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Sidney Glucksman oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, October 12, 2008

Sidney Glucksman (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

Michael Hirsh: Okay, I just turned the recorder on. Could you do me a favor and spell your name for me?

Sidney Glucksman: Sidney Glucksman, G-l-u-c-k-s-m-a-n.

MH: And Sidney is S-i-d or S-y-d?

SG: I.

MH: S-i-d. And your address?

SG: …

MH: And your home phone is….

SG: Correct.

MH: What's your date of birth?

SG: 7-7-27 [July 7, 1927].

MH: Can you just describe for me the circumstances you were in before the liberation?

SG: Before the liberation?

MH: Yes.

SG: From what camp?

MH: Okay—well, let's start with the beginning. Where did you grow up?

SG: I grew up in Poland, near Auschwitz.

MH: When did you first get put into a camp?

SG: I think it must've been, like, maybe six weeks after the Germans came into Poland.

MH: And you were how old?

SF: They put me to a working camp.

MH: How old were you at the time?

SG: At that time, I was twelve and a half.

MH: Twelve and a half. And they took your whole family?

SG: They took away—like me, they took away, out of school. They picked out all the Jewish kids and told them to go outside. We were outside. They started to count us up. I don't remember how many we were. And they put us on a truck, and they took us away to a place; it took, like, maybe hours, you know. They picked us up maybe like noon, and [when] we arrived, it was already dark. When we arrived, there was nothing there, just a lot of lumber. That was already prefabricated barracks. We had to put up those walls for the SS. At that time, there were actually—you know the black uniforms? They had the brown uniforms. The brown uniforms: they were the SA [Sturmabteilung**]**. You heard about them.

MH: Yes.

SG: And there were the armbands with the swastika on the brown uniforms.

MH: Your family had been taken before this?

SG: No, no, no, they were still home.

MH: They were still home.

SG: What happened, they took me away, and it was already a place—they called it Upper Silesia, which had belonged to Germany once, I think. And I didn't know much about it, other than—I don't know exactly how long I was there. And we had to unload bags of cement from trains for them to maybe build the foundations, or whatever. I don't know. And long bags of cement fell on me. At that time, I was a child.

MH: Right. This was what, 1941?

SG: This was in 1949.

MH: No, 1939.

SG: No, forty-nine [1949].

MH: No, it wasn't forty-nine [1949]. Forty-nine [1949]'s already after the war.

SG: Oh. Yeah, yeah. I'm confused.

MH: If you were twelve—yeah, it was 1939. Okay. You were born in 1927. Okay.

SG: Right?

MH: Yes.

SG: And I had broken my arm that time. Anybody who got hurt at the job, they would send us back on a bus into a town in Poland where they called it a *Durchgangslager.* You heard about *Durchgangslager*?

MH: No, I have not.

SG: It was like a camp where—they would send you back because you couldn't work at that time, to a place like—it wasn't like a hospital, and it was not like a convalescent home. It was just like a big brick building with cots there, and we were there until the arm was healed up. I remember that. And then they picked us up and sent us back. And from there, they sent me back; it was a camp by the name of Gross-Rosen. You heard about that?

MH: Yes.

SG: Huh?

MH: Yes.

SG: At that camp, when I arrived, it was already a year later, and it was just terrible. We walked in mud up to my knees, hardly any clothes on. We used to wear still our civilian clothes, and we still had our shoes. But when we arrived there, we had to line up and get counted up, take off the clothes completely, and they would give you the uniform, which was a blue striped uniform.

MH: How big were you at that time, or how small were you?

SG: Who knows?

MH: Okay. I mean, were you a big child or a small child?

SG: Normal.

MH: Normal, okay.

SG: You know, I was still in school at that time. I wouldn't even know. But anyway, then they presented us a blanket, and we were escorted to barracks. The barracks were already built, but it was still in mud. We walked around in mud, and I was there until they finished the barracks in the streets, or whatever it was. There were no sidewalks. I was there for maybe three years. We would go every day to work, and every day we would get back.

MH: Did you ever have news of your family?

SG: Yeah, but I was in camp, in Gross-Rosen. I asked—they brought in some more people from my town, and I asked them, "How are my parents doing? How's my brother doing; how's my sister doing?" They just put the finger in front of their mouth and said, "Shh!" like that. Since then, I never heard from anybody. The people from our town, all the Jews that were taken away, either they took them away to Gross-Rosen still. There was (inaudible)—I don't know if you heard about that?

MH: The which?

