nico and me, we looked so pitch black always, and real dirty. We never could wash it off. So, as dirty as I was, that soldier, that American soldier, kissed me. And I kissed him back, and he was holding me and took me outside and said, "See? You are free now," and he cried, too.

MH: Did you find his name?

CR: What?

MH: Did you know his name?

CR: No, I had further no contact with him, because he left me standing there and he had to do business. And later on, I heard that from Nathan Melman—he was part of that group that liberated us—that there were about ten or twelve men, and they formed a reconnaissance group.² You know, a group that had to go ahead of the armies to see what's going on and decide what the army's next move will be? And that was the reconnaissance group that liberated. When they came through the woods, they stumbled into our camp, you should say. You would say, if you were on a twenty-meter distance, that you wouldn't know there is a camp, so hidden it was, in the woods and in the ground.

MH: Was there shooting going on?

² Nathan Melman was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00089.

CR: Yeah. As far as I later find out, they shot the guards out of the towers, the guard towers. And then they broke open the gate, and suddenly I was on my feet. I walked better on that day than I do now.

MH: When did you—when did Nathan take that photograph of you?

CR: I didn't know that they were taking photographs. I know that we lined up along one of the Jeeps they had with them, and they were loaded with packages of food, rations, and they throw that on us.

JR: Tell him about (inaudible).

MH: But—

CR: Oh, yeah. I am sorry, my wife reminded me. The man, the soldier who I never got in touch with no more, I never saw him in my life anymore, but while he was holding me—I told you that already—he pushed my head back, and he had a bottle with some whiskey or whatever was in there, and he opened up my mouth and poured whiskey in there. And that shot me back, and then I could walk.

MH: (laughs) It could've killed you.

CR: It what?

MH: I said, the whiskey could have killed you, in your condition.

CR: He was not a doctor, thank God.

MH: Yes. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, and I didn't stop him. I didn't stop him, and it was surprising to me, because principally, all my life—the end of my young life, bachelor life, I could say—I always was a non-alcohol man. I was before the war a very idealistic, socialistic-thinking man and I was a member of a youth organization that was international but very strong in the

Netherlands, where we believed in pure living, clean living, no alcohol, no smoking. Everything that young people do on street corners, we stayed away from. So, I was not used to alcohol.

MH: How long before they got you to a hospital?

CR: Say that again?

MH: How long did it take for them to get you to a doctor or a hospital?

CR: I didn't go to a hospital. That was in the Netherlands.

MH: The Americans didn't—they must have.

CR: No.

MH: They didn't give you medical care?

CR: I don't know if Americans—there were American ambulances that did the moving.

MH: Right. Where did the ambulances take you?

CR: I was first directed—I have to first say when we entered Holland, when we came back, we had five days' trip on a train, the trains that were open freight cars, and we laid on bundles of straw. And when we arrived in Holland, we had to go to the first selection at the border.

JR: Tell him about the farmer.

CR: But before I went on the trip to Holland, I lived till the end of May by a farmer, with Maupy; we both moved in there. And they took very good care of us.

MH: This is a German farmer.

CR: That was a German farmer, yes.

MH: The Americans forced them to do this?

CR: The Americans didn't do that. There were two more Hollanders in that camp, not Jewish, and so we were the four of us, and we were just liberated. Minutes after the liberation, we stood together, and we go live in the buda, in the underground bunker where we lived in, so there were the four of us and then we went out. Where I got the strength from, I don't know, but we got out to find food. That was most in our head. And we grabbed food in Ampfing VI. Maupy and me knew the way a little bit, because we worked there for a few days, and we know where the kitchen was. So, we got some food, and we got some more things that we thought we could use. There was a barracks where the SS was located, the SS when they were the boss. You understand that?

MH: Yes, I understand.

CR: The SS, when they were the boss. They were the guards, and they lived in a barracks outside the camp. And we went there, and we took what we could on clothing and little things. Well, when you're just liberated and the circumstances are like that, you don't even realize what you're taking. But a pocket knife and hairbrush, things like that, that we haven't seen in years. And that's the little things we take; other people took pans.

