

Lazer (Eliezer) Lazerowitz

born 1925, Sosnowiec

His testimony, in English

USC Shoah Foundation interview no. 37182 · Brooklyn, New York · 11 December
1997

About this transcript. Lazer gave his testimony mostly in English, with some Yiddish. In October 2026 the nine tapes were machine-transcribed on the family's own computer; his English was lightly cleaned and the Yiddish passages translated. Timestamps in the margin match the video. Stretches the machine could not hear are marked *[unclear]*, and uncertain readings carry a (?); nothing has been filled in by guesswork. The names and details of living family members are withheld. This is a family working transcript, not an official one; the video is the authoritative record. The interview itself is © USC Shoah Foundation.

Tape 1

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape1.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:30 Interviewer: My name is Joseph Hotler (?), and I'm interviewing Lazer Lazerowitz here in Brooklyn, New York, in the United States of America. This interview will be conducted in English. Today is December 11, 1997.

00:59 Interviewer: Good afternoon. What is your name?

My name is Lazer Lazerowitz.

01:04 Interviewer: Could you spell that for me?

Yes. L-A-Z-E-R. L-A-Z-E-R-O-W-I-T-Z.

01:14 Interviewer: Mr. Lazerowitz, where were you born?

I was born in Sosnowiec, Poland. S-O-S-N-O-W-I-E-C.

01:33 Interviewer: When were you born?

I was born October 25th, 1925. I am now 72 years old.

01:46 Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

My father's name was Aharon Shmuel, but they called him Shmuel usually, Lazerowitz. My mother's name was Leah Lazerowitz. Her maiden name was Greenblatt.

02:09 Interviewer: Did you have, or do you have, any brothers and sisters? I mean all together.

All together, my father had ten children. With my mother he had six, and from his first wife he had four. The oldest one was Esther Chaba (?). She was married already. The second one was Rachmiel Lazerowitz. The third one was Kalman Lazerowitz. And the fourth one was Moses, Moshe Lazerowitz.

02:57 And from my mother: my older sister was Rachel Lazerowitz, or Rose, as she calls herself. I'm the second, Lazer. Then the younger sister, her name was Hendel Lazerowitz. Later was Rivka Lazerowitz, later was Chana Lazerowitz, and the youngest was Gitel Lazerowitz.

03:22 Interviewer: Where did you live in Sosnowiec?

We lived on the street Kereta (?), number 18. It was the next building to the main synagogue of Sosnowiec. It was almost attached.

03:36 Interviewer: Did your family daven in that synagogue?

No, my father davened, like they say, in a shtiebel, because he was more religious, in a rebbe's shtiebel.

03:49 Interviewer: What kind of shtiebel was it, do you remember?

Yes. First of all, he was a sofer (?), he wrote Sifrei Torah. And he was a son of the [unclear] rebbe. There we davened all the years. But later my father left and went to another shtiebel, to the Dombrowa (?) rebbe's.

04:14 Interviewer: Was your father Hasidic?

Yes, he was Hasidic. Not fanatic, but religious. He davened every day, in the morning, in the evening. Very religious, yes.

04:35 Interviewer: Did he follow a certain rebbe?

He didn't have one rebbe. He used to go to the Lelów (?) rebbe. He also went to the Pińczów rebbe, sometimes for a blessing, for a bracha. That's what I remember.

04:54 Interviewer: Did he ever take you?

Yes, once I went with him. The Pińczów rebbe came to Sosnowiec, and my father took me there. I was very young.

05:10 Interviewer: Do you remember any details of that visit?

More or less. I remember it was very crowded. To go in, the gabbai of the rebbe has to write you, like they say, a kvittel. Later they call you and let you in. Some had to wait a long time, maybe two, three hours, because a lot of people went to him for advice, for a bracha, for a blessing. This I remember, one time I went with him to the Pińczów rebbe. As far as I remember, shortly before the war he moved to Sosnowiec.

05:58 Pińczów was a little town. I had an uncle, my father's brother, who lived in that little town, Pińczów. It's a little town, but it's very famous in Poland. The elders used to have a saying, "It starts to get light in Pińczów." I don't know why. So one brother lived there in Pińczów. One brother lived in a little town, Wodzisław, where my father was born, where my grandfather lived all his life, and he's buried there. My father used to go once in a while, like they say, to the kever, to the grave. One time he took me along, I remember.

06:49 Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

He was a manufacturer of ladies' coats. He had a little workshop, with a few people working for him. He was cutting the material. He made the coats for people. Later my older brothers also had stores for the coats, so my father worked for them.

07:30 Interviewer: Can you describe your father for me?

Yes. He was not very tall, but husky, a little bit of a stomach, with a grayish beard, with glasses. He was nearsighted. A big man, like they say, a strong man. In 1937, all of a sudden, he had a heart attack, and one, two, three, he was gone. He was never sick. I don't remember him once going to visit a doctor. He was a healthy man, a strong man. He even had a strong voice. He always talked with a very strong voice.

08:29 Interviewer: What kind of personality did he have?

[unclear: about 30 seconds missing from the machine transcript; the story begins mid-way] So my father passed by. He heard some noise. He looked in the window. The window shades were closed, but he looked in, and he saw some workers, non-Jewish, working inside on Shabbos. They were making house shoes or something like this. So my father went to our neighbor, his name was Leda, also a religious man, friendly with my father, and told him what was going on: "They're working on Shabbos here." So the two men went and started to knock at the door, to yell and scream, "What's going on, what are you doing?" The door was forced open, they called the police, and later there was a court case. My father got two days in jail, together with that same man, for disturbing [the peace] or something. He was religious, with a very strong personality.

10:15 Interviewer: What kind of father was he to you?

A very good father. He did the best for us that he could. I remember he used to make surprises. One time I went to the cheder, to the yeshiva. It was wintertime. I took off my coat and hung it up with the coats of the other children. Later, when we finished, I put on the coat, put my hand in the pocket, and found a piece of chocolate. I couldn't understand where the chocolate came from. I thought maybe somebody made a mistake, he wanted to put the chocolate in his coat and put it in mine. I was very surprised, and I liked chocolate very much. Like they say, I had a sweet tooth. So I came home and told my father and my mother how lucky I was today, I found a piece of chocolate in my pocket. And my father started to laugh. He said, "You see, I made you a surprise. I put a piece of chocolate in your pocket." He was a very good father.

11:40 He sent me to the best melamdim, to the best teachers, so I should know the Torah well. And a Polish teacher came, I think two hours a day, and taught us to write and read Polish. There was also a public school, and a lot of children went to the public school. But he didn't want to send me, because in the public school you have to sit bareheaded. So he sent me to a private school, half a day Torah and the other half day the Polish language.

12:28 Interviewer: How did things change in the family after he died?

You can imagine, it was very bad. We were six children. The youngest was about four years old, then six years old and eight years old. I was eleven. My [older] sister, she is still alive, was 15. It was very, very bad. But one brother, from his [first] wife, is also alive. He was still single; the others were married. And he supported us. He took, like you say, a little bit of care.

13:13 Interviewer: Did your mother work at all?

No.

13:17 Interviewer: Can you describe your mother for me?

My mother was the opposite of my father. My father was tall and husky, strong, like they say, a baal guf, a hefty man (?). My mother was short, a little lady, skinny, with black hair. My father never had black hair; he was blond, a little bit reddish blond, but more blond, and his eyes were not black, they

were grayish blue. My mother had dark eyes, black eyes and black hair, and short. In general she was not a strong woman. She was, like you say, fragile.

14:10 Interviewer: What kind of personality did she have?

She was a good housewife, always working and cleaning. She had six children. It was not like today. You have washing machines, you have heating with gas or electric. Over there you were heating with coal. [Partly unclear: she had to carry the coal and the wood and make the fire.] It was a very hard time. When my father was alive we were not rich, but we lived comfortably. But later she had to do it herself. She worked very hard. It was not like here, where you buy new clothes. You always had to mend, to put patches, on the socks and so on.

15:26 Interviewer: What do you remember about her as a mother?

I remember one thing. I was a little boy, maybe six years old. We used to have a lunch break at school, and I came home and found my mother crying. I found out that her mother had passed away, in the little town where she lived, Wodzisław. I was scared. I asked, "What happened? What happened?" and she told me her mother had died. [unclear: a garbled passage about his father and about the mourning; he was five or six years old.]

16:44 [Flash-forward] That was in 1942. She went outside with the younger sister, to look around, to shop or something, I was not told. In that time the Germans used to come with trucks. They surrounded the whole street, jumped down from the trucks, and started to scream, "Stehen bleiben! Hände hoch!", stand still and hands up. They used to collect the people, and she was among them, and they took her away. It was between Pesach and Shavuot, about May 1942. I didn't know about it. I was working that day. I came home in the evening, and as I came near the house, one neighbor, a woman, asked me, "What's with your mother? Did they let her go?" I said, "What?" I didn't know what was going on. She told me, "They took your mother. I don't know if she's home already." We lived on an upper floor. I came up; she wasn't there.

18:14 Interviewer: I want to go back to the period before the war. We'll get back to this a little later. What part of Sosnowiec did you live in?

As I told you, in the middle of the city, next to the main synagogue. It was a big house. Usually the old buildings in Poland, you go in through a gate or a big door into a big backyard, and there were a few entrances. I think about 40 families lived there. It was a four-story building. We lived in two rooms, a two-room apartment.

19:09 Interviewer: What do you remember about Jewish life in Sosnowiec?

Oh, Jewish life in Sosnowiec, I remember it was very Jewish, more than Jewish. You couldn't find even one store open on Shabbos. It was quiet. Everybody was dressed in his Shabbos clothes, and everybody went to the shul or to the shtiebel. It was a very, very religious place. Where we lived, in the center of the city, it was mostly, I would say, 80 to 90 percent Jewish.

19:45 The whole city was very still on Shabbos, very quiet. In the afternoon the young people, 15, 16, 17, used to go out on the main street; they called it Chechegamaya (?). On this street the girls and boys used to walk separately, and they used to meet each other and talk a little bit. The older people like my father and my mother, after shul they came home, ate the Shabbos meal, looked in a sefer, and later lay down a little bit to rest, to sleep. And the younger people used to go on that street. It was very crowded, groups of boys and groups of girls, and they used to meet and greet a little bit. That was already a little bit modern, modern young people.

20:56 But 70 percent of the people, more or less, were religious with beards. Everybody wore a beard. And 30 percent were also religious, but modern, with hats, with modern dress, with suits. But 70 percent wore religious clothes, long coats, and beards.

21:22 Interviewer: How did the religious and the modern get along?

In general they got along, yes. There were already Jewish organizations. There was Agudat Yisrael, there was Shomer Hadati, there were organizations, half-Jewish (?), like Betar, like Jabotinsky, and a few a little bit left, very, very few. A very religious life.

21:55 Interviewer: Were there youth organizations, too?

I was not in one. I was young. When the war broke out in 1939, I was not even 14 years old. Close to 14, but not even 14. I didn't go to any organization.

22:13 Interviewer: You mentioned earlier that your father had children from a first marriage. Were you close with them?

Yes, I can say very close. But they were already married, they had their own families. But one brother, the youngest, he's still alive, he was still single. He was the one who took a little care. He came to our house; he didn't live with us. He came to look around, to see if everything was all right, and he used to bring a little bit of money, so we should be able to buy the provisions, the food. He was, like to say, the caretaker, more or less. The other ones too, we used to visit them, they came to us. But mostly he was in charge. He took care of us.

23:10 Interviewer: You mentioned that they were modern Jews. Were there any non-religious Jews that you knew?

Non-religious there were, but very few; you didn't see them. If somebody did something not religious, he did it hidden in the house. Nobody would go in the street with a cigarette on Shabbos. Nobody would open his store on Shabbos. No, no.

23:36 Interviewer: Do you remember what Yom Tovim were like in Sosnowiec?

It was very joyous, very happy. There were a lot of poor people too, who couldn't make a living, but everybody tried the hardest way to prepare for Yom Tov, especially a little bit better food, and everybody put on the best clothes he had. There were a lot of poor people. We lived in a big building, like I told you, 40 families, mostly big families, six, eight children, and poor, very, very poor, with

patched-up clothes, but clean. Everybody tried. There were rich people too, not too many, but in general it was middle class.

24:38 Like us, we made a living. And there were rich people too, with big stores, or owners of buildings. I know famous ones: Josel Abramczyk, a rich man, or Leiby Schweizer, or Leiby Zendel. There were rich people, and people were always envious; they said, "Oh, I wish I should be like one of them."

25:08 Interviewer: You mentioned that your neighborhood was 80 to 90 percent Jewish?

At least 90 percent Jewish, at least. Even in my building where we lived there was only one non-Jew living, the super of the building. She was a widow; her husband died. She had a son; she took care of him. She had to sweep the street outside every day, because the police came by to see if it was clean. She had to clean the backyard. She had to wash the staircases. She was the one person, non-Jewish. The whole house was Jewish, and all the houses around us were something like this.

25:56 Interviewer: Besides her and her son, did you have contact with non-Jews?

No, I never had contact. Never had friends, never got to speak to non-Jews. I would say almost not, no.

26:11 Interviewer: From the time that you were beginning to get older as a child until the war began, did you see any changes in the conditions in Sosnowiec?

The Polish people, what I remember, were very antisemitic. They didn't like the Jews. Sometimes when you went a little bit out of the Jewish quarters, a Polish youth would see you and throw stones at you, or knock [the cap] off your head. Mostly children who wore peyos. Even me, I didn't have big ones, but I had something like this. They used to curse in Polish.

26:58 Interviewer: What does that mean?

It means like "dirty Jew" or something. That was always a big slogan. Before the war, I would say 1938, it was very antisemitic. They always said, "Wait, wait, Hitler is coming." And there were many Poles with an armband, I don't know what was written on it, standing in front of the big Jewish stores. They didn't let Polish gentile customers into the stores. They used to say in Polish, "Polak nie kupuje u Żyda," a Pole doesn't buy in Jewish stores. There used to be a little bit of fighting. The owners of the stores used to come out and push them away. It was very, very antisemitic. They used to threaten, mostly, "Wait, Hitler, Hitler."

28:02 We didn't imagine. We knew already more or less that he hated Jews, but nobody had even a dream that something like this was going to happen. You just thought the conditions were going to be harder. Otherwise we would have tried to emigrate or to run away. Everybody had his own place, living there for generations. As I know, Jews lived in Poland close to a thousand years.

28:38 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Yes.

Tape 2

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape2.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number 2, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz. You had just mentioned at the end of the last tape how things were beginning to change. Do you remember any specific antisemitic incidents that happened to you?

Yes. I used to go a little bit out of town, to what they called the old city of Sosnowiec, old Sosnowiec. Jewish people lived there too, but Gentiles too. The Polish youth used to come running. One gave me a kick, and hit me with his fist, pushed me. Many times they used to throw stones. They used to call names, "parszywy Żyd" (?), something like this.

00:56 Interviewer: Do you remember when the war began?

Yes. It was September 1st, 1939, on a Friday morning. But a week before, they started to mobilize the people. On the radio they used to say it's going to be war, "we're not scared of the Germans." In Polish they used to say, "Not even one button, one Polish button, we're going to give to the Germans." A lot of propaganda, yes.

01:35 On Friday morning we heard it on the radio. There was only one radio in the whole building. A man, his name was Baum; we lived on the third floor, he lived on the second floor. It was one radio, a big box; we didn't have little radios like today. It was about ten o'clock in the morning, and the Polish president gave a speech. He said the Germans had attacked Poland and we are not scared. Almost all the people from the building were standing inside his apartment and outside, to hear what was going on. Later, when he finished, they also said that the Polish army had pushed back the Germans on some front. We were so happy to hear this, but now I have to laugh.

02:50 And I remember there was one woman, an older woman, her family name was Krawiec. When she heard that the Polish army had pushed back the Germans on the front, she went to the radio and gave the radio a kiss. And she said in Yiddish, "Dayn hartz zol azoy freylekh zayn vi mayn hartz," your heart should feel as good as I'm feeling. She was a very simple, older woman, as we say, with a kerchief on her head (?). Later we used to laugh about the woman who kissed the radio.

