

Interview with Natan Zielon  
Conducted on October 1, 2010

*Edited Transcript*

Natan Zielon will be identified as **NZ**

Devon Gladstone will be identified as **DG**

**DG:** It's October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. I'm here with Natan Zielon. My name is Devon Gladstone, we are at his home in Boca Raton, Florida. Natan can you state your name for me please?

**NZ:** Okay, Natan. This is without the H. N-A-T-A-N.

**DG:** And the last name?

**NZ:** Z-I-E-L-O-N. No middle name.

**DG:** Describe your life in Poland before World War II.

**NZ:** Well, before World War II?

**DG:** Your family life?

**NZ:** I was with the parents. They were in dairy business, and I help out, I was a young boy.

**DG:** Did you have a large family?

**NZ:** I had a sister. She was younger, and I had a brother. And two kids died when they were babies. And we were three children.

**DG:** Was your family religious?

**NZ:** Yes, my father was very religious.

**DG:** What city were you from in Poland?

**NZ:** Well I was born in Wodzisław. And that was not a big city. And, but raised, I was in Kraków.

**DG:** What was your community like?

**NZ:** You mean where I was born? Or in Kraków?

**DG:** In Kraków.

**NZ:** Oh Kraków was a big city. It was, there were probably about 250,000, lots of Jews were there.

**DG:** Did you have many non-Jewish friends?

**NZ:** Yes.

**DG:** Do you remember experiencing anti-Semitism when you were growing up?

**NZ:** [Laugh] I don't have to think too hard. Eighty percent from the Jewish people in Poland, they were killed by the Pollacks. Directly and un-directly. What means un-directly is, for instance, when the Germans came in, we never experienced something like this. Nobody knew something like this could be happening with crematories and with gas chambers. We didn't know even what the meaning from this. But people were preparing. Lately, what we hear. What happened like, okay I live in Boca, the next one is Delray, the next one is Boynton Beach. When I hear what was in Boynton Beach what was in Delray I could expect the next one was going to be here.<sup>1</sup> So we were preparing. What you mean by preparing? Like the parents were preparing the children. They were giving them bag in case we run away night time, and we get separated, they should have something like to put the bread in or to put some clothes in. When we run away night time and they surrounded the town. What those Polish people were doing, they were standing on the outskirts. You know what means the outskirts? They were standing outskirts with dogs, and catching us, and taking the bags away from us. And after that, after took the bags away even, they turned us over to the Germans. If we were running away, they turned us over to the Germans. And, there was...well, I have to skip too much. When we were running away, there was lots of times there was force around us, you know? Lots of times, oh they going tonight, they going take us. But, this one, the last time when we run away there was not a force around. And, I was in a little town at that time. That was in Wodzisław, ya the little town I came back from Kraków.

**DG:** When did you move to Kraków?

**NZ:** Oh I was probably about ten years old. [Pause] And when we run away that night every parents told the children, in case we get separated in night time, we have to meet wherever there was some woods over there. Maybe about seven eight miles from where we were. There was hundreds of miles of woods over there. Then we going regroup over there. We know who survived, who got shot or something like this. So I run, my father was caught right away over there. He tried, he tried he had a box of jewelry over there from his great-grandma, he tried to hide his basement. He got caught right away. Me and my brother, we run away, and my mother and sister a few minutes later, they run away but we got separated anyway. Night time we were running, we didn't know where we were running. We got separated in the morning we met over there in those woods. When I come in the morning over there, if I would have atomic bomb I would throw over there destroy the whole Polish...people. What they done, you saw little girls...seven, and eight,

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<sup>1</sup> Boca Raton, Delray, and Boynton Beach are neighboring towns in Palm Beach County, Florida.