And there was a kitchen, and that was the SS kitchen that cooked strictly for the guards. There was a big fire going on in the heater, and there was like a pot with a fire on there, and that was on gas. And that was boiling, and there was soup in there. That was from the guards. But most people were fighting on some barrels along the walls while the soup was cooked from mostly bones. Not for us, but for the guards. I only know that in Holland we used to call it that the top of the soup: when you cook the bones, that is called a bouillon. The best part is on top. And that was boiling in one of these big pots. So, I took a carafe which I found and scooped up some soup and drunk it and throw it back, and then another. And I didn't know what to go first.

Well, the other people were fighting over the barrels along the wall, over the cooked bones. They were fighting each other. There was always fighting going on. The prisoners were not so organized that they listened to themselves or listened to any reason. They did a lot of fighting and killing. I hoped always that (inaudible) about three years.

MH: When did you first see a doctor? Not till you got back to Holland?

CR: No, we lived first till the end of May by a farmer. We called it a (inaudible).

MH: But no medical—

CR: I called it a (inaudible).

MH: But no medical care?

CR: We tried to get some medical care. For that, you had to walk at least ten kilometer, and Maupy and I did that, and we tried to get medical care. This is all written in my book, so I really cannot go too far on that.

MH: When did you come to the—

CR: On the end of the month of May—it was May 31 or in June 1—we went to Mühldorf because there was a transport organized to Western Europe. You see, all of this is Bavaria, what I've been talking about, which is on the east side of Germany. That is where we lived, in the vicinity of Munich at Linz, by the River Linz. Well, anyway, every move we made from that farmer's house—you had to go to get something or you wanted to be there where something was going on, because we wanted to be part of life again. And you had to walk at least ten kilometers to reach a point where you could take part of daily life in that neighborhood.

MH: When did you come to the United States?

CR: Oh, that was fifteen years later.

MH: And where did you go?

CR: I went to Shreveport, because an old friend of mine lived in Shreveport. He moved there from the Netherlands five years before, in 1955. And when he came to the United States, in New York, he had to report to an immigrant organization. I think the name is HIAS.

MH: HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

CR: Well, that is for the help of immigrants. Well, they put him on the train and said, “You go to Shreveport.” I didn’t know where Shreveport was, but they wrote quite nice about it to us, to Holland. So, when the necessity came for me, I lived still in Amsterdam and I had my business. We lost our very young son; died in accident. And the neighborhood where I lived had to be eradicated, because they’re going to build an underground railway, and our house would be taken away and demolished. So, I had—in 1959, I had only in front of me, I stay and have no house, or I move and find somewhere else. So, I wrote my friend who lived in Shreveport and was quite happy with it, and I asked him if they had a need for a tailor. And he told them in Shreveport, the Jewish Federation, that I was looking for a place in America. And I could go over right away, because Shreveport sponsored me. That means the cost was mine, but they helped me coming over. They had a preference with me, because in my business, I am a master tailor and I had experience as an independent businessman.

MH: And your wife went with you?

CR: Yeah, my wife went with me, and my daughter. We lost our young son in that house, so that was already something.

MH: And so, you worked as a tailor in Shreveport.

CR: I worked in Shreveport and got in a pretty good business. They were planning to make me the—how you say, the chef? No, the chef is a cook; the chief of the tailoring. Well, I found right away out that the people who sold clothes to customers—it was about the biggest clothing store in Shreveport, but the people behind the counter didn’t know what they were selling to customers. The service could be a lot better. And as a routine tailor, I saw that right away. There were lots of things that had to be done that could be done better, I would say. And when they found out that I knew that and I could do things that they never thought could be done, they were planning to make me the head of the tailoring department. There were eight tailors, and that was quite a bit, for a clothing store to have eight tailors in a shop to take care of customers. Usually, one or two tailors is the norm. But they had eight tailors, and they wanted me the head of it. But I didn’t like it because the boss never was a tailor. He just got it from his father-in-law, the business, and I saw that when I talked about the practical things in tailoring, about the art of tailoring, about what is needed, that I know always, although I could not speak the language, but I saw that they didn’t know what they were talking about. They didn’t know what we call the finesse. Can you understand?

