

July 2010

Herta Pila and Salomon Pila oral history interview by Carolyn Ellis and Chris Patti, July 2, 2010


Herta Pila (Interviewee)

Carolyn Ellis (Interviewer)

Chris J. Patti (Interviewer)

Salomon Pila (Interviewee)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Pila, Herta (Interviewee); Ellis, Carolyn (Interviewer); Patti, Chris J. (Interviewer); and Pila, Salomon (Interviewee), "Herta Pila and Salomon Pila oral history interview by Carolyn Ellis and Chris Patti, July 2, 2010" (2010). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 176.

http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/176

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2011, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: F60-00033
Interviewees: Herta Pila (HP) and Salomon Pila (SP)
Interviewers: Carolyn Ellis (CE) and Christopher Patti (CP)
Interview date: July 2, 2010
Interview location: Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by: Kimberly Nordon
Transcription date: January 24, 2011 to February 2, 2011
Audit Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Audit Edit date: February 7, 2011 to February 9, 2011
Final Edit by: Dorian L. Thomas
Final Edit date: March 23, 2011

Carolyn Ellis: Today is July 2, 2010. I am interviewing survivor Herta Pila. My name is Carolyn Ellis. We're in Tampa, Florida, in the USA. We're using English as our language, and the videographers are Jane Duncan and David Purnell.

Herta, I was wondering if you could just tell me your full name and spell it for me.

Herta Pila: My name is Herta Pila. I was born Neuburger. And it's spelled H-e-r-t-a P-i-l-a, and my maiden name is N-e-u-b-u-r-g-e-r.

CE: And where were you born?

HP: I was born in Munich, Germany.

CE: Okay, and when?

HP: December 8, 1932.

CE: Thirty-two [1932], so how old are you right now?

HP: Seventy-seven.

CE: Seventy-seven, okay. And your parents' names?

HP: My mother's name was Charlotte Neuburger, and she was born Schram. And my dad's name was Moritz Neuburger.

CE: Could you spell Schram?

HP: S-c-h-r-a-m.

CE: And Moritz?

HP: M-o-r-t-i-z [*sic*], last letter of the alphabet. (laughs)

CE: Okay, Z instead of C. Okay, thank you.

HP: Because I never can spell it right, so I always say that.

CE: That's good, that's good. And where was your father born?

HP: My father was born in Ichenhausen, which is Swabia. But he moved to Munich in 1912.

CE: Okay, and where did he die?

HP: He died in Munich on—following from having been in Dachau.

CE: Okay, and do you know when he died?

HP: Yes, he died in 1941, the twenty-sixth of May.

CE: Okay, and your mother?

HP: My mother was born in Plauen, by Dresden.

CE: Okay.

HP: And she survived the war, and she died in June of seventy-nine [1979].

CE: Could you spell where she was born?

HP: P-l-a-u-e-n-slash-Dresden D-r-e-s-e-n [*sic*].

CE: Okay, and your father, you said, was born in—

HP: Ichenhausen.

CE: Ichenhausen; you want to spell that for us?

HP: I-c-h-e-n-h-a-u-s-e-n.

CE: Okay. All right, so let's start—well, let's get your siblings' names while we're getting names.

HP: I had a brother by the name of Theodore David Neuburger, and a sister, Regina. I think she only had one name, Regina Neuburger, and she was married then later on to a V-a-l-f-e-r, Valfer.

CE: Okay, and are they still living?

HP: No, they both passed on.

CE: And can you tell me when?

HP: I don't know the exact dates, but my sister died twelve years ago; my brother died six years ago.

CE: Okay, thank you.

HP: Both they and my mother are buried here in Tampa.

CE: Okay. So let's go back to your childhood—and this was in Munich—and tell me just a little about what you remember.

HP: Well, I tell you something, I kind of grew up into the mess that Hitler started. So I thought that was the way life was, which it really wasn't but it was the way I knew. We must have been a fairly affluent family, because we used to have a house in the country, which in 1935, when we all—all German Jews lost their citizenship automatically, so we had to get rid of the house because it was not allowed. And I do remember my mother had to take over the driving because—for the business, which we were in the leather branch, which meant my father used to sell the—not raw, but the tanned hides and leather for soles to factories. And he delivered, too, but he never drove because he never learned how; he had a chauffeur. But in 1935 nobody could have any more gentiles working for them, and our chauffeur was the first one who said he was leaving, so Mother took over for driving for the business.

CE: Okay. Had she driven before?

HP: Well, she drove, which was unusual because, you know, in Germany in order to get a driver's license you had to know how the engine works.

CE: Oh, really?

HP: Uh-huh. You didn't just go in and what your—the rules on the road; you had to know how the engines work in order to get a driver's license. She got her driver's license in 1929: that was even before I was born. But she did take over for the chauffeur then. And we still could have a nanny, but she had to be over fifty years old. So we were still there, and both my brother and sister were seven and eight years older than me.

And in thirty-five [1935], with all that was going on, my mother tried to start getting us slowly out of Germany, and so she sent both my brother and sister to Italy, into a boarding school. Then in 1938, naturally, when they closed all of our accounts, she had to take them back because she couldn't pay any more money for them. And I think that was even before the Night of Broken Glasses [Kristallnacht]. But she—it just didn't work for her. We also did have a cousin here in New York who had vouched for us, with \$50,000 for the whole family to get us out, but in thirty-eight [1938], the Night of Broken Glasses, my father ended up in Dachau. And when he came back in thirty-nine [1939], he was sick. So I—to this day I kind of feel sorry that I didn't question my mother about what really happened, but from what I heard from others, they all got kind of injected with some kind of a virus. And because everybody that was left, which were the men who used to serve in the First World War and had the Iron Cross, and so they let them out. But all of them pretty soon passed away.

CE: Interesting.

HP: So it was like—and like I say, our bank account was closed. Anything my mother had to pay for, she had to bring the bill to the bank, and if they felt that it was too much money that was on that bill, then they just wouldn't give her the money for it. From our own account—and the business was taken away anyway already, in thirty-eight [1938], as soon as the Night of the Broken Glasses.

But like I say, for me, I grew right into it. It was don't do this and don't that. You can't go on a streetcar, you cannot go with a train, you cannot go to a movie, you cannot go anywhere; you have to stay home. And then in forty-one [1941], we all had to wear the Jewish star. Even so, Hitler—well, Germany really didn't have any more ghettos, but Hitler made a ghetto. What he did is downtown he would empty out a kind of a high-rise—well, high-rise: six floors, seven floors. And he would move all Jewish people in it, so they all were in one place so he knew where to get whom. And so we stayed there.

And actually, when Dad passed away, it was kind of quiet yet, because it was forty-one [1941]. There was one transport, which actually we were on that list, too, because an aunt of mine and her husband were on that transport, resettling to the east. And somehow, I don't know why, we got eliminated; we were not picked up to go. Well, that one transport went to Kovno, and they were shot right after they got off the train.

CE: So let's go back before 1941 and just—how did you spend your days as a child?

HP: There was not very much.

CE: Not much?

HP: Because you couldn't go anywhere, and you even were afraid of going on the street. Kids I used to play with—and you know, in the—see, Germany didn't have cars parked in the streets. After six o'clock there was no car anymore on the streets, so we used the street as a playground. And all the kids in the neighborhood we used to play with

wouldn't play with us anymore. And my brother and sister were too old to really play with me, so there was nothing to do.

I started school in thirty-nine [1939], and I had to go to the Jewish school, which then when my mother brought my brother and sister back from Italy, they had to go and finish their year up—which they were in their last year of school—also in the Jewish school. And so I went—in 1941, when the first transport went to the east, there was always the teachers, the professors and everybody with all the higher echelon of learning that was sent with that very first, so the school was closed. So a good thing is I went two years, and I knew how to read and I knew how to write and I also knew how to figure things out with numbers.

And so this is how I spent my time, actually, reading. But I was also forbidden to go into because Germany had no public libraries, except for the universities and so on. But there were private lending libraries, and we had—well, she knew me very well, the lady who had one right around the corner from us, and she says, “Well, if you come at 6:30 when I'm closed and come to the back door, I'll let you take out a book.” Well, money we didn't have, but we did have books. So Mother let me take some of our books, and then she kind of gave me the equivalent of using the books from the library. Naturally she got them back, because that was all I could do. And really I read just about everything. I didn't understand half of it, but I read it.

CE: Was your family religious?

HP: We were Orthodox, but—well, like I say, that's the way I was used to, you know. And the big synagogue was actually not burned; it was torn down because Hitler needed a parking spot. So it was torn down and everything was thrown out into the streets, and most likely most of the women picked up whatever was theirs, because you never carried your prayer books; they were in the synagogue. Each one had their seat and there was little cases where like my dad kept his tallit, and my brother did, too. But it was torn up. And there was a small synagogue that they opened up in a back yard; but that was then closed down, too, in forty-one [1941] after all these people—when most of the people went away. And especially most of the children from the orphanage, because people complained seeing those kids running around with their Jewish star. So the orphanage was also in forty—forty-one [1941] sent about 1,000 people from Munich. As a matter of fact, I still—a friend of mine I correspond with sent me the list of it. Where he got it from I don't know, but he sent me the full list of who was sent away.

CE: Now on the Night of the Broken Glass, do you remember that?

HP: Oh, yes, I remember that—

CE: Tell me what you remember.

HP: That's because my dad wasn't home, and it was a Thursday night. Thursday? Yeah, Thursday to Friday. And my dad wasn't home and Mother was out, but she was coming

back that night. And as I mentioned before, our chauffeur, who was a bigwig in the Party—and as I said, there were no cars in the street after six o'clock. You had a—in a garage you had a spot, and that's where your car went. So he would let Mother drive into the garage; he was the caretaker of it. And as soon as Mother got out of the car, he said, "Give me the key. The car is mine now. You have nothing to do with it." So what was she going to do? That's what she did.

Also, before Mother got back, there was the SS coming up to our apartment, and they tore the apartment just about into shreds because they were looking for my dad: in the wardrobe, under the beds, and in the kitchen cabinets. They just wouldn't believe he wasn't there. But they left a message with our nanny and said she better get message to him: if he doesn't show up by Saturday noon at the Gestapo, Geheime Staatspolizei, then they will take all three children. So our maid knew where he was, so she got message to him. And naturally, being a father, he went, and that's when he got to Dachau.

CE: So that was 1938?

HP: Thirty-eight [1938], in November.

CE: Okay, and did you hear from him at all?

HP: No, we didn't hear anything. But you know what, bad things you always hear; somebody always knows something about it. So anyway, they did let him out in the beginning of thirty-nine [1939], as I said, because he was a bearer of the Iron Cross, but he came home, he was sick. Also, under the restrictions he could not see a doctor, he could not go to a hospital, he just had to stay. So, bit by bit, and he died just before—about six months before the first transport was sent in, as they call resettlement.

CE: And that was 1941.

HP: That was forty-one [1941]. And so really, I don't know. That was the way: don't do this, don't do that and don't go here and don't go there.

CE: And that was just life.

HP: That was life.

CE: That was life, so you didn't really question it all that much.

HP: No. My brother and sister, they both were then sent to forced labor. My brother was a—because I told you they were much older—and my brother was with a plumber, with a plumbing unit. And my sister was sent to where they made hats for the army. So they both worked, and so we kind of—I don't know; they went by day. Then we got—we were just about the—no, we were the last ones in that house who were Jewish. We had—the woman who bought the house, which used to belong to a cousin of ours, she said—because also, "No Jews in the bunker, no Jews in the basement, and no Jews anywhere."

Also, what they used to do because of the air raids—you know, it was row houses, like in big cities, and there's always a double—a firewall between row houses. You had to, in the basement, break through there and open up a hole that somebody could get through it and then put the bricks, which was usually three, four bricks thick, and all you could do is put one brick in and it wasn't cemented any more. So we had that in the basement, and the landlady said, "Anybody who is here when there is an air raid comes to the basement, and that means you, too."

And she always had to fight, because we had a very big—I don't know; he was one of the brown shirts [*Sturmabteilung*, SA], which he always fought with her, because he said we had no business being in the basement. But one day in there—it was two days before we had to—because in Germany it wasn't like in Poland, as my husband in Poland: they just routed them out. In Germany you got a letter that on this day with two suitcases you have to show up at this and this place for re-settlement to the east. Don't worry about the rest of your stuff; it will be sent after you.

CE: And they gave you a list of what you could bring, right?

HP: And they gave you a list, exactly what you could pack. And then two days before there was an air raid in the middle of the day. We were down in the basement, my mother and I, and the whole house came down on us.

CE: Oh, my!

HP: Absolutely, it just came right down. It came through the basement, stairs and everything, but the basement where we were held.

CE: Oh, my!

HP: So Mother and the landlady went later on outside when the air raid was over, and there was already a truck there to dig for the dead or whoever would be alive. So the landlady, she knew that we were getting ready to go be resettled, so what she did is she looked at my mother and she said to the guy, "You know, whoever was in the basement got out. And who was in the apartment—you don't need to dig; they lived on the main floor." So she kind of saved our life then, because, listen, we were dead by all appearances.

CE: That's amazing, that's amazing!

HP: And she let us stay in the basement, sleep overnight, you know, for a couple weeks, and then she said to my mother, "You've got to move. Somebody saw one of your kids."

CE: Who came back?

HP: Most likely it was either my sister or my brother, because at the day we had the—they weren't with us because they worked; they were somewhere else. But to sleep at night they used to come be where we were, Mom and I. And so she said, "I'm sorry, but you've got to move." So Mother and I—well, Mother and I, we kind of traipsed around the streets. Any time there was an air raid we would go in the next bunker. Well, naturally we took the stars off. But it was always somewhere else than where we used to live all the time, because we knew where the bombings went on and so on. And also, there usually was about—a couple hours later there was a soup kitchen going up, and you didn't have to show an identification. For twenty-four hours, no identification, so you got something to eat.

CE: After an air raid, you mean?

HP: After an air raid.

CE: You didn't have to show identification? Why was that?

HP: Because you just said you lived in that house and it was burnt down.

CE: Oh, right! Right, okay.

HP: You know, it takes a couple of times to get the new one.

CE: Wow.

HP: And we couldn't—we had ours, but we couldn't show them. We had a big J on the front.

CE: Now, how many days did you do this?

HP: Well, any time there was a big air raid, which from forty-four [1944], the beginning of forty-four [1944], was just about every day. And we always ended up into a different neighborhood, and we just looked which house either was burning down or which house had fallen down, and that's the address my mother gave.

CE: And where did you actually sleep?

HP: Most likely in a bunker, because there was always air raids anyway at night, so you just stayed in.

CE: So you found a bunker to stay in?

HP: There were lots of bunkers.

CE: Lots of bunkers?