03:44 That I know, and that is what happened. [Partly unclear:] The whole city was tense. We wanted to lay in some food. What was the food? A few loaves of bread, some potatoes, a sack of potatoes. That's how it began. We were very, very tense.

04:08 It was Friday morning, and I think it was Monday or Tuesday, I don't know exactly, two, three days later, the Germans marched into Sosnowiec, the German army. As I said, we lived next to the main synagogue. There was always a man there, he was mentally ill. His name was Shaul. He wore maybe five overcoats, one on top of the other. He had a little beard. He was always walking,

walking, walking. When the Germans marched in, he was standing in front of the synagogue. Right away they killed him. They shot him.

05:17 Not only him, a lot of people. I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who lived on another street, called Pierwszego Maja, number 28. They took out a lot of Jewish people there and shot them in the yard. One man I knew, they called him Abrum Shister. He was a shoemaker, a man with a beard. His wife had died, and he had married a young woman; people made a little fun of it, an old man with a young wife. The Germans came, took him out with a few others, and killed them in the street, in the yard.

06:08 Not only them. They gathered a lot of people, the young people. They had to come to a big factory, big buildings, a German company, they called it Schön (?). [unclear: a long repetition loop; the content of this passage is lost.]

06:57 It was very bad. There was no food. All the stores were closed. No bread, nothing. But a few days later we heard that a bakery was giving out bread, but you had to stand in line. So I got up in the morning with my mother and my sister, because the others were little children and we were the oldest, and we went to the line to get some bread. The first time I came, thousands of people were standing in the line, thousands. German soldiers were keeping law and order. They pushed; we had to stand straight in the row. We stood from seven o'clock in the morning. Before seven we were not allowed out on the street: from seven in the evening till seven in the morning we were not allowed to walk in the street. Maybe I stood till eleven, twelve o'clock. I was lucky that they gave me a small piece of bread, a pound or half a pound, I don't remember exactly. They gave only to whoever was standing at the front. Sometimes there was no more. You had to go home after standing three, four hours, no more bread, no more nothing. So it was the first few weeks.

08:39 Later they gave out ration cards. So you were standing with ration cards, but they gave so little that you could eat it up in one day. We used to bring it home, I remember. Everybody took his ration, his piece of bread, and everybody was in charge of his own. We used to compare, one sister to the other: "Oh, you see, my portion is still bigger." We had to make it last the whole week. [Partly unclear: whoever had a bigger piece left was very happy.]

09:36 We used to get a little bit of potatoes, also standing in line, and a little bit of coal to cook. We didn't have electricity [for cooking] like today; we had to cook a little bit of soup, or whatever we had.

09:57 What else I remember: approximately two weeks after the Germans occupied the city, it was an evening, if I'm not mistaken a Saturday night. I think it was the night we were going to bed, about ten, eleven o'clock or so. All of a sudden we heard a small explosion, or something like it. We didn't know what it was all about. A little later we smelled smoke. It was smoky. We looked around, smoke, we didn't know what was going on. Every few minutes, more smoke. Later it was so smoky, we looked out and saw the synagogue, the shul, was burning.

10:46 We ran down, because I saw the steps were already hot; it was a wooden staircase. We ran down to the backyard, to the gate to the outside. We were not allowed to go out; they had told us

that if somebody went out after that time, he would be shot in the street. But everything was full of smoke. We couldn't see one another anymore. So we opened the gate and started to run outside.

11:30 And my brother, the brother was not living with us, but he came [that night] (?). He took the children, the little sisters. I know the youngest was born in '33; she was maybe five, six years old. The others were seven, nine years old. We had been in bed; they were all undressed. So we grabbed something and started to run. We ran outside. We said, whatever is going to be, it's better than to get burned.

12:05 My brother lived two streets away, on Spulna (?) Street. We started to run there, my family and a few other people; some other people ran in a different direction. And on the street was the fire station. There were firemen and police standing outside. The police asked, "Why are you running, what's going on?" So my brother told him that Kereta 18 is burning, the house. He didn't say the synagogue. "Kereta 18 is burning." So right away they took the fire engine and extinguished it. We went to his brother's [place], we stayed the whole night there, and the next day we went back. Part of the roof had started to burn, because the synagogue was very close. So this is how it happened, about two weeks, I think, after the Germans occupied.

13:16 Later there was more trouble. They gave an order that every Jew had to wear an armband. I think it was on the right arm, about ten centimeters (?) wide, something like this. And on the armband was the Star of David. [Partly unclear: they posted it on the walls, on the posters, how it must look.] The armband had to be in place, but sometimes it slid down. We used to take a safety pin, a safety pin up and a safety pin down, so it shouldn't slide down. We were very, very careful, because they caught some people who forgot; they got beaten up, and they shot some people. The armband. I personally didn't have problems with the armband.

14:37 Interviewer: I want to ask a question about something you said. You said that in the first few days there were the shootings. Did you see the shootings?

No, I didn't see them. But I know who it was. I didn't see it, but in my family, I think my brother came up and said nobody dare go outside. The German army, with the trucks, with the tanks, marching, everybody was scared, hiding, sitting like this. But it quieted down a little bit later, a few hours later. My [brother], I think, went down, came up and told us the story. [unclear] The next day my uncle came, my mother's brother. His name was Greenblatt. He had a family with three children. He came and told us the story, how they took some people out of the houses, out of [the yard], and shot them. I forget the other men; I forget the names. They took them out into the yard. But that is what I know, what I remember.

16:00 Interviewer: How did it feel to have to wear the bands?

How did I feel? I felt like I was in prison (?). It was very aggravating. The Polish people, the Gentiles, used to go in the streets free, without one, and we had to worry, we had to be scared. Besides this, the Jewish people were not allowed to go out, like I told you, after seven o'clock in the evening. The Polish people were allowed, but the Jewish people not. It was very, very depressing. It was very, very bad.

16:43 Later they made identification cards for us. They called it the Lichtbildausweis. It was with a picture. And on that Ausweis was your name, like, say, Lazer Lazerowitz. And besides your name, they added another name, Israel. Whoever was Jewish, they called him Israel: "Lazer Israel Lazerowitz." And for the women, they put in the name Sarah, whatever their real name was. This was the identification card they made only for the Jewish people.

17:30 Interviewer: When did they start making the cards?

I don't know exactly, but it was a few months later, something like that. Besides that, the Germans set up the Jewish Committee. Whatever they wanted, they asked the Committee: let's say, "We need 1,000 people, we need 500 people, we need that." All the orders went to the Jewish Committee. [unclear: a long repetition loop.] People also had to clean some buildings, the good buildings the Gestapo took: clean the offices, scrub the floors, everything.

18:45 Other people, like me, started to work in sanitation, sweeping the street. In wintertime they sent us to clear the snow. There's a lot of snow over there, a long winter. At the end of October it's already winter, there's already snow, and the snow lies till around March, till Pesach. Sometimes at Pesach you still get a little snow. [Partly unclear:] We also had to clear snow in the next city, a very big city, Katowice. There were not many Jews there, but there were many Germans, Volksdeutsche, of German nationality. People from my city had to go over there to clean, the sanitation, clean the streets of garbage. It was always through the Jewish Committee: they got the orders, and we had to go and do it.

19:56 Later they opened up some shops, big tailoring shops, making German uniforms. Who made the uniforms? The Jewish tailors had to work there. The Committee brought in sewing machines. The name of the shop, I remember, was a German company, Hans Held. My sister, who is still alive, knew a little bit of tailoring. She was 15 or 16 years old. She worked for that firm.

20:38 Interviewer: Where was it located?

On the main street, in the business district. Ulica Modrzejowska, in Polish. In Yiddish we called it Modzhayevke (?). About number 20, or 18. I think number 20. It was a big building, a modern building. It became a very big operation, and many tailors, many people had to go there.

21:09 My brother also had to go [to work], not in Sosnowiec, but in Dąbrowa, also a city, about five, six miles away.

21:19 Interviewer: Which brother is that?

The one who is still alive. Moshe, yes. He had to go to Dąbrowa, and they also had the same kind of work there, mending, fixing German uniforms. And you had to go by streetcar, like a German Straßenbahn, electric, with an electric wire. You had to have special permission, and there was a special car. Three cars used to go together, and on the last car was written, "Nur für Juden," only for Jews. It went only once an hour, though the streetcar ran every ten, fifteen minutes. But if you had the permission, you could go.

22:18 Interviewer: At this point, were you also working?

I told you, we were sent by the Jewish [Committee]. They sent us to do something, to clean. But later around, at the end of '40, people were already glad they had work. You know why? Because they started to threaten you. They started to take young people away to the forced labor camps. They threatened the people: if you don't work, you go to the Zwangsarbeitslager, the forced labor camp. When you worked, you had, like I said, a certificate that you were working. Sometimes the Germans used to grab you in the street. Sometimes, when you were lucky, you showed them and they let you go. But sometimes even with this they took you. If they didn't have enough, if they had a quota and they needed 500 people, they let you go only if they had enough; if not, they took you. They always had excuses.

23:32 Interviewer: How was religious life affected when the Germans occupied?

Yes, what I forgot to tell: a few weeks after the Germans came, they gave an order that all the people who had beards had to cut off the beards. You had to take off the beard; somebody with a beard was going to be shot. We saw the people with their beards cut off. It looked so funny. We were young; we had a lot of trouble, but still we had a little bit of humor. We saw people I knew, religious old men with white beards or black beards or blond beards, all of a sudden with no beard. They looked so funny, and we used to laugh: "Look how he looks." And religious people in Poland wore special caps. They had to take off those caps and put on different, non-Jewish caps.

24:38 Most of the people who wore hats like me took them off, and everybody wore a cap. But the Jewish caps, you see my father in the picture, it was black, with a little visor. Everybody took it off and took off the beards. It looked very, very strange. It was very depressing for the people, a tragedy for a religious man like this to be without a beard, something unbelievable. I heard there were a few cases where people didn't want to take off the beard. They said, "I'm not going into the street, I'm not going out, they shouldn't catch me." Some dared a little bit to go out; they covered [the beard] (?) and hid it. That's how it was.

25:42 Around the end of '40 they already started to take young people to the forced labor camps. The Jewish Committee got the orders and sent a letter. They made a Jewish police. They called it police, they called it "Ordnungsdienst." They were young Jewish people, in their twenties or something like this. They wore an armband, and written on the band was "Ordnungsdienst." It means they kept law and order. And I think they had a special cap. They were the people who, when somebody was wanted, came to take him or bring him to a certain place. They started to take the people to the labor camps in 1940.

26:44 Interviewer: Was anybody from your family taken at that point?

No. From my family, no. Yes, I remember: my uncle, my mother's brother, his son, my cousin, they took him to a camp. His name in Yiddish was Berl, Berl Greenblatt. He was about 17, 18, and they took him to a labor camp. I never saw him again. My uncle had three children. One survived, one daughter. She lives in Israel; her name is Esther. When I was in Israel, I met her there.

27:31 Interviewer: At this point, was the family still together?

Yes, we lived together, as I said, at Kereta 18. We stayed together. As I said, my oldest brother, from the first wife, lived elsewhere, on a street called Spulna (?). And a few months after the Germans occupied, he was living with another brother, a married brother. But that other brother, before the war broke out, went to his father-in-law, who had a farm. He went for a vacation, and he got stuck over there when the war broke out. So my brother lived in that apartment.

28:25 But a few weeks later, a few months later, a German came and told him (because nearby was a factory, a mill, for grinding) that he had half an hour to get out of the apartment. [Partly unclear: he took what he could, a bed or whatever he had.] So the Jewish Committee helped him with these things, and assigned him to live with us, with our family. But we were all, all our children, still together.

29:12 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Tape 3

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape3.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number 3, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997. You were describing what was going on at the end of 1940. What happened after that?

Life was very hard. We used to live on the ration card, and it was very, very little. So people did a little bit of, like you say, black market. The Polish peasants used to come from 20, 30, 40 miles away with horse and carriage to our city, because there were a lot of coal mines there. They used to come to buy coal for heating. So they used to bring a little bit of food, a little beans, a little flour, a little potatoes. We used to sell whatever we had, clothes, whatever. Some people had diamonds, I don't know, but mostly they were trading clothes and other things.

01:16 I remember I had one suit. My father was not alive anymore; my brother made me the suit. I still remember, it was a brownish color, a very good suit, the only good suit I had. And I sold it for maybe ten pounds of potatoes. We used to run around to the peasants. I showed it to one, "Look, nice." He said in Polish, "Okay, what do you want?" I said, "Give me 50 pounds of potatoes." He made fun of me; he joked, "You've got so many offers from people." So he told me, "I'll give you a little bit," I don't remember, ten, fifteen pounds, a little bit in a sack. So I gave it away. We were hungry. People did a little bit of black marketeering in order to survive.

02:13 Some people got caught. There was one man who was dealing a little bit, what I heard, in material. His name was something like Kohn (?) [unclear]. They hanged him in the middle of the city, him and his son and another two people. They took out some people who had to go and see how he was hanged. They gave us a warning: people who do black marketeering are going to end up like this.

02:55 Some people they took away. In 1941 you already heard very often, "Auschwitz, Auschwitz, he goes to Auschwitz," for every little thing. We didn't know Auschwitz. Auschwitz was about 20 miles away from my city. It was a Jewish town; the name was Oświęcim. I even had a cousin living there from my father's side, a daughter of my uncle. She married a man who worked there in a factory; his name was Peek (?). They lived in that town. But later, around 1940, they emptied the whole town of Jews and sent them to my city and to the city next to mine, Będzin, more or less like Sosnowiec.

03:51 It was Oświęcim, but later the Germans came and they called it Auschwitz. We knew it was a place like soldiers' barracks. We knew, we thought maybe it was a labor camp, Auschwitz. In '41 we heard very often, "Auschwitz, Auschwitz." So they grabbed a lot of people who did something wrong, this or that: Auschwitz. And they hanged people, like I told you, a few times, and you had to go out and watch what they were doing.

04:32 Interviewer: You had to go out?

Yes, they took people out. I didn't go, but they grabbed some people, hundreds. It happened where the city hall was. It was a big, big place, not paved, a little bit hilly. There they made the gallows, and there they hanged the people. That was, as I say, in 1941.

05:12 Interviewer: What were you hearing about Auschwitz?

We knew nothing. As I said, we knew Auschwitz as a camp, like a jail, a punishment. But exactly what, neither I nor the people around me knew. We didn't have, like I told you, even the slightest imagination that this was a camp where they destroy you, where they gas you or bury you. We didn't know. But later, in 1942, people already had a hunch. Not exactly, but they knew already it was very bad. Maybe some people knew a little bit, but we didn't know exactly. Some pessimistic people would say, "Oh, when you go over there, you're not coming back anymore. They finish you off." In what way, we didn't know. And some optimistic people would say, "Ah, it's like a camp, you have to go to work, and this and that." That was wrong.

06:23 Interviewer: How were you getting information at this time?

Most information we got from the Polish people. Some people had friends, acquaintances, a little bit. But like I told you, we were not allowed to leave the city, and there was the curfew at seven o'clock at night. But mostly, I assume, they got it from the Polish people.

06:59 Besides this, when the Germans occupied, they took my city and another two little cities and connected them to the Third Reich, to Germany. And the money we had was the German mark, the same German mark they had in Germany. There used to be German newspapers. I remember, I even read the newspapers, the Abendzeitung, the Lokalanzeiger (?). But they didn't write about this. They wrote the news from the war: occupied France, occupied this, occupied that. Later, on the 22nd of June, they attacked Russia, and I remember the German headlines, that they were pushing the Russians back, that they took so many prisoners, with pictures, all kinds of news from the war. But about this we didn't know.

08:14 Later it got worse and worse. In 1942, on the Hebrew calendar it was Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul; on the other calendar it was probably August 1942. They put posters on the walls. I don't remember the date, I only know it in Hebrew, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul. All Jewish people, no exceptions, young and old and sick, had to come to a big soccer field at the edge of the city. They called it a Fußballplatz; in Europe they call it football. All the people had to come there. It was a Wednesday morning. Everybody had to come, no exceptions, and if somebody was caught in the house (they were going to check), he would be killed, shot.