SG: (inaudible)—Flossenbürg.

MH: Yes.

SG: You heard about it?

MH: Flossenbürg, yes.

SG: Ottmuth [Otmęt, Poland]; that was another German camp near Gogolin [Poland].

MH: What was your—you said your hometown was near Auschwitz. What town was it?

SG: Chrzanów.

MH: How do you spell that?

SG: The correct spelling? Hold on a minute. Okay?

MH: Yes.

SG: C-h-r-z-a-n-ó-w.

MH: It's a good thing I asked you, 'cause I would have never guessed it.

SG: And I forgot already myself, because I don't remember everything when it comes to a name like this.

MH: Of course. How did you come to Dachau?

SG: From Gross-Rosen.

MH: Why did they move you there?

SG: Huh?

MH: Why did they move you there?

SG: Because—you mean the move from Gross-Rosen?

MH: Yes, to Dachau.

SG: To Dachau. We were on a death march.

MH: Do you remember the date?

SG: No.

MH: But it was—

SG: You know, after six [sixty] years, I don't remember the date. I don't remember it now, or anything like this.

MH: Okay, let me ask it a different way. How long had you been in Dachau before the Americans came on April 29?

SG: I would say maybe for about a year and a half.

MH: In Dachau?

SG: Yeah.

MH: So, they were having death marches long before the end of the war.

SG: Long before, yeah, especially out of Gross-Rosen.

MH: Do you recall that march, or is that something you've pushed out of your mind?

SG: I recall that march.

MH: Could you tell me about it? If I ask you anything that you don't want to talk about, just say, "I don't want to talk about it."

SG: You know, the march was one day. They took us out, especially—we were young, we were able to walk. But every night when it got dark, they put us on the field where it was nothing there, no trees or anything, and we had to lay down like an animal on the grass until daylight came, because they were watching us. But there was no way to go away, or to run away. If you had to pee, you had to pee right there where you were. Or if you had to—we didn't have anything to eat. A lot of people died during the march.

MH: How long did the march take?

SG: There again, I don't know exactly.

MH: But, I mean, are we talking three days or a month?

SG: It could've been even more than three days.

MH: Okay. What did they do once they got you to Dachau?

SG: Once we got to Dachau, there we had to again line up. There were chairs and tables and SS, a woman and a man, sitting on one side, and we would stay up on the other side. And they asked the name, the year that you were born, what nationality. I was already at that time, you know, maybe like fifteen by the time I got to Dachau; or maybe even sixteen, I don't know. And I remember that much. When they called out, you know, "Next!" to come over to the table, I went over to the table. The name, the year that you were born, I gave that to them.

MH: Did you give them—is that the point at which you gave them a Polish name, or you still—

SG: Wait. I still said, "Sidney Glucksman."

MH: How would you have said that—what was your name in Polish or in Yiddish?

SG: Gleiksman.

MH: Gleiksman. And your first name?

SG: They used to call me in Poland Stashek.

MH: Stashek?

SG: Yeah.

MH: When you were with your family, they still called you Stashek?

SG: Yeah.

MH: Okay. So—

SG: In Jewish, they would call me Shlamik.

MH: Shlamik, okay. All right, so now they call you—

SG: I got to the table. I remember when they say, "Jews on one side, every other nationality to stay where you are." I could smell the stink from the crematorium. You saw the smoke coming out. It stunk like terrible, you know, when flesh burns and the bones. So, I said to myself, and I said to another friend of mine who didn't go into the—you know, the chamber—I said, "I'm going to take the name of my friend who—we lived together in the same building." So, I gave them Bernard Stanislaus, which was a Polish name, and they let me stay like this. You know, they brought me over to the other side, where I was with the Polish people.

But I must have gotten either sick or something: I wasn't able to get up, and I was laying there. And I must've been speaking from the high fever, something in Jewish. So, they went and they told the guard that I am Jewish. I speak a different language.

MH: You had not been wearing a Star of David on your uniform?

SG: I wasn't at that time. We had no Star of David. We had the number on the uniform printed down, and we just had a triangle in the yellow color next to the number.

MH: And the triangle in yellow meant—?

SG: Jew.

MH: Jew. So, you must've taken that off.

SG: I didn't. I don't remember if I took it off or what. But I knew that that's how I—but they still didn't take me away from the barracks. But a few days later, they came and they picked me up, and they put me in another barracks where I was with other nationalities. But there were younger people there.

MH: Younger than you?

SG: Younger than me.

MH: Okay.