HP: And as long as they didn't want to know an identification we were okay, but the minute they asked for identification—but then Mother found a room in an apartment way out in Munich: that's where we stayed then. That's when the next letters came; they came to where my sister worked. She brought them home. And my brother took one look at them and he said, "I'm not going with anybody, I'm leaving," and he left.

CE: And what year was this?

HP: This was forty-four [1944].

CE: Forty-four [1944], okay.

HP: And he left because he—and we had no idea. And so a couple of days later somebody—because they gave you about two weeks until you had to show up at that place—at least I think that's what it was; that I can't exactly remember anymore. Somebody came and said I should go with them, and I said, "I'm not going with you. Who sent you?" [The person said] "I can't tell you who sent me." So I said, "Well, I'm not used to"—I was told from the time I was a little kid, "You don't go with anybody you don't know." Okay, so he left, came back—

CE: And you're by yourself?

HP: I was by myself. I don't know where Mother went, but you know everybody—nobody told the other one where they went to, except I usually hung on to my mother, but I think I had a bad cold that day.

CE: Now, why didn't you—you didn't tell because you didn't want—

HP: I didn't want to go with him.

CE: But I mean, why didn't you tell each other where you were going?

HP: Just in case if somebody gets caught.

CE: Okay, and then they can't tell.

HP: They couldn't say where the rest of were. And so he came back and he told me that Mr. Schörghofer sent him. Well, Mr. Schörghofer I knew, because we used to go visit my dad's grave down at the cemetery. And he said to me like this: he said, "You don't need to go with me. Get yourself down to the cemetery."

CE: Okay, now how did you know Mr. Schörghofer?

HP: Because he was the caretaker of the Jewish cemetery.

CE: Cemetery, okay.

HP: But as you saw in the picture, he had a big beard, and anybody that has a big beard like this is recognizable, and there aren't that many people who do have it. So he didn't want to come where we were, just in case if someone sees me leave with him, that they said, "Well, yeah, we saw her go with this man." Anyway, I went down—so I packed up my little satchel, which always was packed because of the air raids, and that was all I had anyway, and I left. I left a note—"See you after the war"—but that was all. And the one who owned this apartment, she had shown up that day, and took the slip and put it behind something. Took two days till my mother found it.

CE: And why do you think she put it somewhere?

HP: It was a him; it was a big Nazi.

CE: Oh, really?

HP: Yeah, he didn't like that I wrote, "See you after the war," I guess, if he read it. But anyway, so they didn't know where I was at all, and my sister was then—my mother was very sick at that time, and she was talking to my sister that they should go to a friend of hers, which said—when Mother was asking her the first time we were supposed to be resettled, she said, "Well, you I take, but the kids I can't take. Kids are trouble."

CE: And why are they trouble?

HP: Well, because first of all it's more people, and when there's kids there's always some kind of a thing going on, and especially between brothers and sisters, you know, there's always a squabble.

CE: Right, okay.

HP: So she didn't. But now that Ted was gone and I was gone, she figured she would take her and Gina, but my sister never came back. They picked her off the street. She went to Terezín, Theresienstadt. And so Mother did go to that woman, but she was very sick. She had a big abscess on the back of her neck, and she couldn't go see a doctor either, you know. So I don't know what they did there, but she stayed with that lady. And so this is when I—

CE: Now, did you know your sister was in Theresienstadt?

HP: No, I had no idea. I didn't know anymore where anybody was until after the war.

CE: Did your mother know where your sister had gone?

HP: Well, she figured where she was going when she didn't show up anymore. And I think maybe somebody had told her that they saw that she was taken off the street.

CE: And your brother, where—

HP: My brother was gone already. He went into the mountains and he worked for a farmer, and the farmer said to him, “Don’t show me your identification. You can sleep in the hay loft, and if anybody looks around and looks for you I don’t know you. You are just a vagrant.” But all these things I only found out after.

CE: Afterwards.

HP: I went down to the cemetery. And because—as you have read in his biography—Mr. Schörghofer kept more people than one, so I also was one too many. So he shipped me with his daughter to the other daughter, because women with children were evacuated into the country. The country wasn’t bombed, it was just the big cities that were bombed. And so he—so, I went out there. Also Hitler had made a rule: any fourteen-year-old had to work for a family with children so they become good housewives and mothers. So, this is how I was introduced there. But on the way there, we stopped at one of the three—first of all, I shouldn’t have been in a train altogether and, as you know, I didn’t wear my Jewish star.

CE: And you’re by yourself in the train now?

HP: With that woman.

CE: With that woman, the daughter.

HP: With one daughter of Schörghofer, the youngest. She took me to her sister. And we’re standing at the platform in the train station, and there comes another train going towards Munich. And right opposite me is a young man with all the medals he has already earned in the Hitler-Jugend, and he knew me because he was our next-door neighbor. He was the first one who threw me off the sidewalk, that I had no business being on the sidewalk. And I said to her, “Anne, this young man knows me.” And she said, “If he says anything, if he calls his leader, we are all done for.” And we would have, and to this day I don’t know why he didn’t, because he did recognize me. Listen—

CE: Oh, my.

HP: So we went on—

CE: Do you remember that moment?

HP: I remember that moment. My heart sank right into—because it was a full compartment with other people, too.

CE: Doing the same thing?

HP: No, who didn't know us, but having me there and her, it could have been a disaster if he would have called his leader. He didn't. And I still don't know why he didn't, because I finally—about six years ago I was in Germany, and I got the phone number where he—who he had. And I called up and I said this is so and so, and remember you were opposite me in Holzkirchen at the station. He said, “Never was there!”

CE: Wow! Now, how do you interpret that?

HP: I interpret that he doesn't want to know anything about it anymore. That's how I interpret it, because—but right away he cut me off completely. I wanted to tell him thank you, I lived to see grandchildren. But, “I never was in that place!”

CE: Wow! How did you feel when that happened?

HP: I really couldn't care less, to tell you the truth. And I never would have even bothered asking him, but we were talking once at the Holocaust Museum about my story and they said, “Didn't you ever find out why he didn't call his leader?” And I said no. But then there was a time in-between till we finally got to Germany and somebody gave me the phone number, because there you don't get—not everybody has a phone book; you have to go to the post office in order to get a phone book. And so I decided as long as I got the phone number from somebody I am going to call. That was the answer. It was okay with me, too.

CE: Okay, all right.

HP: So anyway, I stayed there. It was a single farmhouse up on a hill. The owner did not live there, but three families, which means three women with children, were quartered there. And one was the lady I was staying with, Martha Schleipfer. She knew that I was Jewish, and she had a six-month-old and she had a five-year-old. And when the other ladies asked who I was, she said I was sent from the government. So that was the story about it. And so I—and you know, this was—here I am, a big city girl, had to pump water. There was no running water, no running light. You had to warm stuff on a cook stove, on a wooden cook stove which—how should I know how to work it? I was altogether not quite twelve years old. So you know, and I was the youngest at home. After the maid was gone my sister had to do the work. It's a completely different thing, but I managed. Used to do the laundry in a topless—one of those things they only use for music now.

CE: The washboard?

HP: The washboards I used. And then I had to go—outside was a little river—it wasn't a river, a little thing that came down from—and there I had to rinse the clothes in. But like I say—one thing I will have to say to this day: she made me a good housewife! (both laugh) She had beautiful hand carved furniture in ebony, and she would go after me with a—I had a little brush and I had to dust all these figures, and then she would come with white gloves to see whether I did the work.

CE: Wow! Do you dust all these figures?

HP: Nah, not anymore.

CE: Did you?

HP: I used to, I used to. And I see they just as well stay the way they are. (both laugh) But anyway, this is how—any time we saw a strange car come up on the driveway, I would quickly pick up the older boy and he and I would go down in the back, into the woods. We'd pick twigs and stuff for the stove. Because after all, a five-year-old can tell that there's one more person there. So he and I, we kind of took off until we saw that the car left.

CE: Now, did you ever interact with other people?

HP: No.

CE: No.

HP: Well, only sometimes with the ones that lived upstairs, you know, but not really because there was never was any time. By the time—you know, you had to clean the carbine lamps to see, and I had to take care of the kids. And there wasn't really anything—they were busy and I was busy.

CE: And did you have to pretend that you were not Jewish with them?

HP: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

CE: And was that difficult?

HP: Well, really not, because nothing was ever talked about religion. And I myself knew that that was a dead giveaway, you know. And the kids didn't understand, really. You know, I was just somebody that took care of them. So I stayed there, then her husband—

CE: Did you get to read and do things?

HP: Oh, yeah, she had stuff there that she let me do if the kids were asleep, but until then I had to entertain the kids. Mrs. Schleipfer didn't have to—wasn't very busy with her kids.

CE: She was not very busy with her kids. Okay.

HP: No, but she was—you know what, she was not a very outgoing person anyway. Why she did it, I don't know, why she really got herself into that kind—but I guess her father talked her into it.

CE: Did you think she did it to get the help, or was she trying to help you?

HP: No, I don't think—because she could have gotten anybody anyway, you know, and she took a big *risiko*, risk, by having me there. Because you never can tell, you know, what—

CE: I want to come back to all that, but just go ahead for a moment; did you see her later?

HP: Oh, yeah. I did, because her husband was a dentist, and he used to be my dentist.

CE: Oh, you did?

HP: When they went back to Munich.

CE: Okay, so you continued to see her?

HP: Yeah.

CE: Okay, so back in the farmhouse, then—so how did you feel at that point?

HP: Well, I tell you something, I know that she—I don't think whether I really knew that, what kind of a risk she took. You know, that I really—because I hadn't known so much about it, what was really going on. Children were only to be seen and never were told what was going on, even if the parents would know about it. I know it wasn't anything good, because anytime something came up with like the letters with the resettlement, or with Mother not being able to go see a doctor, you know, the whole bit. But I told you, I grew right into it then. It was a matter of life; it wasn't anything that was strange to me.

CE: Yes, okay. It was just normal.

HP: It was normal. And somehow, as I said, it only dawned on me later, after the war. Her husband went AWL [Absent Without Leave] just before the end of the war and he came back and he just stayed there, which then was two things that she had to be careful of.

CE: Oh, right. So he had to hide, too?

HP: Sure.

CE: Yeah. Wow!

HP: But then, like I said, then when the war was at an end, my brother was still in the mountains and where he was in a—oh, kind of where they—in a cottage, you know, when they went hunting. And there were a lot of SS up there and, being Jewish, he had to always watch that they didn't go to the bathroom together. But what he did, then,

when he heard that the Americans were down in the little town, he went downstairs and he went to their headquarters and said, “Listen, you want to find some Nazis? Go up there; you’ll find quite a few there.” And then they were afraid that he was a—it was, you know, a trap that he would set. He said, “Listen, I’m Jewish, and I was hiding out with them, but now that you’re here, you take care of them.”

CE: So he hid with Nazis?

HP: Well, yeah, in the end, because he went up into that same cottage, you know, where a lot of the SS thought that they would kind of get away with whatever, at the end of the war. And so he went down, and there was—the CO [commanding officer] or whatever he was, he was Jewish too, and he tried my brother with the Hebrew and the whole bit, whether he knew it. He was old enough, you know, so he should have known it, and he did. But then he said, “Okay, what do you want?” He [HP’s brother] says, “I want to go back to Munich. I want to see what happened to the rest of”—see, he didn’t know either what happened—

CE: He didn’t know, he didn’t know.

HP: —to the rest of us. He says, “I want to see what happened to the rest of my family.” So they gave him a motorbike and a slip that he can pass every point, because—there was two. You could only go five kilometers in circumference from where you were; you weren’t allowed to go any further. But they gave him a slip that he should be able to get into Munich without trouble, and if he needed for the motorbike—if he needed any gasoline, they should give him gasoline. So he got back to Munich, and he went naturally to the last place we were. There he found a slip: “If you want to know where your youngest sister is—”

CE: That was still there?

HP: Well, no, that was a different slip. It said, “If you want to know where your youngest sister is, come down to the cemetery.” So naturally the first thing, he got a real shock, you know. But he did go down and then Mr. Schörghofer told him where I was, and he also told him where my sister was. He didn’t know where my mother was, but he—so my brother just figured out where she may have gone.

CE: Okay, ’cause he knew the friend?

HP: Yeah. And he knew that Mother had already asked her once before whether she could with the kids stay with her, and she said, “No, kids are—they’re trouble.” So he went—he got back on his bicycle, on his motorcycle, and came and got me.

CE: Now, how long had you been in the farmhouse at this point?

HP: At this point I was in the farmhouse eight months.

CE: Eight months, okay.

HP: Eight months, seven or eight months. Anyway, he came and he picked me up.

CE: Do you remember that moment?

HP: Yeah.

CE: Tell me.

HP: Well, I tell you something—just to see him, because him, we had not known what and how. And then he told me what had happened to my sister. He said, “But she is alive and she’s waiting for a transport back.” Theresienstadt had a quarantine right after the war because they had typhoid so bad. So they all were held back for about three weeks when everybody else was already let go; they wouldn’t let them out.

CE: And how did he know she was there?

HP: Because they told him at the cemetery. They told what happened to her.

CE: Okay, so they knew.

HP: They knew. I mean, it was the same thing. I get asked how did Mr. Schörghofer know that we were supposed to be sent away. Well, I have no idea how he knew, but he knew. That’s why he came to get me. I never asked him. I tell you something, when you’re that age you don’t ask questions. As a matter of fact, you were told not to ask too many questions; it’s not healthy. So he picked me up and he brought me to Mother. It was Mothers’ Day when he dropped me off at Mother’s.

CE: Oh, my! Now, tell me about that meeting.

HP: Well, that was—she couldn’t believe it. But she said, “I knew that you were alive. I just knew you were alive.” So then we—I stayed with her a little bit and I saw that the lady didn’t like my staying there, so when Ted came another time around to see how we were doing, I told him, “Take me with you to Munich.” Because we still had that one—you know, the guy didn’t come back with his wife; he came back after I had been there already. Mother didn’t come with us, because how could she and there was no transportation. Me, I sat on my coat on the back of the motorcycle, and so he dropped me. When he was there and I was there comes the big guy; he was a big Nazi, told my brother, “You get out of here. By tomorrow I want you out of here.” Well, by that time, my brother wasn’t taking any statement from him. He said, “You know what? You come tomorrow with a truck. I’ll let you take all your stuff that’s yours,” which they left us without anything.

CE: So this was your old place?

HP: No, this wasn't the old place; it was the one room Mother found—

CE: The one room, okay.

HP: Where they didn't want—where they said they didn't need to see your identification.

CE: Okay, okay.

HP: See, identification was the one important thing at that time. So they didn't want—so that's where my brother went to, because that was the last place he had been.

CE: So this big guard now lived there or had his stuff there?