09:25 So the people started to panic, asking one another, "What's your opinion? What do you say? What's going to happen?" They claimed that the Gestapo wanted to check us out, to see what kind of people they were dealing with. And the Jewish Committee advised the people that we should put on the best clothes we had and make a happy face, like you say, walk straight, and nothing was going to happen. It would take only a couple of hours; they would check us out and let us go. This was a trick.

10:01 About six miles from my city was a city, Dąbrowa. Only a few hundred Jewish families lived there. They did the same thing there two weeks before; they also had to come to a certain field. They came and stood there a day; the Germans came, the Gestapo, the SS, looked around, and sent them home. And they told us the same thing was going to happen: "Dąbrowa. The same thing is going to happen. You don't have to worry, don't be scared, go happy, put on the best clothes you have." So we had no choice. But people were scared. We had a feeling that something was not right.

11:00 So I remember it was on a Wednesday in August, like I told you, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul 1942. We went, we took the whole family, my little sisters and my brothers. It was a beautiful shiny day, the sun was shining, beautiful and warm. We went to that field, and the field was surrounded by a fence. We went inside like nothing. It was crowded, like herring, one against another. All kinds of people came, fragile people, old people, little children, sick people, infants with carriages, everything.

11:48 So we came to that place and stood one hour, two hours, three hours. It was already about noon, before noon. All of a sudden we heard shooting in the air. The Gestapo came, the SS, with trucks, and they surrounded the whole field all around. They started to shoot so it should be scary. People started to panic; you can imagine what it was. Most people took no food, because they told us you don't need anything, you're going to go home soon. Some people started to faint. Some people had to go to the toilet; there were toilets only for two, three people. There were a few thousand people, yelling and screaming and crying. No imagination.

12:53 And then all of a sudden it started to get cloudy. It was a beautiful day, the sky was blue, and all of a sudden it got cloudy and the rain started to come down, like they say, pouring, and we were standing unprotected. We got all wet, standing and standing and standing. We were standing the whole day. Then the night fell. We stood into the middle of the night. Then they told us over the loudspeakers that we should line up, make two lines, toward the gate where we would go out. Thousands of people, and the whole family should stay together. We started to line up. We were standing in the line, thousands of people. A lot of people were already lying on the ground. There came no ambulance or anything. Little infants.

14:05 It was raining, it didn't stop. Maybe it stopped for a few minutes, like they say, for spite, and then raining and raining and raining. What they did, the Germans put up two tents, and inside a table with a chair. They told us to stand by families, with your identification card, the Lichtbildausweis. And we started to move a little bit, inch by inch, forward. It was night, it was dark; I didn't see what was going on. I was a few hundred yards from the gate. Later we came closer.

14:58 So my oldest brother said, "You know what, I think we're going to be better off if we separate, make two groups. I'll take the two little sisters." [unclear: a repetition loop.] We came closer. I saw my brother, with the two little sisters, at the table with the Gestapo, the SS, and they asked him where he works. He showed him the certificate; I told you he worked in a shop, a tailoring shop. He asked him, "Sind das deine Kinder?", are these your children? He said yes. Nearby a few Jewish police were standing. He said, "Eins," number one. So they grabbed him and took him to the gate,

they took the document and put a Gestapo stamp on it, and I saw he got out. A few minutes later, maybe ten, fifteen, I was so happy. I said, "Thank God, he's out with the two children."

17:00 And later we came. I was at that time 16 years old. My younger sister was 14 years old, and the older one was maybe 20. So we came in, he looked at us and said, "Wo arbeitest du?", where do you work? My older sister, like I told you, worked on uniforms in the company Hans Held: "I work at Hans Held." "Where do you work?" I showed him [my card]; I was in the sanitation [crew] (?). So he looked, one second, a split second. He pointed with his finger to the Jewish Ordnungsdienst standing there. He said to my sister, "One." And to me and my younger sister he said, "Two," number two. So they took me to the gate, me and my younger sister.

17:57 They took us to a corner (?) of the field, the soccer field. In that corner there were already standing some young people, boys and girls, mostly boys, young, twenty. They put me over there, and I was standing over there. The next day was already Thursday, like they say, Rosh Chodesh Elul. I was standing there for a few hours, till they had checked everything.

18:27 Yes, I forgot to say: one meant to get out, two was to go to work, Arbeitseinsatz, and number three meant to go to die, to be destroyed. Mostly that was the old people and the young children, little children. Some people were lucky; it was a matter of luck. They even let out some younger people, children with families. But mostly they kept them.

19:01 So when they had checked everything, we were standing there, and from time to time they brought a few more people. So there were a few hundred people standing there already. From there they took us; we had to line up in fives, like soldiers, and they took us away. Where did they take us? At the end of the city, which they call Old Sosnowiec, there was a big university (?), a modern one; they built it just before the war, a very big modern building. In that building they made a transit point. From there they sent people away to the forced labor camps. And they took me there, me with my sister.

19:58 We came there into the yard. They separated me from my sister, the girls separately, the men separately. They took me up; inside there were bunk beds, only beds. We were all wet, soaked through, and hungry. We hadn't eaten for 24 hours already. I took off the clothes, the shirt, and it dried a little bit. Later somebody came and said we had to go out, we were going to be checked by the doctor. We had to stand in line in the corridor, in the hallway, stripped to the waist. So I came in to the doctor. He looked at me a second; everything took seconds. He asked me my name. I told him, "Lazerowitz." That's it, out. Next. Very fast. I went back to my room.

21:09 A couple of hours later, toward evening, somebody came in from those people [the Ordnungsdienst] and said whoever's name is read has to go downstairs into the yard. It was closed in with ironwork around it; the building was closed. So they started to read and read. I heard "Lazerowitz." So I went down into the yard. There were already some people standing there, not too many, maybe 20, 30.

21:53 Later they opened the gate and marched us, and I started to march. I didn't know where they were going. I saw they were going in the direction of the same field, the same soccer field. I said,

that's right; I came to the soccer field. There was a gate, as I said, I think a wooden gate. They opened the gate, and they attached me to the people who were not good for work. I was still young, I was 16 or 15 years old. There were thousands [of people] (?). [unclear: a garbled passage.]

23:02 I walked in among the people, and all of a sudden I saw my younger sister; her name was Hendel. I said, "What are you doing here? How did you get here?" She had been there half an hour already, and she told me the same thing had happened to her. [Partly unclear: they had put her with the third group; they said she was not good for work, she was still too young, two years younger than me (?).] I was there a few more hours, and then they announced over the microphones that the people would be taken away.

23:50 So we started out, surrounded on all sides by Gestapo and guards with guns, and they took us. We walked and walked and came to a certain street in Sosnowiec, ulica Kołłątaja, Kołłątaja Street. They let us into houses, empty houses, three-, four-story houses, empty, with furniture; people used to live there. Later we found out that the representative of the Jewish Gemeinde asked the Germans, since they had no transportation (we were supposed to go probably to Auschwitz), and they didn't know when the train was going to come, to let us into the houses in the meantime until the transportation came. They probably agreed, and they let us into the houses.

25:02 We came into the houses. I held my sister tight by the hand. It was crowded with people. I was so tired and hungry and wet. I remember I went with her under a table. We slept the whole night under the table. People were sleeping in beds; people were sitting on chairs; they pushed in. I lay there the whole night, under it.

25:28 The next morning was already Friday; I think that was the second day. Friday morning, at eight, nine o'clock, they announced with the microphone, with the loudspeaker: "Everybody down, everybody down. You can go home, everybody down. Whoever has a certificate that he's working should hold it in his hand. Everybody down." So I went down with my sister. People were pushing. It was a four-story building, and everybody was pushing on the stairs, everybody wanted to get out. You push, you push, hundreds of people. Like I told you, in Poland there were backyards. We came out into the yard, and I came to the exit of that building.

26:29 I saw the Gestapo, the SS, standing outside, and everybody had to line up. They didn't let anybody go. They had a trick. Maybe they didn't want to have to push the people; maybe the people wouldn't come down and they'd have to drag them down. So they had a good trick: they said they were letting the people go home. Everybody was pushing. People are like sheep: when one sheep runs first, everybody runs after her. So I came up, ready to go outside, and I saw what was going on. I started to push back, back, and I held my sister's hand in my hand. People pushed forward and I pushed backward, and I ran back.

27:19 I came into the building, I ran up to the first floor or the second floor, I don't remember. It was already empty; everybody was already in the yard pushing out. So I came in, I was so scared, and I saw this, so I went under a bed with my sister. Maybe I lay under the bed for a few minutes.

My heart was pounding; I was terrified. Then the idea came into my head: this is no good. Maybe they're going to come to search, to look; they'll find me.

28:08 So I got out and started to go up, higher, to the second floor, the third floor, up the stairs, till I came to the end. There was an attic. Nothing there. People used to hang their wash there when they did their laundry; there used to be ropes to hang the wash. I ran up into that attic with my sister. I was very, very scared. I looked for where I could hide. I saw an old mattress standing against the wall. I said, maybe that's the only place. I went in behind it, and I saw a man already hiding himself there. I said to him, "Please move a little bit, I want to come in too." So he moved, he came out. I saw the man, because I knew him; his son used to go with me to school. His name was Zuckermann. He used to live on the same street, a few houses away. And I told him in Yiddish, "Mr. Zuckermann, this is not good. They'll catch us like rats. We have to see how to save ourselves."

29:37 Interviewer: We have to stop here and change tapes.

Okay.

Tape 4

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape4.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number four, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997.

So I told Mr. Zuckermann, "We have to save ourselves, because it's no good." He said, "What can we do?" We started to go, both of us, and my sister, a little girl, like nothing. He was very alert. He started to look, look, look, nothing. Later he looked up and saw an opening in the roof, like a cover, like a door that opens up. But it was high and we couldn't reach it. So we looked around and found a bench, a wooden bench. He brought it and set it down, and he pushed me up on the bench.

00:54 I could reach the cover. I pushed it out, it opened (?). So I got up onto the roof; I was young. And my sister got up on the bench and stretched out her arm, and I pulled her up, up onto the roof. And then the man, Zuckermann, a middle-aged man, maybe 50. His family had already been taken away. He had no more family; they had taken them [and he was left] all by himself. He had a few children and a wife. He had a little soap factory in my city; I knew him. So I helped him up; I pulled him up onto the roof.

01:52 I came out on the roof. The roof was not straight; it was a little bit slanted. I saw the Gestapo with the people, maybe 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 people, lined up in the street. And across the street there were houses too. It was a narrow street, not a wide street. People showed us with their arms that we should bend down, that they could see us. So I lay flat on the roof, all of us, and we started to move away, to the end of the building.

02:37 I came to the end of the building. Most of the houses were attached. The next building was one floor lower; this was a four-story building, and the other was a three-story building. So what I did, I grabbed the edge and lowered myself and jumped down to the next building. Then my sister grabbed the edge and let go with her hands, and I caught her by the legs and feet and pulled her down. Then the man too. We lay down and went, go, go, go. We moved maybe three, four houses away. In that fourth house lived that man, Zuckermann.

03:27 We did the same thing. There was a cover on the roof. We took it off, we went down, jumped down, and went to his apartment where he lived. I was in his apartment a couple of hours. I was so scared, I was trembling like something terrible, my teeth, my whole body. His window looked onto the street. He looked down and saw all the people. They took all the people to the railroad. The transportation had probably come, the freight trains. It was already quiet. So he said, "Stay here, stay here." I said, "No, no, I'm so scared." I thought maybe they would come to search here, maybe they'd find us in the yard or something. It was a great fear. I said to my sister, "Come, we're going." I went with my sister, because we lived on Kereta (?) Street.

04:28 We went down. At the exit of the building a Polish woman was standing; she was the super of the house, I assume. She saw us, how we looked; probably she saw what was going on. And she said in Polish, "Zaczekaj, zaczekaj," wait, wait. She looked all around her, and she said, "Now, go!" So I took my sister and we started to sneak, sneak. It was not far, two, three little streets from the house where we lived, on Kereta. And I ran there with my sister and came home. My brother was just there, the older brother. He saw how I looked; I was trembling.

05:19 So he said, "Come to the store." He had a store before the war on the main street in Sosnowiec, the best shopping area. The street was Modrzejowska. He had a store there selling ladies' coats. But when the Germans occupied, he had to register all the merchandise he had, and he had to give everything away, all he had. But later he had some people from the Jewish Committee [helping him]. He wanted very badly to hold on to that store, because he had paid a lot of money, like they say, key money, to go in, a few thousand dollars, in the '30s, because it was the best area for shopping. And he wanted by all means to hold that store. So he got somebody, and they gave him permission to make a tailoring shop there, to fix things. Besides this, they gave him permission to sell monthly tickets for the streetcar. So he did everything to keep that store. Maybe we didn't know what was waiting for us, but maybe the war would come to an end, and at least he would have the store; it was a very expensive location for business.

06:54 And when the trouble started with taking people away, he came upon an idea. There were two rooms, and in the back room was a wooden ceiling. [Partly unclear:] There was an attic space, so he called a carpenter, a trustworthy man. He told him, "Can you make an opening, like a hiding place?" He said, "Okay." But he had to give a shvut, like they say, an oath; he had to swear that nobody would be told. He opened it up, and it was like an attic, a double ceiling. But it was not high enough to stand straight up. So he said, since I had come and was so scared, I had no words, "Come, come to the store." The store was closed. When they looked for people, they mostly looked in the apartments. Nobody had an idea that people were hidden in the store. So they took me to that store and I lay there maybe a day and a night, sleeping, all nervous.

08:20 Then later I got out of there, but there was a problem too. The people they had released had a stamp on the identification card. I had no stamp, not me and not my sister. But later there was a stamp, or somebody made it; it cost a little bit of money. It was a stamp with the swastika, I remember. Because sometimes they stopped you in the street to check, and if you had no stamp, they knew right away: "Oh, you didn't go to that place," something happened. So I got a stamp and I was very, very happy; it was good. They didn't know whom they had taken and whom they hadn't. There was no order. Whoever ran away, whoever was hiding, was lucky.

09:26 Interviewer: This incident that you just described, with the football stadium, was this before your mother was taken away or after?

This was after my mother was taken away. My mother was taken away, like I told you, close to Shavuot, about May. And this happened in August, like I told you, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul.

09:50 Interviewer: And who was she taken away with?

She was taken away with our youngest (?) sister. Her name was Rivka. At that time she was about, maybe, 13 years old. She went, like I told you, with my mother in the street. Maybe they wanted to buy something, I don't know why. And they surrounded them and took her away.

10:13 Interviewer: Did you ever learn what happened to her?

No, never learned. Just that they took her away, and since that time I didn't see her.

10:23 Interviewer: So after this, August 1942, what happened next?

It was about two, three months later. There was a new order that we had to move out of the city, one or two kilometers away. It was a kind of shabby town; the name was Środula. Little houses, one, two stories, like shacks. Very poor people used to live there, the coal miners. They told us, "Umsiedeln," in German, we're going to be resettled to Środula; we have to move to Środula. It didn't take a long time. The Jewish Committee sent you the date when they were going to come with a horse and wagon, and you had to put on the wagon whatever you could. We had a wardrobe to hang the clothes in, a few chairs, a little table, maybe not even half the furniture we had, the bed. We went to Środula, which was, like I told you, about two miles out, a very shabby place, with mud in the streets, muddy everything.

12:09 We came there, and they gave us an attic, two, three families together, in a one-story or two-story house. I came there and saw it was an attic. The ceiling was so low that, though I was not tall, I was young, I couldn't walk upright. I always had to bend down. In one part it was a little higher, but half the room was very low. There was no water. There was no electricity. There was nothing; it was like a shack. We brought up the little furniture we had, and the wardrobe to hang up the few clothes we had. We took it apart and wanted to put it up, but it was too high; we couldn't put it up. So we lived there like this. When we needed water, we had to go with a pail; there was a well someplace, and we had to walk to it for a pail of water.

13:31 No electricity. What we had, I don't know exactly, was a lamp, a carbide lamp. Carbide is what the coal miners used when they went into the mines, as a lamp. Carbide is like a stone. You put it in water, the stone dissolves itself and makes a gas. I don't know how to say it. You lit it and it made a flame, but there was such an odor, carbide. It stank like hell; we couldn't take the smell. The coal miners were not modern like today, with electric lamps. [unclear] And we lived in very bad conditions. That was already at the end of '42.

