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[Transcriber's Note: The oral history interview includes wife Angelica Gans in Part 4 of the interview.]

Dr. Carolyn Ellis: This is April 9, 2009. I am—my name is Carolyn Ellis, and I am interviewing Holocaust survivor Mr. Philip Gans. We are in Clearwater, Florida, in the United States; the language we are using is English; and we have two videographers, Jane Duncan and Nafa Fa'alogu. Okay, Mr. Gans, could you read that?

Philip Gans: Sure.

CE: I'm going to call you Phil.

PG: Yeah.

CE: Phil, could you read that into the camera?

PG: I, Philip Gans, acknowledge and agree that my oral testimony may be used by the Florida Holocaust Museum for all standard museum purposes. The museum may use this

interview, including my name, photograph, videotaped image, and related written materials.

CE: Okay, thank you.

PG: You're welcome.

CE: Phil, let's start with your—just telling us your name and spelling it for us, if you could?

PG: My name is Philip L. Gans. Philip, P-h-i-l-i-p; middle initial L., stands for Louis; and last name Gans, G-a-n-s.

CE: Okay, and did you have a nickname as a child?

PG: Yes. My brother could not pronounce Philip—he was two years older—and he wound up calling me “Ip.” So everybody called me “Ip,” or sometimes “Ippy,” I-p-p-y.

CE: Okay, and what is your date of birth? When were you born?

PG: Twenty-two January, 1928.

CE: And what is your current age?

PG: ooh—eighty-one years.

CE: Okay, and what is the city and country of your birth?

PG: I was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

CE: Okay, and then could you tell us the name of your father?

PG: My father's name was Levie, L-e-v-i-e, Gans.

CE: And your mother's name?

PG: Lea, L-e-a, Gans; her maiden name, de Beer.

CE: Could you spell de Beer for us?

PG: Small-d-e capital-B-e-e-r.

CE: And then the name of your siblings?

PG: My brother, who was two years older, was Benjamin Herman Gans, and my sister was Rebecca Gans.

CE: Okay, and did anyone else live in your house before the war?

PG: Occasionally Grandmom, my mother's mother, used to stay with us. She had another daughter in Paris, but when the war broke out, unfortunately, she was in Holland, so she stayed with us. Had she been with her other daughter in Paris, they would have fled and wound up in Jamaica and finally in Aruba. But she stayed with us and—the rest you'll hear later. (laughs)

CE: Okay, and what was her name? Your grandmother's name?

PG: Sara de Beer de Vries, d-e V-r-i-e-s. That was her maiden name.

CE: Okay, and then could you just tell us quickly the professions of your father and your mother?

PG: Well, my father was a businessman. We were in the ladies' fashion business. We had girls working for us, sewing machines, ironing, cutting. My mom had a degree [in of](#) something like—what was that called?—well, economics—

CE: Home economics?

PG: Home economics. She never used her profession as a teacher, but she used it in our business, designing different blouses and collars for the ladies' wear. She worked in our business.

CE: Now, what I would like is just to start with your childhood—and this is all informal—and just tell us a little bit about your childhood, what it was like.

PG: Well, I remember having to go to kindergarten, and I hated it. They had to drag me and I was screaming and so, but I had to go anyway. I remember we had a cat, and I tortured it so much that it really clawed me, right here in my face somewhere. I still have the scar. I remember my sister knitting, sitting on the—we called it the divan; it's like a couch—and she dropped a stitch and she told me to find it. I looked all over the place. (both laugh) I couldn't find the stitch.

My mom's sister was funny; she worked in the business after she graduated from school. We had a boy working for us that did all the running around, and she sent him out to get mosquito netting, without holes. He went to all the stores and he came back and he said "Nobody has mosquito netting without holes." (both laugh) Poor kid, he went all over the place.

I went to school, not too far; we had to walk. I remember meeting the teacher sometimes, and we walked to school together. And it was a very small school in Amsterdam, right across from the Jewish invalid home, on Weesperplein. We played games. We had school from, I believe, nine to twelve and two to four; we went home during lunch hour.

I ate a lot of sugar. When the war broke out and things were rationed I got my mom's sugar and my sister's sugar, because there wasn't enough sugar for me. I would put sugar in anything. Even today, if I have sauerkraut with mashed potatoes, I love to have a little bit of sugar on top of that. I think Jewish people do cook with a lot of sugar.

Grandma did a lot of cooking, even though we had a maid, and I remember Mom coming down during lunch hour. And we ate raw hamburger, and you had little meatballs, real tiny ones that we'd put in the noodle soup and we ate them raw. And still today I eat raw meat, and people think I'm crazy, but in Holland you can go in the delicatessen and they have all kind of meats and then a bowl with raw hamburger. They take two halves of a bun, dip them in the onions, and then you put the raw hamburger on top of it, and if you want it special you get a hardboiled egg sliced on it.

I remember playing with my brother. We had a dog. My brother and I got along good. I used to make breakfast every morning. We never trusted the maid to make breakfast; we made our own breakfast. Yeah—

CE: What was a day like for you? Did you help in your father's store ever, or were you—

PG: Yeah, sometimes we had to make buttons, and we had a special machine that would make round material and a little machine—the two parts to the button, you put half of it on top of the cloth and then the thing bend it over and the other part would go down and you pull the handle, and push that down. And one time I did have to do something and I used a razor blade, and I cut my finger so bad that I kept screaming to my mother and bleeding and I blamed it on something else—I was lying, I did use a razor blade. (laughs)

CE: Okay, tell me what it was like to be Jewish at that point in time.

PG: At that point, no. I don't think we had any problem, no. Matter of fact, this is how—I remember very clearly having a friend at the house, and he asked me if I was Jewish, and I told him, "I don't know."

CE: Well, that's interesting.

PG: Yeah, honestly, I remember that so clearly. He asked me if I was Jewish, and I said, "I don't know."

CE: So it wasn't an important part of your identity at that point?

PG: I mean, that was in the early ages.

CE: Yeah.

PG: And I was so bad that one year I didn't get anything for St. Nicholas¹. We don't celebrate Christmas, we celebrate St. Nicholas, the fifth of December, and I didn't get anything, no present. I was so disappointed and I thought, "Well, they'll come later," and I waited and I hoped and I never got anything as punishment.

CE: How would you describe your parents?

PG: My parents?

CE: Yeah, what kind of people were they?

PG: I would say they were nice, not because that's what every child says about their parents, but Dad was strict. But I remember sitting on Mom's lap while she was crocheting and reading at the same time. Or knitting and reading; she was very good at that. Sitting on her lap was good. We had a nice family relationship.

CE: So you were close to your parents?

PG: Yeah.

CE: And to your siblings? What was your—?

PG: Yeah, like I said, my brother and I got along very well.

CE: And your sister?

PG: Yeah, well, she was five years older; my brother was only two years older.

¹St. Nicholas' Eve, the night before the saint's feast day on December 6.

CE: So you would describe this time in your life as happy, would you?

PG: I would think so, yeah.

CE: So any other stories you remember from your childhood, that you would—?

PG: We had a dog, and of course in those days there was no central heating, so we only had heating in the living room. And in the front of the living room was really a sitting room—the living room was originally the dining room. And in the front of that, with French doors, was our sitting room, but that was turned into an office. And in our dining room, which became our living room, we only had a fireplace. That was the only heat in the house. And I remember Mom sitting in one chair and Dad in the other and the table in front and my dad sitting there with his legs crossed reading the paper, and the dog came and peed on his leg. (both laugh) He was so mad. I'll never forget that.

I was scared of the dark, and when I had to go and get coal downstairs I was petrified, because people that delivered the coal would go through the cellar and a little bit through the yard and then in a shed underneath—well, part of the building, underneath the kitchen. And the staircase goes right down next to the kitchen to the place where the coal was, and I was scared stiff, even going to bed at night. And when I had to wash the fruit—there was the maid; later on we had a butler who'd do it, but if it was his day off and I had to take fruit, take it to the kitchen to wash it, I always had to whistle, so they knew I wouldn't be eating it. (laughs)

And Grandma used to bake ginger-butter cake; it's real thin, made out of sugar, and butter and ginger, very rich. And we would sneak it, but Mom had in mind she'd put them in there and she knew there was one missing, so later on they put a key in the cabinet, but somehow I found the key. Oh, I was a devil when I was a kid. I was—there was a friend of mine that lives about five minutes from here, Sam Schryver, and he always tells my wife, he says, "Phil was terrible when he was a kid."

CE: So he knew you as a kid.

PG: Oh, yeah, he lived across the street from me.

CE: Okay. And how do you spell his last name?

PG: S-c-h-r-y-v-e-r. I'm sure you are going to interview him if you do it before May the second, because he's leaving for Canada.

CE: Will he be back?

PG: Oh, yeah, every six months he comes back.

CE: Okay. I would like to have his name and phone number.

PG: Oh, he's—now he is—he was a salesman all his life. He is a talker.

CE: Good.

PG: He does better than I, even though my story in my mind is much more important and better than his story. But he is the perfect talker. Schools always look for him because he has this way about it, you know, but that's salesmen, and I tell him that. "Sam, you're [a](#) super salesman."

CE: Okay, so you—going back to your childhood. Would you describe your family as pretty well off financially?

PG: Oh, yeah. We had a car in 1939, 1940. And Sam always says, "Yeah, you people were, you know, well off."

CE: Okay, and could you talk a little bit about your religious life during that time?

PG: Yeah, I went—I think it was— See, we went to school Monday, Tuesday, full day; Wednesday, half a day. Then Thursday and Friday and every Wednesday afternoon I went to the Jonnas Donel Meierplan right across from the—I think it was Portuguese church, Portuguese synagogue—I went to the synagogue there and had my Jewish lessons. But again, when I went bar mitzvah I had to learn all this recital, and I could never remember. I never made it, so the rabbi did it for me.

CE: Okay. But your parents did send you to—

PG: Oh, yeah, I went to Hebrew school.

CE: Okay. Now talk a little bit about your parents and your grandmother and religion.

PG: Well, Grandmom and Grandpop, before he died, they were very religious. They lived in Brissom, ten, fifteen kilometers outside of Amsterdam, had a three story building there. And I think at that time we didn't really (inaudible) after he passed away, but we always had a girl across the street come to turn on the lights on Friday night and turn them off. Well, we probably turn them on before the Sabbath, but then the girl came and turned them off.

Yeah, they were very religious. Everything kosher, and like I said, very religious. Especially my grandfather, but he died at an early age. I don't remember how old I was, but I was very young when he died. And then Grandma stayed there but rented out the first two floors—for a while only the first floor, the downstairs, cause I remember when my aunt from Paris would come, they'll be on the second floor. And then on the third floor we had two bedrooms, a front little room and a big—like an attic, a big area there. We used to live there.

CE: So would it be true, you think, to say that religion was very important to your family, more important than Jewish identity? What would you say about religion and Jewish identity?

PG: Well, for my grandparents, yes. My parents, like I said, we did everything according to the Jewish religion as far as table was concerned, the linens for dairy products, for meat products, dishes, dairy products, meat products. But on the other hand, we were in business and we had girls working on the Saturday, and money was exchanged. In that part, we were not too religious. My grandparents were, yeah; they were.

CE: But you didn't get—you didn't seem to—tell me what you think of about this. You didn't seem to have a real sense of being Jewish, or that didn't seem to be something that was being emphasized—

PG: No, I don't think so.

CE: —in your life at that point.

PG: Yeah, well, like I said, as a kid I remember a boy asking me if I was Jewish and I said, "I don't know," but I was very young. But later on we knew very well we were Jewish. I went to Hebrew school and the school I went to where a lot of Jewish children [also attended], and we—Friday afternoon we used to get out of school early while the other students still stayed.

CE: Okay, so this is a pretty good life that you are describing to me. Can you remember at what point that got disrupted?

PG: Yeah, life was very good until May the tenth [1940]—well, actually, I was a bad boy, and they send me to a boarding house—boarding school, house, cause the guy that wants to write a book about me, he asked me the name of the school. Well, it was an individual house, row homes in Scheveningen, and husband and wife run it. There weren't too many children there. And that was in 1939. I went to the sixth grade there. And so I was not at home with the family.

CE: How far away from home was this?

PG: The Hague and Scheveningen—The Hague and Holl—Amsterdam? I don't know.

CE: Yeah, it's about—it's an hour or so, right?

PG: That's it, roughly.

CE: One train, I think.

PG: So I don't know what the family was. When the war broke out on May tenth, I was in Scheveningen. There were bombardments, and I can still see from the house—we slept on the second floor—the parachuting. The Germans parachuted outside of Scheveningen,

and anti-aircraft guns shot down many German planes. We went to look at them on the beach.

CE: But you still were in the boarding school at this point?

PG: Oh, yeah. I'm at the boarding school for I'd say close to two years, all of sixth to seventh grade. And when the war was—well, there was bombardments. I remember one night, next thing I knew, I was on the floor because ~~there was~~ a big bomb had fell in the middle of the street. Maybe three, four, five houses from where we lived. No houses were damaged. There was a big crater in the ground and it threw me out of bed, and everything was—sirens went and we went downstairs with a pillow over our head. But the buildings were never damaged where we lived.

And finally, fifteenth of May [1940], when Holland surrendered to Germany². The Germans walked through the streets, and they looked like normal people to me. I didn't realize that it was bad, but my parents and the elders, they were worried because they didn't like the Germans and they didn't think it was good. But to me, they looked like normal people.

CE: Do you know why they didn't like the Germans?

PG: I don't know exactly the reason. But I remember having German toys—and they had fantastic toys—and Dad wouldn't buy them anymore. I had a little car that I had pulled the rear bumper out and it went backwards; go into the garage, the doors would close from the garage, and because it hit the back of the garage the bumper would go back in; and if you took the telephone or something else, the doors open and the car would come out again. I mean Schuco, S-c-h-u-c-o, was the name, and my dad wouldn't buy them anymore. They would not buy German items. We used to have a German maid, and finally Hitler called all the German girls back and that's when we had to get a butler, a Dutchman.

CE: Okay. So you're in school and there is some bombing, and then what happened?

PG: Well, I sometimes feel guilty because we had—Mom and Dad had the money, but there was no transportation; you couldn't go back and forth—because I think if I had

²The order for surrender was given on May 14 and the last skirmish was on May 16, 1940.

been in Amsterdam, we might have wound up in England. I think my dad would have fled. But I wasn't there, and I'm sure they did not [\[want to\]](#) leave without me.

I came back to Amsterdam in summer of forty-one [1941], went to school from forty-one [1941] to forty-two [1942] but could not go to a regular school. I had to go to a school for all Jewish children. I went there from forty-one [1941] to forty-two [1942].

CE: And that was high school, now?

PG: Yeah, and that's—actually, it's a five year schooling called HBS. And in Scheveningen one time, already Jews were not allowed in the beach. We went to the beach anyway; it was one block from the beach where we lived—it was very nice—and got into an argument and got into a fight and the boy called me a “dirty Jew.” He lived in the same boarding house that I lived was, and I told and he got punished.

They were very, very strict. I had to eat everything. I didn't like spinach, I didn't like endive, and they let me sit in a room until I ate it all and—

CE: Was the school run by Jewish people?

PG: No, I don't think they were Jewish, just a husband and wife. I saw the man after the war, but I have no clue his name. But I used to take—finally I got a bright idea. I took my spinach and put it in my handkerchief, put it in my pocket. “I'm finished.” They come and look. “Okay, you can go now.” I go to the bathroom and flush it down. They caught me sooner or later. (laughs) My parents were not allowed to come on the weekend.