HP: No, no, no, no. He still had his stuff all in there, because he hadn't come before. I guess he must have hid out somewhere else, too, so they wouldn't find him because he was a big Nazi. See, his wife and children were also in the country.

So he came and he says we have to get out by tomorrow. "Twelve o'clock, I want you out of here." My brother had some of his friends were there, too, because they had nowhere else to say, so they stayed with us. Listen, it was a big apartment: it had one, two, three bedrooms, a dining room, and a big kitchen. And it was built around a big foyer—I still see it in front of me. And so it was big enough; we all found room where to sleep. And so they stood up right behind him, and my brother said to him, "Listen, I don't care what you say. I'll let you come tomorrow with a truck. Pick up your stuff and then you get out of here. The apartment is ours now." But he was so scared that he did. The next day he came with his truck, he picked up his stuff, and we stayed in the apartment. (laughs)

So that was about the story of it from there on. And, as I was telling you before, we then made quite a bit of friends with displaced persons. Very few German Jews were back, very few, and definitely nobody my age. So life wasn't that easy, and you know, you grew up a little bit too fast, especially if you then in retrospect you listen to all that had happened—which wasn't very much, actually, because none of the displaced persons would tell you. Yes, they were in concentration camps, they were in more than one, but nobody would talk about it.

CE: You didn't? Now, when did your sister get back?

HP: My sister got back in about—in July, beginning of July. Like I said, they held them back because of the typhoid. And when she came back—first of all, she was a completely changed person. She wasn't the same anymore. And then the next thing was, "I'm not going to stay in Germany."

CE: Tell me how she was different.

HP: Her whole being. She used to be the epitome of a lady. I always looked up to her. And she didn't care about anything, she didn't need anything, she just wanted to get out of Germany.

CE: And did she talk about her experiences?

HP: No, no.

CE: No? Did she ever talk about her experiences?

HP: No. Even I have given from the Shoah; she did talk on the Shoah, too. And so did my brother, and I gave my daughter all three of the tapes. That's why I don't have mine here. She talked, but she didn't really say anything on it. And I told my daughter, I said, "You know what, you will hear pretty much the same thing your mother said. The only thing is, it isn't the same thing." And my daughter said, "You're right, Mom." My brother, he just told it like it was with him, and not too much, and my sister somehow must [have] talked around everything so much that you could not figure what she really was saying.

CE: Wow! Interesting. I will watch that. I would like to see that.

HP: I said we all were in the same boat, I said they should be somehow—but somehow from Gina you cannot get really anything what was.

CE: Okay, so you're back living in this apartment with your mother and your brother—

HP: Mom came then and we all were there.

CE: And your sister.

HP: Yeah.

CE: And then what happens?

HP: My sister went—my sister went on the first transport in 1947 that displaced persons could come to the United States. She was on that one. She got on and she got out.

CE: And she came to where, New York?

HP: She came to New York, and then she could not stand the winter in New York; you know she wasn't too well anymore. And so then the doctor told her she should move to Miami, and so that's where she went. And so Mother and I, well, we couldn't get out, and neither could my brother because America only let in displaced persons.

CE: And you were not displaced?

HP: And we weren't displaced persons. And then we got our German citizenship back with our—we didn't ask for it, we got it back.

CE: Now, what did you have to do to be a displaced person?

HP: You had to be in concentration camp, that was if you were—or the ones that were in Russia you heard about: also displaced because they went with the Russian Army into Siberia when the Germans overran Poland. So this is what was called the displaced persons were the ones that—I tell you something: they didn't have a great life, either, afterwards in those displaced person camps in Germany. They were not treated very nice.

CE: I think we're almost through the tape, so why don't we stop? And then when we pick up the tape, I would like to talk more about what you know about the displaced persons camps.

HP: Okay.

CE: And then what happened with you and your mother at that point as well.

HP: Okay.

CE: Okay. Thank you. I can't believe—

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CE: This is tape two with Herta Pila. So, Herta, we were talking a little bit about displaced persons, and your sister and her travels to America. Let's go back with, then, you and your mother and what's happening with the two of you.

HP: Well, we just had to stay, because there was nothing you can do. I really wasn't liking it too much. But then there came Australia, but that's already way after, when I went to school. Australia gave out permits anywhere between seventeen and thirty-five years, so I applied for one of them to go to Australia. And I went to Australia, because by that time I was just seventeen.

CE: Okay. Now before that, then, let's come back to Germany and what was happening in Germany?

HP: Well, in Germany the displaced persons—there were a couple of displaced camps in Munich and then there were a couple out around Munich. These people weren't treated very nice. Some of them went back into the barracks that they were in when they were in concentration camp. And it was—but everybody really, I will have to say, started to make a life of their own again. They got married—they found somebody, they got married, they had children and they did the best they could.

And naturally the first time, right after the war, the main income was from black market, which you wouldn't have had if it wouldn't have been for the Americans who supplied it! (laughs) The soldiers, you know, they supplied it. Nylons, cigarettes—anything you wanted, you could get. Then in 1948 they changed the Reichsmark to just the German Mark. And what was—it was you only had 10 percent of what you had, which meant when they started out with the new money, the head of the household got sixty marks and everybody else in the household got forty marks, which was nothing. But all of a sudden, all the stores, whatever you could only think you would want, were in the stores.

But life kept on going. You know, people talk, people work, people did things. It wasn't that anybody laid down and say, "You owe me something." You know, that's one thing: it was not the idea of all the displaced people that were there from, you know, the concentration camp where I got around. And everybody was busy. Some of the younger ones went because (inaudible) started schools for trades and HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] helped out a little bit. It wasn't much that they helped, but it did somehow. The people themselves were trying to get back to a normal life. That's why nobody wanted to talk about what had happened to them. And nobody anyway, who wasn't in their same category, would believe it.

You know, Dachau was right outside Munich, sixteen kilometers; that's about twelve miles. People certainly didn't know what was going on there. There was a town right by it. People said they didn't know what was going on there. It was a complete thing—nobody had anything to do with it and nobody knew anything.

CE: You really believe they didn't know about it?

HP: I'm sure they had to. And you see the same thing is in Poland. Auschwitz was burning that many bodies; the smell must have been absolutely horrible. And people didn't know what happened. People don't want to, don't want to be involved.

CE: Now, what was it like living with non-Jews at that point, after everything that had happened?

HP: Well, I think they were a little bit afraid of non-Jews, but on the whole they went on their merry-go-round that they had been on all the time. You know, there was not much. And you really, in one way—we stayed away from them and they stayed away from us, because first of all, they were always afraid that we might want something. And that was about the life. Like I said, life after the war wasn't that great in Germany.

CE: How did you feel at that point living in Germany?

HP: I wanted to get out, too—

CE: You wanted to get out, too?

HP: Just like my sister did, like my sister did. There wasn't a life anymore. And as I said, I had only to do with (inaudible) German people because nobody was my age. So when I had to go back to school, I had to go back to school.

CE: Okay, now let's talk about school.

HP: So I passed the entrance exam, after having only two years of schooling to begin with and about forty-two [1942] to forty-five [1945], three years of nothing. I made the exam in the second year gymnasium.

CE: Which is about fifth grade?

HP: Fifth grade. I did okay the first year, and then the second year they demanded more subjects that you had to take, and so it got kind of a little bit hairy. And by the end of the third year I got my report card, which I brought home, and it said if I don't improve the first six weeks in the fourth year, then I will have to repeat the third year. And I told my mother point blank I'm not going back, and I'm not going to get a tutor either. But by the regulars I didn't have to go actually to school; I was by that time old enough. I was fourteen, and so—but I had to be apprenticed to a trade.

And so, well, we want to go—what I'm going to be apprenticed to was a furrier. The furrier didn't work anymore with new things, but all you had to do was rip out old furs, and you can imagine the dust and everything, and me, I am very allergic. And on top of it, I had to work here—again, with the gentile people. My mother, naturally, would send with me a beautiful nice sandwich for lunch, and they always would look in what I had to eat, and so I got to the point where I wouldn't eat anymore because they were so jealous, you know. I mean, my mother—sure, my mother went back into our business. She went back to one of the suppliers for my dad and she said, "Listen, I don't have any money, but I will be good for it." And he knew our family so he let her have the goods, and Mother sold them. Half of it went—and he said to her, he said, "I know it's going to go most on the black market." She said, "You're right." He said, "So, whatever you sell regular, I get the regular price for it. What you sell on the black market, I want 10 percent."

CE: Ten percent more of the—okay.

HP: Yup.

CE: Yeah, okay.

HP: So my mother went back into business, and naturally soon she bought stuff for us to eat that was better than what anybody else could get. So they were very jealous that I brought those sandwiches; you know, Mother made a beautiful sandwich and I couldn't eat it. So, not eating, I got home and we sat home to eat, and I'd run and I'd throw up because I couldn't eat anymore. And anybody talks about being—at that time you didn't know about—what is it?

CE: Bulimia.

HP: Yeah, I don't know about it, but that's what I had.

CE: Or anorexia?

HP: Or anorexia, because it was just—I just couldn't. The minute I saw the food on the table, that was it. I ran. But so I said to my mother, "I don't think I can stay with that." So at that time—

CE: Did you get real skinny?

HP: Oh, yeah, I was very skinny. Calvin couldn't believe it when I told him, because of what the clinic told me I should take—Mayo Clinic for (inaudible) pills. He says, "But you never had anorexia." I says, "How do you know?" Because he remembers his mother being a little bit hefty.

So anyway, at that time I saw in the paper that there was a course given for baby nursing and kindergarten help. I said, "That's where I'm going to go for a year." Because I had to still go to school, you know. If you are apprenticed you have to go twice a week at night, two hours, to school to learn about bookkeeping and all that stuff. But the furs were not for me. I did graduate from baby nursing and kindergarten help; it was something more to my doing.

CE: Your liking, yes.

HP: But like I say, life—I don't know, thinking back on it, you lived through it but it wasn't really anything that you would write home about.

CE: Tell me how the blackmail system worked.

HP: The black market?

CE: The black market, yeah. I meant black market, sorry.

HP: Yeah, the black market system worked that you got the stuff from the Americans, and then you sold it for more money.

CE: Okay, so cigarettes or whatever.

HP: And it was stuff that you couldn't get in a store until after forty-eight [1948]. After forty-eight [1948], it started to be normalized; you could go into any store, you could get—if you had the money, you could get it. There was no problem—

CE: So did you sell them on the streets?

HP: Well, no, it wasn't—Mother had a—like with our business. Mother had a store—not a store, but a place where she stored the bales and the hides and so on, and so she sold right from out there. But most of the people there—like I say, it's very hard to explain, but it was a way of living.

CE: So now you're a teenager, but you've had all these experiences. You've been a nanny for children—

HP: Ran a household.

CE: Ran a household, and now you—then you go back into school. And so, what's the rest of your life like? Do you have boyfriends? Are you dating?

HP: Oh, I had enough friends. I went out dancing. I even made once the “nicest legs of Munich.” I could think of all those crazy things to do. There was a contest, so I decided I was joining it. Made first prize. (laughs)

CE: Okay, so how would you describe yourself at this point? Were you outgoing, shy?

HP: No, I was outgoing, and actually I did things that in a normal time I don't think people would have done. (laughs)

CE: So you were kind of adventurous and—which would make sense.

HP: Then I—like I say, it was just—I don't know. Thinking back on it, in one way I have to laugh, and on the other hand I think to myself, “I can't believe I did that.”

CE: Hey, I see my life that way, and I didn't live through the Holocaust. (both laugh)

HP: So that's like I say, then, when they gave the permit and I got a permit at seventeen years, I took off for Australia.

CE: By yourself.

HP: By myself.

CE: What did your mother say about that?

HP: Nothing. She didn't want to stay either, so she hoped that if I'd be over there I will be able to send her papers. But, you know, it's very hard to get people to sign for somebody, because they are afraid they really would be taken to task to take care of them. So it took me a long time till I got somebody to finally sign the papers for her. And when I had that German—America had changed, that anybody that fell under the Nuremberg Laws could immigrate to the United States. Well, so now my mother had both papers in her hand. She wrote to me, “What should I do?” I said, “You know what, you go to

America. Gina is there.” And by that time my brother, who then also fell under the Nuremberg Law, had gotten papers and he was in America, so then I’m coming. I’m not that fond of Australia. (laughs) But then I found out that with being back on a German quota of having once immigrated, I would have to wait six years.

CE: Oh, my.

HP: Well, that didn’t sit too well with me, so one day I—every Friday—I worked for a very religious man who closed the store on Friday at three. So at 3:30 I was at the American consulate. Every week; you set your clock by me. And so finally the consul said, “What is she doing here every Friday?”

So his secretary said, “She’s coming to see whether there’s something new. She wants to go to America.”

So he called me in and he talked to me, and he said, “I hear you want to go to America, but you know the German quota is six years.”

“Yeah,” I said. “But my whole family is in America.”

So he says, “How old are you?”

I said, “Nineteen.”

And he said, “Okay. You have your mother go to the consul in Miami and tell them that she’s got a daughter underage in Australia and she wants her to come.”

I said, “But my mother doesn’t know how to speak English; she just got there.”

He said, “Tell her your sister should do it.” So, six weeks later I had a permit.

CE: Wonderful. Now, what was your relationship with your mother like after the war?

HP: I don’t know. I think we each kind of—she was my mother, I loved her; and still, you know, life was so completely different. You know, we kind of were mother and daughter and we weren’t mother and daughter. I mean, life for her, if I think on it, I think she had a miserable life all during the time. She had a miserable—she had three kids, she had to still—you know, at the time we were around—feed on something that was not there, and she had to take care of it and the whole bit. I think my mother had a horrible life, and sometimes I feel very guilty. But that was just how life was. It wasn’t the same anymore. So, that’s the way it goes.

CE: Yeah. Did she—she came to the United States?

HP: Yeah, she came to the United—well, she came before me.

CE: She came before you.

HP: Because then she got to the—so I could come to the United States. And so when I came to the United States, I had to come on a freighter because I wanted to go down to Miami. By that time I knew that my husband was already—he was not then my husband. He was here, because I used to correspond with his sister-in-law, because I knew his brothers from right after the war. The only thing he always said to me was, “You’re jailbait.” (CE laughs) But otherwise, he and I got along very well together.

CE: That’s great.

HP: He always talked about a brother that he had, but he never—you know, I don’t know. He wasn’t there, so I didn’t know. And so I met him at a party, and I just—I was ready to leave, and he was standing there behind me on the window; we were looking down. And he said, “*Fräulein*, you have anything to do tonight?”

CE: Oh, this is great.

HP: I looked at him, and I said, “Yes, I do.” So—

CE: All right, I’m going to stop you, only because I want your husband to be here and have the two of you tell this story together.

HP: Okay.

CE: Okay?

HP: Okay.

CE: So, as much as I want to hear it right now, let’s wait.