SG: And one day I got sick. I had typhoid, because an epidemic broke out. And I don't remember anything that happened. I just remember that I fell down while I was talking to somebody, and that was the end. How I survived, who put me up in my bunk, I don't remember. I don't know. I woke up after that, maybe when my fever left me. I wasn't able to walk at all. Just to try—you know, you didn't care at that time, just you wanted to live. So, somehow I was holding onto the walls and tried to walk, to look for some water to get washed. I must have been laying there in filth without washing myself, without taking a drink of water, even. I still don't know how I survived. Somebody must've gave me something to drink, or whatever.

MH: So, you recovered from the typhoid.

SG: Yeah.

MH: And then you still had a long time in Dachau before the Americans finally came.

SG: I still had a long time in Dachau, yeah.

MH: What did you do? I mean, how do you avoid the SS?

SG: I didn't avoid it. I saw them every day. When they said that I have to go to work, you know, I just (inaudible). I would put on my striped *schmata* on myself, and the shoes with the wooden soles, which you could hardly walk, and they put us in trucks. And what we had to do is clean up after the bombardments, you know, bigger towns like Munich or any other place if they bombarded during the night. That was like being on vacation, in paradise, because there, we were able to find some kind of food, if it was a rotten potato, or even a dead cat or even a—whatever, just to eat. At that time, I must have been weighing about eighty-seven pounds. I was very skinny, I know, even when I was liberated.

MH: Were you a religious person?

SG: Religious? No. My parents sent me to cheder.

MH: Okay. So, you were taken before you were bar mitzvahed.

SG: I was taken before, yes. And the thing is this: I remember, and I always say to myself; you know, I always keep it in my head. Where the hell was God? I saw so many atrocities, even during the few days or weeks when the Germans came into our town. I went with my father and grandfather and everybody else to synagogue. One day, they ripped open the door, and they took all the older people outside in the front of the synagogue. They made them stand up, and they machine gunned them down. And that, I remember. Every day, I talk about this. I don't even have a picture from my father. My mother sent me a picture. It was already broken up from Israel. I had it restored here, so I can look at her every day.

MH: This is a picture of what?

SG: My mother.

MH: Your mother. That thing—the machine gunning you just described happened—

SG: Just one day. It had to be on Shabbat.

MH: Right, but that was—

SG: Because we were all walking to the synagogue, and the men were wearing—in our town, they had a lot of yeshivas. You know what a yeshiva is?

MH: Yeah, of course.

SG: They had a lot of those in our town. Friday night, Saturday, they would change their clothes, put on the black kapotes to go to the synagogue. And they were wearing, even before, you know, the—

MH: Shtreimel.

SG: Yeah. And we were—because the older people couldn't carry their book or the tallit, and I remember I would carry it for my father or my grandfather.

MH: So, your questioning of, as you say, where the hell was God—

SG: Yes, that's what I said. And I said, "How can a God see this happen, innocent people to get machine gunned down in the front of my eyes?"—and not just my eyes, for all the other kids that were there. And I still—many times now, even, I ask, "How could that ever happen?"

MH: I've asked this question of some soldiers I've talked to, if what they saw in the camps affected their belief in God. Some reacted exactly the way you've just described. Others—seven of the men I interviewed went on to become ministers; it made them more religious. Sixty-some years later, how would you say you feel about God?

SG: I'm still not sure yet. Because you know, when I get together with some very Orthodox people, you know, I'm not going to tell, "I don't believe in God now." But to myself, many times I think about it. How could that all happen, to see a family wiped out?

MH: I don't understand—in the reading I've done, I don't understand, for example, how someone like Elie Wiesel can come out of that and believe in God. I don't understand that degree of faith.

SG: Maybe he didn't see all those things that I saw.

MH: He was in Buchenwald.

SG: Well, yeah, he could've been in Buchenwald. Maybe he was in Buchenwald—I don't know how long he was. I spent, from the first day until I was liberated, six years.

MH: Tell me about how you found out that the Americans might be coming, that the war might be coming to an end?

SG: I didn't know of the Americans. But that day, we were lined up to go to work like every other day. We would get picked up between 6:00 [AM], 6:30, even when it was in winter. Six-thirty is still very dark. They came out every day and count up the groups to go to work. That day, we were lined up, waiting for the Gestapo—the SS—to come and get us, to count us up and get to work. They didn't show. It was very quiet. Everybody was waiting to get counted up.