and nine, and ten year olds. They were already in October, its cold over there, you know? They strip them nude and they rape them, and I saw those little girls. The blood was running from the legs when they were raping them. And, there was one was probably about seven, the next one was maybe about eight, there was maybe about ten, about ten fifteen little girls and there was no parents. The parents either they got shot or they got separated some place they didn't know where the children were. [Takes deep breath] So, I couldn't help them much, because what I had, I had a bag on my back, and I had a few shirts over there, a pair of shoes over there, maybe a bread over there to, you know for, like a first aide. But one was a little girl...and she, the blood was coming over the legs, and she was bleeding even from mouth too, probably she didn't cooperate. She was screaming or something, he hit her, and the blood was running from her mouth too. And shivering, laying on the grass and shivering. I, I took out a shirt, and I gave her the shirt. The other little girl too as far what I could spare. I didn't have that much to spare. And I, we were walking into the woods and we met some more Jews over there, from this area over there. And whatever what anybody could spare would be done for those kids. And we were there maybe about two weeks in the woods, raining and everything. We didn't caught a cold at that time. [Laugh] Now if I pass by a fan I catch a cold. In that time I didn't caught a cold. And my mother, was supplying us with food. Because, she was speaking a perfect Polish. And, she was putting on a scarf like a farmer lady. And, barefooted went to the town over there, buying food and coming back to the woods over there. She...

**DG:** She had a risk of getting caught though, right?

**NZ:** One evening, I didn't see her coming in time. And I was thinking she got caught. And I was standing in the outside in the woods, you know the woods were a, a few hundred miles those woods. It's not like you say I meet you on Fourteenth Street or something like this. In the woods, even day time, in daytime when you walk in the woods...if you get off by a quarter of a inch the straight line [NZ indecipherable]. You don't know where you are. Then I was thinking I was so worried here there's getting dark...and I don't see my mother. And I was still standing outside the edge from the woods we knew which way she's going come. Finally I saw some, she had a white scarf and I saw she was coming. Now, we were maybe five, five six miles in the woods. How, how do you go in night time, and meet at the people over there? There's no, [Laugh] you don't have a number from the street or something like this. You cannot keep on hollering, [shouts] "hey where are you?" We had to in the dark, I had a very good sense of direction. In the dark, we met the people over there. We were over there...we were over there about two weeks in the woods. And later one Monday morning they surrounded us around, and they start to shoot with machine guns and they, whoever they could they grabbed, and we were running away.

**DG:** How old were you at this time...when you were in the woods?

**NZ:** How old I was? I was probably about twenty.

**DG:** How many people were there?

**NZ:** There? Well there was lots of people, but in the group where I was maybe about fifteen, maybe forty feet away could be another thirty. We don't know how many people there were. But in the group where I was over there was about fifteen / eighteen people... And there was pouring and raining. We were all wet and cold. So we were running when they, they caught with the machine guns, and running grabbing us. We run away there was, we run into one house over there. This lady, [laugh],[indecipherable] Those Pollacks over there, they help us a little. And our clothes were all wet and everything, hungry, and she was baking bread. And she send us on the attic. And she took the clothes, and she put them in the oven over there, the clothes should dry. And, she sold us, sold us some bread. If a bread was fifty cents a loaf they took ten dollars from us. You know how they was, but what could we do? We were glad we got this. And what we were doing for instance, like I said before, like I live in Boca, they knew already Delray got all the Jews out. So we run back to Delray hiding over there. But was coming October, November, and December. The snow was coming, and we were hiding there's no place. The worst part was the snow, because when we run away the footprints. When we were running in the snow, they could shoot us very easy because the footprints. And we were over there in this like, in Delray where there was already they took the Jews out. I would say another few months, and there was no place where to go anymore. In that time...

**DG:** So for a few months you were just going through the woods?

**NZ:** For a few months I was in the woods before, but later we running to the place that already took the Jews out. So we were hiding in attics, in basements. We were hiding. And, in that time they took just the men. They didn't took the ladies at that time to work. But they could come, they were coming and taking for instance, hundred men to work. And sometimes in evening come back thirty. [Laugh] There was nobody to ask questions. What has happened to the other seventy? We didn't knew whether they got shot or whatever happened to them. We never knew. So finally, they got me... at Sędziszów. Me and my brother, and my mother and the sister was left in a little town over there. And, uh they got us working on a railroad tracks. The railroad track, they were building construction over there, houses. What they did just to torture us, the Polish people done this. They had scaffolds, you know what scaffolds is? Like, you work, if you work on a building you have to build...