HP: Okay, okay. But like I said, this is—but he came to pick me up in Boston when he found out that I was on my way to America.

CE: Okay. All right. Is there anything else that we’ve left out up to the point that you meet your husband?

HP: Not really. Like I say, life went on, but it wasn’t really what it should have been for somebody my age.

CE: It’s real hard for me to even imagine what it would be like to be a teenager, to have those experiences, to figure out really what your relationship with your mother was because you had been so independent.

HP: That’s right, I really—it wasn’t to my mother’s liking either.

CE: Yeah. I've talked to other survivors who were separated from their parents and then got back together, and it was really difficult.

HP: It is difficult, it is difficult. Because you go on and you live pretty much on your own wits and your wits aren't that great.

CE: But you're not used to being told what to do.

HP: That's it, that's it.

CE: And then, all of a sudden—

HP: Then, all of a sudden, you're back under jurisdiction.

CE: Yes.

HP: And that doesn't work too well either. And then on top of it by that time I had a sister-in-law who was kind of a little flirt, and when my mother said anything to her she said, "Well, look at your daughter, what your daughter does." And so then naturally then Mother will get real angry at me for nothing. I just liked to go dancing.

CE: That sounds reasonable, to have a little fun after having that life where you didn't—

HP: That's about it, that's about it.

CE: —didn't have friends, didn't have fun.

HP: That's it. So, like I say, I—it is a hard thing.

CE: Okay, is there anything—let me ask you one other question: have you visited Germany?

HP: Oh, yeah. We've been back, but I'm still walking in Germany with my head over my shoulder.

CE: Looking back to—you still feel that way?

HP: Even so, I will say the last time we were there, four, five years ago—the younger generation really has changed quite a bit. It is quite a different—you know, the old generation, the ones that were the perpetrators, are pretty much out. And somehow their kids and grandkids—some of the kids are still I wouldn't trust around, but the grandkids are really completely different. They have a much more open outlook.

CE: And do you read a lot?

HP: Oh, yeah.

CE: Do you read a lot about the Holocaust?

HP: Oh, yeah.

CE: You do? So you're really self-educated on that, all of that, in addition to the experience.

HP: Oh, yeah.

CE: Do you think in a different situation you would have gone on to school and then a professional—

HP: Most likely, most likely.

CE: What would you have liked to have done?

HP: Oh, I don't know. Something like—I would say most likely into a profession. Nurse, I don't think so; I wasn't fond of nurses. But I might have gone on and studied as a doctor.

CE: I wondered about that. So your children really—you really are living through your children?

HP: Well, I really—I do and I don't, because all I wanted for them is to be educated and then live whatever they feel like it. The oldest, I know exactly he is patterning himself after a doctor that was in the small town where he grew up. He really is the same type of a doctor this little land doctor was. And so this is why I say I don't think I really pushed him towards it, I just pushed him that he has to learn. Did that to all three of them. I was a terrible mother.

CE: Oh, I don't believe it!

HP: I was a terrible mother.

CE: What do you mean by that?

HP: Everything had to be just so. And God forbid if they didn't.

CE: Would you do it different if you were doing it over?

HP: Most likely not.

CE: (laughs) It seemed to work pretty well, didn't it?

HP: Most likely not, because you know what, here I am after the war. I bring up children, again, in a strictly gentile environment. I want them to be good Jews, and I also know that it isn't the best thing either, you know, because people's minds are kind of funny on different things. And so I really—you don't do this and you don't do that, and God forbid you do this. You know, that's why I say I used to—my rules were very strict, and I followed up with a pat on the behind, too. So, you know, nowadays you can't do that anymore; they can go to the police and you gonna get—mine didn't do that yet.

CE: That's good.

HP: But I do know I was terribly strict. You know, same thing we had in Stewartville. One day we come home and we had a bonfire on our driveway. You know what my first words were to my husband?

CE: What?

HP: "We got to move." It was just a kid that didn't have anything to do, and that was a big driveway so he decided he was making a bonfire; you know, it was the doctor's son (laughs) who did it. And so I, like I say—but that was my first idea. When I saw that, we have to move. So, you know, you don't get over it. You also push it back in your mind. And then, like my husband always says, he says, "Life is beautiful, and the will to live is very strong."

CE: Do you think about it every day?

HP: Pretty much. Certain things will bring something to your mind, even if you don't want to.

CE: Yeah. And how does it feel to tell your story?

HP: You know what, I have two feelings about it, like when I go to the Holocaust Museum and I talk to the children. First of all, they really—even so, I always tell them, "You've got to figure that at the time these things happened to me, I was either your age or even younger than what you are." But they can't completely fathom that—there's an old lady with grey hair, you know, she's telling the story. Secondly, you have to do with a lot of classes which are dark, and their life isn't the best either. And you can tell it on their faces and their eyes. "What is she telling me? We go to bed hungry so many nights"—you know, the whole bit.

So I myself have trouble with saying it, so I don't know. But I also know it has to be told. But you know what, if we really go right down to it, it doesn't help much, because go look at how the world is treating people. I don't care. It doesn't have to be Jews; they treat just about everybody terrible. So it isn't any better than what it was after the war in Germany either, you know, if you really compare one thing to the other.

CE: So that's the impact your telling has on other people. What impact does it have on you?

HP: On me?

CE: Does it make you feel better? Worse?

HP: It does neither. It just does to me that it—one way it has to be perpetuated to tell it, and that we hope that the next generations are a little bit more aware of what can happen. And you know what? It doesn't say anywhere it can't happen again. Especially now: now we're in a time where things are not that great anymore, and actually the next generation is used to live in euphoria, best of times—"it was the best of times"—and now all of a sudden things are getting cut down. And, you know, people are still people. I don't care what anybody says.

CE: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

HP: You are very welcome.

CE: I really enjoyed—

HP: You're very welcome.

CE: Enjoyment is not the right word.

HP: No, I know.

CE: I'm really appreciative.

HP: And I'm appreciative that you are listening to it, and as I said, it needs to be told. And compared to my husband's, mine wasn't that bad—except, as I said, if you look at the age. I missed out on an awful lot. But you know what? I'm still very positive.

CE: You are.

HP: I'm very positive. And you know what? That's my husband's doing.

CE: Is it?

HP: It is my husband's doing. Because I don't know whether you remember when, during [John F.] Kennedy's [term], when it was with people starting building bunkers and the whole thing—

CE: Oh, yes, I do.

HP: —because of the bombing and so on. I said to my husband, “You know what? If it comes to that, I’m going to kill myself and I’m going to kill the kids.” And he kind of looked at me and he says, “You’re stupid.” (both laugh) He says, “Life is so precious. You wouldn’t do it, because you always hope things are getting better.”

CE: It’s just your personality, isn’t it?

HP: And that’s what he said to me. And I think—every time I get a little upset about things, I think about his words.

CE: That’s wonderful, that’s wonderful. Well, let’s bring him in and let the two of you talk about meeting each other and your relationship and what you do for each other and all of that. That would be wonderful.

HP: Well, we take care of each other.

CE: Okay. Well, that’s important. Thank you.

HP: You’re welcome.

CE: You can—

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins

CE: Okay, this is tape three with Sam and Herta Pila, and we’ve asked them to come together to talk to us about how they met, and then we’re going to ask them questions about their relationship.

Salomon Pila: It’s okay, we give the answer.

CE: Okay. Herta, do you want to start by giving us a little history?

HP: Well, the history is that actually that I have met his brother in 1945. He always talked that he had a brother, but where the brother was I had no idea. And as I had said before, nobody ever spoke about what happened to them in the concentration camps or so. But anyway, so finally the brother kind of showed up and I met him at a baby naming of a cousin of his, and I couldn’t really care too much about it. I had other things on my mind. (all laugh) So he kind of walked up to me—I was looking down to the street and I was hoping to get out of there, and I—and he said to me, “Hello, *fräulein*. What are you doing tonight?”

SP: I wanted to take her out for dinner.

HP: I looked at him and I said, “I’m busy.” (all laugh) Then his sister-in-law once said, “I got to introduce you to him,” when I saw her. So I said, “I don’t care, really; if you want to introduce me, introduce me.” And then we finally got introduced by who’s who. You know, he does look like an awful lot like his brother, and yet he doesn’t look like his

brother. Only from the back you think they are brothers: when they walked, then you could tell that they belonged together.

But otherwise—and that’s how we go to—then he would take me out and he would—I think we would go in different places. Dancing he didn’t, because he never knew how to dance. And he made me teach how to dance, which cost him an awful lot of money in nylons. (all laugh) Because he always stepped on my feet and then I had a hole in it, you know. But I got smart in the end and I piled up the nylons, because I just put the same nylons back on and just pulled the hole underneath it. You know, so the next dancing lesson then he stepped on it again, and I said, “There goes another pair of nylons.” So I really was very well stocked up on nylons with him, but I’ve never—

SP: She piled up nylons, that’s the main thing.

HP: But I never taught him how to dance.

CE: You didn’t? Sam, I want to hear your beginning. How did you meet Herta?

SP: My beginning? Well, how I met her—the same thing, just like she said.

CE: No, I want to hear your version, though.

SP: Uh-huh. Well, my cousin up there, and I was in love with her. I liked her. Yeah, I liked her right away.

CE: What did you like about her?

SP: Well, the whole—everything. She was nice, was pretty, and she was friendly. Yeah, I talked to her and then I invited her for dinner or to go out sometimes. Then we get closer, and after that for a long time was talking—well, most of the time, a lot of times, together we went out.

HP: I used to pull a lot of tricks on him.

SP: Yeah.

HP: I still went to the—

Christopher Patti: I guess that’s why you liked her.

SP: That’s right!

HP: I went to that, you know, school for baby nursing. And so they had a big hike down by the river, and I went with them all the way down to I don’t know how far it was. It wasn’t my way of doing things, but I went along, and then we had lunch there and then

you naturally had to hike back. And I said, “I’m not hiking back. I’m going to call Sam and he’s going to come pick me up.” (all laugh)

SP: I left the business—I got business up there, and I come and pick her up.

HP: He left the business; he got me.

SP: I left the business—

HP: I wasn’t going to walk back from there. (laughs)

SP: She was smart!

CE: And how long did you date before you got married?

HP: We knew each other in—we started—

SP: In forty-eight [1948].

HP: In forty-nine [1949].

SP: Forty-nine [1949]?

HP: Forty-nine [1949] in April.

SP: Forty-nine [1949]. I thought it was forty-eight [1948].

HP: When Toby was born. Anyway, so he—

SP: Forty-nine [1949] to what—when we got married it was in fifty-two [1952].

HP: Fifty-three [1953].

SP: Fifty-three [1953], fifty-three [1953]. No.

HP: But then I decided I was going to Australia and I told him good-bye.

CE: Oh, so you left him!

SP: Yeah, she left me for two years.

CE: For two years!

SP: Yeah.

HP: I was sure he was going to be married by that time. But I used to correspond with my sister-in-law, who was here in America too, and I wrote—in the last letter I wrote that I have papers and I'm coming to America. In order to make the letter longer I wrote where I was coming and when I was coming, which wasn't the right date anyway. So on the way over here I get a card, somewhere in the middle of where. And it said, "I'll see you in Boston."

SP: That's right.

CE: So he got all this information.

HP: From my—from his sister-in-law.

SP: And I left the business in Minnesota, and I went to Boston. I had a friend and I stayed with the friend up there; it was in Connecticut. In Connecticut, and then—

HP: Because we got—being afraid; we got later and later, you know, because they had to wait for a delivery that was supposed to go with us, and so we got later and later. So he stayed with his friend in Connecticut.

SP: For a week.

HP: And he was there in Boston.

SP: He was in the dairy business, too. He was farmer; he was milking cows. I shipped to that same guy, to my friend, some cows from Minnesota I bought for him.

CE: And now this two years that you were in Australia, did you communicate?

HP: At the beginning we did.

SP: Yeah, yeah.

HP: And then I must have written something to my mother and she let him read it—

SP: The mother show me the letter. The mother told me what she write and everything.

HP: And then he was mad.

CE: He was mad?

HP: And then I didn't hear from him.

CE: You don't know what it was?

HP: I can't even remember what it was that I wrote. But he was mad.

CE: Do you remember what made you mad?

HP: What was it that I wrote to Mother that made you mad?

SP: Well, to tell you the truth, I forgot that. Well, she said—well, yeah, she said, “Why you tell everything to Mama?” That’s right, because she says (inaudible). That’s what I said.

CE: Oh, okay!

HP: And then he didn’t write anymore. But as I said, I got the card. And so one day, as we got later and later, I asked one of the ship officers. I said, “How far is St. Paul away from Boston?”

SP: It was pretty far. (laughs)

HP: So he said—well, he said, “Sixteen hundred miles by flight.” So I thought to myself, “I don’t know any geography; he doesn’t know any geography.” So he doesn’t know how far it is, so I didn’t even figure he would be there.

SP: I know how far it was. (all laugh)

HP: You came.

CP: It sounds to me like you knew that you had him all along, since the very beginning.

SP: That’s right, that’s right.

HP: So then—so he went with me. I wanted to go see New York, so we went to New York. He stayed with friends of his and I stayed with some friends of mine. And then we went down to Miami, where my mother and sister were. So then it was time; you know, he had to go back to work. So he says one day to me, “I didn’t come to just look at you.”

SP: That’s right.

HP: “You want to get married?” (all laugh)

SP: That’s right, this is true.

HP: That was my proposal. So I looked at him and I said, “You know, I just got here. I have to see what’s going on.”

CE: (laughs) Oh, that’s wonderful! She was hard to get, wasn’t she?

SP: Yeah, that's right.

HP: So then he left, but every Saturday we talked on the phone—on his nickel, not on mine.

SP: I didn't come for nothing. I said—I just ask the way it is. “I didn't come just to come and see you. Now, sure, I come and see you, just I wanted to know yes or no. Otherwise we forget about it, and that's it.”

CP: So you'd had enough at that point; you wanted a commitment.

SP: That's right.

CP: You didn't want her playing all those games anymore.

SP: That's right, no more games.

HP: I didn't play games, I just wanted to see. I had just gotten to America and I wanted to see what it was like. So I stayed with my mother and my sister and I worked. And like I say, with my allergies I was sick most of the time down in Miami, because it wasn't like now. You sat close to the air conditioner, you got a cold; you sat a bit away, you sweat. So it wasn't any good. The morning you got up, your shoes were full with mildew, you know, and the pillows stink from it. So I wasn't too thrilled with it, but I had to see first what it was like. So then finally I wrote to him—I talked to him the last time on Saturday. Didn't have a penny to my name: when I left Australia I had twenty dollars in my pocket, that was all. And so I told him, “If you still want to marry me, send me a ticket. I'll come.” Which he did!

SP: Yeah. (all laugh)

CE: So you sent a ticket?