MH: Nobody—no kapo comes in and makes you come out of the—

SG: The kapos I didn't even see that day. But when daylight came around, we looked around to see in the guardhouses. We see somebody moving over there. We see the arrival of the machine guns, white rags tied around, but we still didn't know what's going on. You know, I didn't see a newspaper in six years. I didn't have—we don't have radio. We didn't know what's going on. We didn't know what day it was. By nine o'clock in the morning, it was really bright, and those guards are still staying there. Shaved their heads off. They didn't have any helmets on, and they had uniforms on from what we wore, striped uniforms.

MH: These were guards walking around, or in the towers?

SG: In the towers. Within minutes, we started to hear a lot of noise, like cannon shells. The sky got black from—you know, when they started to use the shells from the tanks. The sky got all clouded from the shells. And then, within minutes later, we heard a lot of noise. Suddenly, the main gate—were you ever at Dachau?

MH: No. I've been to Auschwitz, but I've never been to Dachau.

SG: Okay. Then the main gate ripped open, and tanks and trucks started to come in one after another, by the hundreds. And on every Jeep, they had maybe about six soldiers. They jumped off the Jeeps to take over the camp. Whoever was able to walk—you know, whoever was not sick anymore, but they were able to run or walk—they started to run towards the gates.

MH: Can I ask you—it's my understanding that the prisoners' enclosure was a barbed-wire enclosure inside.

SG: Yes.

MH: And then—I mean, the main gate—

SG: Yes, inside, because the barbed wire inside was electrocuted. You know, if somebody from the prisoners went and touched the wire, they'd get burned to death. And then they had in Dachau, all around the camp, like—let's say ditches, where the wires were, with concrete walls filled with water right to the top. How many feet of water I couldn't tell you, but it had to be really deep. If somebody did try once to escape, they would have to go into the water, and there was no way to climb out of it. By the time they would go into the water, they would be dead already, because the electric wire's there.

MH: Okay. But the gate that the Jeeps and tanks came through was not into the prisoner compound, it was the—

SG: Yes, it was into the prisoner compound, the big door where we were waiting—

MH: Is that what they call the Jourhaus Gate?

SG: I don't have any idea. But I remember, you know, I was staying not that far from the main big entrance, and I saw the Jeeps coming in. And we saw different colored Jeeps, so we knew it's not a German tank or Jeep. We saw the color green, and the German tanks were, like, dark gray, so we knew that something happened. Until we saw the soldiers jumping off, or jumping out of the Jeeps or from the trucks; they jumped off. We saw a different marker on the truck, a white star, and on the Jeeps white stars.

They started to surround the whole camp, staying on guard. And they started to go in deeper into the camp, and the people were laying there, half-dead all over the ground, with flies all over the bodies, maybe rats, even. People were still typhoid, and they were not able to stand up. They were too weak. They were breathing, but that's all. And some soldiers I saw, when they bent down, they started to cry like children. That's how bad it was. It stunk terrible. And between—you know, in the front, where the main entrance is to the camp, was just a few feet away from the crematorium. They still found bodies in the crematorium, in the ovens, and there were bodies laying in the front to be burned with those big pliers to be picked up and thrown in the fire. Those things I do remember.

MH: At what point did you personally have contact with one of the soldiers?

SG: With, like—you're talking about Jerome [Klein]?[1]

MH: Was there anybody before Jerome?

SG: Yeah, there were soldiers, but I didn't know anything about it, because what happened was, you know, I just sat down. I was too weak to go back to the barracks. And I know nobody's going to hear me now, so we just sit there. It was not just me. There were a whole bunch of us, many nationalities.

MH: And you just sit there and wait.

SG: And wait, yeah.

MH: Any idea how long, any sense of time?

[1] Jerome Klein was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00069.

SG: We were waiting?

MH: Yes.

SG: No, it was the same day.

MH: Okay. Were you able to talk—you spoke Yiddish and you spoke Polish.

SG: Yes.

MH: And by then—

SG: And German, too.

MH: And German, too. Were you able to talk to any of the Americans?

SG: The first American I was able to talk to was Jerome.

MH: Tell me about that. How did you see him?

SG: How I saw him? He had to be either on guard or somewhere in the camp. He must have recognized me, because I'm Jewish, by looking at the triangle, and he started to speak German.

MH: Was this the first day or the second day?

SG: No, that was the first day.

MH: The first day, okay. And he started to talk German.

SG: Yeah. I myself—I couldn't believe it. I didn't know that he's a Jew, because I thought all the Jews in the whole world are dead. I didn't know that Jews were still alive when I was liberated.