**DG:** Scaffolds.

**NZ:** Yah, they had this. Now, they need water to mix the cement over there. They could take a hose, and connect it [laugh] to you know the faucet and have plenty water up stairs over there. No they didn't do this. We had to take buckets, in ten below zero and carry the buckets with water. You know you walk on two-bys. When you walk on two-bys...you swing! [NZ stands up and demonstrates walking on two-bys with buckets swinging in both hands.] And the water is spilling on those two-bys. So, they had lots of fun see us falling down us and get killed, and they broke a neck, broke a leg. That's the way they were keeping us, ten below zero. We were carrying this water, we were working over there...maybe over a year, maybe a year, maybe over a year. Then, when Hitler said...

there cannot be Jews anymore. The Jews have to be in camps or they're exterminated. So, they come and they took us from the railroad, they took us to Skarzysko.

Skarzysko was an ammunition factory over there. They took men and the woman, everybody over there. The old people they right away took them to Auschwitz. But the younger only you know...they took us over there. So, we come to Skarzysko...and they put us in a school, a big school over there. And they said, "Everything what you have...watches, rings, money, everything there was barrels over there. You had to put in those barrels. So everybody was dumping in whatever he had. If you don't do this, you get shot. So, then, okay, whatever somebody had they dumped into those barrels. So when everybody put everything in, they went to a man to search him for he put everything away. They didn't search him because he had, they just took a twenty dollar bill, and put his pocket in. They pull out the twenty dollar from his pocket, he never had the twenty dollar over there, just to set example. Took out the twenty dollar, he was cheating. They tell him to knee and they shot him in the head. So, now you got your chance. Whoever didn't put everything in then the monies had to go again to the barrels. I don't know I had two bags with me. So one bag, I had close to me. One bag I had middle the floor. In this bag I had hidden over there some money. I had hidden, and I was thinking in case if they get this bag, they will not even know to whom this bag belong. And, that's the way it was. They took us over there, Skarzysko to work, ammunition factory. And this was the worst thing, I was five years in the concentration camp, but Skarzysko was the worst...thing. When we come over there. They make three groups. If one run away from there. And, I [phone rings]...

**NZ:** One group...that was Werk A, Werk B, Werk C. Werk C that was death. You were working over week to, they were making the bombs. And you turn yellow, from the picric over there. That was a chemical. You turn yellow, and the UHHH UHHH [noise and gesture of gasping for air]. You couldn't talk. They were eating your lungs up. But the Pollacks didn't worry about it because they loved to see, because they know there's still Jews outside, and when they bring new Jews in they got new clothes to take from and rob them, and then whatever they bring in. So they tried to kill off as fast as possible to bring new one in. So, I...they were making three groups. [indecipherable] Now who knows which groups going to go to Werk C, and I was in Werk A, and sneak away to Werk B. But a good thing I didn't sneak to Werk C otherwise I wouldn't be here now. And I was working there and when I come in they, they put me in a place was twenty-five machines. And I met a man was working by this machine, and they put me to take his place. And I saw...his lip is hanging down...and black eyes, swollen everything, beat up from the Pollacks. He says, he was talking Jewish to me. "Du bist" Do you understand a little Jewish, no? He said, "Du bist malekh-hamoves". You don't know what this is, malekh-hamoves "You are my angel of death". Because he says a week before they took me to this machine, and the other man was looking like I'm looking now. So they took him out to the woods and they shot him. So they put me over there, and the next day they took him out to the woods and they shot him because he was no good anymore. They beat you up. You had to make 200 shells...you had to make every hour. And maybe would be possible to make those shells if you wouldn't be under...a gun behind your neck, you know? When you make a shell you have to make, to check the shell with eight gauges.