SP: Sure I did.

CE: Yeah? Were you excited?

SP: I send her a ticket, she come. That's right. Then I was happy. I was thinking maybe she didn't come anyhow, she'd keep the ticket, that's—

HP: Aw! So then four weeks later we were married in Minnesota.

CP: Did you two talk about your experiences during the Holocaust before you were married? Like, did you know—

HP: Not at all.

CP: Not at all?

SP: Not at all.

CE: Not at all?

HP: Not at all!

SP: No!

HP: It's just like—

SP: Nothing to the kids about it.

HP: The only time he started to talking about the Holocaust—what happened was we were at a wedding in Montreal, and there was just a—

SP: That's right.

HP: It was just the time *Schindler's List* came out [1993]. And I'm a big one for books, so we were there and he—

SP: I even forgot to tell you what I talked to Schindler in Munich.

CP: That's right; in forty-seven [1947], right?

SP: Yeah, that's right. I forgot to tell you.

CP: Yeah, I forgot to ask you, so—

SP: Yeah, that's right.

HP: So he said to me, "You know," he said—he was with me in the bookstore because we had to wait for the plane to go back to Minnesota. He said, "You know, I worked for that guy." And after that, it was the first time that he started talking about it.

CP: So that wasn't until the early nineties [1990s]?

HP: No, that's right.

SP: About ninety [1990]—yeah, in the nineties [1990s], not before.

HP: We never—that never was a—yes, he was in the concentration camp; yes, he did this and that; but he never really—you know, it's like I said: nobody ever talked about it.

SP: They didn't know—not even (inaudible) know. Nobody, he was the (inaudible).

CE: Nobody talked.

CP: Since we talked about—since you mentioned Schindler, would you tell us about your experience of seeing Schindler after the war in forty-seven [1947]?

SP: After the war, yeah. I saw him and we talked to each other, and I took him out for lunch. Schindler told me he worked for the Haganah; he was working for the Haganah. He said (inaudible) a lot of Jewish kids in the (inaudible) to Israel. He helped the Haganah, that's what he told me. And then he told me some other things—Schindler was a guy, he didn't care for—he cared just to make money. He was a businessman. He was a very nice person, very nice. If somebody talks him a bad word, then he doesn't know what he talk of. Very nice guy.

CP: So, Mrs. Pila, what must you have thought when all of a sudden when you saw *Schindler's List* and he says, "Oh, I worked for him." What did that do?

HP: Well, I was kind of really flabbergasted, and then I did buy the book and I started reading it and then I talked to him. He says, "Mm-hm, that all happened, that all happened." So it's really—and after that, he kind of opened up a little bit more. But he really doesn't want to talk that much about it.

SP: No.

HP: I'm surprised he talked to you.

SP: I don't want to talk. (inaudible) Because you know as soon as I talk—I still got the very bad dreams now. Very bad dreams.

CP: It will come back.

CE: Yeah.

SP: Very bad. I don't want to talk too much. Bad dreams, very bad dreams.

HP: I wake him up more than once at night because his legs go and the arms are just like he was (inaudible).

SP: As long as I was busy at the business then I don't dream so much, but now—

CP: But now that you have time to dream, time to remember.

SP: That's right. I got a lot of bad dreams. I can't sleep at all.

CE: When we came and you talked to Chris before, did it bother you to talk about it then?

SP: Somebody—

CE: When we came before?

SP: No, no, that didn't bother me. No, no, no—

CE: But that didn't make you have more dreams?

SP: A little bit, but if I start talking then it was all right. It goes—

CE: It goes, okay.

HP: Well, you know it's just like I said before: you live with it for the rest of your life, you push it in the back of your mind, and you still—it's still there.

SP: It's no fun, you know, to get up in the morning: here is a dead one, here is every day, and as long as we come out from the—all ready for work to the barrack, then he took out—him, him, him and took them out and (inaudible), and then (makes zapping noise) shot him, from assessment. It's no different.

HP: You know, you put stuff back into the—you hope you don't have to bring it up again, but it sticks with you.

CE: Did you tell him your story right away, or no?

HP: No, we really didn't talk about much either.

SP: No, no, no, we didn't. No, we didn't.

HP: He just knew that I had been hidden, that's about all he knew.

SP: I don't want the kids [to] listen and I don't want to tell her. We didn't talk nothing about it.

CE: No? When did you tell the kids anything?

HP: Well, also after they came out with the book, Schindler's book.

SP: That's it. Otherwise I didn't talk.

CP: And then you must have been contacted pretty soon after that for the Shoah Foundation?

HP: Right, right, right.

SP: That's right.

CE: Were your children interested in your story?

HP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SP: Oh, yeah.

HP: I have even—I have a couple of essays of my grandkids that they wrote about it when they got into the elementary school, more so than my own kids were. I don't know; maybe they decided their mother was mad enough anyway. (CE laughs)

SP: You see, if I go, you know, I got the—if I go to somebody and start talking about the Holocaust, they say, "Forget about it, leave me alone."

CE: They say that?

HP: Oh, yeah.

SP: I say that.

CE: Oh, you say that?

SP: I say that, I say that.

CE: Oh, if they start talking about—

SP: Yeah, we've had that talk. Better talk for something else, because I dream enough from that.

CP: Yeah. Well, that makes it even more—

SP: No, no, no, just as bad because this I know, it's going to come. That's all. It doesn't bother me.

CP: And you mentioned that your grandkids were more interested; that's actually been a pretty common theme that we've heard. The second generation, usually the parents don't want to have to burden their kids with that, but then by the third generation all of a sudden they want to recover that history, recover that family—

HP: That's right.

SP: They like to know now; they like to know.

HP: Like I say, I have a couple of their essays that they gave me after they had it approved by their teachers.

SP: Well, actually, the daughter someday want to write a book from that, too. She wanted to write, in cause we're not here.

HP: Well, there's enough said.

CE: Never enough. So, you've been married how many years?

HP: It's going to be now fifty-seven years.

CE: Fifty-seven.

HP: In August.

SP: August 30.

CE: August 30.

SP: August 30.

CE: Good, you've got that one.

SP: Fifty-seven years, after 120.

HP: He wants to live to 150.

SP: That's right, I said till I was nice.

HP And I told him I will make to 120, and then he can do it by himself.

SP: The world is nice, too. The people are mean; there's a lot of mean people, that's all. The world is beautiful. (inaudible) It's not a different world, the world is the same; the people are different, that's it. There's a lot of people you can't trust and before—I remember when I come by here to Florida and I met my neighbor, then we went on the plane for a meeting (inaudible), and then—well, Smith, he died a few years ago, and then he had a dairy in Tampa that he bought up there with 1,000 acres of land—no, 2,000 acres of land.

And then he said—he built that brand new dairy, and he says, “You know what?” (inaudible) He said, “I wanted to sell it.” I says, “Why you sell it to him?” “Well,” he says, “if I sell it, then I don't owe nobody nothing.” Whatever he built—the dairy, the house and the cows and everything will be paid. And I ask him, “How much you want for it?” “Well, maybe a million dollars, for 1,000 acres.” Okay. When we come home and we go and we stop out there (inaudible), I said to him, “You want to really sell it?” And he says, “Yes, just I want the money right away.” Okay. Then I talked first to Federal Land Bank, and I said, “I need a million dollars.” I don't have no money, just I

got some property already what was worth more than that. And then I gave him one dollar down payment, one dollar—

HP: And nothing written.

CE: Wow!

SP: No, never. I didn't back out, he didn't back out.

HP: Nothing written.

SP: Nothing. In thirty days, we closed. We got the money and that's all.

HP: Can't do that anymore.

SP: Now we can't do that.

CP: Can't do that anymore.

CE: No, no, no.

SP: That way nobody can say on us, on me, when my brother was alive, that we was cheaters or we were that—nobody. I got some land there still in Minnesota that I bought the first time in 1952. Nineteen fifty-two, still there.

HP: Can I tell you something? If we come back to Minnesota, they roll out the red carpet.

SP: That's right.

HP: And anybody we don't get to see that we know—

SP: All gentiles, all gentiles.

HP: Then they are all—

SP: They said—my business was in gentiles.

CE: Do you get back there soon?

HP: We go at least once a year; we go back.

SP: (inaudible)

CE: Good, good.

SP: That's right, my business.

HP: My very best friends, they live up there still. Still good friends. They come down here once a year and we—

SP: That's right.

CE: That's great. Now, once you got to the United States, did you ever feel that you had to hide being Jewish, or not?

HP: No, not really.

SP: No.

HP: Not really. The only time we had, which was the funny thing in Rochester: we went to a synagogue in Rochester and somebody in Rochester was marking up on the synagogue with swastikas and everything. And the other Jews from Rochester said it was all our fault. (both laugh)

CE: Why?

HP: Because we didn't hide anything.

CE: Oh, and they did?

SP: That's right.

HP: And they tried to be, you know, good with everybody and they didn't very much say so; they said it was our fault that the synagogue got—

SP: They mean them, not us. (laughs) Because it's Saturday that I hold my day, you know. Then on Sunday, then I know this is their day and I never bother them. I don't do no business Saturday or Sunday.

HP: If they knew it they never bothered him on Saturday, either, and you know—

SP: Sure, the cows got to be milked.

HP: You know, you kind of get used to, like if they didn't know—if they wanted to see us and they didn't know our address, they would say, "Where do the Jews live?" because we were the only Jewish family in the small town.

SP: And so—was less than ten miles.

HP: But you know that you don't—

SP: Ten miles from Rochester.

CE: So did your kids have a strong Jewish identity growing up?

HP: I think so. I think so.

CE: Even without other Jews around?

HP: All three of them. Yeah, they had their lesson. I told you they had a horrible mother.

CE: (laughs) That's right, I forgot that.

HP: They had a horrible mother; the mother insisted on certain things. And always my end was, "You know what? I wouldn't want you—that grandparents to be ashamed of you." That was always my answer to it. So, they were pretty good. He used to go every Saturday. You know, women in my—even my generation or my mother's generation, women very seldom went Saturday morning or Friday afternoon to services. They went to either one: either they went Friday or they went Saturday, but mostly Saturday morning because Friday they had to get ready for the meal and everything. I, myself, I won't go on Friday because I used to go with my dad, and that's in my mind still and I don't want to change that. But he used to go regularly with all three kids in tow. He went to—

SP: Every Saturday.

HP: And they knew it. He was telling you we just saw our old rabbi in Jerusalem.

SP: Yeah, we just saw him now, that was—he got the papers—

CE: Oh, wonderful!

HP: And he gave me all the papers; he looked all that stuff up for me. And he—he was so thrilled. We were thrilled to see him. He was nice.

CE: So, what's the secret of your relationship?

HP: Ours?

SP: Very good.

CE: Very good?

SP: We can't get, you know, mad at each other for one day.

CE: You can't?

SP: That more—

HP: It doesn't pay.

SP: We just were—got mad; half an hour later is—

CE: All over?

HP: Talk to each other again.

SP: That's right. Like others—others, they get mad for weeks. They don't talk to each other.

HP: No, we are getting along very well.

SP: That's right, absolutely.

HP: I mean, it was kind of tough when he quit working, you know; before that I could really go and do whatever I felt like, as long as I was home for supper. But after the kids were gone, you know. But it was kind of tough to get used to—he didn't have anything to do, so I didn't feel like I should go on doing what I had been doing. I mean, I've always been—I went to the theater, I didn't think anything of doing it on my own. I told you, I've done things that somebody else wouldn't do. (laughs)

SP: A lot of times then she gets mad because, you know, I don't hear.

CE: Yeah, that's a tough one.

SP: She scream; I says, "No, I don't hear."

HP: That's okay; sometimes you have selective hearing. (all laugh) But so do I! So do I, without hearing aids.

CE: (laughs) That's good, that's good.

HP: No, I think we take care of each other.

SP: That's right.

HP: We do the best we can.

CP: You seem to share an exuberance for life; have you always had that between the two of you?

HP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

CP: Because it's infectious.

CE: It is.

CP: I think we can feel it, and—yeah.

HP: I told you that it is really his (inaudible) that got me to the point where I think life is beautiful.

CE: That's a wonderful compliment. Did you hear that?

SP: Yeah, yeah, thank you.

CE: Yeah, that's a wonderful compliment.

HP: I know, it's okay; we get along very well.

SP: Very good, no problem.

CE: Lovely, lovely. And especially given what you've lived through, to have had such a beautiful life for fifty-seven years.

HP: Yes.

SP: Beautiful life, a good life.

HP: And I tell you something, I'm always saying I—first of all, after I looked back at what happened, I always thought, "I'm never going to live that long," you know, anyway. But I will have to say I'm blessed. God blessed me. I have a good husband, I have three wonderful children, I got six lovely grandchildren, and I got three more step-grandchildren, which are very nice. So, I have nothing to complain about.

SP: You like the daughter-in-laws.

CE: Oh, wonderful.

SP: That's right, we like the daughter-in-law, no against her.

HP: That goes with it.

CE: Wonderful.

HP: So, we have nothing to complain about.

CE: Okay. You have any messages you want to leave for the audience who will be watching this for years and years to come?

HP: The only message I would like to leave is, don't take everything on the point.

SP: That's right.

HP: Take everything with a grain of salt. And don't get too upset about, because it doesn't—

SP: That's the most important thing.

CE: Is it?

HP: It may—whatever—

SP: You know what they say in Europe? One piece of wood you can burn; you got to be two pieces to build. The same thing: if I say something, she don't give me an answer; then my wife says something and I don't give an answer. That's it. (laughs)

HP: Well, like I say—

SP: You understand what I'm say—

CE: I understand, yes.

HP: And like I say, I just have left—and you got to be positive. There's nothing that bad that you can't be positive about it. It may kind of screw up your time a little bit, but that's okay.

CE: (laughs) The next day it doesn't matter, right?

HP: Even the next hour it doesn't make any—

CE: The next hour doesn't matter.

CP: That sounds like a philosophy to live by.

CE: It does.

HP: You know, it is. I was saying that to my niece and she said—

SP: In Israel.

HP: In Israel. She said, "You know, Aunt Herta, you really haven't changed much." I said, "Why should I? I take it as it comes and I do the best with it I can."

SP: That's right.

CE: Good, good. This was wonderful. Thank you so much.

SP: You're more than welcome.

CE: I'm just thrilled!

SP: It was nice meeting you.

CP: Yes.

SP: You and you and you.

CP: Thank you so much, thank you.

HP: What is your musical instrument?

CP: I'm a bass guitar player, electric bass guitar, and a singer.

HP: Well, at least you can sing. My grandson is a classical guitar—

CP: I saw the picture of him.

HP: That's when he won a prize at Ruth Eckerd Hall.

CE: Oh, wonderful.

HP: He won first prize. That's long ago; he is now in his third year of getting a doctorate.