14:39 Interviewer: How many of you in the family were there at the time?

We were five children, only five children. My mother was not there anymore. [unclear: possibly "Rivka was with her mother."]

15:01 Interviewer: What about your half-brothers and sisters? Were they all still there?

My half-brothers. I said the first brother was not in the city. He got stuck, I told you. He lived on the farm (?) for the first few months. He was ready to come back to Sosnowiec, but a couple of months later, like I told you, they made a border between Poland and us; they attached us, connected us to

Germany, and made a border, and it was very hard. Some people took chances; from the other side they wanted to come to Sosnowiec, because they said conditions in Sosnowiec were a little better than over there, where it was even worse. He wanted to come back, but it was very, very risky.

15:51 They caught some people from my family, from the farm over there. They caught one man; he was related to my brother, from his mother's side, a cousin, with two children, two daughters. They caught him at the border; he wanted to come to Sosnowiec. They caught him and beat him, they beat him to death. They brought him to Sosnowiec, to the police (?). My brother... I saw him; he was all bloody. His name was Lefkowitsch, Jesel Lefkowitsch. Two nice girls. Then came another cousin from my brother's side; his name was Kalman Potok. And the other two girls, not his, from his sisters, they shot them, all three, against the wall.

16:44 Interviewer: How did you find out about this? [no answer in the machine transcript] What about your married sisters, the older ones? Were you in contact with them at this point?

17:14 They used to come by; I used to see them. They were also in bad conditions. I used to see them, yes. And I was in that ghetto, in Środula, till the end of February.

17:34 Interviewer: What year is this now?

'43, end of February '43. But they used to come, like I told you, at night, and take out the people. Usually they grabbed younger people for work. But already since the beginning of '42 they took away the people who were no good for work, children. First they emptied out the old-age home; they took them away. The orphanage, the orphans' home of Sosnowiec, the Tuckover (?).

18:16 So in 1943, not in March, at the end of February 1943, I was sitting in the house. I was not working; I don't remember why. We lived in that attic, with a tiny little window, like an attic window. I looked through the window, I looked down, and I saw two Ordnungsdienst, two police, going into that little building. So I got scared. I thought maybe they were coming for me. So I ran under the bed. I had four sisters in the house, the younger ones and the older one, at home.

19:05 So I was under the bed. They knocked, boom, boom. I don't know if we had a lock. And they came in with a list. I was under the bed. "Lazer Lazerowitz. We're here for Lazer Lazerowitz." So my sister said to the Ordnungsdienst, "He's not home." "Where is he?" "I don't know where he is." So they said, "Okay, you come with us." [unclear] So I was under the bed. I couldn't take it, to see this, so I got out and said, "Here I am."

20:01 So they took me away to the same building, like I said, the school, as I said; it was a Gymnasium. From there they used to send all the people to the camps; it was like a gathering place. They put me there, and the same thing: I had to go to the doctor again, take off the clothes, and then nothing happened. I was there two, three days, and there were hundreds of people.

20:46 There came a German, a civilian, not in uniform. We knew about him already. In Yiddish they called him "der lamer soycher." A soycher is a businessman, and lame, because he was limping a little bit. He came every week or two and took a few hundred people. He went with the transport;

besides the guards, he was in charge. So after a few days he took me to the railroad. It was a few hours, and they brought me to the camp.

21:29 The name was Markstädt. It was a very big camp, a forced labor camp. It had barbed wire, not electric, barbed wire. The guards were the SA, in yellow uniforms, and also Wehrmacht, some older men in the Wehrmacht, some who were already wounded from the front line; they sent them there to guard us. They sent me to work, and I worked there, hard work, mostly construction. They gave me a shovel and a pick, for digging. Sometimes freight cars came with the train and we had to unload them, unload the bricks and the bags of cement and iron beams. They were building big factories, ammunition factories. A lot of people worked there, not our people, Gentiles and Germans, but we did the hard work. They mostly worked inside, in the munitions [plants]. We never went inside; we always worked outside, guarded.

22:54 We were divided into groups. Every group had a German foreman. He divided you: "You, you, you, you do this." There were freight cars, maybe three freight cars, and you had to unload them. All kinds of work, and we were guarded. We worked very hard. The food was very bad. Every evening we came back, we got a piece of bread and a little bit of soup. It was watery, with a few pieces of potato. Grass, like grass, something like you eat here. You felt the sand in your teeth.

23:36 With the bread, there were four or five people to one loaf. One man, who had a good eye (?), made a knife, and he cut it into four or five pieces, and everybody watched that it was even, that no piece should be more. And sometimes some groups made a scale. We took a piece of wood, with two little pieces and a string, to weigh it. It was a whole procedure that we went through over the bread. Later they made it like a lottery: "This is for you," and you shouldn't see. Everybody got almost the same. Everybody was so jealous. "Oh, he got a bigger portion." Sometimes a man couldn't sleep, aggravated, aggravated: his portion was bigger. They measured everything. Maybe it was two or three grams of difference between them. We worked very, very hard.

24:54 Interviewer: What were the sleeping conditions there?

We slept in wooden barracks. If I'm not mistaken, there were 18 barracks. I lived in barrack 17, I remember. And we slept on bunk beds, on straw, like a straw sack, with a little gray blanket, a cover, and a pillow, also of straw or something. This is how we slept. Every morning we had to wake up very early. There was a kapo, the Lagerkapo, and the block kapo; each barrack had a kapo, they called him the block kapo. Besides this there was the Lagerkapo, wearing an armband with "Kapo" written on it. They were always with sticks, with whips, like nothing. They hit you for nothing, for nothing.

25:56 In the morning we had to go out. And two people had to clean the room, every time two other people; they had Stubendienst. In the meantime the Lagerkapo came to inspect. [Partly unclear:] And when we came back they'd say, "You stay here," [if they found] straw under the bed or something. We were beaten; we had to do it over and over. It was a very hard time. I was there, in the camp. But what I want to say, [the days off (?)] were even worse, worse than the middle [of the week]. I was wishing to go to work, because [in the camp] you had to run around, you had to clean

up the camp, whatever they could find. They chased you, they hit you with the sticks, with the whips, for nothing. You felt it here, with a whip.

27:23 I was in that camp till around February 1944. In Markstädt, they called it.

Interviewer: So you were there nearly a year?

Pardon? Nearly a year, yes.

27:41 Interviewer: Was it possible to be observant, to be religious, when you were there?

What do you mean, observant? How can you be observant? A tallis you don't have. Even married men had no tefillin. The food was not kosher. But you could be observant; maybe you could pray, say some prayers by heart or something. I think, if I'm not mistaken, one or two had a siddur, a prayer book, but I didn't have one. What could you observe? Yes, I remember, we were observant on Yom Kippur. I'm still wondering till today how we knew it was Yom Kippur. I was fasting, and not only me.

28:31 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Okay.

Tape 5

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape5.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number five, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997. After you left Markstädt in 1944, where did you go?

So I was in Markstädt till February '44. One day, I think it was on a Saturday, on Shabbos, we heard that they were going to close down the whole camp and send away the people. A few miles away was another camp; the name was Fünfteichen. We never knew about it, but when we went to work in the morning (we always had to march a few miles from the camp to the working place), from far away we saw some people in uniforms with stripes, striped clothes, going under guard. We didn't see exactly who, but we saw German soldiers guarding them. We were guarded too, but we went in groups, and after each group went two or three Germans with rifles. But over there we saw them going with Germans every few yards, with their rifles, in uniform, far away. So we never knew who those people were. They used to walk separately; we never met them.

01:45 But later, one Saturday, we found out that we were going to be transferred over there, to Fünfteichen. So we got the order that we had to undress, all naked, in the room where we lived.

02:06 Interviewer: In whose room?

Where I lived in the camp, in the barrack. We had to take off all our clothes, all naked, and run a few barracks away for a check-up by the doctor: "We're going to check you out." So each room, about 20, 25 people in each room, in groups, had to run through the camp naked. It was still cold, some snow in the corners, still very cold. We came there and went in to the doctor one by one. He looked at you; he never asked you anything. He looked at you and asked, "What's your name?" He asked me, "What's your name?" I told him, "Lazerowitz." You still went by your name; when they wanted something, they always called you by the name, Lazerowitz. I told him "Lazerowitz," and he wrote it down: "Out, out." Everything in seconds.

03:11 I ran back to my room, to my barrack, and got dressed. This was on a Saturday. Sunday morning we had to make Appell, where they counted us. It was a big field, a big square or something. Every day, when we went to work in the morning and when we came back, everybody had to be counted. One time, I remember, one man from us disappeared, ran away. They counted and counted; nobody [knew], and we all had to be punished. Nobody knew what happened to him. He went through the barbed wire; it was not electrified. And a few days later they caught him, a young man. The next morning we went to work, and we saw him lying dead at the gate. Everybody had to turn to look at him. They told us later: when you try to run away, this is going to be your end.

04:35 So this was on a Saturday. Sunday morning we went to that Appellplatz. And they said that the people whose names were read should step out. [Partly unclear: repetition loop.] They read my

name, Lazerowitz. So I stepped out and went where they showed me. It took half an hour until they had read the names. They read maybe, approximately, about 300 men. It was a selection. And the rest they took away on foot, to the death camp, you could call it. I didn't know what happened to those people. Later, toward the end of the war, still in the camps, we came in touch with some people from there.

05:30 And so we stayed in the camp, more or less about 300 people. It was one day, two days, three days we were in that camp, doing nothing, walking around, lying and sleeping.

05:50 One day in the camp I saw two, three men, our men, carrying potatoes, raw potatoes. I said, "Where do you have the potatoes from?" They told me the cellar where the potatoes were stored was open: "You can go and take as many potatoes as you wish." So I went to the cellar. It was a few steps down, and there were a lot of potatoes, big piles of potatoes. I took a few potatoes and wanted to go out. There were another two men there, I think. All of a sudden I saw the Lagerkapo with a whip, and he started to yell, "Ihr Schweine!", you pigs, "What are you doing here? You want to steal potatoes?" We told him, "No, they told us it's open, you can take, nothing to it." "Raus!" Out. So we went out. [Partly unclear:] We started to run away, three people, each one in a different direction. I ran here, one ran here, and one ran here. And my luck, he ran after me. He caught me; he was a strong guy.

07:30 We wore civilian clothes, but one thing: we had to have, here, a piece cut out like a Star of David, six points, and you had to sew in white linen. Here, in the back, and on the pants, here. But you went in civilian clothes. So he ran after me and caught me. What can I tell you? He beat me with a whip. He whipped me. I started to scream and yell, and he hit me so much that later I didn't even feel anything. I didn't know what happened to me; I was like fainted. I don't know how long I was lying there, maybe half an hour, maybe a few minutes, I don't know. I started to wake up. I felt pain all over; all my body was beaten, especially my head. I had bumps on my head like this. For a few weeks I couldn't [lie] (?) except on my front, because of it. [unclear]

08:44 I was in that camp a few days, maybe a week or so. Then some trucks came and they loaded us onto the trucks. It was a few hours, I don't know. We came to another camp; they called it Blechhammer. But this was already a different camp. It was already from the Gestapo, from the SS, an SS camp. The camp had electric wires, not just one fence, double: one fence with electric wires, and maybe a yard, a yard and a half away another fence with electric wires. There were towers. You saw it was the SS, because they had the mark, the Totenkopf, the skull. You saw right away they were different. They wore steel helmets. Before, like I told you, it was the Wehrmacht or the SA; this was different.

10:02 When you came into the camp, they put you in a barrack they called the Revierstube. It was like a hospital, for somebody who was sick or dying, a whole barrack with a few rooms. They put us there. You had to take off your clothes; they took them away, [and left you] the shirt and the underwear. [Partly unclear:] There were all the bunks; in each room 20 to 30 people, many bunks,

on one side of the room the beds, and on the other side, in the middle, a few tables. I didn't know what it was.

10:51 One day a doctor came in, a Lagerarzt, a camp doctor. I know, a wild face (?); he was bald-headed, a husky guy. He came into my room; like I said, there were maybe 30 people, something like that. He sat down and said to us, "Listen. You came here to this camp as sick people, weak, sick. I want to help you. I have some medicines, this and that. I want to help you, but you have to tell me what bothers you, what is wrong with you. You can stay here; you don't have to work for a few weeks, a few months, until you've recovered. You have to tell us what is wrong with you."

11:43 So the people went to him, and he wrote down the names. One said, "I feel my heart." One guy showed his legs; they were swollen, he had swollen legs. Everybody, he wrote it all down. I was lying on the bed. And I didn't know why, without reason; even till now I can't explain why. I didn't go. I didn't say anything. So he wrote it all down and left. He went from room to room in the barrack. In every barrack there were about four or five rooms, each room, like I told you, 30, 40 people.

12:32 In the end, it was a few days later, an evening, between day and night, there came whistling in the camp. The kapo ran around whistling. He yelled, "Blocksperrre! Blocksperrre!" That means everybody had to go to his barrack, the whole camp. Usually there was movement; people went from one block to the other. It happened a few times later, but this was the first time I heard it: "Blocksperrre, Blocksperrre," the kapos running around whistling and yelling loud, "Blocksperrre!" Everybody into his barracks. Okay. You got a feeling something was going to happen here.

13:39 I was lying on my bed. All of a sudden I saw the door open. It was still the end of February; it was cold outside. In came that doctor, with him two SS men, and the doctor said, "Everybody on his bed," because a few people were [standing]. "Everybody on his bed." And he said, "Those people whose names you're going to hear have to come down from the bed and go near the door." He started to read, read, read. Almost everybody he read was standing almost naked, with the shirt, with the underwear. Later he stopped. I didn't hear my name, so I was lying on the bed. I saw something was wrong here. I knew more or less, you have the instinct, it told you something is wrong.

14:48 I was lying on the bed, scared, and I took the blanket, the gray blanket, and covered my face, the whole face, up to here. And I was scared, my heart pumping like this. Then I heard him open the door and say, "Alle raus, alles raus!", the SS. They started to protest: "We have no clothes, it's cold, outside it's cold." He told them, "Ihr braucht nichts, raus!", you need nothing, out. Some of them started to [unclear] and they started to hit them. "You need nothing, raus, out." And before this I had looked through the window, and I saw some trucks, German trucks, covered with a canvas. So they took them out, and I was lying there like fainting, fainting.

15:55 All of a sudden I heard walking inside, with the boots on the wooden floor, walking, walking. All of a sudden I felt his hand. He ripped the blanket off me, off my head, and he looked at me. I opened my eyes. He looked at me, maybe for a couple of seconds, and he said to me in German,

"Bist du gesund?", are you healthy? And I said, "Ja, ich bin gesund," yes, I'm healthy. He said to me, "Du hast Glück," you're lucky. That's what he said. And he left. I think there was somebody else, maybe two out of all the people [who were left].

16:43 The next day he came [back] (?). They took me to the showers. They showered me, cut off the hair. I didn't have too much hair, but they shaved me with a machine, not only here but the whole body, wherever you had hair, they shaved me. And they took me to a barrack and gave me a uniform, the concentration [camp] stripes. They took me to another barrack and [tattooed me] (?). [unclear]

17:32 Interviewer: Can we see?

Yes.

17:42 Interviewer: Can you read me the number on the tattoo?

Yes. 179,419.

18:04 Interviewer: Is that the only number that you got? I mean tattooed.

This is the only number. I got other numbers: in Buchenwald I got a different number, in Dachau a different one. But they tattooed only this number, because, after the war I found out, only Auschwitz tattooed; no other camp did this.

18:27 Interviewer: But you got a tattoo in this camp?

Yes, but because it belonged to Auschwitz. It was under the same command, even on the paper I got. Auschwitz had a few camps under its jurisdiction. They had Blechhammer, they had Buna (?); you heard about Buna. That used to be IG [Farben], pardon, they used to make the chemicals; it belonged to Auschwitz. They had another two, three [camps], chemicals; I don't remember.

18:57 Interviewer: Those men who were taken away, did you ever learn what happened to them?