To see if it's good. And this, this was taking time. There's no way you could make. So, when you start seven o'clock in the morning, they come to you...you didn't have your 200 shells done. There was a bench, you had to go and lay down on the bench. There was two Pollacks going out in the woods chopped off...branches from the trees and they left the little tips, this should hurt you more, you know? And one up, and one down, they gave you twenty-five over your rear-end. After you have the first twenty-five, then you turn red. Now they come nine o'clock when they didn't, you didn't have them done eight o'clock, you didn't have the nine o'clock done the other. So they took you over the bench again. The second time you were getting water blisters. Then when it comes the third time, they busted the water blisters. So, you couldn't live there longer than a week. This was impossible. But I smuggled through something over there. And I gave this to one Pollack, and he was some supervisor over there checking those things. The worst of all, after they took this from you, they kill you! They were afraid you shouldn't tell anybody. But I says I rather be killed with a bullet then to be killed like I saw this man and the way he is dead. And, he took care of me for a week too. But my mind was working worried about if they take him away they switch him to a different department, what's going to be happen to me? But, because I was not afraid...that I was making the hundred shells, because I was not such afraid like the other one. And I was working there...uh, I come over there in forty-one, forty...forty-three. I was working a couple years in this Skarzysko. Later the Russians start to move, closer, they took us away, they took us to Buchenwald.<sup>2</sup>

**DG:** Were you separated from your family at this point?

**NZ:** I didn't have any family anymore. There was no family, I all was by myself. I don't know what was happened. My family went to Auschwitz. I heard some information from somebody. They went to Auschwitz. My brother was with me on the railroad, working with me, and I saw a Pollack took a pipe, an iron pipe, and hit him here on the lip was hanging down. I had to watch, this I could do nothing about it. So the same night he run away. He knew which city my mother is over there, and they run away from over there, they took him to Auschwitz. My mother, my sister. And I was by myself.

So, when I come to Buchenwald I smell steak broiling. It was the crematorium you know? And I saw this smoke coming out, and smelling the steak. And, I, I, there was a big line over there. And where the line was, I always sneak to the back, to the back, to the back, maybe some miracles going be happen. Cause I saw people going down to the basement over there. I said that is the gas chamber over there. And I was sneaking back, sneaking back, sneaking back, but there was no place to sneak back anymore. [sound of paper crumpling] I had to go down. And an old man that in front of me, and he said, "Ohhh, I see the dead for mine eyes." I was thinking that he sees the showers coming gether probably he says he sees the dead for his eyes. Well, I have no choice I'm there. What he done, he fall down a step... and he said he broke his leg. He says he sees the dead for his eyes already. And I was thinking he sees the showers inside. So we went down to over there get a shower...and I didn't believe. I felt the water coming out, I

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<sup>2</sup> For additional information about Skarzysko read *Death Comes in Yellow* by Felicja Karay. (Book information included in portfolio)

didn't believe that's water. I was thinking that is poison water. They gave us the shower, and...they had our clothes. You had to leave the clothes everything outside. When we were through with the shower there was, two men standing by the door. One was giving you a jacket, and one was giving you a pair of pants that they brought from Auschwitz, from the dead people. So, I was a short man. That was okay. I got a pair of pants I could wind them around ten times. And a jacket, long sleeves. Well ok, but you got men that's six feet tall and they got, they got a pair of pants where they were shorts in ten below zero outside. They got a jacket they couldn't button.

And we went in over there to a barrack. Now the floor from the barrack, that the space is like this, one you know. One two by from the other. And the barrack usually sitting on some poles. Ten below zero outside, they let in people over there. There was not enough room for the people, but they put them in this barrack over there. So we had to sit down on the floor like this [NZ demonstrates how the Nazis squeezed the Jews into the barracks by making them sit between each other's legs.] Then next was come in the same way. So we were...in layers over there sitting like this. In night time if somebody had to go to the wash room, what wash room? You couldn't come out. So they wet each other. Especially when there was ten below zero and the blow, the wind is blowing in. You keep on going all night like this. Some didn't get up in the morning at all. So we went to the barrack over there. We were over there a few weeks. We were a few weeks over there, from over there they send you to work some places.