CE: Wonderful.

HP: He is a—

SP: He can't sing. He got no voice to sing, just like me. Forgot the words, like me, to sing.

HP: The Neuburgers have a voice to eat and not to sing.

CE: A voice to eat and not to sing.

HP: That's what my dad used to say.

CE: Okay. Thank you very, very much.

HP: You are very welcome. Is there anything I can do for you?

Part 3 ends; part 4 begins

CP: Okay, today's date is July 2, 2010. I'm interviewing survivor Salomon Pila. My name is Chris Patti. We are in Tampa, Florida; the country is the United States. The language is English. The videographers are Jane Duncan and David Purnell.

Okay, Mr. Pila, the first thing I'm going to ask you—well, first of all, thank you so much for talking with us today.

SP: You are more than welcome.

CP: And can you tell me your full name and can you spell it for me?

SP: Yes, it's S-a-l-o-m-o-n, Salomon Pila, P-i-l-a, and born Miechów, Charsznica. Charsznica is just like a bigger city that says it there. Sometimes, you know, the mail—when it was shipped, you know, it said Miechów. Charsznica, small town.

CP: And that's in Poland?

SP: Yes, in Poland.

CP: And do you spell that C-h-a-r-s-z-n-i-c-a?

SP: That's right. That's correct.

CP: Excellent. Did you go by any other names when you were younger?

SP: No.

CP: Did you have nicknames?

SP: No, no, no.

CP: So always Salomon?

SP: Always the same thing. In Yiddish they called me—Jewish—Shlomo. Shlomo. That's Jewish. It was always Salomon.

CP: Shlomo is a pretty common Yiddish name, right?

SP: Yes, that's a Jewish name, yeah.

CP: And can you tell me your date of birth?

SP: July 20, 1925.

CP: And that makes you how old today?

SP: Now I'm going to be this month eighty-five years old, July 20.

CP: Yes, it's coming up.

SP: Yeah, it's coming up, my birthday; they want to make me a birthday.

CP: Eighty-five, that's a big birthday, too. That's a big one. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

SP: Well, family was very well. We was at home, we was five brothers. I was the youngster one. And Father was in cattle business; and the mother, she was to home—a housekeeper. She watched out for the kids, the children. And the same—cows and horses, both had. And it was a good life; it was a very good life in Poland. I went to school and, well, like in Poland it was twice a day, classes from eight to twelve and from twelve to four. And I always go every morning, that's all.

CP: Can you tell me your mother and father's names?

SP: My mother—my mother was Krasla; from home was Brzescia. And my father was Kalman, K-a-l-m-a-n, Pila, P-i-l-a.

CP: And you spelled your mother's name K-r-a-s-l-a B-r-z-e-s-c-i-a.

SP: Brzescia, correct. That was the home's [maiden] name, Brzescia.

CP: And so, your father must have been pretty busy when you were young?

SP: Oh, yeah, always busy. He worked, well, about six days a week.

CP: And so did you stay home with your mother most of the time, while she was taking care of the kids?

SP: Yeah, yeah. We were always together.

CP: Can you tell me about the community that you grew up in? What was that like?

SP: The community was a small community that was pretty—all the most Orthodox. And it was about 400 families that was living there. And, well, I had a lot of friends, and every Sunday—Saturday we went to the synagogue, Friday night, Saturday; and then Sunday we play, like my friends the same age, you know, ball with a stick. (laughs) Like here, same with a stick; you just play. And it was very, very happy, very good.

CP: Do you remember any early anti-Semitism in your community?

SP: Anti-Semitism? Well, I don't know. Up to Józef Piłsudski passed away, up to him, when he was the president of Poland, it was not bad at all, very good. They don't call like "dirty Jew" or something, you don't—I never heard. After he passed away, they start call "dirty Jew" and everything. (inaudible), the president of Poland, changed everything, changed it all. No, we don't got no trouble, we don't see they killed Jews or something. They did not. Mostly I didn't feel that time was anti-Semitism, except there was—they call the *Volksdeutsche*; they was like German—they was Polacks. They was like—they helped the Germans when the Germans came into Poland, and some of them changed. But they changed. I can say all of the Polish people, what they—we had—my father did business. There was no anti-Semitism. Never see the anti-Semitism, never feel.

CP: For you and for your family, when did you start to see that change? When did you start to experience some of those—like, when did things start to get worse?

SP: Actually, like for us in town, in Charsznica, there was no shooting. We had to work; we had to work for them. They took us—I was working when I was already thirteen-years-old. I start to for every brother, you know, on the railroads. The roads, they (inaudible) the roads and snow shovel for wintertime from the railroad. Every one [of my] brother had to do, and I did it. I did, because they had helped my father to work, to home. You know, my brothers, they was always working.

CP: So you were a businessman even when you were a little kid, when you were working—

SP: Yeah, since 1939. Since 1939 I was working. I was only fourteen-years-old, that time, and I would want to do the work.

CP: So it sounds like things must have changed pretty radically pretty quickly. Can you tell me about that?

SP: Yeah, 'cause my father was in the grove business, selling fruit. He used to deliver to Krakow every year, by a contract. First of all, he make the contract with the guy where he leased that grove. It was ten *morgas*—I don't know how many acres that is; it must be about fifteen acres, I think. And then there was—he delivered order—the apples, just like here, the Golden Delicious, the best ones, to the hospital in Kraków. From one season up to the next season, from fall to the others come and he got to deliver them. And then we all was busy, we all was busy. We don't have—actually, when we evacuate, the same man, the same gentile, Franciszek—I still remember his name—and my father gave him what we had: some gold, some other stuff, old goods that he left him 'cause he was (inaudible) evacuate. This is 1942. And we was figure, well, we come back. We didn't know it, you know.

CP: So you gave him your valuables for safekeeping?

SP: Yeah, we don't know. They told us before we evacuated—that was a Friday—this was the first Jew—this was the Friday. The first Jew was a lady: she went to buy groceries, and then she got shot not far from where we lived. But at that time, then, later we saw everybody got scared. The same time and night those Jewish police they got, they told us we got to get ready, only pack two suitcases per person to take it along with. They evacuated by twelve o'clock in the morning. We got to be ready to go out from the house, twelve o'clock in the morning. And then we got out and then we stayed. From where I was living there was maybe like one kilometer to go up there with the suitcases, and the whole family went up there. We told each other in case something happen, if somebody will be alive, we should see each other on the same town, you know.

And then we went up there, and they told us to get in rows—you know, ten guys in rows. And they put the women separate, the older people separate and the kids separate, and like my age separate, too. And then, like older people, they took all the men. My father was shot that time, too. They shot at that time 126 guys in the forest: in the forest they shot us. And then there was some Jewish police guys, they were shot; it was three of them; his father was killed, too. Then, about four o'clock in the evening, five o'clock, we was in Słomniki; they took us from our little towns, the one field—there was maybe about fifteen, twenty acres of field—the women and children all together. And when he came back, I ask my brother what was—there was four brothers there. It was four brothers—no, three—no, four! Four brothers were there. One brother was not there; he was by his fiancée—fiancée, you know—

CP: Fiancée.

SP: Yeah, and then that's not too far, but thirty kilometer, twenty-five, thirty kilometer. So he was together with us, and up till today I don't know where he got lost. So the four of us was together: the oldest one and the second oldest and the third oldest was with the fiancée, then Jack and me. (inaudible) We was together. And then when he they come from that thing where they killed her, then he says, "They all got killed, they got shot at." And then after, later, that's it, (inaudible), and then we were there Saturday afternoon, or Sunday. Monday, they give us nothing. We don't have nothing to eat, no water, no nothing. Of course that's what we got packed into the two suitcases, and as soon as we got up there they took the suitcases away from us, everything, so we don't have nothing to eat.

CP: And your father had already been killed at this point?

SP: That's right.

CP: Can I ask you a little bit more about that? Do you—so, it sounds like they split you all up. You got split up from your family—

SP: Yes, that's what—

CP: Did you see your father when you—

SP: One of—the two oldest brothers, I don't know how they get lost. We was together up till Monday. My sister-in-law to the oldest brother got married; she was pregnant. My mother was there, too. They say they (inaudible); they must be sending them to Treblinka, she says. I don't know whether they were in the [cattle] car loads. They send them out Monday; they send them out, you know. And us, the others like me, they send about maybe 150 people: they send us right to Płaszów, to Płaszów. Then from Płaszów—we was there in Płaszów one day, overnight, and then they send us then to Rzeszów, Poland, to Rzeszów, Poland. And in Rzeszów, Poland, then I was there up to forty-three [1943]—a year, a little over a year.

Then they send us back from Rzeszów to Płaszów. And then from Płaszów, I was there for about two weeks, then they send us back to Julag, and from Julag then I was there. He was sick, my brother Jack: he was sick for typhus. Then I watched for (inaudible), and then after he got all right then I had the typhus and he took care for me. And then we was there another couple weeks and then they sent us back to Płaszów, from Julag to Płaszów. And then we was there in Płaszów a few days or a week or so, and then I was lucky. Then I went to Schindler.

I was with Schindler from 19—I was there for about a year, for a year. Then they sent me from—we was working for Schindler in the factory, and then they found my brother—there was two, three shifts, actually, and they found me and my brother; we was together, just about a little further away. So he worked for one machine and I worked for another machine. And then he caught a nap, and (inaudible) come to Schindler: he was a big Nazi from Prussia, come down to check how the people doing. Then Schindler come around with him, because he didn't know if—Schindler would have known that he come then; he always used to know and he let us know before, so all people should work, should be all right. But that time, then, nobody know it. He didn't know it, either.

So then Schindler—he was sleeping there, and he says, “*Schick rauf*”; that means they're going to send him to Płaszów. Then he gave my—Schindler gave him a couple things, then he said, “*Er hatte genug*”; that means he's got enough. And then a few days later they call him so he could send them—oh, the guys. There was, I think, about twenty, twenty-five people; I don't remember exactly how many. He said, “*Schick rauf*”; that means he should send them back to Płaszów.

So then, me, not. I was not on the list, as my brother was. And then I went myself to Schindler and I begged him. I says, “You should let my brother here because—there was five brothers together; we was only two left.” And then he says he cannot do. I talked to myself to Schindler, said (inaudible)—you know, in German, if can be with me together. Then he says no; then three times he said, (inaudible) in German. Three times he asked me, and then I says, “Yes. If he don't stay, I want to be with him together.” So they sent us to Płaszów.

CP: Wow!

SP: And then from Płaszów we was there a few days—

CP: Can I interrupt you for a second?

SP: Yes, yes, yes, yes, go ahead.

CP: 'Cause I want to go back to Schindler and I want to come back to your relationship with your brother, because it's a very powerful story. But I wonder if we can go back to your father right at the very beginning.

SP: Okay, okay. I went too fast. (laughs)

CP: No, no, no, it's okay.

SP: I'm sorry, yeah.

CP: Well, we'll get back to all that. But did you see your father get shot?

SP: No.

CP: Or how did you learn that he was killed?

SP: No, I see just what I told you. I knew because the police was there. They come on the field at Słomniki; we all was there. He was later the same policeman who shipped us some other place. I don't ever see him anymore after the war. And he said, "All the Jews got shot." They put them in—there was no ditches [graves], nothing, just in the forest. They killed all the Jews where they was there.

CP: Do you remember what it felt like when you learned about that?

SP: Yes, because I just—

CP: It must have been like the world was over, or something.

SP: No, it was not over, the war was not over.

CP: No, like your world had ended or something, 'cause like all of a sudden you went from having this childhood that sounds very idyllic, and then your father's been killed by the Nazis.

SP: Yeah.

CP: Do you remember what that felt like?

SP: Sure, I remember that because that way I hold—you know, I was this morning (inaudible) when he died, and he lays in—this is just that I know. Now I say Kaddish for him, today.

CP: Yeah, the Kaddish, the prayer for your—

SP: That's right. It was this morning in the synagogue. That was for my brothers and father. And I say exactly the thing on September 20. They killed him in September, I don't know exactly [when], right before the High Holidays, right before the High Holidays, Jewish holidays. And that's when—he sat there. The old people, the old ones from Charsznica, they got killed; there's nobody left over. In just minutes—they killed out some kids, younger kids, too.

CP: And is it—

SP: I still visit the grave, you know, when I was there in Poland, where they all get buried.

CP: I think it's a nice homage to your father that you ended up getting into the cattle business as well, which is kind of the family business, right?

SP: Yes.

CP: Did your mother die early on in the war as well?

SP: I don't know. The mother they took away, like they sent me to Płaszów on a Monday because we was there already Saturday. They took all the women and the pregnant women, little kids, they shipped them with the carloads out to—I don't know, Treblinka or—I think Treblinka they send them, or Auschwitz.

CP: So she was taken to a camp, and that's the last—

SP: No, I never saw. We was together, the three brothers—the four brothers, four brothers, the mother, and the sister-in-law. We was together from Saturday to Monday morning in Słomniki, in that field.

CP: And you and your brother—

SP: We was together.

CP: Did you make a pact to stay together? How did you—?

SP: Yeah, we was one row, my brother and me, Jack. In the second row there was the other brothers, and they cut us off right there with our—they cut us off. So from that time on I never know where they were, where they was going, they killed them or

whether they went away or whatever, I don't know. Just never saw them back, never heard from nobody, nothing.

CP: Okay, so now, coming back to your days when you were going back and forth through various camps, that's when you started to find your love for working. I remember you telling me that you became a workingman at that time, and you were always working on machines and with electrical things.

SP: That's—yeah. That's Rzeszów, Rzeszów, Poland. This was Autoflug; that's for the airplane parts. Yeah, that's where we were working, and at that time I was there from forty-two [1942] till end of forty-three [1943]. Yeah, I was working, me and my brother.

CP: Can you describe that? Where were you living? Were you living with your brother in, like, a bunk or with a bunch of other people?

SP: Yeah, we lived together in the same barrack. You know it was one, two, three, three floors up. I was there in the last one with him; we always sleep together (inaudible).

CP: What was daily life like? Like, how did you get food, and how did you—

SP: Well, we get—early in the morning we get up, then we get a cup of black water and then a slice of bread. And lunch time, then we had an hour rest and then they gave us the water soup. At night, then we come home and in the barrack they give us a slice of bread with a piece of horse sausage, sometimes just a piece of bread. So, you can look through the people. That's all.

CP: So, do you remember being hungry and being afraid at that time, or what were you—

SP: Sure, I was afraid. I liked to live. Sure, I was afraid. And every day, when we got back from the work to the camp, back, they always take a few guys out, and just for fun they shot them. They killed them. I myself have to take a body and throw him on the buggies and they hauled them away.

CP: The dead bodies?

SP: That's what you pull them. Yeah, in Rzeszow.