MH: How did you discover he was Jewish?

SG: He spoke German to me.

MH: He spoke German or he spoke Yiddish?

SG: No, German.

MH: German. And he told you?

SG: And he says—you know, he asked me if I can speak in German. And if you speak German—if you speak Jewish, you can understand German.

MH: Right. What was that first conversation?

SG: I don't know. I don't remember any of that.

MH: Okay.

SG: I just remember that either it was the same day, or maybe a day after. I don't remember. I never asked him. If he remembers, maybe better. He brought me some chocolate or something and gave me chocolate, which was something that I couldn't believe. I forgot already how chocolate tasted.

MH: It didn't make you sick?

SG: No, I was already over with the typhoid. A lot of the people there, they were so sick and the soldiers came in, a lot of them couldn't move. They were, like, frozen, like paralyzed. But everyone who saw the people on the ground, they went over there trying to give them chocolate or something to drink. And a lot of people died from this, because

they were—you know, if they were trying to give them something better to eat than what we used to get, which was nothing, they got sick from that food. And a lot of them died while liberated.

MH: Jerome was on guard there when you met him.

SG: Yeah.

MH: You had no way of knowing whether he was going to stay there or whether he was going to be leaving.

SG: Not from the beginning. I think days after, he told me that he was going to be leaving.

MH: So, he saw you on several days.

SG: Yeah, yeah.

MH: Was it just the fact that the two of you were Jewish that drew you together?

SG: I think so. You know, I told you I didn't believe that any Jews in the whole world were alive still. I thought the Germans killed all the Jews, because in so many years, what I saw bringing in—I would say hundreds of thousands of men, women, even children. So, I thought they're all dead. And I don't know if you ever heard about this; you know, sometimes it's so hard to talk about it.

MH: I'm sure.

SG: But in Gross-Rosen when I was there during that time, I remember when they brought in trainloads of women with children on their hands; you know, they came in, just trains of women and kids. They came into Gross-Rosen. They were lined up. I was already an old timer there; we were already settled in Gross-Rosen. They made the women get undressed, and the little children, [they] set them down on the ground. And the women were all naked, and they told them they have to go in to get showered up. They already had new clothes on their hands, like going to a shower. And that was going down, you know, from a hill down a little bit towards that building.

They never came back. And the children were on the ground. We had to go over there—you know, all the younger prisoners—and undress them: shoes take off, take off the clothes, whatever they had on, and take off eyeglasses—some of the little children, they had eyeglasses—and pick them up. We had to bring them right across from where they were standing originally with their mothers—there were barracks there—to bring all that stuff into the barracks. And then in barracks, they put them [the clothing] in boxes. There were other prisoners there that were working every day, because they already knew where to put everything. The mothers never came back.

MH: And the children?

SG: The children—I cry whenever I start talking about it. They threw them in bags, and hit them against barracks until you didn't hear a child cry anymore. When I start talking about it, it makes me sick, so many years after.

MH: Let's go back to after the liberation. Do you remember the day that Jerome said he was leaving?

SG: No. I only knew that he said that—he moved from Dachau into Munich. Then I got a letter from him that he's going to be leaving in a short—you know, I forgot how far away it was: a week, a month or whatever, I don't know. And then I got a letter the next time from New York.

MH: But you saw him in Munich.

SG: Yes.

MH: I know you helped him get his camera fixed.

SG: Yes, because I—you know, it was maybe a month after I was liberated. Me and a few other friends who were Jewish, we moved together into Munich after the liberation, because we wanted to get out from Dachau. And then while I was still in Dachau after the liberation, I would go into Munich once a week or twice a week on a bicycle, which was like eighteen kilometers, and peddle to Munich just to meet up with some other prisoners. And then we moved in, in Munich.

We saw a house; we would throw out the German family. We all had guns, you know; the American soldiers gave us guns. And we were not afraid to kill a German. We were so hate—we were full of hate. So, we all had guns, and we went into a house and said to leave everything and to get out of the house, we're taking over the house. Nobody would stop us. We could do everything we wanted maybe for three, four weeks, even kill in the street, Germans.

MH: Did you have to?

SG: Did I have to? I don't—I couldn't tell about it. Because what we did, we went around looking for a few that we thought they would be somewhere in Munich, and we found a couple.

MH: People who had been guards at Dachau?