In the morning they took us...to go, there was a mountain with stones over there, a stone mine, you know what the stones to build whatever, roads or something. So they took us about fifty people. We come to the gate, the man, the Gestapo says, "I got fifty stinky, dirty Jews going out to work. That was the title [laugh] they were giving us. We, we going out, I take them to work. So we had to walk for five miles, ten below zero. You pick up a stone, and you walk back to Buchenwald, and you put the stone by the fence over there. They could take one truck [laugh]. They could take one truck but didn't want it. They were just, to torture us. There's lots of people left over after the war they lost their fingers they were frozen they had to amputate them. So we were doing this over there I don't know how long I was over there. I don't know. It was a few weeks over there. And the Russian and the American start to, that was already in forty-five. And they start to come closer and closer. They took us from, from Buchenwald. That was in March, they took us in March from Buchenwald. And there was a wet snow. You know when you got a wet snow, we had shoes...with wooden soles. We had the shoes. When you walk on the snow...every minute, you get taller and taller because the snow gets piled up. Pretty soon you were ten feet tall. You couldn't walk, if you couldn't walk, they shoot you. So, I threw off the shoes, and [slaps his shoulder] got the shoes here. And walking barefooted in the snow. I was walking barefooted in the snow. I could see the steam coming out, and I didn't caught a cold. Okay, that was in daytime walking in the snow. What was about the nighttime? In nighttime, they took us maybe five, four or five thousand out of Buchenwald...and so they were, knocking for a farmer to let us in to a barn. No barn will hold four or five thousand people. But they squeeze in. How did they squeeze in? You see, did you ever see a truck with cement, bag cement? What they do, they take a bag cement [NZ picks up pens and pencils to demonstrate on the table how

they piled the Jews into the barn] in that way, in that way, in that way. Then the other layer goes in that way, in that way, in that way. So they pile us up like cement. Whoever was on the bottom [laugh] he didn't have to worry in the morning anymore. He was dead.

And then before we went to the barn, so the farmer had to steam up some potatoes for us. And we were five thousand, and the farmer cooked them in this kettle, maybe a hundred potatoes. Then they said, "One line you have to stay to get the potato." There was maybe...ten French people, maybe ten Russian people, maybe there, I don't know maybe ten Belgian people, and they knew that the hundred potatoes each one will get a potato. So they said "One line" they were standing one line form you know? Then because we were five-thousand and there's left over there seventy potatoes nobody tried to be the last one. They had fun with us. They with the back from the, from the rifles they can never get us one line and they were beating. I was getting with a rifle here my chin was that big. Some they knocked the teeth out, some they knocked the eyes out. We never reached the potato even and they took us, they took us to Theresienstadt ...they took us to Theresienstadt they supposed to get us. When we arrived in that time. I think, Thursday evening. We arrive they supposed to get us Friday. There was something wrong with the crematorium over there, something and we supposed to get us Sunday. In the meantime Sunday come in the Russian tank...to Theresienstadt they were pretty close. They come the Russian tank in and they liberate us. They liberate us...and, I was liberated but I didn't believe I was liberated. I was still afraid to go out. So after a few days everybody had had a diarrhea over there, because we were getting a little soup, we were getting a little and our stomach was not used to this. Listen, what I'm telling you now that is just a...if I ever have to tell you inch by inch, and day by day, then you need two telephone books. But I just give you just like a headline.

We were over there a few weeks, then we went back to Poland to see maybe we going find somebody. So I went with a friend over there. And I know before we run away, we took everything to a farmer. We gave everything to a farmer in case we will need something he should hide this. And my friend, they had, uh material for suits you know something like this. And he put, they put everything to a farmer. So he went to the farmer over there...maybe about ten miles away where I went to this farmer. I'm waiting and waiting and he's not coming. And I start to go to over there and I found his head...just a head! Maybe [laugh] bout ten blocks, fifteen blocks away where he went in. So when I saw this I disappear out of this village. And I went back, I went back over there, and I...I left Poland. I left Poland, to Germany. And from over there, we were over there I don't know how long we were over there. Probably forty-five. We were over there maybe about two years in Germany. So then we come over here. I supposed to go to Israel, but I got papers here and I come over here. Well, [sound of pen tapping] that is the story.

**DG:** Was there ever a moment when you thought about escaping?

**NZ:** Escaping where?

**DG:** The camp.



**NZ:** How? Escape. The camp was made with electric wires. There was guards, with electric wires you were coming close you were electrocuted. Was no way to escape. When they took us to Skarżysko, Skarżysko was wires but not electric wires. I come with a boy from my town. He says, "Nate lets escape tonight." How to escape? There, where the railroad was going through, there was still from the tracks, was still an opening on the bottom. And he says, "Lets escape". But there's no way to escape. You got the Polish people over there, they were the worst. They were worse than the Nazis. And so there was nowhere, so he escape he escaped at night, I didn't want to go. And he got caught from the Polish people, they brought him back to the camp. When they brought him back, they put him in the middle. The called all the people out. They put him on a table...and he was staying for two days with a sign "He Escape". And there was make a rope already to hang him. They hang him in front of everybody. To see he tried to escape. There was no way, was no way to escape. No way.