No. I saw they were loaded onto the trucks. Probably to Auschwitz. And he told them, "Ihr braucht nichts," you don't need anything. So they started complaining. One guy wanted to take the blanket to cover himself. He threw it away and said, "Ihr braucht nichts," you don't need anything. Naked, at the end of February; it was still very cold outside. I assume [they were killed], because later, from time to time, it was the same thing with the sick people: trucks came and took them away. Because in that camp there was no crematorium, there was nothing.

19:48 Interviewer: What were the conditions like in that camp?

More or less the same. They put you in a Kommando, in a group: Kommando Eins, Kommando Zwei, Kommando Drei. Each Kommando had a kapo, wearing an armband, "Kapo, Kommando Eins," "Kommando Zwei." Each group worked in a different place, and he was responsible, he was in charge of his people, his Kommando.

20:23 So, like I told you, they tattooed me. Later they gave me a piece of white linen, about this long, with the number I have on my arm written on it. And there was a triangle, a red triangle.

Because there used to be red, black, green. You saw in the camps, when you met Germans or other nations, that the ones with the green triangle were criminals. Black was sabotage, something like this. Red, we got red, like political, "politisch."

21:06 Interviewer: Were there any other colors that you saw?

No, mostly what I remember was black and green and red. Mostly our people, Jewish people, [had red]. So I got my number. I had to sew it on here, on my uniform, the number 179419 [he says "17419"] with the red triangle, like I said. Whenever they wanted you, you had no more name, no more Lazerowitz. You only had a number, 179,419 [he says "170,319"]: "Antreten, austreten, gehen," whatever. You are only a number, no more.

21:50 And the conditions were the same. It was very hard. In the morning they chased us out, and there was the Stubendienst, like I say, every day another two guys. Not only this, he was strict: we even had to do it at night. Every two hours one guy had to change, to keep watch, to be up and watch, sitting next to the door. They made a list: from nine to ten, that guy. The Stubenältester, the elder of the room, if he [wanted] a little sleep, he made the list. Every two, three days it was your turn. They wake you up, then you wake up the next one. In the middle of the night you had to sit, I think, two hours; I don't even remember. It was terrible.

22:44 In the very early morning, at five o'clock or something like this, they chased you out of the room, because for maybe an hour, an hour and a half, two guys had to clean the barrack. You were sitting outside. Summer was half as bad, but in winter it was so cold, you have no imagination. The uniform was so thin. In winter they gave you a coat, but the coat was something like linen, striped, with a cap. The shoes had wooden soles, and the upper part was canvas. When you walked in the street in winter, the snow stuck to the soles. You walked a few yards and it piled up; you were walking on a lump of snow, and you had to [knock it off]. It was a hardship. The barrack where you stayed, they always closed it; we had to stand outside, two hours, against the wind.

23:56 Later they took us to the Appellplatz, a big field, and everybody had to stand with his Kommando. You already knew where your Kommando was. You had to stand still, and counting, counting, and counting. Later came the big shots, the Gestapo, the SS. And there was a Lagerführer too, the head of the camp, also from our people. His name was Demmerer (?), a Jewish man. He was the Lagerführer [camp elder]; he spoke perfect German, with a little bit of attitude. He had to report how many inmates. We had to stand still.

24:47 Later we had to go to work. There was a gate. We went out with the guard, and we had to march like soldiers, in step, "Gleichschritt," left, left, left, in step, not one right, one left. In the middle, at the gate, you had to take off the cap, straight like an army. We marched out. You had to be straight, otherwise you got hit. We walked a few miles to the working place in the morning. We came there, and the same thing, hard work. The railroad came, the freight trains. A German was in charge. Usually we worked digging, with the shovel, with the pick, the Kreuzhacke. They came and said, "Today we have four wagons of bricks to unload, three wagons of cement," bagged cement, 100 pounds a bag. They said, "You go to this, you go to this." What can I tell you? Hard labor.

26:14 In winter it was, like I told you, double. Not only did we suffer from hunger, beyond imagination. Your mind was busy only with food, only dreaming of food, food, food, hunger. A few times a day I used to turn my pocket inside out; maybe I'd find a crumb or something. Your mind was always on food. But winter was even worse. The cold killed you. Sometimes we used to take a cement sack, clean it out, and put it on like a vest. We'd open it up and make it [into a vest] here. But later they found out, and they told you, "Whoever is found with this is going to be killed." But some people took a risk; they put it under the jacket. It was impossible; you couldn't take it. Some days it was so cold.

27:38 Anyway, so we worked and worked. During the day we didn't have guards right around us. When we came to the working place, they put a cordon around the working place, like a chain, the SS, every 50 yards or so one standing, the whole day, so we shouldn't be able to get out of that place. But in the daytime [an inspector] came by to check, on a motorcycle; there were two of them who came, always on the motorcycle. They came and asked the foremen, the Germans, "Well, how are the people, are they working hard?" Mostly the foreman complained. He said, "No, they're lazy, they don't want to work, they're lazy dogs, they're lazy pigs."

28:42 One time I was standing there and he came, like an inspection, two guys, and they asked the foreman, "Na, was ist los, arbeiten die Leute heute tüchtig?", are they working hard today? He said, "No, a few people, these here, they're not producing today." So he said to me, "Warum arbeitest du nicht?", why aren't you working? "Ja, ich arbeite, ich arbeite fleißig," yes, I'm working, I'm working hard. He told me, "Steh still, steh gerade, nicht bewegen," stand still, stand straight, don't move. So I was standing. He came, a tall guy, a blond guy, a reddish blond. Next to him was another guy, a little shorter than him, but a very heavy guy. And he told me, "Stand still, don't move." So I was standing still, and he took his fist (?), he gave it to me here and here.

29:50 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Yes.

Tape 6

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape6.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number 6, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997.

So, what I want to say: he beat me up, and he told me, "Next time you go to Auschwitz. You go in through the door, and you come out through the chimney." That means I come in through the door and go out through the chimney, he told me. "You'd better watch out that you work hard." That's it. I was beaten up, I was all bloody, in the mouth (?). I think two, three teeth he broke for me, inside. So that's it, the life. It was a very hard life.

00:59 But at the end of 1944 the airplanes already used to come, raids. American airplanes used to come and started to bomb the working place. It was a very big place. There were a lot of English prisoners, there were Germans, there were Polish civilians, French, a lot. Maybe 40,000 people worked there in one shift. They worked in some big buildings; they made ammunition, munition buildings. But we were not allowed; we worked outside, like I told you. Later, when the airplanes started to come, they started to build bunkers, heavy, heavy, against bombs. And we had to build them, with concrete, very heavy. Each wall was maybe a yard and a half thick. It was round, like this.

02:01 When there was an alarm and the siren started to blow, only the Germans were allowed to go in. But one time I was next to a bunker, like this. And all of a sudden I heard the noise, airplanes. Bombs started to fall. You have no imagination what kind of noise, the air pressure. So I ran inside. I came inside; they put on the light, and they saw me with my uniform. "Du Verfluchter, was machst du hier? Raus!", you damned one, what are you doing here? Out! So they kicked me down. They opened the door, there were iron doors, and kicked me out. And I was lying there with the airplanes. They came in one wave, then ten, fifteen minutes later another wave of airplanes. One time I saw two parachutes come down; probably they had shot down an airplane.

03:08 So this was the life, working in hunger, in the cold, and tired. And from time to time some people got sick, mostly swollen legs. They went to the Revierstube, the Krankenhaus, the hospital, and they collected 50, 60 people or something like this. That was the Blocksperre, like I said. They came with the trucks, took them all out of the barracks, and took them away. That's how it worked.

03:47 And I was there till January 1945, in that camp. In January 1945, on a Saturday, we came back [from work]. We worked a little bit less, I think. Usually we came back at five, six o'clock; we came two hours earlier. We had already heard rumors that they were going to evacuate us, to take us away. It was cold, windy, January, a lot of snow, very cold. Sunday morning we got up and had to go to the Appellplatz, to that square, that field, and we were counted. We were told that today, "heute," we are being evacuated; we have to leave. And they gave us a little bit [of bread], not a little bit, I don't know, maybe [a loaf] (?), something like that.

05:01 And that's it. Everyone in the camps had, like a mess tin, like the soldiers, as we say; we called it a menashka. We tied it with a piece of wire, a piece of string. We always carried it; we always got our soup in it. Everybody had his menashka. So I took the piece of bread and put it inside, and we started to march. We were a few thousand people, I don't know, something like 2,500, about 3,000 people. We started to march, we marched, we marched, with the SS around us every few yards, an SS man with a machine gun, like this. We started to walk and walk.

05:57 It was very, very hard. As I said, it was all snow. The snow used to stick to the wooden soles. Every few yards we had to knock it off. We could hardly [go on], because our legs started to [give out] (?). We left the camp before noon, about ten, eleven o'clock. We walked maybe three, four hours. From very far away we heard artillery explosions, boom, boom, at a very far distance. We didn't know. In the evening we came to some camp there, some barracks. We stopped there; we were sitting there maybe an hour. All of a sudden we heard that we were going back to the camp. So we started to go back to the camp. We walked maybe an hour; all of a sudden came a new order: turn around, we go forward.

07:02 We walked and walked and walked, the whole day. Sometimes they stopped us and we sat down a little bit; I sat down on what I had, freezing and cold. We walked one day, two, three, four days, no food, no nothing. At night, sometimes we passed by big farms, and they pushed us into the farms, into stables, into barns; not everybody, whoever they pushed in. Very cold, the fingers were frozen stiff; we were all stiff. And when I came in, there were grains lying around in the straw, so I started to pick out the grains and eat them. I finished my piece of bread the first day; then nothing. What we ate was snow; instead of water we took snow, we ate snow, and grain, and we ate.

08:13 The next day almost the same. One day I was lucky: they pushed me into a barn, into a stable. I came into the stable, and there were cows inside and a few pigs. The pigs [had] potatoes, potatoes with the peel. We started, I grabbed two or three potatoes; I was lucky. I ate them; it took a second. So we walked, we walked, we walked. And every day I was almost at the back, one of the last. They kept pushing us up, up, because some people started to stay behind. They couldn't walk anymore. And they pushed [us] with the butts (?). Every minute you heard [shots]. A lot of people couldn't walk anymore, and they sat down. In the end, I walked almost at the end, and you heard boom, boom, boom, shots. They got shot. Whoever couldn't walk and stayed behind, right away they shot those people.

09:36 I walked with all my koyach, all my strength. There was somebody I was a little close to. I had already decided to sit down and say, "I can't anymore, I can't, I can't." He schlepped me. He said, "Go, come, come, we'll see, soon, soon we're going to arrive." So he encouraged me a little bit. And I walked, and it took us two weeks, the march. That's why we call it the Totenmarsch, the death march.

10:04 After two weeks we came, at night. We came and saw barracks and a gate: "Go in." So we came to those barracks. They told us we had to line up, "anschießen," in fives (?), everybody hooked

to one another, and they counted us. And we were, out of [the column], 1,400 people. We left the camp maybe 3,000. Half the people, on the way, didn't make it.

10:52 So I came, it was at night, after the counting, and they put me in the camp. We came to a barrack, a wooden barrack, and they said, "Rein, rein," and pushed us in, "rein, rein, rein." There was no light, there was nothing. I went in and they pushed. I came inside, I felt cold, I saw nothing; it was all dark. I felt snow, mud, snow. I found a little place near a wall, near the door, and I was standing over there. I couldn't even sit down; we were so close, one to another.

11:43 In the middle of the night a kapo came by with a flashlight and started to yell, "Raus, raus, raus!" He started to take out some people, maybe 20 people or something like this. "Come." I was one of them, because I was the last [one in]. We went a few hundred yards and came to a kitchen; we smelled some food. In the kitchen barrack there were some barrels with food, covered, made of tin, like, I would say, a big container (?), something like that. So he told us we should carry this to the barrack. So we started to carry, but a lot of people started to fall behind. They couldn't keep up close to one another. [Partly unclear:] I was on the left; [some] couldn't walk. He was ahead of us, and he showed us where to go. We were maybe ten (?) like this.

12:57 On the way I was putting it down; I wanted to rest a little bit. It came into my mind: I took what I had, my menashka, and I opened [the barrel], put my hand in and took some soup, and kept walking, and covered it up, and walking. I was so hungry. When I came close to the camp, to the barrack, I took another one, a little bit more. It was so hot, I burned my hand. I took a little bit more and wiped it off with the hands, and acted like nothing.

13:45 So he came to that barrack, and he took everybody outside. Outside it was a little bit light. He said they should stand in line, and he wanted to give a little bit of soup to the people. But the people started to fight; they started to attack. They were so hungry. And there were beatings over the head. Whoever could grab, whoever could take, took from the other. Who couldn't, didn't have anything. There was no order. People hadn't eaten for a couple of weeks, nothing. But I was lucky; I had the [soup].

14:30 Interviewer: Where were these barracks? Which camp was this?

This was Gross-Rosen. The name of that camp was Gross-Rosen. Most of the people in that camp, there were a lot of Germans and other nations; they had green triangles, like Verbrecher, criminals. There were red too, but the majority was green. We called it a green Winkel; Winkel is a triangle.

14:59 Interviewer: Approximately when did you arrive at Gross-Rosen?

We walked about two weeks. We left Blechhammer on January 21st. At the beginning of February 1945 we came.

15:14 So I was in that camp there, and people grabbed whatever. I was so lucky; I felt like I had won a million dollars. I ate a little bit of soup. I could have eaten ten times as much, but [I ate] a little bit and left a little bit in my menashka. So the next day I was in the barrack there, cold. The barrack was broken; the roof was broken, you saw the sky. I wanted to take a little bit of soup, and

one man from our people saw I had soup. He said, "Give me a little bit. You know what, I'll give you a scarf." He had a piece of white, grayish-white felt, a little thin felt. I don't know where he got it, maybe he found it somewhere. So he told me, "I'll give you this, give me a little bit," because we were so cold, everything all around. I gave him a little bit of soup and took that felt, that scarf, and put it on. I was warm here already.

16:25 I wore it maybe half an hour. All of a sudden I felt it itch me, itch, itch. Itching, itching, no end. I couldn't understand why I was itching so much. I took off the little scarf. I looked: maybe a thousand lice, all over the scarf. I don't know, it was terrible. So I threw it away right away. There were so many lice on us. In the [earlier] camps we used to go once a week to the showers to wash, and we got another shirt, a little bit. There were lice there too, but it was under control. But here it was very, very lousy.

17:12 I was in that camp, I don't know, maybe a week or so. I don't remember exactly the days. One day, the same thing, you have to go. They took a couple of thousand people out of the camp and took us to the railroad, not to the main station but a side track. Freight trains were standing there, maybe 20, 30, I don't know how many boxcars. But no roof. Instead of the roof there was barbed wire, wired up. They pushed us inside, like herring. We were sitting, and we started to move. We moved, we moved, then we were standing. We were closed up inside; we couldn't get out. Of course they locked the doors from outside.

18:15 I was in the [car] (?), and we used to hit one another: "You hit me, I hit you." We wanted to turn around, lying on the floor. You couldn't turn around; the whole line had to turn around. It was so close, like sardines in a box. And the cold, I don't talk about food, the cold killed you. Pinching, as we say in Yiddish, "you do to me, I do to you." Anyway, we went on like that four days.

18:59 The fourth day or the fifth day, I don't know, we came in the morning to a station. We used to move the wires a little bit to look out. We saw a lot of railroad tracks and a lot of freight trains. One man passed by, probably a railroad worker. So one guy asked him in German, "Entschuldigen Sie, was für eine Stadt ist hier?", excuse me, what city is this? He said, "This is Weimar." So we asked him, "Ist hier nebenbei ein Konzentrationslager?", is there a concentration camp nearby? He said yes. I don't remember, seven, eight kilometers. He said, "It's a big camp, Buchenwald." I had never heard of Buchenwald.