SG: Yes. And then we had some people—even if they were not guards, if they were civilians, even. You know, Dachau is a small city, and there were all—you know, what made us so angry was because when we were liberated, we went into some of the buildings—they were like across the street from a normal town, you know—and just asking, "Did you know what went on right next door in the camp?" They claimed they didn't know that there was a camp.

MH: They didn't smell it?

SG: They didn't smell it. It stunk. The whole city stunk, but they didn't know that there was a camp. That's how they lied. And that's what made us so mad, because everybody had the same thing. We thought maybe those people killed my parents, my family, somebody from my family. They were all mostly the Gestapo people.

MH: Right. So, you're living in Munich.

SG: Yeah. And then I get a letter from Jerome's parents asking me if I would like to come to America.

MH: How do you feel—(laughs) pardon me. How do you feel when you get a letter like that?

SG: Well, I didn't know. I wasn't able to read it, even, in English. I had it translated, and then I said to myself, "How can I go to America? I don't have any relatives here. I don't know about any relatives in America." And you had to have a sponsor to come to America. Otherwise, you know, they wanted to send a lot of our younger boys to Israel, Australia, Canada. And wherever they found relatives for them, they went to that country.

But I thought to myself, "I'm going to have to go back to my own town," but then again, I knew that nobody's alive from my hometown. So, I asked in a letter when I wrote back, I asked them that I don't know how to get to America. I have nobody to bring me to America. So, the mother sent me a letter—I don't know if Jerome had it written or anybody from the family—that they would make papers for me and they're gonna get me to America. That's how it happened. They did.

MH: Had you been a tailor before this point?

SG: I was brought up in that, yeah. My great-grandfather was a tailor. And that was another thing maybe, too, that helped me to go through all that I went through, because when they asked nationality and then the occupation, I just raised up my hand when they called out "Tailor." And they put me away again on another side with other tailors. And I knew how to sew, even by hand or if you had—you know, at home at that time we had machines you could pedal, foot pedal.

MH: My grandfather was a tailor, so I'm familiar with the foot pedal machine.

SG: Yeah. And they told me that they would make papers for me, which they did. They brought me over. I lived with when they took me off from the ship.

MH: The ship came to New York?

SG: Yes.

MH: You went through Ellis Island?

SG: Yes.

MH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

SG: The *Marine Marlin*.

MH: Say again?

SG: *Marine Marlin.*

MH: *Marine Marlin*, okay.

SG: A matter of fact, I met my—she's my wife now—in a displaced persons camp in Munich, and she had two sisters that came into the displaced persons camp; there were three of them. The two sisters still live in Canada now, in Nova Scotia. Their husbands died in Nova Scotia.

MH: Where did your ship sail from?

SG: From Bremerhaven [Germany].

MH: Bremerhaven. So, Jerome's family met you at the—

SG: In New York.

MH: In New York.

SG: Yeah, and they brought me to their house. I stayed with them until—maybe about five, six months. Then I found out that there is somebody who came to New Haven, and he was with me in Gross-Rosen, and we were liberated together in Dachau. His family, who he had in New Haven, they brought him over a year ahead of me, and they settled him here in New Haven.

So, I had the address, and when I got to New Haven, I called him up and they came down to the train. I came by train. And I remember, you know, he was settled already here. His

uncle had a delicatessen store on Legion Avenue, and he opened up—or he was working at that time for him. It was like being home, you know, having him here. And then there was another guy who was liberated together with me; his name was Martin Fehman. Both of them died a few years ago. We always talked about it, every day, if we met up on the weekend or something. We were always talking about our life, what we had to go through, that we made it.

MH: What's the relationship that you've had with Jerome over the years?

SG: Oh, like two good buddies, almost like a brother.

MH: That's the sense that I got from talking with him.

SG: Yeah.

MH: It's really an amazing story.

SG: He called last week. Maybe he's going to be—I don't know. You see, my wife was sick last week.

MH: Right, you told me.

SG: Otherwise, he would've been here last week. I told him, because she was not feeling good enough, and I had to keep her in bed a couple days, so I said he should—my daughter actually talked to him last Thursday, and I talked to him, too, last week.

MH: I get the sense that things have turned to the point where he sees himself as part of your family.

SG: That's how I feel towards him. You know, every time whenever I go, either I let him know—if he wants to come, you know, with us. For every good occasion, he's always here. If he had a child, he came—actually, his mother came from New York and she stayed here with us for a month to take care of our baby.

MH: To take care of your baby?

SG: Yeah.

MH: Jerome never had children.

SG: No.

MH: And he wasn't married that long.