Another thing, if one person escaped, they shot ten people. One time I was the lucky one. There were one, two, three, four, five, seven, eight, nine, and I was the ninth one. They put me out, I was supposed to be shot with the ten people. But all of a sudden there was come a bunch of barracks and we had to unload them. And they needed people, so they grabbed me to unload the barracks they forget about me. Cause I was the one supposed to be shot. And when they were leading me I had boots. So the, uh the Ukraine...the Nazi says, "What size boot you wearing?" I told him. He says, "You see this little hill over there? After this little hill I'm going to wear your boots because I'm going shoot you over there." He said, "You will never get out of here." They said, "If you supposed to be liberated tomorrow, you're going be shot today. You will never see your freedom." [phone rings] Well...

**DG:** Were you aware of anyone that contemplated committing suicide in the camp?

**NZ:** No. This I did not. Lots of them did. Not me. I want to live! I want to live so bad. I says I'm going make it. But I was seventy-five pounds. I was seventy-five pounds. But I wasn't thinking...After the liberation. When I went back to Poland, are they going be the same monsters were they, were they were before? Killing the Jews just like they did before. Lots of them did, lots of them did suicide. And, the most of them they didn't have to be suicide. I was laying close to one, he used to be a neighbor in my home. In the morning I says, "get up, its late!" He's dead...dead.

And, when we were working we had ten minutes lunch. And there was twenty-five people working at the machines. You had to stay a line, you get a little water with a couple leaves with cabbage swimming on the top. And in ten minutes you had to stay in the line, and eat up. If you didn't [NZ pounds fist on table] make it in ten minutes you had to go back to the machine. And work the whole day without.

**DG:** How did you cope with hunger? Or illnesses that you had during your time?

**NZ:** Are you kidding...what you mean, you never had. You were getting a slice of bread as made out of potatoes in evening. And in the morning you were getting just a cup coffee

black. Nothing else. In lunch time you had a little water with a little cabbage flying on the top. We constantly we were hunger, we were starving. If you would see the check the cheek bones were sticking out like this, the eyes like that. They were just, you would see somebody just lay. They were looking like for dead all the people. They were... Well, I wasn't thinking I will survive but I had a strong will. I was working in nighttime, and during the daytime, I, I was running around to do something, like... they would carry, they need somebody to take the bread, to carry the bread. So I went, I supposed to rest during, in the daytime, I didn't rest. I work in daytime, I went to carry the bread. What I done, when I carry the bread, I break off edge, some edges from the bread. You're not supposed to do this. I, in that time I didn't chew, I just swallow. In Buchenwald, I went to get potatoes, me with another man a big [indecipherable] with potatoes to give us. That was our supper, one potato. That that little potatoes was the supper. So I was carrying those potatoes, and they were walking behind us, and I grab a potato mouth, I'm telling you was about two inch in diameter. I swallow potato I didn't choke myself. I didn't choke, I'm not lying to you. Because you do, if they see you chew, a chew the potato they kill you. So I just grabbed the potato and swallow, swallowed down like this, a potato, I didn't choke myself. [Laugh] I don't know, if I would see something like this I would say that's not possible. It's not possible something like this... what I went through, myself.

**DG:** How did you, how did you maintain hope? How did you maintain hope?

**NZ:** Well, many times, there was no hope at all. Because physically we will not survive. Our health was giving up. And they were cheering us up. They says, "if you're supposed to be liberated tomorrow, we shot you today." But ... we were not human at that time anyway. We were not human. We were over there you could see... people coming on from nice homes, educated homes and everything. They turn to devils over there. They turn to devils. Lots of them were going crazy... And here I am, knocking the wood I'm ninety years old.