CE: Because you had done this?

PG: Yeah, because I had done that. Oh, yeah, I was the devil.

CE: (laughs) So then what happened in terms of having your life disrupted?

PG: Well, I went to the Jewish school for one year, and—

CE: And you're living at home then?

PG: I'm living at home, yeah, 1941 to forty-two [1942].

CE: So your parents could have fled at that point, right?

PG: No, then—at that time was—no.

CE: Too late?

PG: Yeah, because even the people I was hiding with—they had at that time a lot of people at their house, eight, nine people that was supposed to go. But what happened, the people took their money and they took their suitcases and everything, they say, "It's not safe to go now." Next day: "No, it's not safe; the Germans are patrolling the waters." And finally, it turned out to be a gimmick. They just took the money, and then because it was very hard in those days, you know, after a year after the war—

CE: But your parents didn't try to leave at that point?

PG: No.

CE: Do you remember having discussions about it at all?

PG: No. I went to school. I remember a Jewish boy that lived down the street, we went together, and then he didn't come down and I'm looking up and talking to him and I walked into a telephone pole. And I still have a bump here—I can still feel it; it's right here—and I hit myself, bleeding. And I looked the boy up and I have a book, *In Memoriam: 104,000 People from Holland that Perished in the Holocaust*, and his name is in there, Abram Springer. And his birth is 1928, cause there was many others [named] Abram Springer, but they were different. Was it you that said that? No, the girl in—the lady in Iowa said that her parents' or grandparents' name was Springer; it was a coincidence. I looked him up and all the other Abrams were born in either twenty-six [1926] or twenty-five [1925] or 1800 something, I mean, so I knew it was him. He perished in Auschwitz. But that's the only boy I can remember from before the war.

CE: Okay, so then what happened?

PG: Then in the summer of 1942, there was the Razia; that meant that the Nazis went from house to house taking the people out of their home. And I remember across the street from me— (clock chimes) 124—you want me to stop them?

CE: No, that's okay.

PG: One twenty four; it was next to the unemployment office. Next to that was the back of the music school, to which I had registered but never went there. I'm always planning to go there and says, "See, I'm sorry I didn't make it. Shall I unregister now, sixty-five years later?" And to the left [of to](#) the building was the school, and I can still see them taking the people out of their home. Then they came across the street to our house, and we had the signs, "Mode Industrie Baantje"—yeah, it was—yeah, "Mode Industrie Baantje." "Baantje" comes after the "Mode Industrie." And they passed us by. We were fortunate, because I don't think I could have lasted thirty-three months. Twenty-one months was long enough.

CE: So why did they not bother a business? Because they wanted the business to keep going?

PG: No, they—they took people out of the home, and they figured this is a place of business, that there's no people living here.

CE: But why didn't they come to your home?

PG: That was our home.

CE: So you lived with the—okay.

PG: We lived there, oh, yeah. It was a basement and a three-story building. Yeah, we had the first floor, we had the front room, which was the office, then we had the room behind that was the dining room, which became our living room, and the hallway went all the way back to the kitchen.

CE: Do you remember how that felt—how you felt at that time?

PG: Well, I was scared, because you know, we weren't allowed to have anything. We weren't allowed to have radio, so my dad bought a big music box with big records in those days, and it is all automatic and you know. First we had a little one, which you wind up like this with one record, but then he bought this because we weren't allowed a radio. And so it was scary. They made you scared of the Germans, because they know more than I did.

CE: Your parents, you mean?

PG: Yeah, sure. And I remember in thirty-nine [1939] when Germany invaded Poland that my grandmother said, "Far from my bed." Because in those days those distances were very far from Amsterdam, from Holland to Poland, and she says, "Far from my bed," never figuring that Holland was going to be next. You know, this was thirty-nine [1939], and then May forty [1940], it was Holland. So I was scared that they passed us by.

And I remember one of the girls that worked for us—they were Christian people—they had brought tomatoes, and I used to eat tomatoes with sugar on top of it. I loved it. I still do that. Although lately, since I have problems with my hand and it's either carpal tunnel or sugar, I'm eating tomatoes just as they are. I love tomatoes, but I don't put the sugar on any more, but I used to. I remember that so well, being in the living room and eating those tomatoes with sugar. Now—

CE: So they were taking people out of their homes. Could you describe what that looked like, when they were taking people out of their homes?

PG: Well, yeah, it was scary. They knocked on the door and the people opened the door, and then they brought them out and they marched them down the street to—I think it was Weesperplein where the Joodse Invalide [Jewish Hospital and Home] —I'm sure that you—the diamond exchange is one side and there's two little parks there, and they gathered them together there. And what they did with them, I don't know. But you know, I know now they took them to Westerbork.

CE: What did you think then? Do you remember what you thought then?

PG: Well, they passed us by, so we were happy. But that same year, 1942, Dad received notice to report to Germany. He got a sheet of paper, what all to bring, but he had no intention of going, so we had to go in hiding. So a lady dressed as a nun—I'm sure she was not a nun, but she was dressed as a nun. And I do know that she had a pill that if she ever got caught she said she'd take that pill to kill herself.

CE: Wow.

PG: And she took me to the northern part of Holland into hiding. And that's the last I saw my parents, because I was all by myself.

CE: So why did they take you by yourself? Do you know?

PG: Well, it is tough to find a hiding place for a family of six, you know; it's very risky. And one boy with a farmer in farm country in the northern part of Holland, not many military there, never had any problem. I helped the farmer. And I tell the students that Anne Frank was hiding and never got out of the house, and there I had freedom. I helped the farmer, digging up potatoes, pulling bean bushes out the ground, hanging them in the loft to dry, and then shake them out. I remember he taught me how to use a sickle, I think it's called, to cut the hay, and we let it dry and keep moving it so the sun would dry it. And he had beehives, and his son had a sailboat. We used to go sailing. It was nice there, I had it really good; the people were very nice.

And I remember there again—oh, we made our own sauerkraut. Cut up cabbage and I think put salt on it and a piece of wood, and then a stone on top of that. But downstairs we had this centrifugal—what's it called, a centrifuge? You put the beehives, the—I don't know what they were called there in the beehives. It's a slat where the bees build up their honey. We scrape off the wax, put them in the centrifuge, and then I had to turn. And the faster I go, the more honey come out, and it drip down underneath the bowl, and I remember when they weren't around or whatever going down and getting pieces of wax with the honey on it and chewing on it.

And there is something that very few people know: on a farm, we wore socks with a leather sole. Then you go outside and put those wooden shoes on. When you come back you take your wooden shoes off, leave them in the little vestibule in the back of the house, and then you walk in the house on your socks because they have leather soles on the bottom, you know?

And I remember they made potatoes, scraped them and used the—sifted it, and used the powder to thicken oatmeal or cream of wheat, because there wasn't enough food. Well water, you had a pump; there was no running water in the house. You had to pump.

CE: How long were you on the farm?

PG: Not too long, not too long. Unfortunately, not too long, because on a Friday afternoon, a man on a bicycle came from the capital of the little state and said to the farmer, "You better get rid of Phil."

| And the farmer said, "Why?"

And the man on the bicycle said, "His sister walked out the back door as the Nazis walked in the front door." She was in Leeuwarden, which is the capital of Friesland, and I was in Oenkerk, a little town.

And so the next day, Saturday morning, he took me to Amsterdam, not knowing what to do with me, a fifteen-year-old kid. He took me to a Jewish orphanage. Well, it was Saturday, and they wouldn't do business. Very fortunate, because all Jewish orphanages were emptied and the kids were taken to camps, gassed and cremated. So I was very lucky. Then I remembered one of the girls working for us; we went to her and she knew where Mom and Dad were hiding in The Hague.

CE: So you had not had any contact with them during this time?

PG: No. No, because you know, like I said, I was a bad person, and they thought, too, that. When we—still at home—I remember Dad and my brother in the backyard doing something with shovels, but they never told me what. After the war, when I came home in late forty-five [1945], I went to the house, asked if I could dig up in the backyard. "Well, sure." And I dug and I didn't find anything, but the person that I was staying with, she said, "You better fill up that hole," a couple weeks later.

So as I fill up the hole, a brick fell off the shovel and made noise. It was a little metal box. It was—in there was a watch and some diamond rings and gold coins and chains, various things that my parent—my dad and brother—had buried, knowing that some day

they are going to come back and dig it up, not knowing that they would ever come back. Nobody had that idea. We were always told, “You’re being relocated to work in Germany so the Germans could go fight in the front.” So I remember that part.

CE: So come back to the—so you are on the farm and they move—they go to the orphanage—

PG: Right, and then I went to The Hague.

CE: They took you to The Hague?

PG: My sister came the next day. Now there’s four of us in the house. The woman didn’t want that many people, too risky. I had a cold and I’m coughing, so she gave me a glass of sugar water, and said, “Any time you feel an itch in your throat, drink sugar water, because I want—I don’t want the neighbors to know I have somebody in the house.”

CE: So, it’s you and your sister at that point?

PG: Yeah.

CE: Is that all?

PG: And my parents.

CE: Your parents—so your parents came there, too?

PG: No, they were there before I got there.

CE: Oh, so you went to where your parents were.

PG: Right.

CE: Okay.

PG: The girl that worked for us knew where my parents were, and she told me and then I went there. And I guess my sister must have called one of the girls working for us, and then she came the next day. Then they sent me to another place, to Santpoort, S-a-n-t-p-o-o-r-t; today it's called Bloemendaal.

CE: Right.

PG: They incorporated it.

CE: So before you go to Santpoort—so it's interesting to me, the networks of how these people who helped you and how they communicated with each other and got you—

PG: That's all underground. Now, Sam can tell you a lot about that, because he never got farther than Westerbork, but he worked for the underground.

CE: Oh, he did! Okay.

PG: Yeah, he was an underground worker.

CE: Okay, all right. So the underground seemed to be really big in Amsterdam—in the Netherlands.

PG: Yeah, the kids don't understand. They think you're underground, but you know, it's just a secret organization. And the people I went with, they were very involved in the (inaudible)—she was very involved.

CE: And these were all Dutch people?

PG: Oh, yeah, all Dutch Christian people. Now the lady with the nun that took me out of the house, I have no clue. She might have been Jewish; she might have been a Christian person. And like I said, she was dressed as a nun, but I don't think she was a nun.

CE: Now at this point the Jews had to wear the Jewish star, right—

PG: Yeah.

CE: —if they went out?

PG: Of course, we didn't wear the star because we didn't want them to know that we were in hiding.

CE: Because you were in hiding.

PG: And it's a funny thing, after the war—

CE: But you did wear the star before you went into hiding?

PG: Yeah.

CE: Okay. Just so—tell me about that experience of having the star—what did that?

PG: You know, it's humiliating; everybody you know you're Jewish and—it's uncomfortable. Yeah, and from The Hague, I went to the little town of Santpoort, and those people were just wonderful. They were the nicest people. Now, the people in The Hague, I'm sure they did it for money.

CE: The people who were on the farm?

PG: No, the farm—

CE: No, they didn't do it—

PG: I don't know if they got paid or what, cause it was always better food on the farm then—we had plenty of potatoes and beans and stuff like that. But the people in The Hague, they were—I'm sure they did it for money.

CE: Okay.

PG: But the people in Santpoort, now, they were very, very nice. It was a husband, wife, and two daughters. And according to the girl, my sister had been there, my brother had been there, and when I was there—I was not there with my brother; my brother had already gone. There were three other people in the house. The Jewish boy had no information on mother and daughter, and I want to see if I can get more information from them. I knew their names because I have their ID cards. I know their names and when they were born and where they lived in Amsterdam, right around the corner from us. I want to try to get more information through the newly released papers from Germany.

CE: Now let me go back for just a second, because you started to say something a while ago. You said—when I asked—when you were talking about being alone and you said, “Well, I was a bad person,” and you were about to say more about that, and I just wondered what you were going to say.

PG: Say that again?

CE: When you were talking about being—

PG: A bad—

CE: Being by yourself on the farm, and you said, “Well, I was a bad person.” Because I asked something about why you were alone—why you went alone.

PG: Well, I went alone for the simple reason that my sister went alone.

CE: Okay.

PG: She was in the capital of Friesland, because it was too risky to take too many people. But I was a bad boy because I would sneak and steal honey—

CE: Oh, so that's why you were a bad person!

PG: Yeah, you know. I would do things like that, and—

CE: Okay, all right, so that was all that you were saying. I wasn't sure if you were trying to connect being—you went alone because you were a bad person.

PG: No, no.

CE: Because they thought you were going to get in trouble.

PG: Like I said, my sister went alone.

CE: Okay.

PG: My brother was alone, because it was too risky.

CE: Okay, so now let's go back to Santpoort, then.

PG: The family with the two daughters, like I said, they were wonderful. There were three other people in the house, [including the] Jewish boy. I have no information.

CE: Were they in hiding, too?

PG: Yeah.

CE: Yeah, okay.

PG: And mother and daughter—she ran a bakery around the corner from us, and we knew her very well. Beautiful daughter. And—

CE: So you had known them before you went to stay with them?

PG: Before I went to hiding there, yeah.

CE: And could you go outside the house at all there?

PG: No.

CE: No?

PG: I tell the students that I don't go out the house, so no school. Whoopee! No school. But my parents thought I should learn something, and by mail they send me homework. Well, they got a teacher who by mail sends me homework and I faithfully do it, till one day I found out my brother, who was very smart, was the one giving me the homework. (laughs) I said, "The heck with it!" and never did that again. I never did it again.

CE: Okay, and how long were you there?

PG: I was there a long time.

CE: A long time, about how long?

PG: Um, I would say at least eight months.

CE: Eight months.

PG: At least. Eight, nine months.

CE: Did you have the run of the house at that time?

PG: Oh, yeah.

CE: So you could move—did they keep the curtains closed or—?

PG: We could move around the house. It was a three-story building, was just husband, wife and the four—two daughters—and the four of us.

Now, I tell the students everything is rationed and I show my ration card, and I got a cup—an original one—here, and they needed a little coupon to get a loaf of bread. Gas was also rationed. The old man on Friday nights would take the gas meter out and put an inner-tube from a bicycle between the two pipes—very dangerous, because a little leak and you won't wake up the next morning. But he did for probably two, three years and he never got caught, cause he needed a special coin to put in the gas meter to get it running. And then she cooked all weekend for eight people.

And, like I said, they were wonderful people. I got them—after the war I got them a certificate from Yad Vashem³ from Israel, for all the help for many Jewish people. And to show you how—I don't know if you call it immature or dumb, but one day she said, "I want to make a shirt for my husband; his birthday is in December." So she took measurements of my arm, my neck, my waist, and everything and my birthday—and in December, he got a shirt. Now, my birthday is in January. I got a shirt also.

CE: Ah!

PG: She made one for me. But how stupid for me to not realize. She's got plenty of his shirts in the closet, why does she need measurements from me? (laughs) You know what I mean? Unbelievable. It was years and years later that I realized how dumb I was to tell her—I forgot her name, but Conen was the last name—"You've got shirts of your husband's in the closet." But the nice part was everything was rationed, so where did she get the material from, and all this stuff. So it was very appreciated.