20:00 So we were sitting there in the morning, and suddenly the sirens started to blow, warning sirens; that means enemy airplanes are coming. We were boxed in; we couldn't move, we couldn't go anyplace. It took a few minutes. I saw one plane come; it made like a vapor sign. We looked and looked, and it was a few more minutes. I saw maybe a few hundred planes, maybe that many. They came and came [unclear: repetition loop]. All of a sudden I saw the bombs start to fall. The bombs don't go straight; they always go a little bit crooked. I saw the bombs coming like this. I covered my head so I shouldn't see anything, the eyes. And the explosions, no imagination what kind of explosions.

21:11 It took a couple of minutes, a few minutes, then it got quiet. Maybe ten minutes later, five minutes later, another wave came. So we started to rip off the wires, and one guy jumped out and opened the doors from outside; from inside you can do nothing. He opened the doors, and everybody ran out. We started to run. All of a sudden I saw a freight car standing there with cabbage, heads of cabbage. It was open. One guy jumped up and started to throw down cabbage. We grabbed it. I grabbed one and started to eat. I was hiding behind the car, and the bombs were falling. There were maybe three or four waves. It took maybe an hour or something like this. Some of our people got killed too. I heard that the last wagon, some wagon, was hit. Later we were running around all over. Then they gathered us and took us to another track, to a train, and put us in.

22:30 So we traveled maybe half an hour, and we came to the camp Buchenwald. Outside it was written, Buchenwald. We came into Buchenwald, and there was registration, also by camp people, special ones. There were all kinds of nations there, not only Jews; there were a lot of Germans. It was more, let's say, a political camp. It wasn't mostly criminals with the black [or green]; there it was mostly red. And we got registered. They took away the clothes and put us into the shower room. Before we went into the shower room there was a big kettle, a very big pot. Everybody had to get into the kettle, and you had to put, as you say, your whole body in. It was so burning; it was a special chemical, maybe to kill the lice or so. And then we had to go into the shower room. And then out the other side; once you came out, you couldn't go back.

23:56 Piles of clothing were lying around, and everybody had to go and look for clothes. I think they didn't have underwear; a shirt, a pair of pants. And there I dressed myself, and they put me in a barrack block, I remember it was 59, block 59. There was a big camp and a little camp. The little camp was inside the big camp, but it was separated. Only for an hour, when they opened it once a day, could you go out into the big [camp]. There were maybe ten barracks in the little camp. They put me in block 49, 59. I came in; there were platforms, no beds, platforms. They were [full] of people. I didn't have a mirror; I didn't see how I looked, but terrible, terrible, some people.

25:01 So I pushed myself in. Once a day they gave us very little pieces, a slice of bread, a little bit of soup. And I was in that barrack a few days. One time I was lying next to a man. They were mostly Hungarian Jews. That man and the others around me didn't know Yiddish, nothing, only Hungarian; some knew a few words. So the man spoke to me in Hungarian; I almost didn't understand. Mostly I understood from the hands; he showed me a little bit. One time the man told me, he could hardly speak, "Can you bring me some water? I'll give you a piece of bread." He showed me, under his head, because people used to steal. He said, "I'll give you a piece of bread, can you bring me some water?" But in the daytime they used to close the washrooms; you couldn't get it. I looked around; I was so eager to get a little bit of water [for him].

26:13 But at noontime there was the hour when the big camp was open, so I went into the camp, took water, ran back, and I thought I was going to get some bread. I came over to him. He was sleeping. I shook him and shook him. I saw the man was dead. No movement. I started to look for the bread. I didn't see any bread; probably they had taken it away. I didn't find anything.

26:43 And later, one day, I went out in the camp in the morning. I was looking around in the small camp, always looking. Maybe I'd find something. All your mind, all your imagination, was food: maybe I'll find something, a crumb. So I was looking around. All of a sudden I saw a kapo, a husky guy with a whip: "Come, come, come." So I went with him; later he gathered a few more guys. He took us; we went a few minutes. I came to a place where I saw like a barrack, but it was brick, with a chimney. I found out later this was a crematorium, in Buchenwald.

27:37 And outside there were [bodies] lying around, piled up, many hundreds, people lying half-naked. There were trucks. He wanted us to load the people onto the trucks. So I started to load, one grabbing the hands, one grabbing the [feet]. Sometimes I told the man, "Push up here." The truck was a little bit high; you push up, you throw it up. So I worked maybe ten, fifteen minutes. That kapo turned away; he walked up and down. He turned away. So I looked, he didn't see, and I ran away. Nearby was a barrack. I ran away; I couldn't do the work, I was falling down myself. This is what I remember.

28:27 They took me out of that barrack, in Buchenwald, and put me in the big camp, barrack 8. I was there a couple of days, and then they took me away to another camp, to work.

28:53 Interviewer: Okay, let's stop here to change tapes and we'll go on in the next tape.

Tape 7

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape7.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number 7, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997. You left Buchenwald?

So I was in Buchenwald maybe two weeks, something like this, maybe two and a half weeks. Later they took me out on trucks, me in a group of, I don't know, a couple of hundred people or something like this. We traveled a few hours and came to a camp, a little camp. They called it Bissingen. It's in Germany; I think it's near Stuttgart someplace. A few barracks were standing there, and it was a very shabby camp, all surrounded with wires; I don't remember if they were electric wires or something like this.

01:00 We came there and found some people there, not too many, a couple of hundred people. So we wanted some information. We asked them what kind of camp it was, whether it was a good camp, whether they at least gave you something to eat. I remember one guy from the old inmates; he had been in that camp a year, two years. He showed me, I still remember: "You see over there, there are maybe 600 people buried over there." They died from the circumstances. The same thing: no food, very little bread and a little bit of soup.

01:37 We had to get up; it was all the same. In the camp, I remember, there was a lot of mud. You walked in mud; you dragged yourself through mud. Every day we had to go to work. Big trucks came with stones, flat stones, grayish, dark gray stones. We had to unload them and spread them on the field. The field was a little bit, how do you call it, slanted, and we had to lay them on the slope. And later they set fire to it, they lit it up, and from the stones came out oil. They made some oil, and from the oil they made gasoline. We were guarded there and had to do it, like everywhere. Always, every minute, you heard, "Don't stand around, move."

02:47 Later, one time or so, two airplanes came, American airplanes. They came down so low over our heads, I saw them flying very low, and all around with machine guns. I heard them shooting on the roads; they saw some trucks, some cars. So I was in that camp not long, a few weeks, I don't know. Two, three weeks later they put us on trucks and took us away. They took us to Dachau.

03:24 Interviewer: What month are we in now?

This was already April, April '45. They took us to Dachau-Allach. Near Dachau, next to it, was another camp; it belonged to Dachau. They called it Dachau-Allach. We came there and they put us in the camp. Very bad, no food at all, no food. I remember we used to go around in the camp like crazy, looking for something. They gave a piece, I would say maybe [unclear: about 30 seconds missing from the machine transcript]. So we were in that camp, I don't know, ten days, eight days, something like this. That was the end of April 1945.

04:32 Later they took us away, again into boxcars. We went in and we traveled, ten, fifteen minutes or one, two hours [at a time] (?). The boxcars were closed. Everything was boxcars. But here it was different. In each car there were two SS men. In the middle, by the doors, you had to leave room free for them. They had a bench, I remember, a bench or a chair. They were sitting, and we had to move to both sides; the middle had to be empty. So we were sitting there, also very tight, and in hunger. We used to fight: one yelled, "You're lying on my foot, let me take out my foot!" We couldn't even move. And the SS were hitting us with the [rifle] butts. We were on this maybe four days, three, four days, something like this. We were mostly standing, moving a little bit, standing, moving, more standing.

05:56 It was the day of April 30, '45, in the morning. I had no watch, but I figure about nine, ten o'clock. One SS soldier came by and said to the soldiers that they had a meeting; they should come to the front of the train. So they left and locked the doors. They always left them a little bit open, a few inches, so air could come in, but they left and locked the doors. They were away maybe half an hour or something. They came back, and I saw that they started to go through their rucksacks, checking, checking. They took out some papers and ripped them up, something. It looked very, very fishy. And suddenly we started to hear explosions, boom, boom, and every few minutes, every ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, we heard it closer, closer, more machine guns, some artillery. So the Germans got scared. They locked the sliding doors.

07:27 We were sitting there and heard a lot of explosions. All of a sudden the door opened, and we saw a couple of soldiers standing with helmets, with machine guns, standing like this. We looked; we didn't know what was going on. It looked like one of the Seven Wonders. We didn't know what was going on. So the soldiers said to the Germans, "Raus, raus, raus!" Out, out, out. They got out and we jumped down from the car. We saw that about 20, 30, 40 yards away was the main road, and I saw soldiers with jeeps and jeeps and trucks and tanks, moving, moving. So they gathered the Germans from all [the cars]; there were maybe 50 of them there. And they took away the rifles they had.

08:46 Interviewer: Who had them?

The Americans. We didn't know; we thought maybe it was the Russians. [Partly unclear: a repetition loop.] I knew the five-pointed star, the white one, but I didn't know; the Russians also have a five-pointed star. We didn't know exactly. So a few guys ran to them [the Germans] and started to kick them. [The Americans] put them on their trucks, and they asked them what the destination was, where they wanted to take us, what they wanted to do with us. They said they had the order to take us to Tyrol (that's on the border of Germany with the Italians, there are a lot of big mountains there), and they had the order to take us there and kill us there in the mountains in Tyrol. That's what they said.

09:41 And so the Germans were taken away by the soldiers. We came to the road. The soldiers passed, passed. They started to throw us biscuits from their pockets, cans of food. We grabbed them. What can I say? I think we were like stoned. We didn't know what was going on. We were so

happy, we didn't know. We were all mixed up. It took a little time till we came to ourselves. It took two, three hours.

10:21 There were a couple of thousand of us, I think maybe 1,500 people. This was in a field; there were no houses. But next to it, I don't know, maybe 100 yards away, was a little town; the name was Staltach (?). There was a bigger little town, Iffeldorf. We started to run around to see where we were. So there was somebody I was a little close to; his name, I remember, was Teichmann. He was a few years older than me. We said, "Come, we go." I had a little bit of food already, a few crackers, a little canned food. I opened a piece; I remember they gave me like a little box. I opened it, I wanted to bite into it, and I saw it was soap. I didn't know; I thought it was some food. Some was milk powder; we got some of this.

11:30 So he said, "Come, we go." So we went and saw a house, a little house, a farmhouse like this. We came to the door and knocked. A German woman came and said, "Ja, was wollt ihr haben?", what do you want? I said, "Wir wollen hier übernachten, schlafen," we want to stay overnight here, to sleep. She was scared. [unclear: a repetition loop.] She had no choice; she let us in. We were in the apartment. I was in the room, and everything was so strange for me. I hadn't seen a normal apartment, with furniture, with everything. I don't know, I have no words.

12:30 So we stayed there. The night fell and we lay down there. I think I slept on the sofa there. They had two little girls (?), two girls came [in], and the man was a tall man, maybe 60, skinny, tall. So we were there, and I was sleeping. I was so scared, I was so scared. I always had in my thoughts that the Americans [would leave and] the Germans would come back. Every little movement, we jumped. They also had a clock, a chiming clock, that chimed every hour. It started to chime, and he [my friend] jumped. So he lay down, tired, broken, you can imagine, after all this, and he slept a little bit, but every minute he woke up, frightened, like this.

13:35 At daybreak I opened the window and looked out. There was maybe 20 inches of snow. This was May 1st, 1945, and everything was snowed up. Later the sun came out and everything started to melt. I stayed there, and in the daytime we went out to look around, like you say, to organize, maybe to find some food. We asked; they said, "We don't have anything, we have a little bit of potatoes." So we looked around, and I lived with them maybe a week and a half or something.

14:19 Later we heard that not far away they had opened a DP camp, a displaced persons camp, Feldafing. We should go there; we would get parcels from the Red Cross, we would get Verpflegung, meaning we would get some food. So I took that guy with me, and we started to walk. We went along the tracks. We asked; it was about 15, 16 kilometers, about ten miles away. We walked and walked and came to that camp. They said it was very close to the tracks, you'll see buildings there. We came there; it was an office. We registered, they took our names, and they told us to go take a shower. There was a shower room; there was water.

15:18 It was not barracks, it was brick buildings. It used to be a school of the Hitlerjugend, of the Hitler Youth, maybe seven, eight buildings, houses like this. And we lived there. We got a parcel from the Red Cross. There were beds, all double beds. In a room there were 20 people, ten beds. I

was there, and they gave us [food]. We got it from the American army; the food in Germany was from the army. But a few weeks later it was taken over by the organization, UNRRA, and [later] the IRO. And so we lived there; I lived in that camp.

16:22 And maybe two months later I was in the room, in my bed; it was already evening. All of a sudden people came; there were a few people in a barrack, I think. Somebody came in; it was already dark. He said, "Is there a Jew here? Is there anybody from Sosnowiec?" [There were many people from Sosnowiec there.] So a man from [the room] (?) said, "Yes, there's a young fellow here, a boy, a Sosnowiec boy." So I looked down. I saw somebody standing, a man, not shaven, in shabby clothes. I jumped down and came down. I saw the face was very familiar to me. It was family, but I didn't know [at first]; it was my brother. He had also been in another camp, but I didn't know. [Partly unclear.]

17:21 Interviewer: Which brother is that?

That is the brother who is still alive, in his 80s. He's in Borough Park. His name is Moshe. So I said, "How did you find me?" He said they had lists of the people moved from one camp to another. So he saw me on the list, "Lazer Lazerowitz, born October 25th, 1925, in Feldafing." He was about 30, 40 miles away. He was liberated over there too. He was liberated one day later, May 1st. So he saw it and he came. You can imagine how happy we were. He found me.

18:06 We were together with him for a few years (?). Later he found out [something]. He was in his 30s. He was 17 years [older than me] (?); he was from the first wife. He was [engaged] to a woman; he wanted to get married. That was before the war, but the war came. But he found out that the girl was alive and she was in Germany now, in a city named Bayreuth. Somebody came and told him that she was alive and living there. So he went there by railroad; it's a two-, three-hundred-kilometer distance. He came there and found her. He stayed in Bayreuth; she already had an apartment there. She had also been in Auschwitz. She was also liberated, but in a different place. And he stayed there, and two years later, I think in '47, he married that girl. He has three children with her.

19:35 And I stayed in the camp.

Interviewer: Until when?

I was in the camp till about July 1948. In July 1948 we always heard the news from Israel about the war, that the Arabs attacked Israel on May 15 ['48]. They started to ask for volunteers, whoever wanted to volunteer to go to Israel. So I said, "I'm going to Israel." Not only me; many young people went.

20:04 Interviewer: What were you doing in the two years you were in the camp?

Nothing. We went to the city, 20, 30 kilometers (?) away. It was Munich, München. We went there a little bit to look around; maybe from the GIs, from the soldiers, we bought some cigarettes, all kinds of things, sometimes a bottle of whisky. We used to sell it to the Germans and make a little profit, though it was forbidden. They called it Schwarzhandel, black marketeering. But what they gave you

in the camp wasn't enough. They gave a little bit of bread, a little piece of butter. You couldn't die, but it wasn't [enough]. You were already free. And that was the only possibility, because the Germans at that time were also on rations. But some people were rich; they came with a gold ring, a diamond. Those were the business people; they did a little bigger business. But I was naive. Whatever, a little bit. I saw a GI or something: "Do you have cigarettes to sell?" So I bought two packs; I gave him German marks. And then I used to sell them, to make a little profit. I used to go two, three times a week to Munich.

21:39 And as I said, it was in '48, in July, at the end of July, I think. They asked for volunteers to go to Israel. I said okay. We had a few friends; they said, "We'll go together." More or less, two friends and I joined up together. They took us with trucks to Marseille, not directly to Marseille, [to a place] on the Mediterranean. Then we got onto a boat. There were a few hundred from all different camps, DP camps. We were on the boat, and we went to Israel. We came to Israel, to Haifa. Right away they [sorted] us, with the doctors (?). People who had already married in the camp [were taken separately], and they separated the young people. They took me to a military camp; they called it Beit Lid. It's between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

22:50 I was there; they gave us the uniforms, the military uniforms. They sent us away to a kibbutz near the Syrian border, Kibbutz Dafna; there were two kibbutzim, Dan and Dafna. There was a man there who had been in the Haganah, and he gave us instruction. He gave us a rifle, a machine gun, and instruction how to shoot, how to [load], all kinds of instructions, how to climb, how to crawl, how to do this, for a few days. And then they sent me to the Syrian front. I was over there. From time to time we had to fight; we had to shoot; they shot, we shot back. I was there in the army, I would say at least about ten months.