CP: Do you remember what you and your brother must have talked about back then, when you were in those—

SP: Yeah, we was talking all the time about—we was talking about how we can find out where the mother is and the other brothers, that's all. Just a lot of times we make jokes and everything. It runs together, too.

CP: Did you know—

SP: We lived worse than the cattle.

CP: Did you know what was happening in the war, with the war? Did you have any idea outside of—?

SP: No, we didn't know that.

CP: Just that you—

SP: Only one thing we know: the Russian planes, they come at night and the Americans come in the morning, and they bomb. This we know. This we know.

CP: So, getting back to your encounters with Schindler, so you convinced him, basically, that you needed to stay with your brother, is that right?

SP: Yeah, that's right.

CP: So then he shipped you both back to Płaszów, is that—?

SP: Yeah, send me back to Płaszów, yeah, with my brother.

CP: And then what was happening at that point?

SP: Well—

CP: Once you and your brother were together again in Płaszów.

SP: When we was in Płaszów—they sent us back from Płaszów. They sent us back with the car, with ninety people in the cow car. They sent us to Mauthausen. And from Mauthausen, then we was there for six weeks, Mauthausen.

CP: What were you sent there to do: just to be held, or did you do any work while you were there?

SP: Oh, sure I was working. We had to go. It was Mauthausen, and we have to carry stones—rocks, you know—three times before noon and three times after noon. We had to go put the—there was ninety-six steps, ninety-eight, something like that. I've shown my wife now, too, and the children, too. And then to walk, and you have to find the right—if you took a big stone then the stone kill you, 'cause you couldn't go with it, you know, where they needed it to build some houses or whatever—

CP: This is when you were working in the rock mines?

SP: The rock mines.

CP: And you actually had to go down and pick up stones—

SP: Yeah, and pick up the stone.

CP: And walk the ninety-two steps up.

SP: Yeah, ninety-eight steps up.

CP: Wow!

SP: Ninety-eight steps.

CP: And you'd just be doing that all day long?

SP: Three times before noon, three times after noon. And then a half an hour they gave us lunch: they gave us a little water soup from what was left over from the SS, where they watched us, you know. And if you took a big stone, the stone kill you; if you took a small stone, they push you down from the steps, the Nazis, and so they say you want to escape and so they kill you. And you had to find the right—a lot of people got killed for that. But the going up and down, you can't do it. I always tried to find—and barefoot, barefoot. You got to go barefoot, because they give us wooden shoes and the shoes always busted, you know, the metal, the wood, so then you got a lot of trouble with that. (inaudible) always tried to find—the minimum one of (inaudible) was twenty-five pounds. Twenty-five, thirty pounds, something like that.

CP: That's about the smallest you could get away with. You told me—last time, you told me a very interesting about your—was it a train trip to Mauthausen? And you were talking about how your brother and you would get water while you were on the train.

SP: Yeah, from the trains, the train when we went from—they send us from Płaszów to Mauthausen. We don't got no water. When the locomotives—they stopped at the station, they fill up the locomotives [with] water. So then you would get to the doors, they fill it with the hoses, they put it in a little, but whoever caught that, it's okay. It's a lot of—in the train before we get to Mauthausen, then it was quite a few got that, was killed because there was no room. There was, I think, about eight or ten people got dead.

CP: And just to get water, you actually had to just catch it in your mouth.

SP: Yeah, you had to over the thing.

CP: While they hosed.

SP: With the hose. You know, was a—well, at that time, there were (inaudible) one for the whole night in the train. They would go very slow up there before we get into Mauthausen from Prussia, from Kraków; they load us in Kraków.

CP: And you already mentioned that your brother was sick at one point, and then you got sick. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

SP: This was in Julag, yeah.

CP: That was in Julag?

SP: Yeah. He got sick before with typhus, and then I took care for him. It was a week. It was pretty dangerous, you know. He was lying in a barrack because usually—that time was not so bad; the problem was if somebody get in there they take him out and they kill him right away. And then after he was all right, then I got sick with typhus; then he took care for me. So we both make it. This was in the Julag that time, and from that there they sent us—a few days later they sent us back to Płaszów. Then in Płaszów then we was lucky and Schindler come and order something—you know, I don't know. They go load us to (inaudible), to Kraków, up there where Schindler's factory [was]. And then in Schindler's factory we come and we were in seventh heaven, because first of all, I saw a friend, where he was the same town where I was. And then we got plenty to eat. As long as we were with Schindler we got plenty to eat. Nobody got hungry, nobody got (inaudible).

CP: Yeah, you mentioned that Schindler was a good guy, even—

SP: A good guy. He was a Nazi; just he was a good guy. He changed the clothes—his clothes, you know, twice a day, whatever—how the weather is, so he changed the clothes. He was tall, almost six foot—about six and five foot, six [feet] five [inches]. And then he was—he didn't touch nobody. He gave us everything. We got—at that time there was about 1,200 people, and then we got plenty to eat and everything. Nobody got hungry by him. He said right away when somebody escaped, somebody ran away; then they go and kill fifty people, so everybody was scared. One guy got—it was three guys from the same camp, they escaped. They got them back, they got them back and they killed him. And us, they didn't do nothing, because as soon as they escaped somebody gave them out and then they send them to Prussia and killed them up there. Says, "They don't do nothing—I won't kill nothing."

CP: You also mentioned last time that Schindler wasn't the only good Nazi—

SP: He was a Nazi. He was a Nazi, got the SS. If something supposed to come, you know, down and expect us, you know—I mean, to check it—then he told us; he let us know before. Just that time when I told you about my brother, that time, he didn't know now; he just come unexpected and then he checked us that time.

CP: Were there other Nazis that were helpful to you in your—when you were in these camps?

SP: No, no, no, no, no. There was just the Nazis which watched us in camp. There was—how do you—you know, they're called (inaudible); you must know what I mean. They—

CP: Guards?

SP: Guards! Was guards, you know, with the little houses, twenty-four hours a day. Yeah, there was a big fence, electric fence. It was electric fence; and there was guards and they watched, yes.

CP: And so what happened—what happened after you left then, after you left Mauthausen?

SP: After I left—

CP: Mauthausen. Didn't you go to Linz?

SP: Mauthausen. After I left Mauthausen, then I—when I left Mauthausen, then—well, I was Linz and then my brother was in Ebensee. They separated us.

CP: What separated you two? Do you remember what made you go to one—

SP: Yeah. Well, they asked who was a *Schlosser*, you know; this is a mechanic. And then my brother said, and then I said with my brother—he asked us both, we said. Then they call, “Who's an electrician?” so then I raised up the hand. And me they sent to Linz, and my brother they sent to Ebensee: they split us anyhow. For about a year up to the end we don't—he didn't know where I went and I didn't know where he went. And after the war, then I found him. Well, you get so (inaudible). After the war—

CP: Yeah, yeah. That's my favorite one of your stories, is that story. Well, if we could wait just for a second before that one—

SP: Yeah.

CP: You have a story about—

SP: I jump, I jump. That's the trouble.

CP: You have a story about a Nazi and cigarettes that you can—

SP: Yes, yes.

CP: Can you tell me that one?

SP: Yes, that's from before the war, before the war was end. This was in March. I was electrician in the mines, and I was working with my boss. He was a Czech; he was a

Nazi, just he was a nice guy—a *Volksdeutsche*, they are called. *Volksdeutsche*, Nazis. And then he send me—every day there’s something wrong in the kitchen, and in the kitchen there was—the feed for the Nazis, for when they watched us. They cook for them, and then after that we got the water soup. So then he send me—and I went into the kitchen and I put in a bowl. I was no electrician; I said I am. (laughs) And in a bowl, and then I—because I was a good worker there. I put it, and then I took a little pack of margarine and bread and I put it under the coat that I got. And I was going like that for about three months. It was all right. And then in March, that time before the war—yeah. And then I get—every month I get a pack of cigarettes. I gave all the cigarettes to the boss; that way he send me always to the kitchen to fix the stove. And then I—

CP: So you bribe him with the cigarettes?

SP: Yes, yes. The cigarettes, because I don’t smoke, and to sell them I don’t get nothing anyhow for them, so I give him the cigarettes. And I got every month, too, thirty cigarettes for good working, ’cause he gave me a bill saying I was a good worker. And then one time—this was March; as you know, May I was liberated. May 5, 1945 I was liberated. And then I got some cigarettes—I got some cigarettes with me, and I got cheese and I got the bread. And I took the cigarettes—I hold it, the bread and the margarine I throw—there was a big—from bumps, you know, there was a big hole. And each—there was two guys up there. They hollered at me, “Halt, halt, halt, halt!” and I heard them. I said to my—what the hell are they going to do with that, I was figure. Hell, if they catch me they going to kill me right away now.

So then they ask, “What do”—and I throw away just the bread and the cheese, throw it away; the cigarettes I didn’t throw away. And then they give me one, two—that is come along with me, and they drop me in his office. And then I got in his office and it was dark: the (inaudible) was dark and there was an oven and a pail where they heated his office. And then I took the cigarettes with the guard—I got, I think, three packs, and I make them. There was none, because I make myself from tin, because otherwise—cigarettes, you can’t hold them ’cause they get soft. From tin, tin boxes, and each box got in twenty cigarettes.

And then I throw it in the pail, and he heard it and then he says, “*Was hast du* (inaudible)?” And I says, “Nothing. I didn’t throw nothing out, nothing.” And then he said, “*Was hast du* (inaudible)? What did you throw out?” I says, “Nothing.” And then it must be—I think he found the cigarettes. Just then he told me I should lay down like that, like that, and one guy hit me in here and one guy hit me in here, and I had to count. I had to count 100 times. There was a big cable; it was about like that, a big cable. And then up to 100, then I got out of—and then he said to me, “You go back to work.” And as soon as I got back to the mines he saw what it was. He was a nice guy, the boss mine, and he took me—and then he said to me, “The SS men, when I call you back when we come to the camp, because you was working”—it was about three and a half four kilometers, you know. “Then they call you out and you step out right from the other people, from the line.” I figured if he told me to step out, then they’d send me right away to Mauthausen crematorium, you know to kill. It was good thing he didn’t call.

And then—yeah, and that time when he beat me up, that boss, and he took me in his office where he was, and he send me to the shop where they own the cables and everything there in the shop, in his shop, and he put cold pads on me, he himself. And he says, “I go call you,” because they count us three times a day: in the morning when we come, in lunchtime when we get lunch, and the evening when we get home. They count us. Just, “I will wake you up, I’ll take you out when you got to go for lunch, you go.” And that’s what he did, and after lunch I come because I didn’t want to stay in the camp, because if I were to stay in the camp I would get killed anyhow, you know. I had an uncle with me, too, at that time. And then we come back in the camp, then he put cold pads. Just when I come back next time to work, then he saw me, the guys. He didn’t say nothing; he just gave me another thing, say nothing.

So the cigarettes helped my life, because, like I say, because that’s what I figured, and otherwise I wouldn’t be here. Because you know, he the one that said—(inaudible) cigarettes, the Nazis, because you know, they didn’t get too many cigarettes. You know, he gave me every month for good work—the man, the boss. I would they get thirty cigarettes, and then the other—the other stuff. I trade the cigarettes with the Italians—there were some Italian people, and I give them some cigarettes and they give me some bread to eat.

CP: When you were being beaten, is that the story of where you lose your hearing?

SP: I think so. Since that time I didn’t hear. I think so.

CP: And it was from that—

SP: Because nobody from the family, from us—everybody hears good.

CP: But after that beating over the back of the head, then from there you kind of didn’t have good hearing at that point?

SP: (inaudible)

CP: Wow!

SP: That’s what I think, that’s what I think. I told (inaudible) the same thing.

CP: It’s been with you your whole life, ever since you were young, ever since that time, right?

SP: I heard when I was younger. I was hearing very good, up till I got the thing in the concentration camp. I was hearing good.

CP: And then you got severely beaten up.

SP: Yeah. I was lucky I was alive, because, you know, March, and May then I was liberated, May 5, with the Americans. The people come—I was in Linz. You know, they wake us up early in the morning, they said the Russians are close, so they want to save us. And they wanted you go for a—oh, you got something else.

CP: I think you are right on track.

SP: And then we went to forest, you know. At three o'clock in the morning they wake us up. They told us the Russians was there, the Americans were there, that we got to go away from where there were. They took us in the forest. Because that was in that camp—I think it was about 20,000 people, and then left over was only about 1300, 1100, something like that that was left over from us.¹

CP: So out of 23,000, there was only a little more than 1,000 left.

SP: Yeah, there's 1,000 left over. And then the Russians, they was—Russian prisoners; they was in that camp too. And the Russian was the first lines—there was, you know, about 1,000 people, and the Russians were the first ones walking. The Russian was smarter. They sat one to the next row, was ten guys in a row, and the Russians said, "If you come to the forest, don't go." One told the other one, "Don't go in there." And the forest was (inaudible). When you come to the forest you always stop. And then we saw, there was—that time it was about eight o'clock in the morning, because four o'clock we was walking for about five hours or something like that.

And then we was waiting there, waiting and waiting, and then we saw that all of the Nazis, they left. And the old Wehrmacht—there was two different kinds, Nazis and Wehrmacht. The old guys with the guns, they watched us. And then we stayed, we stayed; it was about eleven o'clock, 11:15, that time of day. I didn't know, just they said that it was time. And we supposed to get the soup and they don't give us any more soup because the Americans—the plane came right down, right out of the woods. And they didn't bomb, they don't bomb. We figured it's going to be something, we going to be liberated. And then we saw right away from Mauthausen, because Mauthausen where we was in the forest it was only seven kilometers, but they want us undermined. There want us killed. And then they come pull a few from the camp, from Mauthausen. There was kapos, you know, and a few Americans that was right there, and then they said, "You're all free, just don't do nothing. Don't do nothing."

Then the trucks, the American trucks, come and these soldiers, they start throw to us chocolates and bread, and everybody can throw. They throw to us. That was up there—there was a warehouse, there was a stripes thing, and then they said, "Whoever wants a striped suit, they should go up there and get one." That's what we did. And then we get the soup, we get ladles of soup, and we eat it up, and then they said, "Well, we go take you, we walk back to the camp." They don't take you with trucks. We go back to camp and they watched us, they watched us, nothing happened. And then was over, then we

¹ Mr. Pila might be confusing the total number of inmates with that of the Mauthausen concentration camp. According the city of Linz, the actual number of inmates of Linz III was 5,600, with 800 perishing.

were in the camp. They said that we got to be there for twenty-four hours, we can nothing do—seventy-two hours, seventy-two. We can nothing do. Don't go out because it's still—the war is not over, it's not done. Just here there was some American soldiers was there to—but they watched us.

CP: Last time you called it seventy-two hours of chaos after.