And also, I show the students toothpaste. You buy a new tube of toothpaste, you had to turn in the old tube because they were made of tin lead, and Germany needed the lead for

³Yad Vashem is Israel's official memorial to Jewish Holocaust victims.

the war effort. And I tell the students and that's what they always say: "We like your presentation, because there was humor in it." You take the lead and roll it up, it stays rolled up; but today you have the plastic, you roll it up and it rolls back again, and they laugh, you know.

And let's see, what else happened there? When my brother was there, there was a knock on the door one night at eleven o'clock, after curfew. They were scared. They quick put my brother on the back porch, closed the doors, put the curtains, closed the curtains, put the big table in front of it, made his bed, went downstairs. There was two girls, husband and wife, so everybody did something; it didn't take too much time. Went downstairs and sure enough the Nazis were there and they searched the whole house. But they even put the curtains aside, the girl tells me, and look, they didn't see him.

CE: Wow! And where were you?

PG: I wasn't there yet; that was before I got there.

CE: Oh, that was before you got there.

PG: Before I got there.

CE: Oh, and then they still hid people after that.

PG: Oh, yeah, they—she was very involved. He was a soccer player and he wasn't doing well, but she was very involved.

CE: So you remember that time as happy? Being in that house?

PG: Yeah, because they were so nice. I mean, I learn different foods, (inaudible), beef with onions, and I loved it. And there was something else they made. And even when I go to Holland now, I still go visit the girl. The husband, her mother and father, died in the sixties [1960s], her sister died in 2000, and she's still alive. She's eighty-six years old; she'll be eighty-seven in June. And every August I go to Holland, for the last ten, twelve years, and I call her twice a week. Matter of fact, I talked to her this morning and I told

her I had this interview, and she wished me luck. And she's very nice. She had polio as a child and walks very bad—you know, limps—but she's a wonderful person.

They were very poor people. They were really working people, working class people, and when they were awarded that award from Yad Vashem, I gave both her and her sister—well, her and her husband, the sister and her husband—a check—I think it was made out in Dutch guilders—at that time for, you know, showing some good will. And still going back every year, cause I have no family in Holland. I have no reason to go to Holland, other than her. And I still do that to show my appreciation, and they really appreciate it, the children really appreciate it. She has grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

They're a very, very nice family. And I asked the girl—her name is Audrey—why was I moved? They moved me to another little town where my mother, father, brother, sister and grandmother were hiding. She says, “Mom wanted you because you were the only one missing. She wanted the family complete.” So in around June forty-five [1945]—no, I'm sorry, forty-three [1943], cause forty-three [1943] to forty-five [1945] I was in camp—in June forty-three [1943] they moved me over there, and I have pictures of the house.

CE: Is that Baarn?

PG: Baarn, right. And it's so funny. I didn't remember the address. So the teacher, the math and English teacher I had in Aruba, he was from Baarn. And one day, a Dutch family here had company from Holland. “And, hey, Phil come on over. I have some Dutch people here.” And I went over there and we got to talking, and his children were—his boy was a very good friend of my English teacher in Aruba, his son; they were very good friends. So we go to talking about them and I asked for his address for the teacher, and the man gave it to me.

And then I wrote that man who wrote that man, the teacher—Hoochstra was his name—could you find out where I was hiding during the war? And he wrote me back and says “Phil, don't you remember I was in Aruba during the war?” See again, dumb. He said, “But I've asked my son's friends' parents to do it.”

Now, this guy went to the—there's a registry in Holland where everybody's registered; went to the police bureau there. That was dumb, too, because we were in hiding. We weren't registered. Nobody knew where we were. So I told him put an ad in the paper, and they didn't put an ad in the paper, but on the front page they say a Jewish boy is looking for a—by the name of Philip Gans where he was hiding in 1943 in Baarn. And they put a phone number there and by five o'clock the phone rang and two people called

—two or three because they knew me. They were people who were living two, three houses down the street. They used to come to us, and I'll tell you what happened there.

And so, they send me a copy of the paper, and they have it on the front page. Instead of just an ad they put it on the front page, because the man that run the newspaper was married to the girl who used to live two houses from where I was hiding. I used to come over all the time. So she says, "Hey, we got to put that on the front page," and they did.

CE: Wow.

PG: And it's amazing how this man tried to get through official officers to find out where we were hiding, because it was all illegal, you know, so it wasn't registered. But while we were hiding there, we never got out of the house.

CE: How long were you in Baarn?

PG: It wasn't long, maybe one or two months.

CE: But you had all—your whole family there.

PG: Yeah, the whole family was there. Now, whether it was boredom or we needed money, we started crocheting gloves. Everybody did a part: the pinky, the ring finger, middle finger. Mom would sew them together. And the man I told you about, and I have pictures here in my Power Point—we lived here, the little house in between, and then a big house, and he lived there with his two sisters, mother and father. And the father used to go to stores, get the boxes, tissue paper. Mom would wrap them up. He'd take them back to the stores we used to do business with. They paid; with the money, we paid the lady of the house, who was very religious. "God is not going to let the Germans get you." Every night she prayed. We paid for the ration cards, till that was all good and well.

And then one day, one of the girls came—and I always tell the students they were very attractive girls; they didn't come often enough—she comes and says, "The Nazis know you're here. They're going come and get you. But Grandma lives across the street. There's a shed in the backyard; you're going to hide there." So at night after curfew, we go across the street, hide in the shed. Well, you know how big sheds are? Grandma's sleeping on the floor, seventy-three years old, and we are sitting in chairs. After several

days she comes and says, “The Dutch police took the Nazis to the wrong address, so it’s safe to come back.” We were happy we could sleep on a decent mattress again.

I never got out the house. But I was young, didn’t wear a star, didn’t look that Jewish, even though I had a big nose. I don’t know why they didn’t think I looked that Jewish. But I had to go to Amsterdam to pick up ration cards and I come out of the train station—Central Station in Amsterdam, that big station—and there the Nazis are checking ID [identification] cards. “Oh, shit!” You didn’t hear that [speaking to CE].

CE: (laughs)

PG: I remember when my dad used to travel a lot and one time we were at the airport—at the train station—he says, “Look, whenever it’s very busy, you have to not go out the front. There’s a back exit.” And I went through the back exit. And it saved me, because otherwise if I had gone to the front, the Nazis would have caught me, and then I wouldn’t have got the ration cards and brought them back.

CE: Where did you go to get the ration cards?

PG: I don’t remember.

CE: You don’t remember?

PG: But I do remember so clearly coming out of the train, going down the steps, and there’s a big hallway and then another big entranceway, like with big boards all for the train arrivals and departure. And I can see everybody gathered there, because there’s Nazis standing there checking, and I quickly went out the back way. But I don’t remember what address I went and picked up the ration cards.

CE: And then did you move—you moved yet to another hiding place, right?

PG: Well, no.

CE: What was Putten? I read that—

PG: No. Then the girl came again and said that the Nazis found out the Dutch police betrayed them, they going to come. So, whether Dad was tired of running or we had no more connections or what, I don't know, but he said to me, "Remember the little town of Putten, where you stayed one summer vacation with the domestic help?" And they had an apple orchard. I ate so many apples that I threw up. I said, "That's it. Either my brother or sister goes, I go," but they wouldn't come.

And that little town, they killed a German soldier. Retaliation, they took every man of that town and every boy and sent them to Auschwitz. They took them to Auschwitz. According to the book I have, they burned half the town down. So I was there looking in. I escaped though the hole, eye of the needle or something like that—but there's a word for it—four times. It's unbelievable.

Then on July 24, 1943, I heard footsteps on the ground while I slept in an upstairs front bedroom on the front wall. My sister and grandmother slept on the opposite wall. And I got up, and my sister said, "What are you doing?" Not wanting to scare her, cause I didn't know what it was, I says, "I want to look at the planes going overhead." As I looked down, I saw the Nazis were there. I says, "There they are," and I jumped in the closet. My sister said, "Go back to bed." Being an obedient boy, I went back to bed.

CE: And why did she tell you to get back in bed? Do you think?

PG: I always wondered why didn't she go in my bed, cause Grandma and her slept, sleeping in one bed, and I would hide in the thing. But then, I don't know what would have happened, what I would have done all by myself, fifteen years old. So I went back to bed.

Nazis walked in, made us get dressed, took us to the police station, put us in cells, interrogated us. I'm fifteen years old. I said, "I don't know." Then after several days in jail, they handcuffed my grandmother and sister, they handcuffed my mother and father and they handcuffed my brother and myself. And, very humiliating, they marched us through the little town, to the train station—and in my Power Point [presentation], I have a picture of the train station. Took a train to Amsterdam, and in Amsterdam they put us in a theater from which they removed all the seats—you might have been there; there's a monument now. You've heard of Artis, the zoo, the big zoo?

CE: Yes.

PG: Well, just—

CE: I didn't go there, but yeah.

PG: Well, just before that, there's—it used to be a theater, now it's a monument with names of people—Gans is there, too—of all the people who went through there. We slept on the floor several days.

CE: Maybe this is a good place to stop and—

PG: Yeah, that's right.

CE: To stop, and then what we'll do when we come back is pick up on your being in that theater, and what happened after that.

PG: In the theater we slept on the floor, and we spent several days there. But one day at a presentation, I see a man and a wife laughing and talking, kind of disturbed me. Afterwards he comes to me and in fluent Dutch he says to me, "I heard you talk about that theater." He says, "I lived around the corner from that theater, our backyards touched, and once in a while we were able to smuggle kids out." You know, over the fence. And I told him I had to tell the students. Once in a while I mention—I don't always get enough time to talk—that if I had told a lie, he would have come to me and said, "What do you mean? There was no people in the theater," or something.

But he came, and he says, "Yes, I remember very well." And he lived right there and he sent me pictures, blueprints of where his house was compared to the theater, because the theater was only the second building on that street and then he lived on this street. It was like this. A coincidence, you know, that the guy was listening to my presentation, like you who heard me talk at Studio 620 and now you're sitting next to me.

CE: That's right, that's right.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CE: Okay, this is tape two, interview of Philip Gans, and the date is April 9, 2009. So, Phil, you want to start talking about being in the theater in Amsterdam?

PG: Yeah, like I said, we slept on the floor. And one funny thing I remember, and it didn't mean anything to me at that time. You know, we were taken out of our house, we didn't have anything, and I remember a guy brushing his teeth with his finger. He says, "But nothing came of it." By that he meant more sexual than brushing his teeth. You know, using his finger, brushing his teeth, but it didn't mean anything to me.

And we stayed there probably eight, nine, ten days. And then they took us from there to a camp in Holland, a detention camp, Westerbork. Being that we did not go when Dad was called, they put us in a punishment barrack surrounded by barbed wire within a camp surrounded by barbed wire. We were not allowed out of barbed wire area.

CE: Now did they take a lot of people at that point? To Westerbork from the theater, or just—

PG: Well, I'd say probably everybody in the theater at the time.

CE: Everybody in the theater?

PG: Yeah, I don't remember.

CE: And how did they—how did they transport you?

PG: I—

CE: You don't remember?

PG: Probably by truck.

CE: By truck?

PG: Probably. I have no—I have no recollection.

CE: So you're not sure.

PG: No.

CE: You're not sure. Okay.

PG: And my mother's sister, who lives in Paris and fled when the Germans came, wound up in Jamaica and Curacao, Aruba. She had—when she passed away, amongst her belongings I found a card that my mother wrote from Westerbork to a lady friend of ours with two daughters. And the return address was L. Gans—Lea Gans—Barrack 67. I would have never known what barrack it was, because in the seventies [1970s] when I went to the people I was hiding with, the Conens, we went to Westerbork, but there were no more barracks there. So then I found out it was Barrack 67.

And she wrote a letter to a lady with two daughters whose father used to supply books to my brother—he lived right around the corner from us between the theater and our house. And my brother was always studying, and he was a brain. When we came to camp, he was in charge of the camp at that time, and I have a picture of him in my Power Point. And he comes to me and he says, “Look”—knowing the family, he comes to me, says, “Look, I'll make you an errand boy, so you have to run out of camp. Also, once a week we have transport going to Germany, and I'll keep you behind if you want to.” I said, “No, I'll stay with the family.”

See, in Westerbork, it was different from other camps. They made you believe that everything was well. They had classes, they had circumcision, they had hospitals, they had sports, they had—I wish I had the piece of paper in front of me. I always read it off to the students—

CE: With your—

PG: You probably have it.

CE: This, your—I do have it here—your memoir, right?

PG: Right.

CE: You can go ahead and say it, while I see if I can—here it is, here it is.

PG: I don't think it's in my memoirs.

CE: Okay, there you are.

(shuffling of papers)

PG: No, it's not in detail. You know what, I got it out of the computer, and I read it off to the students how they made you believe that life was normal. A lady gave birth premature, and it looked—even though Westerbork had one of the best hospitals in Holland, they didn't have an incubator. They looked all over Holland to find an incubator, and when they found one they said to the lady, "See how good care we take of you?" Only six months later, that same lady with the baby was sent to the gas chambers.

But they made you believe that life was—we were going to work in Germany to relieve the Germans so they could fight in the front. Nobody had ever heard of the word concentration camp. And even Sam Schryver, who was in the camp late forty-four [1944], early forty-five [1945], when no more transfers were going to Germany, he says "Phil, we never heard of the word concentration camp." We knew it—

CE: This was a detention camp, right? Is that what they call it?

PG: Detention camp, yeah. So—yeah, they just made you believe that everything was normal. They had classes for children. They had rabbis. They had everything.

CE: Were you able to live with your family there?

PG: Oh, yeah. We were all together.

CE: In what kind of living situation?

PG: Well, like I said, we were in the barrack, but we were not allowed outside the barbed wire area. There were two or three barracks within that barbed wired area where people that were—I believe our hair was already shaved in there, I believe.

CE: Was it?

PG: I'm not 100 percent.

CE: Did they take your belongings there or not?

PG: Well, we didn't have anything.

CE: You didn't even have a suitcase or anything?

PG: No, see, that's it. They just took you straight out of the house to the police station. And that's when I thought later on—you'll hear that at the end of the story—cause other people who went to Westerbork, they were told to bring suitcase, clothing, blankets, rubber boots, to bring all that with them. But we didn't have anything, see. And I don't remember like what did we wear? And when did we change clothes, or what? Were we given clothes, or what? I have no clue.

But we stayed there for not too long, and then on July 24, 1943, they loaded 1,001 people in cattle cars, fifty, sixty, seventy to a cattle car. Can you imagine my grandmother? Cattle cars, they're this high off the ground; you had to climb in them. My grandmother, seventy-three years old, and I can still see her laying, sleeping on the floor. Now, 1,001. I tell the students they have to go to the bathroom the train would have never left, so what did the Nazis do? They put a pail in each boxcar, and if you had to go to the bathroom, that's where you went. Inhumane, in front of everybody, midst of the summer; hot, stinking, smelly, terrible.

We spent several days in those boxcars, and then we wound up—and I show the picture in the Power Point, you see the railroad tracks going underneath the port of a building, come out on the other side and it splits three ways, and the train stops there. And the doors open up and I have my jacket on—I could have put that on. I have a prison jacket.

CE: Yeah, that's right; you had it on when I saw you speak.

PG: Yeah, and people dressed like I'm dressed with my jacket on then, and Germans with police start to yell, "*Raus! Raus!*, Get out! Get out!" Chaos.

CE: Were you all standing up in the cattle car? Did you have to stand up?

PG: No, we would sit down.

CE: You could sit down.

PG: Yeah.

CE: Okay.

PG: Yeah, I don't think I could have stood up for forty-eight hours.