23:52 They made the armistice with the Arabs, so they discharged me from the army. They discharged me and I came to Tel Aviv. I went to the special office. I had nobody in Israel, no relatives, nobody. So they gave me a little place to sleep in a hotel. They gave it to me on the roof, with a little folding bed, on the roof. At night it was so wet, so much moisture. And they gave it to you for two nights, three nights. And sometimes I came and they said they had no more room, they didn't know where to put me. I slept in the street. I was homeless, like you see the homeless on the street, me and my friends.

24:52 One friend had a relative; his name was Morgenstern. He took him in. Sometimes I came to visit my friend; he lived in Tel Aviv. I said to him, "I don't know where to go to sleep, I don't know what to do." So he asked his cousin, a second cousin, whether I could stay there. I slept on the floor. Okay, anyway, I was there, and I saw it was no good. There was no work. Here and there I got a day's work in construction, carrying bricks and this. I saw it was no good.

25:33 In the meantime my brother Moshe had married, and he emigrated to America in '49, at the end of 1949. They sent him to Cincinnati, Ohio. And I got in touch with him because my brother had a friend who had emigrated before the war, and I knew his address. My brother used to write to him, and he gave me the address in Cincinnati. So I wrote my brother. I told him the truth: "I don't

know what to do. I have no work, I have nowhere to sleep, I'm homeless. I made a big mistake going to Israel. I should have stayed with you." He had told me, "Maybe we stay together, maybe you don't go," but I wanted to go to help out, and my friends took me along, so I went to Israel. So I told him, "What can I do? Maybe you can help me come to America or something."

26:40 So he told me, it took a couple of months, he sent me a few dollars. He told me he had gotten information, but he could do nothing. He was not a citizen, he had been only a few months in America, he himself had two little children, and he worked, made a living, but about immigration he could do nothing. But he was told that it might be possible if I went back to Germany as a refugee, to get back the status, stateless and a refugee; over there maybe something could be done. But from Israel they could do nothing. Maybe I should sign up under the Polish quota; it might take five, seven years.

27:32 So I stayed another few months or so; it was no good. So I wrote him that I had decided to go back to Germany, but I had no money. So he sent me, I think, \$150. I took the money, and I had to get a permit to leave Israel; it wasn't so easy. They gave me the permit, and I went back to Germany, back to that camp, to Feldafing, where I had lived, the DP camp. They gave me the status, but not all the rights [as before]. So I was there until 1956. But I was [living] in Munich. Later the Germans, in 1949, already started to rebuild; the Marshall Plan came. I was already starting to live well (?). [Partly unclear:] People gave me a little bit of money, like what they give the poor here.

Interviewer: Welfare.

Welfare, yes. They gave me a few dollars. In 1956, that was my luck, they called me and gave me the visa to go to America, and I came at the end of '56. I came to America.

29:08 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Okay, yes.

Tape 8

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape8.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; names of possibly living family members replaced with bracketed descriptions; not checked against the video.

00:00 Interviewer: This is tape number 8, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11th, 1997. Do you remember the name of the ship which brought you to America?

It was an army ship. It was a ship they used to bring GIs from America to Germany. It's not a passenger ship. And from Germany they used to take people, emigrants, to America. I don't know [the name]; it was an army ship. The crew was army too.

00:35 Interviewer: Where did you settle when you came to America?

I got off in New York. Somebody from HIAS was waiting for me there. She took me to Pennsylvania Station, put me on the train, and sent me to Cincinnati, Ohio, and she informed my brother that I was coming. I traveled the whole night, I remember. In the morning, as I say, in December 1956, I came [to Cincinnati] on the train, to the railroad station. My brother was there for me. He was very happy; we kissed.

01:20 He took me home, to his wife. He had two little children; now he has three. One was born later; no, all three children were already born. Later he stayed with me a little bit and said, sorry, he had to go back to work, because they needed him very badly. So I stayed. My sister-in-law gave me to eat and showed me the television. I was very, very happy. I was with them a few months, two, three months, something like that.

01:59 Before (?), in the DP camp, they made courses to learn trades, tailoring, a few things. So I picked dental technician; they had a course, dental technician. I worked at it a little bit, a few months, a few hours a day. I went to the school, and there was an instructor, a teacher. He showed us, and let us do a little bit of modeling ourselves, this and that. But I didn't learn enough. Then I left for Israel, so I stopped in the middle.

02:40 I came to Cincinnati, and I didn't know what to do. My brother looked around: what can he do? So they went to the organization, to HIAS. They asked me what I knew. I said I knew a little bit of dental technician work; I hadn't finished, but I had an idea. So they got in touch with a dental technician company, and they put me in there after a few weeks. I worked there a little bit, helping out here and there, not the main work. He gave me the minimum wage; I think it was a dollar an hour at that time. I worked maybe approximately two months, something like this.

03:26 But to tell the truth, I wasn't happy. There was no social life. I was with my family, very nice, everything. But there were no young men like me to go out with. I was already in my late 20s, looking around, maybe I'd find a girl to get married or something. There were a few single people there; we used to meet after work on the weekend. But there was no place to [meet someone] to get

married, no social life. Only New York is a very good place, more European, more Jewish people. One man said, "I'm going to Los Angeles." No, I decided, I said to my brother, "I'm going to New York. I'm going to see what's going on."

04:12 I came to New York. Some family had given me an address for when I came to New York; I should call that number, maybe they would know where I could go. I didn't know anybody in New York. So I came to the station, Pennsylvania Station, and called that number. It was a family that lived on the East Side, in Manhattan, on the Lower East Side. The name was Berman, I think. It was a friend [of a friend]. I came and said I was coming from Cincinnati. This family had heard of someone with a room to rent, a family with a few children, and they said yes. I took a taxicab; I didn't know how to go. I had seen the subway, but I didn't know how to use it. I took a taxicab from Pennsylvania Station to 6th Street between Avenues C and D. That was Jewish then. I came with two suitcases. I came up: "Hello, hello." They showed me a little, little room, [with room only] for the bed and a little chest of drawers.

05:33 [They told] me if I wanted, they could rent it to me. How much? Only \$20 a month. I looked in, I said, what is this, nothing. But I had no choice. I said, "Maybe I can rent it weekly?" They said yes, \$5 a week. So I gave them \$5 and I stayed there. The next day I went around New York and started to look around; maybe I'd meet somebody, maybe I'd need somebody. Anyway, maybe a week or two later I was disgusted. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't have too much money either, a few dollars.

06:15 So I met a friend I had been with in the concentration camp. He was an older guy, much older. I was in my late 20s, you must say; he was already maybe 40 at least. His name was Kupferberg, Haskell Kupferberg. By his profession, his trade, he was a painter, a house painter. So I met him, and he said, "What are you doing?" I told him the whole thing, that I had been a couple of months in Cincinnati and had come to New York, I didn't like it over there, there was no social life, but I didn't have a job, I didn't know where to go, what to do. He said, "You know what, I work for myself. I'm not working steady; here and there I get a job." He had been a painter from before the war. "You come with me, I'll teach you a little bit. I'll break you in, like you say."

07:12 So he took me, and I worked with him another few weeks, on and off, a little bit. He also paid me about a dollar an hour. He showed me, explained to me this and that. Later he said that he was going to Canada; he had some relatives there. He said he had somebody, a guy also from his city, also a painter, and he was going to recommend me to him. So he called him up. His first name was Leib. He said, "Leib, [he's] a good boy, he's a painter. I know he's a good painter, but in America they work differently than in Europe; he worked in Europe a little bit. Take him. When he doesn't know something so well, look away, help him a little bit." He said, "Let him come."

08:12 So I went to work with him. I started to work; I worked the first day. I knew [the trade], but everything was different. He asked me how much I wanted. I said I didn't know. He said, "I'll give you fifteen dollars a day," approximately two dollars an hour. I said good; I was happy. I worked with that man a good few years. Later he gave me a raise; he gave me two and a half dollars an hour.

I worked with him. Later, after a good few years, I had saved up penny by penny; I already had a few thousand dollars.

08:53 And from the woman where I lived, I moved. It was so small. It was summertime; it was so hot. I was dying from the heat. I couldn't sleep at night. So I moved to Brooklyn. Somebody recommended me. So I took a room in Brooklyn, a nice room, a bigger room.

09:15 I was there a few years. I already had a few thousand dollars saved. I used to go out and look, maybe I'd find somebody. I was already in my 30s. So it came to my mind; I used to talk with boys like me, and they said, "Here in America, if you're not a money-maker, if you don't have some profession or something, forget about it. You have to be very, very lucky to find a girl to get married. Maybe in Israel." So I got the idea and said, okay, let me go to Israel. So I took off and went to Israel by ship. That was the end of '63, with the boat, and I came to Israel.

10:08 I had some relatives, a little bit. She had also gone from Germany; they were concentration camp people caught by the English, and they were in Cyprus a year and a half. I found out her address, so I came there and stayed with them a little bit. And I went to Tel Aviv to look around. It was the same city; I hadn't been there since '49, and now it was '63, '64, the beginning of '64, a good few years.

10:38 I looked around until I met somebody. I made friends with a woman who had a store, and she said, "You know, I have a nice girl. She always comes around here. She works here in a hospital, a private hospital. She comes here and buys some fruit." There was not much fruit; an apple was a big deal. "She comes by to buy an apple or something. She comes by almost every day around three, four o'clock, when she finishes her job. Be here when she comes by, and maybe you'll make friends with her." One day, after two, three days, she came by and I was in the store. The woman said, "Oh, this is the girl." So we started to talk a little bit. I talked Hebrew, but very, very poorly, very badly. So I talked, and the woman made a date for us. I went out with her a few times.

11:46 Later she took me to her house. [They were] Sephardic; she told me she was born in Libya, born over there. We went out, and later, after a few weeks, I told her I wanted to get married. I liked her, and I saw she was the same as a Yiddish balabuste, a real homemaker. I saw the house, I saw the mother, an elderly woman. She had a few brothers, married brothers. And so I married her. I went to the Tel Aviv Rabbinate, and they made a little wedding. I invited a few people. I still have some pictures.

12:30 I married her, and later I went to the American consulate. "I am married, I want to take my wife to America." I showed them the marriage license. The consulate told me, "You can take her, but as a procedure, it takes a couple of months, two, three months." I said okay. So I registered. I had to bring copies of the marriage license and everything. She had to bring the papers. It took a few months, and she got the visa to go to America.

13:02 And I brought her over to New York, to America, and I rented an apartment, and we lived there. I went back to work for the same man I had worked for. We furnished ourselves little by little,

some furniture, some this. I lived in Crown Heights, in a private four-family house. At that time, in '65, Crown Heights was still good. Later she got pregnant, and my older son was born.

13:36 Interviewer: What's his name?

[Name omitted for privacy], after my father. Two years later another son was born. He has two names, [names omitted for privacy], after her father. Then a few more years, and my little daughter came. [Name omitted for privacy], the name of my mother. That is how it was here.

14:14 I worked as a painter. I left that man and joined the union, because they needed [painters] (?). [Partly unclear.] I was in the union until seven years ago, 1990. I was 65; I retired. It's seven years that I've been retired. I live from the pension, Social Security. I get a little check from Germany, a few hundred dollars, and a few dollars from the union. So I live, not rich, but, like I say, I can get by.

14:56 I gave my children a good education. I sent them to the best schools. They went to the Flatbush Yeshiva, the best. After the Flatbush Yeshiva, when they finished, I sent them to Yeshiva University. They went four years to Yeshiva University. My younger son studied to be an accountant. He works in a big accounting company and makes a nice living. He's already married.

15:23 My oldest son wanted to be a doctor, but later he changed his mind. He went to the hospital and saw once how they do an operation, how they open [the patient] up, and he said he couldn't take it. I saw right away; I told him, "It's not for you. You have to be [made for it]." So I said, "You want to be a lawyer?" He had a friend, and he decided to go to law school. So he went to San Diego, California. [I told him,] here [at home] his mother would ask him the whole day, "What do you want to eat, what do you want to drink?" No, you want to be free; otherwise you will never learn. So he went there, to San Diego. It was approximately three years, I think two and a half, because he took two [semesters] together. So he came back as a lawyer. The first couple of years he worked for somebody, but the last year, two years, he started on his own. You know how it is: he makes a living; sometimes he's busy, sometimes he has nothing to do. And a few months ago, six, four months ago, he got married.

16:43 But my youngest, my daughter, when she was 18 she fell in love with a young man. She went out with a girlfriend and met him, and she came home and said she had found a nice, beautiful, handsome man, a good man. He's Iranian; he came from Iran. He ran away because they wanted to take him into the army, to the war against the Iraqis. They smuggled him out to Pakistan, and from Pakistan to Austria. He was a poor guy, but a very nice man. He lived with a family [here]. I started to talk to her: "What do you need this for? You're a beautiful girl. You're young, you're 18 years old." But I saw I could do nothing with her. She insisted. I said, "What can I do? Make a wedding." And she got married. It's not too bad; that's it.

17:34 My younger son, as you call him, went to Yeshiva University, and he got acquainted with a girl from Stern College. And she fell in love with him. He was very, very good; he used to give concerts there. He's a very, very good piano player, something special. He used to have teachers who came in. One teacher always made me compliments. He said, "[He] was born for the piano and the

piano was born for him." He was the best in classical music, Chopin and Mozart. Till today he's a very good player. But he finished as an accountant; now he works for a big accounting company in Manhattan [address omitted].

18:35 Interviewer: Mr. Lazerowitz, can you tell me what happened to all your brothers and sisters?

Yes. When I went to the camp, my one sister, the oldest sister, what I found out after the war (I met her a few months later; she was liberated by the Russian army over there in East Germany, close to Poland): approximately a month [after me] they took her away, and three little children remained, three little girls by themselves.

19:13 Interviewer: Which sister is this again?

The youngest one was Gitel. This was in '43; she was born in '33; she was ten years old. One sister, her name was Chana, born two years [earlier], in 1931; she was twelve years old. One was two years younger than me, Hendel; this is the girl that I ran away with, saved from the roof. The three were by themselves.

19:45 And the brother, Moshe, the step-, the half-brother, they took him away maybe two weeks before me; they also took him to the camp.

Interviewer: Which camp?

He was in Auschwitz. After Auschwitz they sent him to Warsaw. After the uprising (?) in Warsaw, they sent a few hundred people from Auschwitz to clean up the ghetto; they sent him to Warsaw. He was in Warsaw, in a camp. It was in 1944, when the Russians came into Poland. So they took them to Dachau. He was in Dachau. From Dachau there were little camps, 10, 20, 30 miles away, Kaufering; the camps had names like Lager 7, Lager 1, Lager 4. He was in one of those camps at the end of 1944 and 1945. The same thing happened to him: at the end of the war they took them out on a march, like I said, toward the mountains, and he was liberated on the way, also by the American army.

21:08 Interviewer: What happened to the other sisters?

The little sisters remained in the ghetto. And then about September, a few months later, September '43, they closed it up, you mean liquidated. They took them all and sent them away.

21:33 One brother from the first wife, from the other mother: Kalman. We found out after the war that there was a disturbance (?); people started to shoot, and they shot him. He was killed. [unclear: a long repetition loop of about a minute and a half; the content is lost.] And [we heard] no more. They took away everybody. And this is the end. We never saw anybody, not the other brothers, not the sisters. They got the uncle, they got my brother, they got my mother, a brother, a few children, everybody, everybody. That is the end.

23:24 Interviewer: Do you still have dreams or nightmares about [it]?

Very bad. Very bad dreams. Up until today, but less. But still: running, they're chasing me, jumping. Very bad dreams. I got sick. Till today I have high blood pressure. I have to take three pills a day to

control it. [Partly unclear: he describes the doctor changing his pills because the pressure was very high; he takes three pills, one at night.] Later I got sick too. I started to get dizzy, and I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I went to the doctor; I have a good doctor, a nice man, Dr. Salomon. Years ago we used to go [to him]. I told him I didn't know what was happening to me, that a few times a day I felt like I was having a heart [attack]. [unclear: a short repetition loop.]