MH: Yes, I understand.

CR: Yeah. But I didn't want to be there anymore in the first place. There were about fifteen tailors in Shreveport, and the knowledge of the business was far behind what we know from Western Europe, and I just didn't like to work in—I wanted to go and start a business for myself, so I took over a business in Longview. That is going from Shreveport to Dallas, and about seventy miles up the road is Longview. There was a business for sale, so I bought that one and made Western European-style working place out of it. And I kept that business for forty-three years till I retired.

MH: Okay. I have one other question to ask you about Mühldorf.

CR: Yes?

MH: You were in the camp at Mühldorf?

CR: No, we belonged to Mühldorf, but the camp itself was at Ampfing.

MH: Okay. But—no, before Ampfing—

CR: Mühldorf is surrounded by—was surrounded by all kinds of camps.

MH: There was a camp—

CR: Camps like Moosberg, and other camps.

MH: There was a camp in Mühldorf called Dachau III B.

CR: It was the Dachau vicinity. All these camps—and camps are plenty always—everywhere, they belonged to a certain head camp. So, in Upper Silesia we belonged to Auschwitz. I never was there as a prisoner, but we belonged to it. Registration, administration, regulations, everything was decided by Auschwitz.

MH: Okay. But before you got to Ampfing, I thought you had said you were in a camp called Mühldorf. No?

CR: Yeah, just three days, two and a half days.

MH: Three days. Was that the camp that had the underground tunnels?

CR: I don't know about underground.

MH: Okay. All right.

CR: Mühldorf was an airport facility, and the airport workers are needed and they were part of that concentration camp, a small camp in Mühldorf.

MH: Right. But you were only there for a short time.

CR: We were on our way—we were looking for camps that had room to take us in.

MH: Got it.

CR: Because we were without a house, you could say, so they always want to find that (inaudible). There were several thousands of people that didn't belong to a camp, so they always moved us from one place to another.

MH: And they moved—

CR: That way, we were one morning we were in Mühldorf on our way for another camp, and it was this time on my way to Ampfing. At Mühldorf, we were standing on the road waiting for the guards to let us in, and then we were attacked by airplanes who were shooting at the airport.

MH: You were traveling by truck?

CR: Yeah.

MH: Okay. What is your wife's name?

CR: Jani.

MH: How do you spell that?

CR: This time. When it all happened, that was during my first wedding, first marriage.

MH: Oh, okay.

CR: And my wife was Elisabeth.

MH: Oh, okay. All right. Anything else you want to tell me, because you've shared with me quite a bit.

CR: I'm telling and kind of hesitating, because I'm afraid all the time that I step on something that Fischer can make trouble.

MH: Fischer's not going to make trouble.

CR: The publisher.

MH: They won't make trouble. The book—

CR: I would say that you have to talk with Fischer first about your plans.

MH: The book with Fischer is only written in German, right?

CR: It's written in Dutch.

MH: In Dutch?

CR: Yeah, originally. It was written as a report to the Dutch War Documentation Center in the late 1940s. But it never could be published in Holland because they advised me—since the time I write about was two years, and I was advised to publish it as a book in Holland. But the publisher—in this time, there was less interest in us, the old *concentrationaires*, than there is now. People didn't know anything, they didn't believe us, they said we made it much worse, and we didn't belong to the living anymore; just don't bother us. So, we got the feeling that we were on the side of society. We didn't belong no more. And if I wanted to make a book out of it, commercially, then several publishers advised me to put romance in there.

MH: Yeah, well—

CR: And more heroism; then it would sell better. In that time, first, nobody believed us. We always had the feeling if they asked us, “What happened?” as if you ask somebody, “How was your vacation?” you know. And then we start telling, then the people, the (inaudible) that we had to tell—that was the old prisoners—were too much for people to listen to. So, they said we are overdoing it and we're making up a lot. And in the sixties [1960s], in the 1960s, it changed. There was a television show that had the result that people start believing, that what we told, that was the truth.