CE: Yeah, I wondered.

PG: I would have fallen down. You see, people exaggerate. They say eighty, a hundred people in a cattle car. I question that, and I told them at the museum. I don't believe you can—I would love to take sixty average persons and say, "Okay, guys, come on, let's get in this cattle car, see how we can fit in there," cause there's one on display and it's the same cattle car. No way could you put a hundred men in there unless they stand up like sardines, and you couldn't do that for forty-eight hours because people would be falling dead before they even get there. You know, and there was no—

CE: But some of them did, didn't they—die on the way?

PG: Well, I don't remember, because we were all in good physical condition. Now, who am I to say when somebody says, "I spent seven, eight days in the cattle car," that that

isn't true, because I have records of every cattle car that left Holland. The most was three days. They were all two days. I have two sheets. Every week a transport going, and they all were two days, because I have a book that says when they arrived in Auschwitz. But who am I to say that the guy did not spend six, seven days there, and that people didn't die after being that many days in the cattle car?

CE: And it may have felt like six or seven days.

PG: I beg your pardon?

CE: It may have felt like six or seven days.

PG: Yeah. But just like the story about the apple and the girl at the gate⁴—I told my wife I can't see how a girl could get that close to the gate, because the Germans wouldn't allow it. I mean, watchtowers with people with machine guns there; they would have killed her.

CE: So you're on—now you're on your way to Auschwitz.

PG: So, then they took—we had to get out of the cattle car. It was chaos. They took all the men, put them on one side, and all the women to the other side. One by one the men had to walk in front of a Nazi officer; they tell me it was [Josef] Mengele. He flicked his finger to the left, formed a new group over to the right with the women. When it was Dad's turn, to the left with the new group, my brother's turn, to the left to the new group. When it was my turn he hesitated. At that time I wondered why; later on I found out. Is this kid old enough to work? I'm only fifteen years old, and fifteen years was the cutoff point. He went this way [points to the left].

Had it gone this way, I wouldn't have been standing here—in this case sitting—because all the women and the people were chosen to go to his right who marched straight to the gas chambers, gassed, and cremated. Now again, to show you how deceitful the Germans were, the Nazis, they told those women, “You had a rough trip. Cattle cars for several days? We want to make it up for you; going to have a nice shower and it will be nice from here on in.” Little did they know that five, ten, fifteen minutes later they would be gassed and cremated.

⁴Referring to Holocaust survivor Herman Rosenblat, who claimed that while he was imprisoned at Buchenwald, he encountered a girl at the fence who brought him food. Rosenblat survived the war and was eventually reunited with the girl in America, where they were married. His memoir *Angel at the Fence* was originally scheduled to be published in 2009, but was canceled after Rosenblat's story was proved false.

They were so deceitful it was pathetic. They did that to avoid uprisings, or whatever you want to call it. So in the year 1995, for the fiftieth anniversary of liberation of the last camp I was in, Germany invited us [to] Flossenbürg, Bavaria. I took my two oldest daughters and my son-in-law, and in Germany—Germany pays for everything for four days, food, lodging.

After four days we rented a car and we drove to Dresden. In Dresden, we took a train to Kraków—and this was 1995, was not too long after the breakdown of the [Berlin] Wall. They still had rickety railroads, not like today's modern railroads. And you could see the buildings were a lot different from—north, east, south—from Western Europe, Eastern Germany. And in Kraków, we stayed in a Jewish center, a little hotel, my two daughters, my son-in-law, myself. And a funny thing happened there. We bought a map at a kiosk. Standing in line, my turn next, map five bucks. Guy behind me said something in Polish. I only wound up paying only one dollar. Honest, I'll never forget.

CE: Do you know what he said?

PG: Huh?

CE: Do you have any idea what he—

PG: I have no idea—but I knew that he said, “You’re robbing this guy, the maps don’t cost five dollars; they are only one or two dollars.”

CE: (laughs)

PG: You know, and this is what I—if I have time, I like to tell the students. Stand up if you see something that’s being done that isn’t right; stand up and speak up, even if you’re the only one. And I wish I knew the man’s name, phone number, address, and I would write him or call him and tell him, “Thank you for what you did.” Cause he stood up for something that wasn’t right, and few people do that. They just let it go.

CE: Can we go back to the train, or is there something else you wanted to tell about that story?

PG: Well, the selections and—

CE: I wanted to go back to that moment. So you have the three tracks—

PG: Yeah.

CE: And so your mother and sister go off in one direction and you—

PG: That's after we were unloaded out of the cattle cars; they separated the men from the women.

CE: Okay, do you remember that moment? Can you recall that moment?

PG: Very little.

CE: Very little, so you don't remember what that felt like or—

PG: Well, no, because—

CE: What you were thinking, or can you imagine what you were thinking?

PG: Because we didn't know. You got to remember, a lot of this stuff is Monday morning quarterbacking.

CE: Yeah.

PG: We did not know that those women and people to the right were going to be gassed and cremated. We didn't know that. Of the books I read, some people said "Stay with your mother, stay with your father." Or, "Look older," or, "Look younger," you know, hoping that if you look older maybe you got a better or if you looked younger you wouldn't—because we did not know that they were going to go to gas chambers. But

that's the last time I saw my mother, sister and grandmother, never saying goodbye. Like I said, we did not know what was going to happen to them.

CE: So, then what happened?

PG: So, I went back in 1995. In Kraków we found an agency that had tours; we signed up but they whisk you through. But in the year 2000 my oldest daughter was in Italy, and I said, "Would you like to go to Auschwitz?" She said, "Yes, Dad." I met her in Kraków. Plane comes in at nine o'clock at night, no Christina—my daughter. Took me one hour to find out that there was an air traffic controller strike, and she had missed the plane. So, the next day she came.

Now I'm looking for the taxi cab driver that speaks English—I'll tell you why. In 1995, my middle daughter wanted something out of the gift shop of the Auschwitz museum, so we took a taxi cab and he drove so fast my daughter said, "Dad, I'm getting sick. Tell him to slow down." I don't speak Polish, so I motioned slow down. He didn't pay attention. I should have taken the key and turned the ignition off. If he had done something to me, my son-in-law was a husky guy; he would have taken care of him. We got to Auschwitz, she was throwing up.

Now on my eightieth birthday—that was last year—there was sixty people there, and of course my whole family. We got to talking about it and I said, "Too bad you didn't throw up in his taxi." She said, "I did: half in his taxi, half on the street." And I says, "Good, let him clean it up." (laughs)

So I found a taxi cab driver for fifty dollars, fifty-five dollars. He stayed with us all day. Now, my daughter and I walked the path that my grandmother, mother, and sister walked in 1943 to the gas chambers. It was very emotional, but I tell the students—you learn a lot more hearing the story from a survivor then reading the same thing in a book, and they all agree on that, the letters I get.

But when I have a presentation, I tell them, "I don't get paid for this, but you're going to pay me, right?" And they look at me, they laugh, and, "Didn't the teacher tell you to bring paper money?" I says. "Write a letter what you thought of my presentation; that's enough pay for me." And the letters keeps me going and talking, because please tell this generation what happened. Please go to the schools. We learn so much more from a survivor then reading it in a book or seeing it on T.V. [television]. They're so encouraging that one of the reasons, because it's very emotional, but I keep doing it. So—

CE: Can you go back now to the actual experience of being in the camp?

PG: Yeah.

CE: Okay.

PG: So, the men that were chosen to go to the left. We were loaded in trucks and taken to another camp. Auschwitz is very large; a lot of people don't realize. Three camps: Auschwitz I, the original camp, with one gas chamber and one crematory. Then we had Auschwitz II-Birkenau, with the four gas chambers and four crematories. Then there was Auschwitz III, slave labor camp with many sub-camps: Monowitz, Awebawitz, Gleiwitz I, Gleiwitz II, Monowitz by far being the largest.

And in 1943, at that time, IG Farben, at that time the largest chemical factory, were building a plan to produce synthetic rubber under the trade name of Buna, and synthetic fuel. They already had two plants in Germany making Buna, but they were in reach of the American bombers. And they wanted a place where the American bombers couldn't reach it, and they thought Auschwitz would be the place. And there was water there; everything was favorable for building a plant there. Even though in forty-four [1944] from Italy we were bombed—I remember once, the books told me twice. But I remember once—I remember me running to a pile of dirt. I don't know where the bombs fell, but I wasn't hurt. So they had a lot of people working there.

And we went to the camp, Monowitz—Auschwitz III, but Monowitz, and a lot of people called it Buna. Arriving there, there was the shock of our life. We lost all of our clothing. We had nothing: no shoes, no jewelry, nothing. We were issued uniforms like this—later on I'll show you a copy of it somewhere throughout the interview. Our hair was shaven. We got wooden shoes with a cloth top, and the number you see on my uniform is tattooed on my left forearm. Now again, what a lot of people don't know that Auschwitz I, II, and III are the only camps that tattooed the number. No other camp tattooed the number. And I'll show you the paperwork on that.

CE: Okay.

PG: No other camp tattooed the number. There was one camp that tattooed KL right here, on your wrist, *Konzentrations lager*—German for concentration camp—because I met a guy in Poland that had the KL.

We were sent to get dressed in the central barrack. A barrack consists of 80 percent sleeping quarters for the prisoners. We sleep in bunk beds, three high, two together, a little space in between, and again a set of two bunk beds three high. They're perpendicular to the outside walls; in the center they ran parallel with the outside walls. Bunk bed consisted of straw mattress, a straw pillow, and a blanket. The other 20 percent had benches, tables, and lockers where the block leader, the *kapos*⁵ and the *Stubendienst* stayed. And I'll get to those people later.

Within that 20 percent area was a cubicle, with two sets of bunk beds, two high, one opposite the front door as you walked in and one to the left. And I remember the *kapo* on the top bunk bed on the left. Now, I'm not good looking, but this guy was utterly ugly. He always said, "You'll never get out alive." And it wasn't only a physical abuse, but also mentally. They never had a good word for you. "*Du verfluchte Schweinhund, du!*, You damned dirty pig!" I mean, it's unbelievable.

CE: He'd say that often?

PG: That's all they called you. They're terrible. Something else I wanted to say that slipped my mind. Hope I'll get it back; at my age pretty hard to remember. (laughs)

CE: You're doing remarkably well.

PG: Um, strange things in camp—and everybody will tell you a different story. Anybody who's seen *Paper Clips*⁶, one of the survivors says, "There's not enough paper in this world to write everybody's story from the Holocaust." We had people—their hair wasn't shaven, they were always in the top bunk bed. They were getting packages—they were all Polish—they were getting packages from home. They were sitting there eating in front

⁵Prisoners with administrative duties.

⁶*Paper Clips* is a 2004 documentary about the Paper Clips Project. In 1998, students at a school in Whitwell, Tennessee decided to collect six million paper clips to represent each of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust. The documentary features interviews with students, teachers, Holocaust survivors, and people who contributed paper clips.

of us while we're starving to death. Food left over they put in the lockers with the *kapos*, in that area. Through the Internet I met a guy that works in the archives in Auschwitz museum. And he told me, "Yes, they were prisoners, but they weren't like you." You know, I don't know—I still don't understand the difference, but they got packages—

CE: They weren't Jewish?

PG: No. They were just Polish prisoners.

CE: Okay.

PG: And the beds had to [be] made just perfect, pillow straight on the mattress. And once in a while the block leader would keep somebody behind and—maybe every day, I don't know, but I only had it a few times. And the two boards, this long, the width of the bed with a handle, and you pushed it like that so when Nazi came, he looked down and everything was straight. And I remember one time when I was staying behind when he went to get the Nazis. I'm the only one in this room with those lockers with food, so I go to the food, but I can't steal a candy bar. I notice it, I couldn't steal that because they'll notice it—but sugar. So I ate a couple of spoonfuls of sugar, because they didn't notice, you know, there was three, four spoons full of sugar missing.

CE: That must have tasted good.

PG: (laughs) Say that again. So—

CE: Do you remember the way that tasted at that time?

PG: No.

CE: Can you? Can you?

PG: And I always loved sugar. (laughs)

CE: It always tastes good.

PG: You know, there's so many little things that are unbelievable.

CE: So, tell me what a typical day was like?

PG: Well, I'm trying to figure out the one thing that I forgot to mention.

Anyway, we are assigned to a bunk, go to sleep. Next morning the block leader comes around with a rubber hose, hits left and right. "*Aufstehen! Aufstehen!*, Get up! Get up!" This is four o'clock in the morning. We get up, go to the washroom. In the twenty-one months of my confinement I haven't seen a toothbrush or toothpaste. Soap and towels we used to get infrequent when we took a shower. So we washed ourselves the best we could, dried ourselves with our clothes, go back to the barrack. They had a *Stubendienst*; he hands out the food—he's like a helper, a server.

Now here I remember it this way, but in a book I read it different. Here we get a piece of bread, dark hard bread, with a piece of margarine or a little bit of marmalade; this is the way I remember it. In the books I read, the bread was given at night, but all I can remember is soup for lunch and soup for dinner, and bread in the morning. We only have two utensils, a spoon and a bowl for the soup. At work we'd sharpen the handle of the spoon so we could cut the bread.

After we finish eating, we're told to go to parade ground. Now, you got to remember there's between—depending on when, how many transports came in, how many people died, between seven and twelve thousand people in Monowitz. Go to parade ground, line up by barrack number, and block leader counts, make sure everybody is there. Then he calls the Nazis.

When everybody's accounted for, we are assigned to a *kapo*. A *kapo* is nothing more than a foreman; he takes two, three, four hundred people to work. We march out, we sing German songs. The band is playing. The band is made up from prisoners; they were probably musicians on the outside. We get to work, many people working there: POWs [prisoners of war] from England—I can still see them with their grimy clothes; they had long coats—big husky women from Ukraine, Russia; many, many Holocaust people—thousands of them—and many, many civilians.

Now, somebody wrote a book, and I only recently met him. He told me there were French POWs, but I have never read it anywhere. You have?

CE: I haven't, no.

PG: I have never read it anywhere, but he says yes. It's funny how we met this guy. I was interviewed by Brad something in New York, and he says, "Gee, I interviewed a man from Holland, from Amsterdam, who was in Auschwitz. He lives in California; do you want to talk to him?" I said, "Sure."

So we had a three-way conversation, and the man was Max Garcia, and the first thing he asked me was, "What's your number?"

"139755."

Silence. I said, "What's your number?"

"139829."

CE: Ah!

PG: We were on the same cattle car transport from Holland to Auschwitz, the same.

CE: Wow.

PG: We got separated. At the selection, he went to Monowitz. He wound up in a hospital with broken fingers, from throwing—we had unloading certain things. He got broken fingers, they put him the hospital, and from the Monowitz hospital they sent him to Auschwitz hospital.

Now he said there were French, I never saw them. So I only repeat or I only talk about what I knew that happened, what I saw. I noticed POWs [prisoners of war] from England. I can still see them walking there. And the books will tell you that. I never read anywhere from the French because (inaudible) Ukraine. Now we got all the dirty work. The plant is

still being built, railroad cars with bags with cement. Two guys would put a bag of cement on your shoulder, two guys—you walk a while, two guys take it off. You did it all day long, and if you see how skinny we were, that's rough at the end of the day.