SG: Not too long, no. I remember his wife: beautiful, beautiful girl. She was a doctor. Beautiful. You never met Jerome.

MH: Yes, I met Jerome.

SG: You met him?

MH: I went to his house. I went to his apartment.

SG: In New York?

MH: Yes.

SG: Oh, I didn't know that.

MH: Yeah, I was up there for Rosh Hoshanah. My kids live in New Jersey.

SG: We have a daughter in New Jersey.

MH: I know. Your daughter lives in Wayne; my daughter lives in Livingston.

SG: That's [Wayne] far from Livingston?

MH: I don't think it's that far. My son lives in Ridgewood.

SG: I only know Wayne.

MH: Yeah. So, I went into the city and went to his apartment and spoke with him there.

SG: Yeah, because he has another house in the mountains.

MH: In the mountains, right.

SG: And he has another place in Florida. He is a very special, special person: brilliant.

MH: Yes. Do you have a photograph of you with him, in New Haven?

SG: Yes. Actually, that was a few months ago.

MH: He says the only photographs he ever has are the ones that he took, so he's not in them.

SG: No, I have.

MH: You have?

SG: Yes.

MH: If I send you an envelope, would it be possible for you to send it to me and I'll scan it on the computer and then return it?

SG: Yeah, sure.

MH: Okay, I'll do that.

SG: You know, he is a very, very intelligent, special kind of a guy: smart, brilliant. He remembers more than I do.

MH: He says you remember more about that first day than he does.

SG: Yes, because I never forget about it. You know, this was like a miracle happened. Otherwise, who knows where I would've been today?

MH: It's like the dreidel: *nes gadol haya sham.*

SG: Huh?

MH: *Nes gadol haya sham.*

SG: Yeah. So, you know, we had—in New Haven, we had quite a few survivors. Now there are only a few left; you can count them up on your fingers. And we have a memorial that we built in New Haven. That was the first memorial, actually, on government or city ground; they gave us the ground to build it. And it was just thirty years ago that we put it up. So, there was a big write-up about it.

And I go around whenever they invite me to come and speak to a college or to a high school. I never refuse anybody. I make my time and I go to talk to those kids, because I want as many kids and grownups to know about it, what happened. So, I do go and speak about it. I was invited maybe about six years ago to a college, a Catholic college, and I was speaking to maybe 4,000 students. It was so special to them, and it was so special to me when they came and told me that I'm invited because I'm going to get a doctor degree of humane letters from that college.

MH: Which school was it?

SG: Albertus Magnus.

MH: Albertus?

SG: Magnus College; that's a college, not a school. And Jerome came to this and almost half the city came to it; they were invited. And since I was liberated, I would say that was the best day of my life that I ever had. They put on the black cape, hat and scarf on me and presented me with all the papers, letters from all different things from college, you know. I still talk about it every time I go to speak to a school. And I am invited a lot of times to all kinds of schools, where I speak to thousands—I mean, hundreds of children. You know, it's always on the front page paper. I just did something, and I have a newspaper from Hartford, Connecticut, the *Hartford Courant*.[2]

MH: Right, I saw that article.

SG: You saw it?

MH: That's how I found out about you. Somebody—a Jewish World War II veteran who's been helping me on the West Coast sent me that article; that's how I found out about you. Do you worry that people will forget the Holocaust?

SG: Yes. That's why I decided to do what I'm doing. You know, I'm still working; I have my own shop. But when they call me, I say, "Any time." I drop everything, and I make a date, and I go. Because I always say that I'm alive today because God wanted me to be alive, so I should be able to tell the story about it. There was a stage show in New Haven; the producer was—the show was *The Grey Zone*.[3] You heard about it?

MH: No.

SG: No. That was something like what happened in concentration camp. They had an oven built. They had the whole inside of the show painted dark gray and during the show, there was like a fire burning in the crematorium. And they had people, the actors, dressed up in the SS. They had the kapos dressed up in clothes like they were wearing. The kapos were able to wear their own clothes.

MH: How did you—I'm surprised you didn't—that you were able to deal with seeing that.

[2] This article, "A Survivor's 'Threads'," was written by Kim Martineau and appeared in the August 28, 2008 edition of the *Hartford Courant.*

[3] This play was written by Tim Blake Nelson, who also directed a 2001 film version.

SG: Well, because I helped them to produce it. You know, he didn't know a lot about it, so I told him how, what I remember. So, I told him this. And wouldn't you know that when they told me I helped them with the show, there were hundreds and hundreds of people there. One woman gets up and she says if I feel—what would you say?—guilty to be alive? So, you know what my answer was?