**DG:** Yes you are! Now you were in the camps for five years, correct?

**NZ:** Well, yes.

**DG:** And was all five years...

**NZ:** From place, not in one camp. Lots of them. Ya.

**DG:** Can you give me a chronology of the different camps you were in?

**NZ:** Well, I was Sędziszów, there was a railroad. Working on the railroad, those tracks over there. Then I went to [indecipherable], they were digging, they were digging for the soldiers you know? Over there the big, pit for them. You know where the soldiers going in when they fighting. I was there. Then I was uh Görlitz. That was Germany. In Görlitz we taking, we were building concrete floors we had to chop off the concrete, and stay and chop. [Laugh] We couldn't even lift the chopper. I was there, where else I was I? Yah, I was working on a farm. Digging potatoes, there was, at least I had a potato to eat.

**DG:** When did you go to Buchenwald?

**NZ:** Buchenwald, I went in...I think was beginning of forty-four. When I went to Buchenwald.

**DG:** And was that the last place you were?

**NZ:** No, from Buchenwald I was sent to Görlitz. And later from Görlitz they were leading us, what I told you with the snow. They leading us when the Russians were coming close, they were leading us to, Theresienstadt to get us. There was something wrong and they couldn't get us, they supposed to get us a couple days later. In meantime the Russians come in with the tanks over there. And they didn't have a chance to do this to us.

**DG:** How did you travel from one camp to the next?

**NZ:** How? They took us with trucks. Sometimes with the train, like a cattle train.

**DG:** What were conditions like in the?

**NZ:** They took us with cattle, in cattles over there, in cattle trains over there...sticking the heads out like the cattles. And with the trucks, the most, mostly with trucks. We went with trucks.

**DG:** What age were you when you were liberated?

**NZ:** It was in forty-five, I was about twenty-four years.

**DG:** After the war, were you able to learn what happened to the rest of your family, extended family? [NZ shakes head no] No.

**NZ:** I went to Poland, and to [indecipherable], I went over there. Not, not a sign. Well I had a good idea they went to Auschwitz.

**DG:** How did you cope with losing family and friends?

**NZ:** You know.... Something happen to you [pen tapping on table], you cry, you cry so many days, later you run out of tears. You dry out. The feelings is, you become numb. And you says well... there was a man, there was a man in the camp. He was crying, and [indecipherable]. Well he didn't live through anyway. I says, "listen, what you crying more for us? I was eighteen-nineteen years they took me, took me away from my family and everything and was." He says, "my kin, my child" he says, for me, "my child", he says, "you don't understand", he says. "You are young, and maybe if you survive, you will have a chance to build another family. I'm wiped off", he says. Well he was right. There was a man he was very intelligent man was. He lived through. He was living in the same building that I was living, in Poland, after the war. Not living, just to go to see. In

the morning he took the rope he hang himself up. He says, "I have nothing to live for, anymore." [NZ tapping pen on table] He had a wife and children everything. And everything is gone. And on top of this, I had a wife, I married, I met one, after the war. A, a lady [indecipherable]. I didn't want to take and have any relationships. She was after me. And she says...there was another many [indecipherable]. And uh, I says no we going go through, we going go through this borderlines with woods with everything we can get shot. I don't want to take any responsibility for anybody. And she didn't have a paper either. So finally in the last minute I come to say goodbye, and she start to cry. And [pen tap]...she lost everybody too, and so I says, "come on we will go", oh did I hurt.

We went throughon the borderline on the, on Poland, the borderline. I had papers to go to look for family to Germany, to Czechoslovakia. But on the borderline the Pollacks...[sound of pen tapping] they were asking, "passport, passport, passport". And we were fourteen people. We had like from the governor some passport to go to see. So three governors were no good, but we had passport, I had from each one governor over there. We went separate not the whole bunch. And I see my friends showing the passport for [indecipherable] this was a captain. A Polish Captain. And he said, "this passport is no god you have to go down". If you go down forget about it. Then my wife, she didn't have anything because I took her at the last minute. I lift up to, in the train. I lift up the seat and put you in, and I put the seat on the top of her and I was sitting on the top of her because she didn't have any papers at all. The Russian soldiers saw this and they were laughing but they didn't squeal on me. So later this captain come to me and ask me a passport. I show him...no. When he took from friends the passport, they put them in the pocket here. Then, I saw now we're in trouble. So I went, the train was crowded. I went very close to him. And the paper was right on the top and I pullout the paper. [NZ stands up and demonstrates how he pulled the paper out of the captain's pocket.] I pullout the paper for much, I say I have nothing to lose. If he take us down, they take us to send us to superior and everything, nothing to lose. So I pull out the paper. Yhen when he comes to me and ask my paper, my paper was good. And he say, but my paper was the whole alphabet, my name. That long was my name. And he did remember from this other paper my name. He says, "Did you have another paper?" I says, "no". And he looks, he says, [sound of pen tapping] "This name sounds familiar to me." I says, "no that's the only paper what I got." Before we turn around, the train went through, pass by. Yah. That's easier to tell then it really was.