Now, this I have never said before, and I will not mention the country, but there was a certain country—We had no soap, no water—no soap, no towels, and not everybody washed. And there was one nation in Europe—they were prisoners, Jewish prisoners—their neck was caked with a layer of cement, because they didn't wash. I can see that still in front of me. Now, the Dutch people have a reputation of being clean, we sweep and clean the streets and everything, but that country is—from carrying those bags of cement all day long, even if you do wash, it is going to cake on you, and it was hard.

Another job was—they were still laying railways—carrying rails. They're very heavy; five men to a rail. To me, that was the easiest job, even though the rails were heavy. I was so tiny, so small, I had to raise my shoulders if I was carrying. Now I feel bad, because the other guys had more to carry. But you know, people ask me, "When you were in camp, everybody for himself." You don't worry about the other guy, you want to survive. And I believe Elie Wiesel—I read the book, but somebody told me when there was a problem with his father, he was told, "Look, you try to save him, you're going to die too." So it's everybody for himself, you know.

Another job was coal commander, punishment commander. How I got in it I don't know. I finally got out of it, but that shows you the mentality of the Nazis. First of all, it was a dusty job, inhaling all of the coal dust, and I'm shoveling very hard, lot of coal around. I'm young, fifteen years old. An old man over there is not shoveling much, because there's no coal there. Now what did the Nazis do? He traded places. He put me where there was no coal and the old man shoveling hard. At my age I could have done it better than him, you know. Course at that time I was happy—hey, I got an easy job—but later on I thought, "I could have done it easier than the old man." But they did everything to make life miserable for you. They were sadist. They were cruel.

Another job was they were still pouring foundation, cement for foundations. When they pour the cement you have to get the air out, because air weakens the foundation. So they issued us rubber boots, and all day long we'd be stamping in the cement. Unbeknown to me, I had a little cut on the top of my boots, in the instep. Any time I pull my foot—the fine cement, the lime seeped through, and every time I pulled my foot up it would rub against it, and it became a wound. Later on, it became infected. They took me in the hospital. Now here they take a fifteen year old kid in the hospital, and I got a list where they took two uncles of mine, forty-four and forty-three years, straight to the gas

chambers with their wives and children, one with one child, the other one with two or three children, and here they put a fifteen-year-old kid in the hospital.

A student asked me one time, “How long were you in the hospital?” No clue. But the Netherlands Red Cross, had a—I wrote them one time, getting money from Germany for being a slave laborer; you have to have proof. I wrote Holland, I have proof. Certificates for my parents, brother, sister, and grandmother that they died, but nothing about me. So they send me a list of every place I’d been and how long I was in the hospital. I told her, “They even keep records from the time I spent in the hospital. And we have people deny it.”

Now, since I met this man in Auschwitz that run the archives, he has sent me a copy of an original book of the Monowitz hospital, where every entry is made for every person going into that hospital, the date they came in, the name, the number, and when they were released. And my name is in there, and I’ve got a copy of that original book, of that original page, in my Power Point, and I show it. And they’re amazed how well they kept records. And yet, people deny it.

CE: Why do you think they kept those records? What was the reason?

PG: I know that on the twentieth of December 19—2007, you were at—

CE: I know why you keep records, and I know why they’re important to you. I’m wondering why the Germans kept such records.

PG: That is there—what do you call it? Like I show you all the records from Holland, from my family, one day—where they were born, what city, when they moved, they day they moved and which town they moved to. The records of Europe are so unbelievable. And the Germans never figured at that time they were going to lose the war, because by the time they start losing the war, they burning up stuff.

CE: Control over the information.

PG: But they never figured they were going to lose the war. They kept those records. It has my brother in there; it has my father in there; all on record in those books.

CE: Wow.

PG: Unbelievable. So, I show him a copy of that and up on this chart the doctor. Being only fifteen years old—it was only less than a month after I came to Auschwitz, cause it's from September the twenty-third—I came August the twenty-sixth—September the twenty-third to October the eighth that I was in the hospital, 1943. The doctor gave me leather shoes, which was a plus, and said, "If you're ever hungry, come to the hospital and I'll give you food." And occasionally he did.

My brother didn't fare that well. He had blood poison, and February 1944 they put him in the hospital. I remember when he came out he walked bent over, sore, cold. And according to the records, they put him in the hospital again, and there is a column that says "*Entlassen*, discharge," or "To Auschwitz," or "*Nach* Auschwitz," or "*Nach* Birkenau" behind his name. "*Nach* Birkenau," that meant he went to the gas chambers.

Well, we couldn't find my brother, then we found that out—not through the books, but from people working there—that he went to the gas chambers. Can you imagine how he felt? Because they didn't put him in a limousine, they threw him in a truck with dead and half dead bodies, and he knew where he was going. Everybody knew if you're too weak and they send you to Birkenau, you're going to the gas chambers. Can you imagine how our dad must have felt in forty-three [1943]? He lost his wife, his daughter, and his mother-in-law—and so far I haven't come up with a good joke about the mother-in-law—and, now, in forty-four [1944] he lost his oldest son. But like I tell the students, life goes on.

Once a month, there was selections. Naked, you had to walk in front of a Nazi officer, a doctor, and the block leader. And if they thought you looked too skinny, or you didn't walk properly—and I've shown pictures of two people that are so skinny; how you determine that is beyond me. But when they thought you looked too skinny or didn't walk properly, they asked for your number, and when you gave them your number you knew the next day you were off to the gas chambers. So you live with that the entire life you were there.

My dad was picked out twice, but the doctors, seeing the name, knew he was my father; he took his name off. Your father is the only one out of twenty-one members of his family—all his brothers, sisters, their spouses and the children, they all died in the gas chambers. My dad is the only one that did not die in the gas chambers; he died in the death march.

CE: Now why did they take—when they saw his name, why did they pull him out? Because he had lost so many people? I don't understand.

PG: No, but he knew it was my father, so he didn't want him to go the gas chambers.

CE: Okay.

PG: So he wanted to save his life by crossing his name off so he wouldn't be sent to Birkenau to be gassed.

CE: So it was—

PG: Doesn't that make sense?

CE: Yes, but this person had some relationship to you?

PG: No, that's the doctor that treated me.

CE: It was the doctor that treated you.

PG: That treated me while I was in the hospital.

CE: Okay, that was the missing link for me.

PG: Okay.

CE: Okay, all right.

PG: The doctor that treated me.

CE: Okay.

PG: See, he was nice enough to do that. So, that's the month-to-month selection. Then one night we had to take a shower, no hot water. Here's a bunch of guys standing naked in front of the shower stalls—showerheads. Nobody wants to go in underneath there. What did the Nazis do? They took a fire hose and mowed us down like dominos. Now not only wet, we're hurt, take shower, get a tub, go to the barrack, no heat in the barrack. I remember sitting on that radiator as if it was yesterday. I can still see me sitting there, hoping some heat would come through. I don't know when they did, but I know it was one of the coldest nights. They were ruthless; they didn't give one hoot about humanity.

If a *kapo* left in the morning with four hundred men, comes back at night with 397, we stand in the parade ground for hours and hours. And you know it's hard to convey to those kids. You're not just standing there, I mean, it's cold, you're tired, you worked ten hours a day, you're up at four o'clock in the morning, you work ten hours, and then you stand for hours in a parade ground. Could be raining, cold. When they don't find them, they send you back to the barrack. When they do find them, the next day or two, three days later, we have to come out again and they hang them. I saw a triple hanging—many single hangings, but only one triple hanging. That's a reminder: if you try to escape, this is going to happen to you.

And I actually had twice, once about a year ago and one just within the last couple days. A girl asked me, "Did you try to escape?" I says, "Heck, I don't want to hang." You got—I'm in Poland, I don't speak Polish, and I've read a book where a guy knocked on somebody's door that escaped. I think maybe it was in *Defiance*⁷. Luckily, it was a person who was anti-Nazi, so they helped him, but if you get a person that is even just scared, they would call the police and say, "Hey, I got a man here. I don't want him, I'm afraid." You know, they take you back to camp and hang you.

So, I don't speak Polish. I have no hair on my head. I don't have decent clothes. Now, I—and you know, eight, nine ten thousand men on a big parade ground, those in the back barely see the hanging. But you have to walk by—every barrack column walks by and turn your head to the left and see him hang there. I can so clearly see that.

⁷*Defiance*, by Nechama Tec, is a book about the Bielski brothers, four Polish Jews who fought against the Nazis.

It's only maybe 5 percent of what I remember, of what I'm telling you. There is so much I forgot. Like the shower stalls, the bathrooms, and the washrooms, there were—they were separate. The washrooms were separate from the bath—from the so-called toilets. I got pictures of it, but I don't remember. I like to put it in the Power Point, because it must have been true—and it came straight from Auschwitz, the picture I got, from the archives. But I do not remember it, and I do not like to talk too much about things that I did not personally experience. Like I said, I remember bread in the morning; the book said at night, but I don't remember that.

They were brutal. One time, I—how I got them I don't know, but I wound up with raw potatoes. I smuggled them in camp. In the barrack somebody found out I had it, squealed on me. I got a beating and they took the potatoes away from me.

And what very few people know that there were only about ten camps in Germany where they had brothels. And Monowitz was one of them. And I remember very clearly walking out the gate in the morning, the girls hanging out the window and waving to us. Now they were there for the benefit—I don't know if the SS [Schutzstaffel] was involved in it, too—but for the *kapos*. If a *kapo* did good he got a coupon, and with so many coupons you could go and visit the prostitutes.

Now, somebody questioned me once and says, “Were they Jewish?”

I says, “Most of the people that came to Auschwitz were Jewish. I would say so.”

“Well, the Nazis were not allowed to have contact or intercourse or anything with Jewish people, Jewish female.”

I says, “You got me there. I don't know.” Maybe it was not for the Nazis, maybe it was only for the *kapos*, but I'm sure the *kapos* were—many of them were not Jewish, so—I mean, rules were made to be broken, right? Yeah, few people knew that, because when I mentioned it [at] the museum, the Florida Holocaust Museum, the one girl says, “We never knew that,” and I printed it out of the computer. Just like few people knew that Auschwitz was the only camp that numbered—that tattooed you. And I got that out of the computer, too. That's proof that, you know, I'm not just blubbering my mouth, but that's the truth.

In camp, you had to wear a cap—I got one of them made up—but got into the barrack, you got to take it off. Well, my dad forgot it—whether he was cold or he forgot, I don't

know, but he got a beating, and I remember just like it happened yesterday. When we walked in the barrack, he grabbed his hat, crumpled it up, afraid to get another beating. Here's a forty-three year old successful businessman that—treated like worse than like a dog. And I'm sure there were lawyers and other tradesmen that they couldn't use, like they could use a carpenter or plumber, because they were still building all over the place. So they could use tradesmen, but they probably had not much use for businesspeople, lawyers, accountants and stuff like that. And they were treated just like dogs, and they had good positions on the outside. Yeah, there's so much.

Water; there was a sign above the water: "*Verboten Wasser zu trinken.*" It was prohibited to drink the water—they were saying typhus. Well, if you figure you have nothing to drink or eat between breakfast and lunch, lunch and dinner, and dinner till the next day at breakfast. Right after your meal, you cleaned your bowl out. I don't think we ever used water; we just licked it clean, and then we brought it up for the coffee. Well, I didn't like the coffee; it was terrible. Once in a while we had tea, which I didn't mind. Well, I drank water. I get thirsty, I drink water, and I'm still alive. Now, either I have a strong stomach, that didn't bother me, or they put the signs there to make people feel miserable. They're thirsty, but they can't drink. Because the water is typhus and there's nothing else you can drink.

CE: Did most people drink the water, or not?

PG: I don't know. I have no clue. I know I drank it, that's it. I had so little contact with other people. You get up at four o'clock in the morning, you go to the washrooms, back to eat, you go to the parade ground, you walk to work, you work ten hours, you come home at night, you're dead tired, you go to sleep. You know, there isn't that much free time; you work six days a week. And being fifteen—I don't know, I just didn't have much contact with people.

CE: So the day that you didn't work, what did you do?

PG: Sunday we didn't work.

CE: And what did you do that day?

PG: I have no clue.

CE: You don't know?

PG: I don't remember.

CE: So you don't remember having friends, or—?

PG: No, I had no friends. I still don't have any friends. (laughs)

CE: (laughs) I know better than that.

PG: Finally, on January 18, 1945, unbeknown to me, the Russians were coming. They walked us all day long from Monowitz to Gleiwitz II in the snow, which fell off of people's backs. I know a gal—she has passed away since; she was my age—she walked from Birkenau to Bergen-Belsen, twelve days in January, in the midst of the winter, unbelievable. Twelve days, she survived. She was a tiny girl; she was from Hungary or—Greece or Hungary; now I forgot. She passed away many years—well, many, probably three, four years ago, and I haven't seen her prior to that for a couple of years even. But about eight years ago I met her at the museum. Her English was poor, so she never gave presentations.

In Gleiwitz II, they put us in bunk beds, two, three to a bunk bed. And I tell the students, you read stories about people, two, three in a bunk bed, but like the famous Buna soup⁸ we were given, which resulted in an average weight loss of six and a half to nine pounds a week, and I tell the students that puts the Atkins Diet to shame. The famous Buna soup, a nutritional aid not given to other prisoners, so we were treated a little better because we were slave labors. I never remember and I never saw anybody else sleeping with somebody else. Again, if you put two, three people in a bunk bed you don't sleep much—you can't work the next day; you'd fall over—and we had to work for nine hours in the winter and ten hours in the summer. But then at Gleiwitz II, we slept three in a bunk bed.

After several days there they put us in open cattle cars, and then—now, the midst of the summer we were in closed cattle cars, and now in the midst of the winter we were in open cattle cars. Our train takes off, and you have to go to the bathroom you had to straddle the boxcar, because there were only men in the boxcars. If somebody dies, we

⁸Buna soup was a "soup" with virtually no nutritional value, served as lunch.

took the topcoat up and threw the body overboard. Nazis would shoot at it, thinking somebody was trying to escape.

Right south of Poland we stopped in the Czech Republic, and people saw us and they came to the fence, went back home and got food and drinks. And I remember climbing out of the boxcar and going to the fence. I got a cup of liquid, but I don't know what it was. I go back to the boxcar, hand the liquid, and by the time I climb in I got a rifle right up my behind. I got into the boxcar and there was hardly anything left for me to drink. I should have drunk it first and then go to the boxcar. (laughs) Well, maybe I saw the Nazi coming, so I quick run, didn't have time to drink, and give the liquid to them.

Then we left again and wound up in Mauthausen. Everybody had to get out. Those of us who could walk would climb out the boxcar. Many could only crawl. They fell in front of the boxcar, one on top of the other. Can you imagine how the guy on the bottom must have felt? There was all these people on top of him still alive, but he can't get out, he can't move. We followed the Nazis; they turn around and camp is closed. Now I have to get back in the boxcar. I got to climb over those half dead bodies. Their hands and their faces are blue, their eyes are rolling; an awful sight.

We get back in the boxcar, and the train takes off again and we wind up in Oranienburg. I remember nothing about Oranienburg, but again the Netherlands Red Cross said I spent nine days there. I thought only one or two days. I don't remember anything about Oranienburg.

From Oranienburg we went south to Flossenbürg, and Flossenbürg is also a slave labor camp. I remember filing parts; it was nice because I was inside a building. I remember men showing me how to file. I worked in the laundry room. I don't remember much of Flossenbürg either. The food was the same: three meals, two soups, you know. And the *Stubendienst* is the smart. He gets a kettle, and he has a ladle, and instead of stirring it up to bring the potatoes, the veggies, whatever's in there to the top, we only get the top. And then the bottom part, the veggies and the potatoes went in the 20 percent area and the *kapos* and the *Stubendienst* and the block leader ate that. So they had a little bit better food.