MH: What?

SG: I asked, "What nationality are you?" She told me, "German." So, I said to her, "Well, God wanted me, then, to be alive, so I should be able to tell the true story of what happened, what you people did to us. That's why I am alive. And that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. And now you can go to hell." And they walked her out. That's how the other people started, too, clapping their hands, that I was able to speak to her like this.

MH: So, somewhere inside of you, you do believe there's a God.

SG: Now I do, yes, but that's already quite a few years ago.

MH: Right. It came back to you.

SG: Well, you know, I say, "Thank God for beautiful children and grandchildren," so something good came out of it.

MH: Okay. All right. Is there anything else you want to tell me? I have no more questions. I think I've put you through more than—

SG: Well, I would say almost like they put me through, you know, the first—oh, yeah. A few years ago, the INS called me up—you know who the INS is?

MH: Yes.

SG: Huh?

MH: Yes, I do. Immigration and Nationalization Service.

SG: Right, from Washington. And they said to me, "We're looking for a witness against two SS from Gross-Rosen," and they found me in the Yale archives. You know Yale University?

MH: Yes, of course.

SG: Okay, in their archives. And Dr. [Dori] Laub at that time—I don't know if you heard about him.

MH: No.

SG: He is a psychiatrist, I think; he was the one who interviewed me when they made the archives.[4] And I showed him the papers from Gross-Rosen, when they interviewed me here. Actually, when it was from Dachau, I got some papers. And they saw that I was at Gross-Rosen.

So, they came in from Washington, three people, the next day, to talk about it. They told me what they need me for, as a witness. And I said, "By all means. If you need me to be a witness against those guys, I'll be more than happy to." So, they told me what's going on. They found him in Philadelphia, and I went there, and I appeared as a witness. He [Theodor Szehinskyj] was convicted because of the testimony.

MH: Did you recognize him?

SG: No. I told them right away, after so many years, I'm never going to be able to recognize him, but maybe there are some things that I may be able to be like 100 percent sure that that's him. You know, when he starts speaking to lawyers. I don't know how many lawyers he had. So, I said to those guys, "I think that's him, definitely." And then, I'm not sure. But myself, I knew if it was the elite SS—and that's what they had in Gross-Rosen, the real monsters—he must have the two Ss burned in under the left armpit. Well, you know, that's all I told them. Towards the end, I myself thought he was going to go free. And by coincidence, I says, "Maybe it's possible just to make him take off his shirt and see if that's him." They made him take off the shirt, and there was a patch under his left arm. He tried to remove it by surgery. That was the conviction.

[4] The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, part of Yale's department of Manuscripts and Archives, was begun in 1979 and consists of 4400 videotaped interviews. Clips from some of the interviews may be viewed at their website: http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/index.html.

MH: I'm sure.

SG: And then they called me half a year later about another guy from Gross-Rosen [Adam Friedrich]. That was in St. Louis, and he was convicted. I didn't go to St. Louis, but I did it through the—you know, through telephone. And I have even—they sent me the reports from the trials, so I knew what's going on. So, I really—I do whatever I can to help out, to get rid of all those guys that are still alive today.

MH: Okay. I thank you very, very much for the time. I'll send you an envelope so you can send me the photo. Is it a big photo or a small one?

SG: I don't know, maybe something like four by six [inches], maybe.

MH: Okay.

SG: I would say—I'm gonna make a copy of it, and I'll get the envelope. You send me the envelope with the address.

MH: Okay, I'll do that. Sure. 'Cause what I'm saying is if you can send me the one you have, if it's a good one I can just copy it and send it back, and you don't have to make a copy.

SG: It is in a magazine, I think.

MH: Oh, you don't have a photo—?

SG: Maybe my daughter may have it, because I think she made some copies of it.

MH: Should I just call her?

SG: Yeah, you can.

MH: That's Jeannie?

SG: Jeannie, yeah.

MH: Okay, I'll call her. Thank you very much.

SG: Today, she's not going to be home until maybe about five o'clock.

MH: That's okay. I'll probably call her during the week at the office, 'cause that's the number I have. Okay. Thank you very, very much, Sidney. I sure appreciate it.

SG: Nice talking to you.

MH: Nice talking to you, too.

SG: Happy New Year.

MH: Same to you.

SG: Feel free—any time, if you need anything about this, just feel free to call.

MH: I will.

End of interview