SP: Yeah, seventy-two hours. Yeah, that's right, that what it was. And seventy-two hours, that's right, that's what it was. And we don't do nothing, and then later we don't see nothing, and after that—there was six of us, me, my uncle, and another four friends. Because one never go alone, just we want a few guys. What?

CP: They're just saying we have ten minutes still on this tape.

SP: Yeah.

CP: So, can you describe what did you look like after you were liberated, because you must have—you'd been starving for so long and eating so little food for so long. What was your physical state?

SP: Sure. Well, we had no food to eat, so we figure the best thing is to go, if you want some food. Well, the parents from the soldiers, from the kit, they shipped some packages, and we go and (inaudible) the post office. The post office has got to be some—where you find to eat, because nobody gave us nothing to eat. When we got out of the camp we found some—a bed to sleep, then we got into a house; nobody was there, and we took over that house. We took over that house, the six of us. We got a place where to sleep now.

So we went out in the stores. The stores, there was nothing there. There was nothing there, was all empty. We wanted some other shoes, or some—we wear just the striped suits. So we went with the striped suits, we went to the post office. It was up there we found bread and chocolates and hard salami. And we went to another place, and then we found some brewery where they make alcohol, you know, 190 proof alcohol. There was, you know, barrels, a fifty pound barrel. It was hard to carry it, and then if we roll it the barrel break; you know, we had to walk quite a while, we have to walk for about two hours, two and a half hours, to the house. So what we do is we change each other: we took it, we rested, and we took it along with us. (laughs) Well, and some bread, we took it with us.

CP: So you brought the entire big barrel of alcohol all the way back.

SP: Yeah, yeah. And that's why later we start—we drink a little bit. Nobody got drunk. We eat very slow, not too much, because your stomach was empty, you know. And then for the alcohol, then I trade with some Germans for bread. One time (inaudible) for a German and then we want some—we saw some chicken and we caught them. Then they want us, then there is—we don't do nothing to them. We caught them anyhow, we let

go. He said that—they said they Austrians, “*Wir sind keine Deutschen, wir sind Österreicher.*” That means they are not Germans, they are Austrians. And that’s how we got home, and we got to eat and everything.

Then I was there for two weeks like that, and I want to go look for my brother. And then I couldn’t find my brother. My brother wasn’t—there was just a friend, but he was in the camp before with me, with us. And then he says, “Where are you?” And then I asked him, “You saw Jack?” and then he says, “Yes, he’s at Ebensee. He’s up there.” And then—

CP: How far was Ebensee?

SP: That is 100 kilometers.

CP: A hundred kilometers.

SP: Hundred kilometers.

CP: And at that point, you told me—how much did you weigh after you got out of the camp?

SP: Who, me? Seventy pounds.

CP: Yeah.

SP: Seventy pounds I weighed that time. I was skinny.

CP: So you’re trying to get healthy and get yourself back, and you find out that your brother is 100 kilometers away?

SP: Yes. Yeah. Then I—how I can get there? So many miles, I can’t walk up there. He said the best thing is go to the station is, the train, and talk to the machinist. Then he might—because they was fixing the railroads, you know, from that stretch. They was fixing from, like, from Linz to Ebensee, this railroad. It was seven kilometer, you know. And then I went up there and I come in the barrack, and I couldn’t find him.

CP: Can I interrupt you for one second?

SP: Yes.

CP: I think that this would be the perfect place to probably stop, and then we’ll pick up the story of how you found your brother on the next tape.

SP: Okay.

CP: Does that sound okay?

SP: Yeah.

CP: All right.

SP: That's it?

Part 4 ends; part 5 begins

CP: Okay, this is tape two with my interview with Salomon Pila.

SP: Yes.

CP: Where we left off is, I think, one of the most striking parts of your story for me. You have been saved from the war, you're very thin, you're seventy pounds, and you realize that your brother is 100 kilometers away. And so can you tell me again about the train conductor that you had to talk with and how you were able to go meet your brother?

SP: Well, I went to the station, because he told me to—my friend told me how I can get him, up that way. And then I went to the station and I catch the conductor up there, the guy where he works. He took care for the train, the machinist. And then I says, "I got a brother in Ebensee, and I can't walk. I got to go." He gave me a ride up there, and I told him right away that I give him a—"I give you a bottle of alcohol and some salami." And then he told me, "Well, the best thing is you come at night, here." This was in Linz. "And then I take you in and you are going to be where the coals are," where they keep the coals, the machine. And then I went there; it was early in the morning and I didn't know. I was there at three o'clock already, four o'clock in the morning. Then he told me where I should go, just he told me—he gave me direction where to go, 'cause you going to see nobody at that time, night. "Just straight, and then you see comes a big, big building. First building, that's going to be the camp."

So I got in there. I got in there, and then I didn't know which block he is. Then I knocked on a door and then I looked up some other guys—*Häftlings*, you know, the guys who were there in the camp. Then I ask which way. "Did you hear something from Izack?" That was his name, Izack Pila—Piła, because Polish there was the L, like Germany's L, they never (inaudible). In Poland, in Germany or in the United States, in the Polish ł, that's like (demonstrates), see, like that. You see, that's Piła; that's what it was, Piła. So then he told me, "That block," and then I walked in there and I looked at him. When I saw him he was sleeping, and I just touched him and he was up like that. And then we kissed each other, hugged each other. And finally I helped him to calm down, and I got bread and butter, cheese, and alcohol.

CP: So your brother was very sick when you found him.

SP: Oh, yeah. He was sick and he couldn't go, because I wanted to go right away back. I figure I will see him and then we go back. And so he couldn't go back. So I fed him slowly, bread and some butter I got and sausage I got and water: that's what we got, and

then I fed him. And we was there for three days and then we had to go back. And he [the machinist] told me that you got to come the same, because they changed—a lot of times they went twelve o'clock in the morning back, and so he went four o'clock. I had to be there at four o'clock because they got back, because there was two shifts to Linz. Then he says, "You got to be there at three o'clock in the morning." So I went there, we walked. We walked slowly; it took us twice this much what it took me to go up there.

CP: Is that 'cause your brother, you had to help your brother the whole time?

SP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. (inaudible) And then he took us both out and to this—and the same guy, because he told me he was going to be there. And then I went—he took us back to Linz. And then in Linz, then we went into, because we was already there six guys, six friends who was there already, and he was with—it was seven guys together. And then he was there, and then after that we got chickens and ducks we cooked. We got bread. We was not hungry anymore. And we were there for about two weeks. Then we wanted to go to Israel. So they said I got to smuggle. You know, they didn't take you; just now they take kids, small kids, or pregnant ladies.

CP: So you couldn't legally immigrate to Israel?

SP: No, no, couldn't do that. Then they told us the best thing—there was me, my brother, and another friend, and the uncle, you know. He said the best thing is try to go in where the cars go, with coal or something like that, and just smuggle in. And that's what we did, just didn't work that way. (laughs) They took us right away, they caught us right away. The American MP [military police], they said, "You can't do it." And we tried again, three times. The second time [it didn't work] either; then the third time it was finally was working. We went to Italy. Was an empty car, was nothing there in the car, just the car was empty. And then we was in there and we went up to Bozen, Bolzano. In Bolzano the train stopped, and then we got out. We got out at that time and then we didn't know where to go.

Then we find out there was some Jewish thing, an organization, and then we was there. And then, not too long, they sent us to Rome. Then we were there—they already sent us to Rome. And then from Rome, then they—we was there only for one day; they didn't want to hold us. They said the camps are further south, Santa Maria—Santa [Maria] di Leuca, Santa Cesarea—you know, past Bari. And then they took us, they took us in that time, and then they send us in Santa Maria; that's what used to be the Italian military (inaudible). There was there some people there because they waiting to go to Israel; there was some people there. Just us, they don't take us.

We was there in Italy for long time, for about a year. He was there from forty-five [1945] up to—I was there till forty-eight [1948], he left in forty-six [1946]. He wanted to go to Poland to see if somebody is still there from our family. I told him, "I don't want to go; it's no use to go because whoever I ask, there's nobody there." And some Polish people they don't know—it was good friends of ours, was gentiles. It was good friend, and then he said they don't know because they talked to him. Then he says he don't know, there's

nobody there for us. So I said, “Don’t ask me to go”—’cause we wrote letters too. And then he still went. That’s right, and then I was alone. We are alone, me and my uncle, in Italy, Santa Maria di Bagni.

I still wanted to go to Israel. They didn’t—I couldn’t go. And I sat, and then I did some business for black market. I bought some cigarettes from Americans, coffee from American soldiers, and they gave me the cigarettes and I paid them for that, in liras. So then later, then I start to—the Italian, the Italian people are very nice people. I borrowed some oil and I bought leché, leché. I was in Santa Maria di Bagni, Santa Maria, so I bought some oil from the Italians. And then what I did—they did it right away. They said this oil will be cheaper because the oil sets up, the water goes down, you see? And I drove a lot of times to Milan or to Naples and sold them up there. I don’t have to pay nothing for the tickets, because I couldn’t afford it if I had to pay for the tickets.

One time, then, they caught me. I got a Jewish book, I took out the piece of paper with the Jewish seal, and I showed them. They say, “*Permesso, permesso.*” So I gave them that. They said, “*Pardone*, it’s okay.” It went like that for a few times, and then one time when they caught me they took me down to the station. There was a MP, military—must be Jewish, I don’t know, because he saw right away; he know what that was. I don’t know, maybe not. So he says, “Don’t do it anymore. I’ll let you go home to the camp. Just don’t you ever do.” Then I says, “No, I’m not going to do that anymore.” Then he let me go home, and that’s it. Then I did it for a long time, I did that. Then later I deal, like, with clothes, you know, something like that, so I can make a living.

CP: When did you end up getting into cattle? Didn’t you and your brother do that together?

SP: Yeah, when I got together. I come back to Germany in 1948, end of forty-eight [1948]. My brother was already there in the cattle business, and we had a barn right in Munich. So, we got together with the cattle.

CP: When did you end up coming to the United States?

SP: United States, my brother come here in 1950. I come here in 1952. I got a passport already over a year, in the pocket, so whenever (inaudible) I can go. Oh, yeah. And then my brother come with the (inaudible). They sent—he don’t got no passport. He went on the quota, he went on the quota. He got the quota, go to America, because he had already a daughter, a child; him and his wife and the daughter, they left. The baby was born in Munich after I come; the baby was born. And then he come with the quota to America, then he was in New York, and then from New York they went to Minneapolis.

Then from Minneapolis they send them to—because he was in the cattle business, then he met a guy, he’s got a—in Montana, he’s got about 20,000 acres of land. He got 105 miles long way on the road; he’s got a lot of cattle, about 30,000 head of cattle. So he wanted to give him a good—he gave him a good deal. He helped us a lot out, this same guy. And then just he saw he got a brother in Germany because he wanted him up there;

he wanted to give him a house to live. He was there a long time, but his wife doesn't want him to go up there, doesn't want to be there.

So then he come back to Germany when I was in Germany, and he told me the whole story and said, "You got a lot of money." But he helped us out, the same guy; he saw we want to go on our own. Well, I got there about \$20,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 I got. And then he says, "We don't got no money, we told him." So he says, "Don't worry; if he wants to be in the cattle business in here, then you got to have a farm. So let's buy a farm." We got no money. And he said, "Ask me," and then he was told what he got—and he was a very, very nice guy.

And so then he said he got to—he sent his son, told his son he got to buy a farm, and then—this was in Minnesota. And that was 160 acres of land. And that farmer was he makes silos, he was milking cows, he make silos for the cattle feed. So the silos didn't come out good, so he was mad and he killed himself in the silo house that wintertime. So he left the wife with six children there, so she wanted to sell it. Then find it out, his son find it out, because he was looking some other farms and then they know it, because (inaudible) because it depends on not too much money because you got to say we've \$15,000 in that farm but you found it. We could buy—that was 160 acres, and we pay him \$32,000, \$200 an acre. So—

CP: That's not bad.

SP: Yeah, and we paid them, but it's got to be cash, cash money; she want it for the kids. Then he paid him and then we make—we told him, you know, I have \$15,000. You can't spend over the—you got some, then have to look to, then came \$10,000, \$20,000. We take it for three years mortgage, and in two years we paid them back because we start dealing cattle. We work right away by hand, cows. We started with about fifteen cows.

CP: Wow!

SP: So.

CP: Last time, we talked a little bit about coming from Europe, coming from surviving the Holocaust, and then moving to the United States and being able to start with nothing and turn into a successful cattle rancher. You talked a lot about—you love the United States for that.

SP: That's right, that's right. Yeah.

CP: Can you say something about that?

SP: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you it was there—this was not far from Rochester, where we was living there. And then we start the—we was buying—then I was working for a guy. He was a junker, a junk yard in Rochester, and I was working for him. And he was married; this guy was already married and then for—for three of us; was another partner

to work. We couldn't make no living, just from cows to milk and so on. I went out to work, milk the cows in the morning, milk the cows at night, help him, and then I went to work. And then I was working for about a year, close to a year, and I get paid. He paid me, and at that time there was a—I make twenty-five dollars a week, twenty dollars a week. And then I went for *risiko*, you know, and he talked me up fifteen cents that night after a few minutes.

He was Jewish himself. He come from Russia, years ago. He was very, very rich. And then he took me (inaudible) that I come home and I was crying, you know, from the (inaudible) and then I got back to work. Then next day I didn't go to work anymore, picked up the check where they gave me a few dollars, the twenty-some dollars and that's all. And then I got rid of my own, took a few dollars in the pocket, and I bought a few calves. I bought three calves, but three calves are \$100, right away \$100 that I make for the whole month, the whole month. And the farmer ask me for them, that's what he ask, that's what I am. He speak nothing, he wrote in the paper. He told me, "How much you want? I give you that." That's (inaudible).

CP: You realized it was a good business deal.

SP: And I know, and I know what they was worth it. They're worth more than that, that's it. I sold them to a neighbor right away and make 100 dollars. It's that time that I went on my own.

CP: Well, you've lived quite a miraculous life. Is there anything that you would want to leave for future generations, somebody who's watching your testimony, that you'd like to say, having lived through all this and having survived the Holocaust and now being retired in Florida?

SP: There was somebody else, the others. I told them—not in Rochester, here; in here. In Rochester nobody—there was nobody there, so they want to check for—because there was no survivors up there in Rochester. In Rochester there was only thirty families of Jews, that's all. And they were scared if I'd eat something from them, so they stay away from them guys, what they call refugees. They stay away from us.

CP: Do you have any future message for people who would watch this video?

SP: If they will—

CP: A future message, just about surviving the Holocaust, or about living life, anything? No? Well, it's been a pleasure talking with you today.

SP: Thank you.

CP: Thank you very much.

SP: Thank you, Chris. That's all?

CE: Yeah.

SP: That's all, I going say what—
End of interview