If you didn't work you only got two meals; you forfeited your lunch. Belgian boy didn't feel good; he stayed in the barrack, for whatever reason—I never found out. The Nazis—I stayed with him—the Nazis pulled us out and gave us twenty-five lashes with a rubber hose. After one or two on your behind you straighten up, and they hit you over the head so you'll go down again. They asked me if I could work, I said, "Yes." They asked the

Belgian boy, and he said he still had a stomachache. They made him run in the washroom, and every time they came out of the front they kick him. And you know, you got to imagine, you're skinny, you have nothing to your bones, and he was bleeding all over. I saw that with my own eyes. They're brutal. They were sadists.

Dirty camp; we had lice. Nobody would do anything about it. In Auschwitz the barracks would be disinfected, we'd get clean clothes and a shower. Not so in Flossenbürg. When I was liberated, I still had lice.

Finally, on the sixteenth of March, 1945, they moved us again and we were in cattle cars, some open, some closed. I was in an open one, and I can still see the Nazis sitting on planks with rifles on their lap. The train takes off, and from nowhere come the Allied planes, thinking it's a troop transport, and start shooting at us. The train stops—now, there again, the train stops, the Nazis fled, so did the prisoners.

Some of us stayed behind and robbed the knapsack of the Nazis. All I got was margarine, and I remember so clearly a bullet hitting the wooden floor of the boxcar when I jumped out, too. Many people got killed, or severely wounded. I saw a guy with a big chunk of bread; I asked him to give me a piece of bread. Somebody saw me with bread—I didn't have that much. I broke it in half, put it here. "That's all I got." I went to the bushes, ate the bread and the margarine. When the planes stopped firing, the Nazis called us back, found out the food was stolen. They searched in our boxcar, and they found a man with food on him.

Now, I gave the teachers—every teacher that I talk to, I send them ahead of time—you got it, too—a booklet about a death march in which they talk about Flossenbürg. In the booklet it describes that the train left again, the next day or whatever, I do not remember. I only remember once in the boxcar the train stops because of the shooting by the Allied planes, and then we start marching. Because according to the booklet, we went back in the boxcars and went a little bit farther or whatever and stopped again or whatever. I don't know. I do not remember that, and that's why I say that we left. We started to march. Now, somebody that's been on the same transport might say, "Hey, that isn't right," but hey, James, that's all I remember. That's all I can say.

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins

CE: This is tape three interview of Philip Gans, on April 9, 2009. Okay, we were just beginning on the last tape to talk about the death march. And would you like to pick up?

PG: Okay, this Hungarian boy and I, we went to the gate, hoping we'd start from there, but they cut the gate where all the bodies were put that were shot at by the plane and the wounded bodies. By the time we got there, we were in the last group, and I remember that there weren't enough guards left and they wouldn't let us go out. We pushed our way out, and they called a couple guards back. Now, we are in the last column, which I don't like to be, because on the death march, if you fall behind, you will be shot. They are not going to let you lay there and be alive.

I had wooden shoes, again; my shoes were hurting. You know, everyday items like handkerchiefs, belts, shoelaces, socks, we didn't have. I had a piece of wire holding my shoe together, and it was hurting me and I kneeled down to fix it. And I look around and I was the last one. I quick got up, because I knew if I stayed behind, I would be shot. We marched for six days soaking wet. I remember sleeping in the woods at night, cuddled up trying to stay warm. It's unbelievable. The booklet *The Death March*, which I always give to the teachers—I'm sure the museum will have a copy; if not, I'll give them a couple copies—it's unbelievable how they treated the prisoners during those death marches.

On the last day, the sixth day, the twenty-second, we arrived in the little town of Stamsried, spent the night there. The next day we started marching again, through the woods, and I heard thunder in the distance. And the Nazis are running back and forth. Finally, they pushed us all amongst the trees. The Nazis left. I never saw another Nazi, only people in civilian clothes. They knew the end was near, and had civilian clothes with them.

The man who wrote the booklet, he went ahead. Some of us walked back. Pamphlets were falling. "Surrender! Surrender!" I come to the little town. There is a big German officer standing there and we were scared, but nevertheless he said, "*Geradeaus*, straight ahead." We walk straight in a church, they gave us drinks and food, and I always thought we got cake, but a piece of white bread would have tasted like cake to me. We heard noises outside and went outside and saw American tanks came rolling through.

Now, the camp Flossenbürg was liberated April the twenty-third, the same day that the tanks liberated us—liberated by the [U.S. Army] 90th Infantry Division. I don't know if those tanks belonged to the 90th Infantry Division. I don't know. I will try to research that and find out. They saw how skinny we were and they gave us their food, their rations. Too rich for our body; people died of dysentery. No Red Cross telling me where to go. I slept on somebody's front porch; next morning I wake up, the guy next to me is dead. Another Dutchman and I are trying to get back to Holland, but this is war. Twenty-

third, twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth of April, the war was still going on, and nowhere was the transportation. They sent us from one town to another town.

In one little town, we befriended ourselves with the American soldiers that were staying there. A man from city hall came around and says, “Everybody that has been in a camp, you have to go back to a camp.” And I mentioned that to the officers, and he said, “You tell him that you been in a camp long enough, for him to go a camp.”

The reason was there was tens of thousands of DP [displaced persons] people throughout Germany, and they were afraid for retaliation. And rightfully so, because how we got involved—and I’m ashamed of it now. But a bunch of guys, me involved, we got a horse and buggy and raided a German farm. And the German was petrified. We took his food away; he was petrified. So if those other people were not put into DP camps, they would have done the same thing throughout Germany. So there were many DP Camps. And there was one time in a museum there was an exhibition or whatever they call it about DP camps, and they asked me and I said, “No, I never been in a DP camp.”

We walked from our little town to another one up in Schwarzenfeld, and in Schwarzenfeld were the occupational troops. They took us in, gave us uniforms, and I still remember how the lieutenant—he was Jewish—teaching me “fork,” “knife,” “table”—English. My German was fluent. I became a translator for the American Army for the division. I worked in the kitchen, I ironed clothes, and to show you how things—going back to my childhood, like stealing. I would give oranges to the soldiers on their plate. And they came in a crate; each orange was wrapped in tissue paper—now I’m going back to forty-five [1945]. When there was still two, three oranges in the crate, I would put it in the elevator, and on the way to the trash can—ground level—I stopped on the second and third floor where my bed was, and put the oranges underneath the pillow. Now, I’m sure if I’d asked the soldiers to give some oranges, extra oranges, they would have given them to me, but it’s just being greedy.

And that brings back the very funny story when I came to the States and I met a doctor and his wife and they invited me over. They lived in New York and I was stationed in Fort Dix [New Jersey]. And they would bake—they made whatever would you like, okay, this and this. They would cook it, and then we had a pie for desert, cherry pie. “Would you like another piece?” “Yep.” After I had the second piece: “Would you like some more?” “Yep.” And later on they told me, “After two, we never ask you again, because you kept saying yes.”

CE: (laughs)

PG: I'll never forget that. "We never ask you anymore after two pieces, because you keep saying yes." So there, too, with the oranges, and I'm sure if I'd asked them, they would have given to me.

And a funny thing happened there. We sleeping, him and I—the other Dutchman and I—in a bunk bed on the second or third floor. On the fourth floor or fifth, top level, there was a factory that made roof slates, you know, those ceramic slates on the roof, and there were all the cots for all the soldiers. And every night there was a head count. Well, the guy that slept underneath me, he traded with one of the soldiers, and the soldier brought the girl, and here they're having love underneath me. And I didn't know what was going on. I was sound asleep. I remember that so well.

And—but the factory was working, because I remember when a girl in the tool room—I would stay with her and she invited me to her home, and I came there at night. I had to climb through the window, and as I climbed through the window, the curtain rod fell down and made noise, and her father came down. Well, I high-tailed it out of there. And the next day she told me she got a beating from her dad, you know. (laughs)

CE: So you were still a bad boy.

PG: Yeah. (laughs) I never changed.

So, we finally went back to Holland in a cattle car, the other Dutchman and I. Oh, we had a—

CE: Now how long were you—before you went to Holland? After you were liberated?

PG: April, May, June, July, August, September—about six months.

CE: Six months, so that period of time you are just moving from town to town?

PG: No, no, there was only a couple of days moving from town to town.

CE: Okay.

PG: You know, maybe a week or so.

CE: Okay

PG: Because I didn't know where we spent the nights. I have no clue. And the other Dutchman rode bicycle—we had a motorcycle because they confiscated all motorcycles from Germany. And one time, motorcycle's going like this, I said, "Jasper, quit it!" Well, there was sand and he couldn't quit it, and (whistles) motorcycle went down and the whole side was scraped. We would up in the hospital, but nothing serious happened. I never rode motorcycles again. I still don't. I won't get near one.

So, in Strasbourg we got regular cars, railroad cars, and then in Holland we came to Eindhoven, the (inaudible) factories. We came through there, and it's late in the year. They weren't too friendly: "You still coming back?" I mean, they were very unfriendly. They weren't—they didn't really welcome you back home.

I stayed with the lady with the two girls. Her uncle had never had children. He adopted me; he paid for the room, food and everything. One day, walking in Amsterdam, I see a girl that lived across the summer place. I tapped her on her shoulder, and she recognized me. "Hey, Philip, there's telegrams there." I went there the next day, got a telegram from my aunt, sent her a telegram back, but no return address. So my aunt had to check out with the Western Union, and she screamed so loud when she got the telegram that Charlie Bar, kitty corner, came running over and says, "Mrs. Engers, what's the matter?" And she tells him that eight, nine, ten months after the war she still find somebody alive from her sister's family.

She arranged for my trip to Aruba, and during that time that I was in Holland, I dug up the backyard and found the jewelry. She arranged for my trip to Aruba, went to Aruba from forty-six [1946] to fifty [1950]. I wore long sleeves in the tropics, because—I don't know; that number almost seems like it was something I'd done wrong.

CE: Wow, wow.

PG: I never—in the summer in the tropical climate in Aruba, I wore long sleeves, and I have pictures of that. Even in New York, in 1964 when I started wearing short sleeves,

the Japanese—there was a World’s Fair—the Japanese kept looking at me because I had that number. But nobody talked about it, because when I came to the States in 1950, “Any identifying marks?” I said, “I got this number.” Nobody says, “What’s this number from; were you in a camp?” Nobody spoke about it.

I stayed in Aruba for forty-six [1946] to fifty [1950]. I met an American, he married a Belgian girl, and they lived with us. And he says, “Phil, this place is not for you. There’s nothing to do for me, no schooling or anything.” So he introduced me to Henry Krause, the vice-consul, American vice-consul, they arrange for papers. It took three years, but after one year somebody dropped out, and they asked me if I want to go. My aunt says, “Yeah, go ahead.”

So I went to the States in 1950 in April, came to New York. Man picked me up at the—no, I went—I went to Aruba with a boat, a banana boat to Puerto Rico, and I got deathly sick. And I had bought this watch in 1949, 1950, before I came to the States and it was 350 dollars in those days; it was a lot of money. And I was so scared that I hid it on board ship. And they fed me whiskey and I threw up. They taught me bridge. I love playing cards, and I played good at bridge. Never played it again, but on a six-day trip or five-day, whatever it was, from Aruba to Puerto Rico, I played bridge, and they fed me whiskey and I threw up.

Came to the States, Puerto Rico, Mayagüez. Went from there to San Juan, took a plane from there to New York. A man picked me up that I’d met, a salesman. He was a Dutchman, but he had lived in New York, and he said, “Well, we figured you’re pretty tired and we have a party to go to, so my son will stay home with you.” I was babysitting his son. If I could have taken the first plane back to Holland, to Aruba, I would have. With him in New York, all these tall buildings—you know, it’s a big city when you come from an island like Aruba. And, of course, the food. I ate so much good food—strawberry shortcake every day, and beef sandwiches—because Aruba didn’t have much. Everything was imported.

I knew another salesman. I says I want to see him. He told me on the subway, “Get off in this and this station.” Well, I’m scared stiff because the subway goes so fast. Stop station, that’s not it, that’s not it; did I miss it? Did I miss it? Finally I got it. This guy gave me a coat, because it was cold yet, and his secretary got a room for me about three, four houses from where she slept—she had, I don’t know, she lived there or had a room—I don’t know. And she told me how to get there, and I said, “Look, I have no clue. I’ll wait till you get off and you can show me.” So we went and I said, “Look, in appreciation, I want to take you out. I’ve got the money but I don’t know anything.” So we went out a couple

times in New York. And one night—yeah, one night coming home, she didn't have a key. She wound up in my room. I didn't do anything. (both laugh) I was too bashful.

So then I had to register—the Korean War was going on. I registered, got drafted, and in forty-six [1946] I went to Boston, Camp Devens [Fort Devens, Massachusetts]. And from there they sent us to Camp Stewart [Fort Stewart] in Georgia. I found a big difference between the Northern and the Southern, a big difference.

CE: What? What kind of difference?

PG: Much more friendly down South; up North they knew it all. They were smarter, you know—smart alecks, I should say. I like the South very much. In Camp Stewart, I stayed there and went to Fort Bliss, Texas. I went to schooling. I got vacation here and there. I made out like a bandit. Then I had a cyst on my back, and they operated on me and kept me in the hospital for three months. Because I knew typing, I did typing for them. Colonel—I had wooden shoes, I showed them that—they treated me very good.

But because I stayed in the hospital and had less than three months to serve, they don't reassign you. They discharge you. So I only served twenty-one months. And I went to Fort Leadership School, passed that, but couldn't go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] school because I didn't have a college degree. So I wound up in the [United States] Army, stayed Stateside, never went overseas, got discharged twenty-one months later. Met a girl roller-skating—I love to roller skate—and we got married.

And a student asked one time in March 2003, “Where did you meet your wife?” I said, “Which one?” And they laugh. I said, “I've been married for twenty-five years to my first wife, and in May of 2003—as of May of this year, I'll be married twenty-five years to my second wife. I hope she takes the hint.” And then I tell them she didn't; for our twenty-fifth anniversary we went to Aruba, where we met and got married.

Now, what do I tell them? Thirty years, and next month I will tell them I'm married thirty-one years. Two daughters by my first wife; they are registered nurses. Daughter by my second wife, who graduated valedictorian from (inaudible) high school, graduated summa cum laude University of Miami. Could have become a doctor, but says, “Dad, no way will I be a doctor in America.” The medical society or the medical stinks, says it's terrible; all they worry about is money.

I took my uncle to the hospital emergency room. A lady throwing up, none of the nurses did anything about it. She says, “I went and got a bucket and water and held the lady.” She says, “No way will I become so—” She traveled the world quite a bit, and surely she met a boy from New Zealand about six years ago, and he came and stayed with us January, February and March, and he went back to New Zealand around the same time my daughter went to visit her grandparents in Colombia—Medellín, Colombia. And she came back, and then in May that year, she says, “Dad, Massey University—in Palmerston North, New Zealand, will take me.” She wanted to go to veterinarian school. She wants to become a veterinarian so she can take care of me when I get old.