25:08 About 20 years ago I received a letter from the German consulate. Since I had been in the camp Blechhammer, they were looking for witnesses: could I come to be a witness for something. They gave me a date, and I shouldn't worry, they would pay me whatever I lost for the day. So I went up to the German consulate on Park Avenue, about 20 years ago, something like this. I brought the letter, and they took me to a room. There was a woman, and she asked me if I wanted English or German. I said, "I speak German like English, no difference."

25:59 She asked me in German whether I knew somebody in the camp who had been an SS guard; the name was Tamex (?). I said, "Yes, I know him." She asked me how he looked. He was very tall, not fat but slim and tall, with reddish-blond hair. "He's a very bad guy." And I told her that he was the one who came to inspect, to see if everything was all right, if we were working. And I told her he came with another SS man, with black hair, a husky guy, a strong husky guy. She asked me if I knew his name. I said, "I don't know." I remembered a little bit: they used to call him "der Knochenbrecher," the bone-breaker. When he hit you, he had to break something; a bone was broken. In German, Knochen is the bone. And they always came on a motorcycle. And I told her about that Tamex: "I still have the scars. He beat me up, he broke a few of my teeth." And she wrote everything down, and then she thanked me.

27:26 She asked me a few more details and asked how much I made a day. I don't know, I said \$50 or so. And a week later, two weeks later, they sent me a check, \$60. They sent me that. That's it.

27:47 Interviewer: We're going to stop here to change tapes.

Tape 9

Method: cleaned from a Whisper machine transcript (Lazer_Lazerowitz_Tape9.de.srt); his English kept with light cleanup, German-like and Yiddish stretches translated, repetition loops collapsed, uncertain readings marked (?) and lost passages [unclear]; names of possibly living family members replaced with bracketed descriptions; not checked against the video.

00:02 Interviewer: This is tape number 9, interview of Lazer Lazerowitz, December 11, 1997. When we were discussing your youth, you said that you grew up in an observant, an Orthodox home.

Orthodox home, yes.

00:19 Interviewer: How would you describe yourself now, religiously?

Modern Orthodox. I go to shul every Shabbos, and we observe the Shabbos. We don't answer the telephone, we don't put on the lights. We have a kosher home. In the same way I brought up my children. They also wear yarmulkes; maybe in New York they take them off sometimes, I don't know, but usually, yes.

00:54 Interviewer: Has your experience, what you've been through, affected your faith at all?

No, I wouldn't say so. But sometimes you start to think: why did all this happen, why did God punish the Jewish people like this? Sometimes you ask questions of rabbis, and they always tell you this and that: this is the gezeirah, the decree, on the Jewish people; this is faith; we will be rewarded (?) for all this; the time will come. Something like this. But I still try to hold myself to being religious. My wife too. She also comes from a religious life, Sephardic, a little bit different. But she, more than me, watches out for kashrut. I eat kosher too, but she's like this: what plate you took, what it is, so there shouldn't be a mix, taking a milk plate for meat, or a spoon, which spoon. We keep kosher.

02:14 And every Shabbos, in the middle of the week, I won't say [always], sometimes, but Friday night and Shabbos I go every time. They know me already. I daven here in the shul in Brighton Beach. There's a shul; I've been davening there for 35 years, since I've lived here in Brighton Beach. The name is the Hebrew Alliance. The rabbi is Rabbi Hollander; I don't know if you've heard of Hollander. I've been there 35 years. On Friday night I go here around the corner, to the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, because it's night, it's dark, it's a walk, and I don't want to walk at night. So I go here at night, and on Shabbos morning at nine o'clock I go over there, almost every Shabbos. They know me already. Now there are very, very few people, so I don't want to miss it; there should be a minyan.

03:18 Interviewer: Before we finish this interview, is there anything you'd like to say about your experience, any message?

What shall I tell you? When you're younger, you're busy with work, you try to build up the family, to bring them up, so they should be educated; you want to see a little nachas. You don't even have time to think too much. You come home, it was hard. I worked very hard, because I made a good living,

especially in the union. But you have to do a lot of work. They tell you, "This job has to be finished by such and such." So you come home tired; you didn't have time to think too much. You pushed through the week, looking forward to Shabbos, to Sunday, to the weekend.

04:24 But for several years now, you're retired already, almost doing nothing, a little bit of shopping, a little bit here, a little bit there. You start to think about the past and about life, about your family. Your brain works more about the past, about everything that happened to you. Yes, it does. Mostly I wake up in the middle of the night. Many, many times I'm dreaming. It's faded already, but walking, running, this and that. I see the uniforms, the Gestapo. They're screaming, yelling, this and that.

05:13 But something else I forgot to tell you, about my brother's store. He tried to keep up the store. We made a double, how do you say, a double bottom [ceiling]. We used to hide ourselves there. Sometimes we found out [in advance]; we had people in the Ordnungsdienst, the police. My brother had somebody who used to come to him and say, "Something is going to happen tonight. They're going to take people out." So we took our family to that store, because it was locked up with shutters, and there was an entrance from the back, an iron door, and we closed it from the inside. We felt safer, because it was commercial, a store. When we found out something was going to happen, we went to that store. My brother also took a few other people in; he said, "Come." We smuggled ourselves in through the back.

06:20 We got in, and at nine, ten o'clock at night we saw it was already lively outside. In the front there was a glass door, covered with, how do you call it, a curtain. With the curtain, yes. So it was always dark inside. We always walked slowly to the front. We saw the Germans yelling, with the boots, and the Ordnungsdienst, schlepping people, noise. We were so quiet, and scared to death.

07:04 One time we were inside, and there was banging on the back door, the iron door: "Aufmachen! Aufmachen!", open up! With the rifles, with the butts, maybe for a couple of minutes. We got so scared. Then we heard one of the two SS men say to the other, "Niemand ist drin, das ist ein Laden," nobody is inside, it's a store. And there were a few people inside. One man, I remember the name, an old man, his name was Shaul. He fainted (?). And his wife started to scream, "Oh, water, water!" And we got so scared. They had already moved away from the door, but we could still hear them from a distance, walking. And another two guys, excuse me, got diarrhea from fear. There was no toilet there; you had to give him a pot or something. It stank. Very, very bad. The young people, we climbed up into the double bottom, into the ceiling, covered it, and lay there shivering.

08:36 From time to time we found out that something was going to happen; we got a little information. [Somebody] was a little friendly with my brother: "Watch out, something is going to happen tonight." They used to drag out the people to transports and take them away, 500 people, 1,000 people, every few weeks. And that was the life.

09:08 Interviewer: Is there something you'd like to say to your children?

What I'd say to my children? I have very good children. They are Jewish, they went to good yeshivas, religious yeshivas. [Partly unclear:] The children don't know [everything] about the

Holocaust. But the yeshivas, Yeshiva of Flatbush and Yeshiva University, they know; they give them lectures about it. Even my little granddaughter (in the picture she was small) also goes to Flatbush. She comes home; one time she asked me, "Saba," she calls me Saba, Hebrew for grandfather, "Saba, there was a Holocaust; you too?" Because she hears sometimes about the camp. She says, "You were also in the camp? Tell me what it was like there." What I want to bring out is that they're very good children and they know more or less what happened. Not exactly, not all the details like I told you now.

10:25 But I went through it, and what happened to my family: we had a very big family. My father had two brothers, with grown children, married, and grandchildren, a family of a few hundred people. Only one second cousin from my father's side survived. He was also from where my father was born, a little town, Wodzisław. I met him here in America; I found out that he is here. And from my mother's side, Greenblatt, she also had three brothers. From one brother, one cousin is alive; he's still alive, he lives here in New Jersey, in Edison (?), New Jersey. And from another brother, one daughter; her name is Esther, too. She is in Israel. She lives in Israel. She's a widow. Her husband was in the army, a professional soldier. He passed away; he had a heart attack too. She has two children. Two years ago I was in Israel for a visit, and I visited her. I have some pictures.

11:48 We talked about everything. When we come together, my brother and I, mostly the subject is only the past, memories, this and that. But anyway, of the whole family, we are a lucky family, because we are three. People are jealous: to have three alive. Some families, not even one is alive. Like I told you, from my mother's side and my father's side there were maybe a hundred, from this side and this side. I could tell you the names. I remember they were big families; Polish Jewish people mostly had big families. Two, three people are alive.

12:37 We come together. I always go to visit my brother. He's in his late 80s; he's sick. He can't walk anymore; his legs are stuck; he can walk with a cane a little bit, from here to here. I go often, every week, two weeks; we talk on the telephone, I come to visit. Mostly what we talk about is just memories. [Partly unclear:] [I] always say: by the end, I had the feeling this was the end, something bad was going to happen. We saw it already, but we didn't believe it. We always said, as long as we can breathe. I didn't know what to do; what could we do? I lived in the ghetto, we lived in the attic, there was a little window, and I looked down; there was a big field. I always stood near the window and said, "If I could go onto this field and make a little hole and hide myself." But it was impossible.

13:49 Interviewer: You knew something was going to happen to you.

We knew and we didn't know. We knew already that we were going to be, as we say, exterminated, killed, but not 100 percent. Human beings are like this. Even when they take you to shoot you, to kill you, you think, the instinct, maybe the rifle will jam, it won't shoot, or when they hang you, maybe the rope will break. You don't believe it. That is human nature. Because you get like a stone; you get stony. Like I told you, on the day they took away the people to the gas chamber, he came to me and asked me, "Bist du gesund?" I was like a piece of stone. I couldn't move my body. And I said,

"Ja, ich bin gesund." And a few seconds later he said, "Du hast Glück." [Partly unclear:] You are like stone, but you are trembling, inside, everything inside trembles. But you're motionless.

15:05 The same thing when I ran away in Sosnowiec. Like I told you, they sent me back to go to Auschwitz with the old people, with the children. And I ran away; I told you, I went up into the attic, I went up onto the roof. Your mind works overtime. You're so concentrated, you get ideas. Your life is at stake, life and death, and you get ideas.

15:40 What can I tell you? I live, and I'm happy that I survived, and I'm happy that I can tell you, I can tell all the stories, and [leave them for] the children of all the Jewish people. They should know what happened. They should know what happened to us. That's it.

16:03 Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Pardon? No. That's it.

16:10 Interviewer: I want to thank you for letting us interview you.

You're welcome. I'm very happy that people maybe can learn from all this, know what went on.

16:26 Interviewer: Who's in this picture?

This is my father.

Interviewer: What was his name?

His full name was Aharon Shmuel Lazerowitz.

16:40 Interviewer: When was this picture taken?

I think it was taken in 1936, in Sosnowiec.

16:48 Interviewer: How did you get hold of this picture?

I got hold of the picture after the liberation. My sister went back to the ghetto, to Środula, where we lived. I still remember the name of the street; the name was Kurzheile (?). And she went to that house, to that attic. She met a Polish man, a Gentile. He asked her, "What do you want?" She told him in Polish that we had lived there in the ghetto during the war. And she recognized some furniture too. She begged him, "Maybe you can give me some pictures." She didn't tell him about the furniture, nothing. She said, "Maybe you have some pictures here of my family." He said, "I didn't find anything. I have nothing." She started to beg him. She promised him, she gave him some food, a little bit of money. He told her she should come back in two weeks; he would start to look around. So in two weeks she came back, and he gave her one picture. This is only a copy. He gave her a picture; she paid him, she gave him some money. And this is the only picture, he said, that he found. That's how it was. So we made some copies, and my brother even had it enlarged.

18:20 Interviewer: What is this document?

The document was from 1950. I lived in the DP camp, Feldafing. They put up some posters. I read a poster that said they had found documentation about some people from the concentration camps,

not all, some, with an address: you should write to this address, and if they found something for me, they would send it to me. So there was a form to fill out, my name, when I was born, and I sent it to the address that was written there. It took a while, maybe a few months or something. One day I received this document, this documentation.

19:26 It's written where they found that I was in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, it's written here, 179,419. That was when I came to Gross-Rosen. Later, from Gross-Rosen I came to Buchenwald, and they wrote down the number from Buchenwald, because in Buchenwald they also gave me a piece of linen on my breast. It was 125,284. This I remembered a little bit, but it wasn't clear. This is written here in the documentation, the number from Buchenwald. Later they wrote that from Buchenwald they sent me to work, to a camp; the name is Bissingen, Natzweiler-Bissingen. They found documentation in Bissingen. They write here that I came to Dachau-Allach, Dachau. And my name, my inmate number, Häftlingsnummer, all that is written in the documentation. This is what I found. This is what I have.

20:45 Interviewer: Mr. Lazerowitz, who is here with you?

This is my oldest son, [name omitted for privacy]. This is my youngest, my daughter, [name omitted for privacy]. I have another son, [name omitted for privacy], but unfortunately he couldn't come. He lives far away. I spoke to him last night. He said he was sorry; if it had been on the weekend or something, or if I had told him a few weeks ahead, maybe he could have done something. [unclear]

21:16 Interviewer: [Name omitted], is there something you'd like to say about your father's experience, what it means for you?

[His son:] Well, I feel badly that he went through the experience. I mean, there's no way I could ever understand what he went through. On the other hand, I'm very proud of the fact that after he got out of it, he accomplished as much as he did. I mean, he raised a family, he got married, he put kids through school. He's really done a lot, and it's incredible. And it touches me a lot. It makes me feel proud of him. I have a lot of respect for him. He worked hard even after the Holocaust and after the war. It wasn't easy for him. He had to go to work every day. He was the sole provider. He worked hard. I remember mornings he'd be waking up at four, five o'clock in the morning to go to work. It was a physical kind of job, and he did a really good job. And I'm proud of him.

22:28 Interviewer: [Name omitted]?

[His daughter:] Well, I'm very proud that he's my father, because I feel like he's a very determined man. He's a very strong man, because after all that he's been through, after losing your whole entire family to such a tragedy like that, to be able to provide for a family and want the best for your family and give them the best education and work so hard for them, it just shows me you have to be a very tough and very strong and very determined human being to do that, after such a horrendous tragedy that you've been through as a child, as a teenager, losing everybody to that. So he really bounced back, as they say, in a very big way. And I'm very proud of him. And I feel like it's an honor that I know somebody that close to me who was a survivor, because a lot of people hear about it but just can't imagine what these people have gone through. And I feel that it's really kind

of a privilege for me to have him as my father, and to really understand first-hand all the suffering that he's been through and all the courage that he had, and to hear the stories first-hand. And I'm very proud of him.

23:36 I remember as a little kid hearing some of the stories. Most were in response to, as you probably know, my father has a number on his arm. And when you're a little kid and you see a tattoo and you see numbers, you really don't know what it is. You'd maybe see it on a biker one day, or something. He would start to tell us stories about the concentration camps and his life in Poland as a little kid. He really didn't talk very much about it, I suspect because he probably didn't want to share all the horrors, and it was hard for him to talk about it. So as I grew older, I did a lot of reading about the topic myself, immersed myself in it, became very familiar with all of that.

24:32 But despite the fact that he didn't talk much about it, I know that there were some things that were very important to him. One of those things was certain dates, what we call anniversary dates. He would always mention two very important dates that I remember. One of them was September 1st, which was the anniversary of Germany invading Poland, if I'm not mistaken. And the other date was April 30th, 1945, which was the day that he was liberated. And every year on those dates, wherever I was, he would come find me and say, "You know, 40 years ago on this date I was liberated," or, "30 years ago on this date Germany invaded Poland."

25:22 That started the trouble. When they invaded, I told you, they started shooting and killing.

Interviewer: That's really when your whole life changed.

Always when September 1st came, I said, "Today started the Yiddishe tzores, the Jewish troubles." And April 30th [he says "April 3rd"]: "This is my anniversary. I was born again. I was liberated by the American army," I told them.

25:50 Interviewer: You were given a second chance?

Yes. About noontime. I was liberated; a new man was born. I always told them, "My liberation day." I say, "Maybe I'll take a little bit of whiskey." I take it.

26:05 Interviewer: Thank you all very much.

Thank you.