**DG:** How did you start your life again, after the Holocaust? Where did you go?

**NZ;** We supposed to go to Israel. But I got papers to come to this country. And I start from scratch.

**DG:** So you came to this country with your wife?

**NZ:** Yah, I married her in Germany.

**DG:** In what year?

**NZ:** In forty-five.

**DG:** And when you came to this country where did you go?

**NZ:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**DG:** What did you do in Wisconsin?

**NZ:** Well, you know when you come to a country...you cannot write, you cannot talk. You don't understand. It's not easy. Well I took, any job that was available. And, when I had bad luck, my wife died at having a third child. The doctor killed her. And she was a healthy woman, a gorgeous girl. And having a third baby, there was some butcher. And he ripped her apart before we turn around she went to a doctor for nine months, he never took a blood test for her. Then she start to bleed. It was twelve o'clock at night time, they didn't know what type of blood to give her, what transfusion to give, they didn't know the blood. In that time, you couldn't get a doctor to testify. They would be now they would have to pay millions for this. They kill a girl, she was...she died in fifty-four, yah. She was twenty-nine years old. And I was left with three little babies. I didn't have five, five-hundred dollars for my name. And I had to raise three babies. No sister, no brother, nobody to help me. And I had to...make it.

**DG:** Tell me a little bit about your children. You have three?

**NZ:** I got three daughters. And I got five grandchildren, and I got six great-grandchildren.

**DG:** Have you been back to Poland since?

**NZ:** No.

**DG:** Your faith, how has it changed...over the years?

**NZ:** Well, I tell you how it went. I became a atheist, after the war. But, there was situations would make me turn back to God. I saw, they took nine rabbis, and a cemetery. They says they got to put sewage in over there pipes, they should dig some holes over there. The nine rabbis dig holes over there on the cemetery. And later they told the rabbis to take their heads, and pound against the tombstone. And those rabbis were pounding. They says he don't hear this enough, louder, louder, the blood was all over going. Says he harder he hit, after they were all through, they put them on the edge, the grave, and they shot them, and they fall in. Why did I return back to God? [NZ clears throat] After was happen to my wife, you know, when she died in childbirth [pen taps]...and I had some pain in my tummy here. And I went to the doctor, and he says, I see something over there, a cyst or a tumor something in my bladder. That was a couple months ago after my wife died, and here I got three little babies. No relatives, no sister, no brother, no mother, nothing. And after, the doctor operate me. [NZ crinkles paper] He told all my friends that were waiting outside...that there was cancer. And he never told me, but he told all my

friends. And my friends were coming in whispering, whispering, whispering. I had pain, I was in pain, I was pulling the bed sheet. I had tubes all over me. But I was conscious, I was not dead, I didn't lose my consciousness. And I was laying with the eyes closed...I was laying, then I name God again. I says, "God, please [laugh], help me! What's going to be happen to those three little girls." They will throw them in an orphan home. Will, God knows how they will come out. Going come out druggies, prostitutes, all kind of thing from an orphan home, you know? And that time [laugh] I make up with God again. My wife died the day after Rosh Hashanah. And Yom Kippur I was going to the temple, and everybody says to me, "have a happy New Years", and I was looking, he's crazy...I lost my wife, and I have my three little babies, have a happy New Years. I didn't want to open the book. Nothing. I didn't want, I was on strike with God. I didn't want to pray, I didn't want to do anything. After when I had the operation, I made up with God again. Well I think that's it.

**DG:** Yep.