CE: (laughs)

PG: I’m the old dog to her. So I said, “Go ahead.” Now, I don’t know if she went because of her boyfriend was there or because actually the school took her, because in the States you have to wait two years to get into a vet school, very hard to get in. And she graduated—I think it was 2007, and that will be two years already. She’s married there,. She loves it. And when I talk to USF [University of South Florida], just the other day Roy Kaplan and I told the students—and he agreed, cause he’s been to New Zealand—if you ever get a chance to go to New Zealand or Australia, go! People are wonderful; the country is beautiful, energy conscious, very clean. It’s nice. When you have an opportunity, go.

Part 3 ends; part 4 begins

CE: Okay, this is tape four, interview of Phil Gans on April 9, 2009, and we’ve asked his wife Angelica to join us to talk a little bit about the last twenty-five—thirty-one—years that you’ve had together. So, Angelica, could you just say your name and spell it for us?

Angelica Gans: Uh, well— Hi, my name is—I have a little bit of accent because I’m from Colombia, South America, so you’re going to detect an accent on me. My name is Angelica (A-n-g-e-l-i-c-a), and my last name Gans.

CE: And when did you meet?

AG: We met in Aruba, in the Caribbean, in 1976 around Christmas time. I went there on vacation to see my sister, who was living there at the time, and while I was there we were at the beach with my sister, her husband, my cousin. While the whole group was together I saw a *gringo* coming.

CE: (laughs)

AG: So, I said to my brother-in-law, “Why don’t you ask that *gringo* to take a picture of the—all of us.” Because I didn’t speak English, so my brother-in-law asked him to take a picture, and he did. “Bye.” That was it.

The next day—well, my cousin and I went back to the beach. Well, there he was again, so he started to talk to me. He thought we were Americans, and I said, “No, we don’t speak English.” But he spoke a little bit of Papiamentu, which is the dialect from Aruba and very similar to Spanish in many ways, so somehow—and I knew a little bit of English, the one that you learn in high school. Somehow, we started to talk in broken English and broken Spanish. And at the moment, nothing; you know, just very nice man. And the next day I see him again, and here we started talking more and he’s telling me—asking me more questions. And I told him where I was from and my (inaudible) was in Colombia, and so on and so on.

And that was in seventy-six [1976], in December. By April seventy-seven [1977], he was already visiting me in Colombia. So that was an incredible experience for him, for me, for my whole entire family.

PG: But wasn’t that the year that I drove by your house and you saw me?

AG: Yes!

PG: Okay.

AG: Yes, that is true. That is true. He—it’s crazy, because at the moment when I met him at the beach, I didn’t want to give too much information about where I was staying. My cousin and I were standing in front of my sister’s car waiting for the bus to take us to downtown Oranjestad in Aruba. Who comes driving by? Mr. Gans. (laughs) Oh, my God, he stopped, turned around and came and picked us up. (laughs) And so he dropped us off at the downtown. But the time I got back from downtown, he was already sitting on the couch in my sister’s house waiting for me. (laughs)

CE: You quit being bashful, then!

AG: Yeah! No, he wasn't bashful at all. He wasn't bashful. There was too many things that were between us that was difficult to overcome. It was—he was a foreigner for my family, he was divorced, much older than I was, and he was Jewish and I'm Catholic, and so for my family was a little bit difficult to see how this relationship could work. So we let time go by, and—where was it, in seventy—what year did we get married?—seventy-eight! [1978] Seventy-eight [1978], the year after.

PG: Yeah, but in seventy-seven [1977] I went to Colombia.

AG: Yeah, you went to Colombia in seventy-seven [1977], then we—I went back to Aruba that Christmas, and then you came back to Colombia in seventy-eight [1978] and that's when we established all the relationship between us and the papers. But I tell you; I received letters every single day from him. Every single day there was letters coming in. That was incredible! And so I came here in May seventy-eight [1978], and we got married May eighth.

PG: Tell them about the beautiful wedding we had.

AG: Yeah, that was funny. (laughs) Yeah, we had a big wedding or anything, cause in Colombia it was very important for my mom that I get a blessing in the church, you know, even though he wasn't part of it. I went to church to get the blessing, but we didn't have any big wedding. I borrowed a dress from my sister, a two-piece— (laughs)

PG: I took my ring and put it upside down, remember, for you.

AG: Yeah.

PG: They didn't have money over there.

AG: So everything was just funny. They—we are like a funny party at home, but it was just fun. We had just fun.

PG: Kentucky Fried Chicken.

(all laugh)

CE: All right.

AG: Something like Kentucky Fried Chicken. But it was nice. Then I came here, and that's when my real life started with him. And it was very hard, very difficult—

PG: She had no clue what she was coming to. I showed her pictures, but those pictures could have been from anybody's house or anybody. She had no clue where I was living or what. That was hard for her.

AG: Yeah, practically I was blindfolded—he could have—

CE: And you came to Florida?

AG: No.

CE: Or New York?

PG: No.

AG: We went to Delaware. He was with—

CE: Delaware?

AG: Delaware.

CE: Delaware.

AG: He was working at the refinery over there at that time. So, actually, I went to New York first and he picked me up in New York, and we lived in Delaware for eight years.

CE: And you worked in a refinery?

PG: Yeah.

CE: What did you do?

PG: Well, it's pretty hard. Nobody ever came up with a proper nomenclature. I worked out in the fields, opening and closing valves and taking samples. And then as you become a B operator, they train you for the board, then as an A operator I worked the control boards.

CE: Okay. So tell me more, Angelica, about what made it so difficult?

AG: Well, it was not only adjusting to the country, the language, the customs, [it was] adjusting to him, because he—well, he was used to having somebody that knows—that spoke English perfect, that knew how to run the house. I didn't even know how to cook, because in Colombia—

PG: She still doesn't (inaudible).

(all laugh)

AG: In Colombia we got—we have help, you know. We have a maid, so I was not used to really doing much around the house. And here I have this man, I remember the first week I was in the house, on the table put a bunch of bottles in front of me: lemon Pledge [wood cleaning product], Windex [glass cleaning product], Cascade [dishwasher detergent], Palmolive [dish cleaning product]—

PG: She had no clue.

AG: I have no clue how to run the dishwasher, the washing machine—

PG: She couldn't close the blinds, you know, those—

AG: Shades!

PG: Shades.

AG: We didn't have shades in Colombia. We don't have shades.

PG: Because they don't have them. If you don't hold them a certain way everything she pulled down (makes whooshing sound) went back up again. (makes whooshing sound) Back up again. I had to teach her to hold it down.

CE: A whole different world.

AG: It was a whole different world.

PG: Difficult.

AG: And here I have all these bottles in front of me, and I said, "What am I going to with all that?"

And he said, "This bottle is for this, this bottle is for that—" And it's not like I came from the very bad place, it's because I never did anything at home, you know. So it was very confusing for me to have all these things at the same time.

He told me I need to learn how to drive, so I learn in Colombia how to drive a car before I came here. I was here probably a month when he came with the keys and said, "Well, here you are, you have to drive now." Gave me a huge Cadillac; it was bigger than—my God, the regular car right now. The size of that car was unbelievable.

So I said, "Well, I have no choice but do it. He said, 'I don't have time to take you anywhere.' You have to do it."

I was—he enrolled me in classes at the University of Delaware to learn English, so I was probably the only one of all the foreigners that I was driving by myself to the university, because I learned how to go to the university and park the car (laughs) and park the car over there. In fact, we used to take trips to New York City a lot, and I don't know; he had the guts to tell me, "You got to drive on the New Jersey Turnpike."

CE: Oh, my!

AG: I know! He said, "I'm too tired—"

PG: The reason for that is when I worked in the refinery, I learned that if I had a trainee, I didn't show him how to do it, cause he'd never learn. You do it. Tell me what you're going to do; if it's wrong I'll tell you to stop. That's the way they learn. You have to do it yourself. I can show you ten times, and the eleventh time you do it and you're confused.

AG: Well, imagine me, just in this country, I mean driving on the New Jersey Turnpike. I have trucks going by here, going by here, and I said, "Oh, God, please don't help me— just help me, that nothing is going to—" And he's sleeping. He's sleeping! I don't know how he trusted me, but that taught me how to drive everywhere, learn my way around.

Another difficult thing with him was he didn't let me speak Spanish at all, and my neighbor next door was from Peru, and of course I'm going to speak Spanish with her. Boy, he used to get so—

PG: Yeah, because they both knew English—

AG: No, I—

PG: Yes, you went to school, and here they're speaking Spanish in front of me, and I couldn't understand what they were talking about, cause they rattled so quick.

AG: Anyway, he was very strict that way. And that created a lot of—

PG: Friction.

AG: —friction between us. I tell you, he was so strict—he was so strict in everything; everything has to be certain ways, certain—and I am telling you, I was completely the opposite, completely the opposite, because I grew up in the Latino environment where we just go, “Hey!” We do it, we do it, we don’t do it so what. Not with him, not with him. It was difficult, it was just plain difficult. I used to go to the store, food shopping. I came home, brought the things, he said, “No, you bought everything wrong. This is wrong, this is wrong.”

PG: Not everything, but you—

AG: But a lot of things wrong, so I said, “Oh, now what am I going to do?”

He said, “You going to take—we are going to take it back.”

“Oh, okay, you come with me?” I said.

And he said, “Yeah, I go with you.” So we will go to the store. What did he do? He stay by the door and I have to go inside to talk to the people. Forced me!

PG: I was inside too, but I stood in the back because they have a very bad attitude towards Latinos. And then if they said something that I didn’t like, I walked up and spoke English to them, I says, “Look, you treat them the way you treat everybody else.” You know? But that’s the way she learned, by doing things for herself. I could have taken it back every time; that didn’t help her any.

CE: So did things just gradually improve, or—

AG: Things gradually improved in some ways, and then it got even more difficult because I got pregnant. And then Christina [their daughter] came, and it was in a whole new world started with that. But I think for me it was wonderful, because it was a different—now I have somebody over there, because I have no family, nobody, nothing.

So it was really nice, but Phil was very strict. And that was so hard to live with him that way. I would say there were times that I really wanted to leave, because it was very difficult to be with him the way he was. And I guess what made me stay—I don't know it was my upbringing or I just felt that I needed to be with him because it was not fair—he went through so much in life that I just couldn't leave him.

CE: Now how—what did he tell you about his experiences, initially?

AG: Very little.

CE: Very little.

AG: Very little. Only—the only thing that I knew was that his parents were gassed and he was in the concentration camp in Auschwitz. His aunt was alive. I don't know, he mentioned his aunt from Aruba, and through her I learned a little bit more about what happened to them, but still everything was not very clear to me how things went because he didn't want to speak up—he didn't want to talk. In fact, when we were in Philadelphia, they had a special celebration one year over there about—

PG: I forgot—I know what it was.

AG: I don't remember what it was, but it was but it was all about the Holocaust and they were asking survivors to come in this march with their families to go and be part of it. And when I read that in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, I said, "I want to go with you."

He said, "No, I don't want to go."

I said, "We want to go; you are a part of it. And Christina will come, too."

Somehow I convinced him, and we sign up and we went to this march. It was beautiful. It ended at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and everybody will come at the end and bring a flower. Well, Christina was the youngest daughter from a survivor because—being older, and Christina was only four or five years old—so they took movies of her putting the—depositing the flower over there—and to me it was the first time that I was ever part of anything concerning to his experience.

But it took me a while to convince him to be part. And even when I have Christina, I want her to learn a little bit more about him, his Judaism and my religion, but he didn't want nothing to do with it. It was like he put a wall right there. He didn't care, so I said okay. You know, I was open—I was open to whatever. Phil—it was something so horrible with him that he just put a wall between his past and whatever happened to him, and I think that make him a very bitter person, angry, with a short fuse, that he will come and react very quick to whatever was going on around him, whether it was the outside people or the family.

Life in Delaware was very difficult for me, not only being away from the family, but the weather was very hard for me, the cold weather. So, we were looking when I asked him if we could move to Florida when he retired from the refinery. He say, "Yes."

PG: Say that again?

AG: When you retire—

PG: Oh.

AG: —that we move down here to Florida, that I was lucky that you say yes. Right? That's how—

PG: I had just bought a big shed, because my workshop was so full I was going to put all my garden tools in the shed I bought, remember? I paid a down payment and I worked up there part-time with a friend of mine in building construction, adding rooms and remodeling and all that stuff, and he went to Florida and we went with him. And we start looking then. My aunt had a place here in Dunedin. And then I came back and I asked the people if they could give me my deposit back, and they did. And then we kept coming down a couple of times and looking at homes, and finally found something.

AG: That was a new beginning. I would say a new beginning for us, especially for me, I would say, because this was the house we bought together, that we started—really like a new life for us. Still, he was still the same angry man, and that's—I think he mentioned it to you—how things change when he went with his aunt with the lawyer in Holland and he got the psychiatrist.

CE: Yes.

AG: Did he talk about, with you, about—

CE: We really didn't talk on tape about that very much—at all really.

PG: No.

CE: No. Do you want to say a little something about that?

PG: Well, not much to say. I went to [a] psychiatrist. What happened is in Holland, the lawyer said, "You should see a psychiatrist," because they had heard from the Dutch consul in California how I always raved and ranted, because I said, "You sold us down the river," cause they made a agreement with Germany that they would pay us, but they never paid me the pension. So when I came back here, I called Boston or whatever it was up north—Massachusetts—and they gave me a list of doctors, but they highly recommended Dennis Donovan and I went to see him. And like Angelica said, all our friends said that definitely made a big difference in me. I didn't have a chip on my shoulder anymore, and I became a better person.

CE: So you found talking to the psychiatrist very helpful. Telling your story?

PG: Oh, yeah.

CE: Yeah, okay.

AG: I think he took so much that he had inside him out and unload with him, because I could see gradually the difference on him. He mellows, he was nicer, more easy going—sometimes temper tantrums or you know, just anger. We could be out in a restaurant and if he didn't like something he would react very—you know, that I want to go underneath the table and I'm not with this man. But absolutely, he makes wonders with him.

PG: He was a nice guy—

AG: He is a nice guy.

PG: He quit his psychiatry because too many people owed him money that he didn't collect because he wouldn't go after him. He wouldn't send people to hospitals; he would just talk to them, no medication. He became very good friends with my—him and his wife love me, and through him we go every year to Sioux City, Iowa. I just saw a picture with the toilets over there on which he wrote, "It's because of you I'm going to Sioux City." Because he was born there, but he didn't have really the money to spend—a lot of money to go to Sioux City and spend time there. So now, he's going there every year with me—isn't that written on that piece of paper there with the toilets?

CE: Yeah.

PG: Right, yeah.

CE: So after the psychiatrist you saw a real difference, and then what happened?

AG: Um, well, I could see the difference with our daughter, because at the beginning he was not very warm with her, and it was a completely a 360 degree. He became—I would say the best father you can ever imagine, what he was to Christina. Absolutely incredible, involved completely 100 percent in her school, in whatever project she had to go—

CE: What year was this that he went to the psychiatrist?

PG: Nineteen ninety-one, 1992.

CE: So how old was Christina then?

AG: Christina was—

PG: Twelve years.

AG: It was—

PG: Born in seventy-nine [1979].

AG: Yeah, twelve years, twelve years. Ah, yes, twelve. That's after we came back from Europe, wasn't it? That was an experience, I tell you. First time we went to Europe together, the three of us—it was the first time for me. And we visited Dachau in Germany. We took a trip all around, five weeks—rented a car, wow!

PG: Holland, Belgium, France.