MH: All right. Well, I thank you very much. How old are you today? How old are you now?

CR: I'm in ninety-second year.

MH: You're in your ninety-second year.

CR: What?

MH: Nothing. I hope you continue to live and be healthy.

CR: (laughs) I hope, too. I hope it for you, too.

MH: Thank you very much, Coen.

CR: You're welcome.

MH: Okay.

CR: Let me know how it went.

MH: I will let you know. I will send you a letter telling you about the book.

CR: Well, then I have to tell you something. Since I had no luck with publishing my book—I call it “my book,” but I’d rather call it always “my story”—in the United States neither, because I have no experience in it, and I don’t know the ins and outs. And they did with me what they wanted. One publisher in California, they want to just put my book aside; when the time was good to publish with some profit, they’d put it out. So, I thought I’d waited too long and told them to break the contract. I didn’t want to go on anymore. I didn’t want to be handled by somebody who’s selling a bunch of fish.

The book, the report, is not only what the War Documentation Center wanted to know what happened in all these camps. We promised each other, the little leftover Dutch Jews in Gleiwitz, one of the first big camps: we promised each other that whoever survived will try to write down to let the world know what happened to us. And I felt tied to that promise. I am the only one surviving, so I have an obligation. I have to do this. And that was the reason for me, the only way to publish a book.

But after here, getting fed up with the whole thing, my two daughters—the daughter from my first marriage; she is in her late fifties now; and my youngest daughter, who is about forty. They both went together and said, “Papa, since you never wanted to have any financial profit from it,” because I always—whatever contract I was making up, I always promised that if there was a royalty to give away, then it’d go to the Holocaust centers, not in my pocket. I in no way wanted a cent to go in my pocket. I didn’t want anything to do financial with it. They said, “Papa, if you try all the time with that book and you’re getting high in age, there is a way out that costs you not any money and costs nobody any money.” I went in touch with the University of Texas—you know I live in Texas.

MH: Yes.

CR: And an old acquaintance, Robert Abzug, one of the professors there, is very much interested. Do you know him?

MH: Yes, he wrote the book *Inside the Vicious Heart*.

CR: Then you know about him. And he met me long ago, and he said I made an impression on him, and he has an Internet program going, or how you call that. And he offered that to me. We can use it fully, and my daughters are working on it. So, if you want to know about that, if that is any help to you, go in touch with my daughters. If you want to, I give you the address.

MH: Yes, would you please?

CR: Do you have something to write down?

MH: Yes, I do. Go ahead.

CR: The oldest one is Magdalena—do I have to spell that?

MH: No.

CR: Magdalena Rood. She goes by her own name. And she lives in....

(to JR) Jani?

JR: Yeah?

CR: Will you give the address for Marlene?

JR: E-mail address?

MH: Sure, e-mail is good.

JR: You want the e-mail address?

CR: Telephone, like you did to me; that goes faster, I think. She can inform you more about it.

JR: (inaudible)

MH: I can't hear her, though. It's not coming through. Could you pick up the phone?

CR: Hello?

MH: Yes.

CR: You're still there?

MH: Yes. I just couldn't—

CR: ...

MH: And what is her phone number?

JR: I didn't hear that.

MH: Her phone number?

JR: Oh, I have her cell phone number, but I don't know that by heart. Let me see.

CR: She is looking.

JR: Okay. ...

MH: Thank you very, very much.

JR: Josepha works more on the Web site than Marlene does. That's our other daughter; she lives in Singapore right now. And her cell phone number is....

MH: That's your other daughter.

JR: That's the other daughter.

MH: And her name is?

JR: Josepha.

MH: Josepha.

JR: And her e-mail address is....

MH: Okay. Thank you very, very much. I appreciate it. And thank your husband, please, for me.

JR: I will do that.

MH: I will be in touch with you. Do you have e-mail?

JR: Yes.

MH: What is your e-mail?

JR: ...

MH: ... Okay. Thank you very, very much.

JR: All right. Thank you.

End of interview