AG: Italy, Austria, and the last part was Germany. When we got there, oh, my goodness, it was like he was ready to attack the whole world. And we decided to go to visit Dachau, the concentration camp. To me, it was horrible. He was angry, he was mad, he was—the reaction was so horrible, and he took it out on me because I guess he didn't want—he didn't have anyone else to take it out. So, after that I said never again I will go and visit a concentration camp with him after that experience.

CE: And that was all after the psychiatrist?

AG: Before.

CE: That was before?

AG: Before the psychiatrist. Before the psychiatrist. And I said, never! I will never do this again, because this is too hard for you, and it's too hard for me. Well, I still haven't been—I still don't go to any concentration camps. (laughs)

PG: I told her, if they charge an admission, I'm going to jump over the gate and tell them I paid my admission. No more.

AG: It was an experience there. It was an experience, and for me it was very hard. It was like a little by little I've been learning so much, you know, more about what happen to him. But truthfully, I learn all the details more in the last six years that I start listening to

his story with all the details. Before that, I didn't—he didn't want to tell me and I didn't want to hear it, I guess because it was too much for him and—

But this has been, I think, a blessing for our marriage ever since he start talking, and he's making out of this tragedy a something good. Something good. Because he's giving a message to a young generation right now about no hate, or be in peace, or accept one another, and he has a meaning. He had a meaning out of this, and it's a difference, it's a big difference on him; it's like he's a completely different person.

CE: Okay, when did this start? Tell me how it started that you decided to give talks and be involved?

PG: Well, remember the fellow I told you [about], Sam Schryver? Well, he was talking at the Florida Holocaust Museum when they were still on Dune Road in—what was that beach called? You know, near where Kapok Tree⁹ used to be?

CE: Oh, I do, yes. I don't remember—I know where Kapok Tree used to be.

PG: On Dune Road.

CE: Yes, yes.

PG: He used to talk there all day long; he was the only speaker. And when they built this new one here [Florida Holocaust Museum] in St. Petersburg, one day he said, "Phil, why don't you come along?" Well, he had asked me several times. Finally, I went one day; it was around ninety-one [1991]—2001—only a year or two after they opened. We have a round table conference, eight or nine students and teacher. I think there was a docent and a survivor. And he started to talk.

Now one thing he talks about, the concentration camp he was in, Westerbork, and I have told him many times, "Sam, you were not in a concentration camp." And the last time we were somewhere at the museum, only about a month ago, and he talked about again Westerbork, but he told me that was nothing like what Phil was in concentration camp. He did admit that. But he still calls it a concentration camp, and I told him it's not.

⁹The Kapok Tree was a prominent Clearwater restaurant that opened in 1958 and closed in 1991.

But when he stopped talking he says, “Wait, Phil has a story to tell you.” Well, here I am for the first time opening my mouth in front of five, six kids. Well, it wasn’t exactly the first time, but I wasn’t very comfortable, and the museum wouldn’t let me talk to any big groups.

CE: Okay. And that was 2001?

PG: Around 2001, yeah.

CE: So you had already done that videotape in ninety-six [1996].

AG: Yes.

CE: Right, right?

AG: Yes.

CE: With the—

| AG: From Spielberg [Steven-??]—

PG: That was so bad.

CE: But at least you did it, you talked.

PG: I did. I did. They asked me questions. You look at it—you look at the—

CE: Oh, I’m going to look at the whole thing.

PG: And please call me and tell what your opinion is. Please.

CE: Okay, I will.

PG: Because my daughter wanted the tape. I said, “You’ll get it after I’m dead.”

CE: Okay, so back to 2001—so that didn’t have a real impact on you, doing that tape?

AG: This tape?

CE: Yeah.

AG: No, I don’t think so.

CE: No?

AG: I don’t think so.

PG: And they only let me talk to small groups, but little by little I was talking to bigger groups. I remember at Palm Harbor University High School—it’s a high school/university combined or something—I’m standing, leaning on a desk on a podium, and they never called me back because they know it was terrible. But the last letter I just got from the teacher, she says, “You’re a real pro.” You know? I just put the card away because I have improved so much that, like I said, I talk to two thousand students in Sioux City. Of course, I didn’t see anybody; they turned the light on me. (laughs) I couldn’t see a soul.

CE: Right, right.

PG: Very—I saw some, vaguely, but not with—I had no problem talking anymore.

CE: How did it feel when you first started talking? How did it feel to tell the story?

PG: Well, I was nervous. I was afraid of—

AG: Emotional.

PG: —saying the wrong thing, and stuff like that.

AG: Very emotional.

CE: Very emotional?

AG: Very emotional.

PG: That too, yeah.

AG: Still is, because I can tell when he comes home from any presentation that he's drained, emotionally. And that's the reason I try not to participate when he goes. I'd rather stay home that when he come home he finds me in another mood, different than the one he was in. So, he—I can tell that he's tired, drained—

PG: Oh, yeah. I can go right to sleep right away when I get home.

AG: Yeah. And actually, I can tell you last year he has so many presentations—

PG: May—April and May I had a presentation every day of the week, five. One time I didn't have one on Monday, but I had it on Saturday. For two months in a row, every week five presentation. In June, I went to bed at eight o'clock at night, slept till seven, eight in the morning, got up for one hour and back to bed again, slept again for three hours, got up. Angelica [says], "What's wrong with you?" I don't know!

Finally I went to the doctor, and the girl in Holland, she told me, "Phil, you're talking too much. You have too many presentations." And that eventually was the problem, and it took me the whole month. In June, we went—in July, we went to Colombia and then I

had nothing to worry about, nothing. I came back. I was fine. I didn't even work. I couldn't even get myself to do any work. And when I came back—

AG: You were drained.

PG: I pressure washed the front of the house, and I did everything again.

CE: Were you—would you call yourself depressed during that time?

AG: Yes, yes, because in fact the doctor prescribed him some antidepressants, because I could tell. I could tell he was completely down, depressed, and I said, "From now on, I'm going to be checking how many times you be talking, because it is too much."

CE: Yeah.

AG: It is too much. Living him—doing this every single day.

CE: Staying in that—

AG: In that mood.

CE: Yeah.

AG: And I said no. That's not healthy for you. So even though—I tell you, this is the everyday talk in this house. (laughs)

CE: (laughs)

PG: You what?

AG: We talk about this every day now.

PG: Oh.

CE: Do you?

AG: Oh, well, everything is around it. It's every day something. It just became his life now, in a different way. In a different way, because I think he wants to investigate about more things about what happened there, because he was still very young and doesn't know, or because he wants to add something to his presentation to improve, or whatever.

PG: That's how I met the guy on the Internet. I saw a fax number there, because they had no address or anything. I saw a fax number. I'm going to fax him. The next day I had an answer.

CE: Wow.

PG: This guy and my psychiatrist want to know how many people are still alive from the Holocaust concentration camp survivor. He said, "Ask him." I said, "No, you ask him, because you put it in a different way and more questions."

So I asked this guy, "Do you mind if my doctor writes you a letter?" He said, "No."

The doctor wrote him a letter, email. The next day he had an answer. He says, "Phil, this man is remarkable."

And I wanted information from Holland, from the Netherlands Red Cross. I'm a Dutchman; it took a year! And finally I wrote the Queen [Beatrix of the Netherlands], remember? And when I was in Holland, she [Angelica] called me and said, "We just got a letter from the Netherlands Red Cross." It was a hundred and sixty guilders, but we're not going to charge you because the Queen told them, "Look, this guy waited long enough." And this guy, the next day I have an answer. And the doctor had an answer the next day. It was unbelievable. A very nice guy; I want to go and meet him.

AG: So—

CE: So it seems to me what you're saying is not talking at all was bad for Phil, but overdoing it was exhausting—

AG: It's exhausting.

CE: Plus, it sounds like—is this correct that it also depressed him to live in that experience all the time?

AG: Yes. Exactly.

CE: And so now you think there's a balance, more or—

AG: Yeah, it's the finding the happy medium, finding something different to do. A lot of times I say, "Come on, let's go out! Let's do something!" You know? Even Sunday I took him to the park. He didn't want to go. (laughs)

PG: We bought a hoagie and then ate it at the park. And then we walked a little bit.

AG: I said, "Isn't this wonderful!" I said, "Look at the water, look at how nice!" I took him away from the computer and the same thing over and over and over and over again and (inaudible) to talk about the same thing.

PG: Well, the kids ask so many questions, and I don't always have the answer. So even though I am in a museum many times, I never walked through the whole museum and spent ten minutes or five minutes in any one place to learn about it. I don't know why. But in the computer I'm trying to get more and more information, and that's how I wound up with that guy and he sent me those pictures of the latrines of my—a copy of the book, the mission book through the Monowitz hospital. I mean, the guy's been nice to me.

CE: I also heard you say something about he was learning new things. Did that have an impact on—

PG: I was doing what?

CE: That you said, now he was learning new things?

AG: You mean in relation to—

CE: To the Holocaust and the experience.

AG: Yes, yes. Yeah.

CE: And you sounded like you were saying that made it more positive for him.

AG: Yes. I think it's—I could tell every day, and he learn more and investigate more about the whole thing. It helped him to be more comfortable when he talks and when he stands in front of the people. But I want a little bit less. (laughs) I want a little bit less that when we go out or something, I just want him to put that here and not bring it with him wherever we go.

CE: Okay. Phil, how do you feel about that comment?

PG: Well, what she probably is referring to: I have those cards and I always have them with me. And whenever I go to a restaurant, I give the girls or the guys a card. And one girl came up and said, “We [were] just talking about this. Where can I get a dvd [digital video disc]?” She bought the dvd right then and there, because they were talking about the Holocaust, about Auschwitz III; she specifically mentioned Auschwitz III. And a month or two later we were in Chili's [restaurant chain] in St. Pete or Tampa. I gave the guy a card. He came back outside, bought my dvd, and gave me ten dollars worth of free coupons for Chili's.

AG: What a business. (laughs)

PG: Yeah, I'm getting rich from it.

AG: No, my point—my point is when we are out doing something different, it's like I want to just have fun and just—

PG: Well, I just give them a card. I don't give them a spiel.

AG: But it's always, always come back. Somebody always come back with a remark or whatever. When we were in New Zealand for our daughter's wedding, our daughter said, "Dad, please—" she even said to you; we were going to introduce us to all her friends "—please don't talk about the Holocaust." She made that, because she wanted the meeting to be fun, no bringing back bad memories. And that's my point; that's my point. That's all I want to say. Now, he's doing—

PG: My point is, I'm getting so involved in this, the more people I tell, the better it is.

AG: I agree with you.

CE: Does it make you feel better?

PG: No.

CE: No, but it's better because people are knowing about it.

PG: I talk to ninety-seven hundred students last year, seventy eight hundred students the year before. This year I think we're at a very slow spring. I don't think I reached—not even seven thousand.

AG: But it's better, because last year was too much.

PG: Well, wait till you hear about Sioux City; that is going to be busy. I have somebody driving me around, and we've been going out for dinners. I have—

AG: It will be a diversion in between.

PG: —two in one day—

CE: That's good.

PG: —one in school and one in (inaudible) gymnasium. Two on Tuesday, one in a school, one in a church, and the lady from the Buena Vista University is going to meet me in the church. She said, "They have a dinner planned for you. From five o'clock until seven o'clock you'll be talking, and I and my colleague will be there." So I'll meet her then. Wednesday, I have two; Thursday, I have two; Friday, they have nothing lined up; Saturday, I'm coming home.

AG: It's so much.

CE: Yeah, it'll be interesting to see how you perceive him when he gets back, whether it was overdone or not.

AG: For me, that's too much.

CE: We're almost at the end of the tape and I just wondered if the two of you have anything you want to say to each other right now, or anything you want to say to the audience.

PG: Well, she's been a good girl. (laughs)

CE: (laughs)

AG: Well we've been together for thirty-one years.

PG: Thirty-one years.

AG: Thirty-one years. Very difficult at the beginning, I would say, very difficult because of our backgrounds, because of what he went through. But right now, I think—

PG: I don't know if it's her Latino upbringing, but she does everything for me. But she did from day one. When I worked night shift, I came home tired, threw my shirt here, my pens their, my shoes there, and she picked them up. And till today—you saw it—when my shoelace is undone, she will tie it. I don't—she does everything for me!

AG: It's not because I want to be like a slave or anything, no.

PG: That's the way you're brought up in Colombia.

AG: Well, that's how my mom was, but you have to understand I don't work. I don't have—I don't work. I'm home; why can't I do those things for him?

PG: She always does everything.

AG: Why can't I do it for him? It doesn't make—it doesn't take anything out from me or anything.

PG: She's very, very good that way. People can't believe it when I tell them what my wife does; they just can't believe it.

AG: That doesn't bother me. I think this is part of what I supposed to do for him, because he does so much for me.

CE: Yeah.

AG: You know he does so much for me.

CE: That makes sense.

AG: He gave a beautiful life, nice beautiful home. I have a beautiful daughter. I have a very nice life. That's nothing.

CE: Wonderful.

AG: You know, so that's—

CE: I have one more question for Phil, and then I'll give you the last word, Angelica. This question probably doesn't have an answer, but I'm just wondering, do you have any sense why you survived all this? Why? How?

PG: Students ask me that. What I tell them: hope. Don't give up hope. And the funny thing is, in November of 2008—I don't know if either—any one of you ever read the comics? *Hagar the Horrible*? Nafa, [speaking to the USF videographer], do you read the comics? You ever read *Hagar the Horrible*? Well, in November 2008, Lucky Eddie and him are tied with chains to a wall, and he keep talking. Lucky Eddie finally, "What keeps us alive?" And you know what Hagar said? "Hope." And I wonder if his student, his child or somebody heard my presentation, and he picked that up for his comic strip.

CE: Wow!

PG: Because I always tell the students, don't give up hope. No matter how bad it is, it will get better. So that's one reason. The second reason, in (inaudible), somebody said I had a—what do you call it? Angel, a guardian angel.

AG and CE: Guardian angel.

PG: Guardian angel. They passed by our house in forty-two [1942]. I didn't go to the Jewish orphanage. I didn't go to the little town, Putten¹⁰. At the selection I was told to go to the left. Four times I crawled through the eye of a needle. Unbelievable—they're really five. I forget which one the fifth one was. But it's unbelievable how—oh, not going to that little town. I think I missed that, I don't know. But four or five times I came this close. So I told the kids, don't give up hope.

CE Do you want to say something?

¹⁰Putten was the site of a very large Nazi raid in 1944.

AG: Ah, yes. That is true, because I see it on him. He's very optimistic in many ways. Optimistic, I would say. When it comes to pain, it doesn't bother him. Pain is nothing to him, physical pain; he takes it so unbelievable. That's probably why he endured and he survived, because he just goes through pain like nothing. And he always said, "Don't think, think positive! Don't ever dwell in your pains and that you're aching." And the mental—he's mentally very tough, and I think that helped him.

CE: Okay. Thank you, both of you, so very much.

AG: Thank you very much.

PG: Thank you.

AG: Thank you very much. It's been a pleasure.

CE: It's been just wonderful.

AG: I have never done this before in my life.

PG: She's a better talker than I am.

AG: No, I'm not going to talk to—

CE: She's fantastic.

AG: I'm not a very good talker, but I just like to talk. (laughs)

CE: This is an experience I will never, ever forget.

AG: Thank you very much.

CE: No matter how long I live.

PG: Thank you.

AG: Very, very sweet. Thank you.

end of interview