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Interview with William (Bill) Orlin, a Polish-Jewish Refugee of Nazi Occupation

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1. The first steps in Bill Orlin's life

Bill Orlin (born Velvel Orlinkski) is an 85-year-old Polish-Jew refugee who lives in Houston (Texas, USA). He was born in Brok, Poland in 1932. When Nazi troops invaded his village in 1939, he was 7 years old. His family observed how the Nazis destroyed his village according to the policies of Jew's persecution. The village's population was compelled to a 50-mile march under abusive indignity. This march was driven to the east which was occupied by Stalin. The family stayed in the Soviet's care until 1944, just when Nazis invaded Russia. Bill and his family escaped to Uzbekistan and lived there until the end of the war. The family lived in Fritzlar displaced persons camp in Germany from 1946 to 1948. His family escaped from Europe and emigrated to Canada with the help From United Nations Relief Organization (UNRO). In Canada the family stayed until 1951 due to the Polish quota established by USA. His family settled in Houston (Texas). Bill served as an assistant gunner on a M47 tank with a National Unit from Montana. Later Bill assumed duties for Troop Information and Education office with the U.S. Army Intelligence in Frankfurt. In 1954 he became an American citizen in Frankfurt, in the IG Farben office complex, the company that elaborated Zyklon B gas.

This interview took place in the library of the Houston Holocaust Museum, where Bill Orlin teaches his experiences which show the relevance of respecting human life. The interview shows different scenes in Bill Orlin's life: his family memories, the journey that Bill Orlin's family had to go through to save their lives through different cities as a result of the continuous invasions of the German forces. No city, no town or village was too small to escape the diabolical schemes of the Nazis to annihilate the Jewish people.

2. Second scene: Brok (Poland) and family memories

Christina Holgado: I would like to know about the names of your parents, where they worked when they lived in Brok.

Bill Orlin: My mother's name was a Jewish name, it was a very pretty Jewish name. She was called Sheine Malke. That means "pretty queen". My father's name was not so flowery, not so fancy. His name was Sender. We lived in Brok (Poland), which was a small little village about 65 km. from Warsaw. The population of this little village was only 2,000. Of the 2,000 people 834 were Jewish people before 1939. The Jewish people have been in Brok since about 1740. So, of the 834 people that were Jewish people in Brok, only 35 survived. I am of those that survived.

Christina Holgado: How do you remember your life before the war started?

Bill Orilin: Well, you have to remember that before the war started I was only 7 years old. So my life evolved around the house, the family. I did not go to school because I was young. I did go to a Jewish school, a religious school, like a Sunday school, a Jewish day school. And the Jewish day school was called *cheder*[1]. I went to school, I learnt to speak Hebrew, but the Hebrew that I learnt is not the same Hebrew that is spoken now. In Europe I am an *ashkenazi* Jew. So, the *ashkenazi* Hebrew is different from the Spanish Hebrew, where the Spanish Hebrew is called Sephardic. Sephardic means Spanish. So, the Jews of the Sephardic area spoke Hebrew as it is spoken today. So, that is what I learnt. We used to call it "the holy language". The *ashkenazi* Hebrew was pronounced like *lushen koidesh*[2], this means "the holy language". So, as a little boy I played on the street, played with the kids, went to *cheder*. It was uneventful.

Christina Holgado: Can you remember the first time you ever heard about Hitler?

Bill Orlin: The first time I heard about Hitler I was 7 years old, when the Germans invaded Poland, September 1939. I did not know that there were people like Hitler. First time I heard about that it was when the war started.

Christina Holgado: This information about Hitler, did you get it from the radio? How did you get this information?

Bill Orlin: To the best of my knowledge we had no radio. I heard it from my parents, what Hitler was doing to the Jewish people in Germany. And some other countries that they'd already occupied. Well, primarily from my parents because there was no radio.

Christina Holgado: What happened in your memory, or in your brain when you heard this from your parents?

Bill Orlin: I was thinking, you know, that my parents were telling me things of what was happening in the world, in Poland, primarily in Poland. That was not good. Natu-

1. Cheder is the word used for the elementary school in the countries where Yiddish was spoken.
2. *Lushen koidesh* is the yiddish pronunciation for the Hebrew *lashon kodesh.* Its meaning is "the holy language".

rally I was scared of what could happen to us. But for a 7-year-old boy a lot of these things do not mean that much. You just hear it and you think about it. Now, when the Germans came in the little town, when they started prosecuting the Jews, when I saw my house burning, this was visual. So I could see what was happening. That I remember to the minute detail.

Christina Holgado: Did you ever know what your parents thought of Hitler with the passing of the years?

Bill Orlin: I could not tell you that I did because they really did not discuss with me that much. They did not talk to me because, what does a 7-year-old boy know?

Christina Holgado: What impact did travelling from one place to another have in your life as a child, and then when you were 10 or 11 years old?

Bill Orlin: It made a big impact on me because we were always looking to see if we were safe, to see if anybody was after us, "be careful, be careful to who you talk to, what you say, to whom you say it". It made a very big impact on me, and being a young child I had to go as the saying goes, the water to flow, wherever my parents said. That is all what we did.

Christina Holgado: Did you ever have any thoughts about being captured and sent with your family to a concentration camp?

Bill Orlin: Absolutely, absolutely. My mother, my mother was the factor that prevented us from being captured. My father was gone, he was in the service. So, at that time there were two boys, me and my brother who was born in 1937, and then my mother was expecting. So, under my mother's guidance, she sensed that it is best for us not to be in a certain spot, and it is the best for us to leave as soon as we can, and as quickly as we can. So, yes, we were always, when the Germans were advancing in Poland and later on in Russia, absolutely made sure that we walked, for example, one day, we walked for a day and night and a day. We were little kids, my brother and I. We walked as fast as we could. My brother was 2 years old when the war started, and so in Russia the same way. We walked as fast as we could to make a better time to get out of the advancing Germans.

Christina Holgado: I would like to return to Brok, to the day that you all were requested to be in front of the church, in front of the synagogue, when your town was burnt.

Bill Orlin: We were in the Catholic church yard.

Christina Holgado: I imagine the German soldiers coming in my town, and how do they know that I am a Jew? Because at that time in Poland you did not have to wear anything, any mark, any Star of David. The Catholic and Jewish people, they look like practically the same.

Bill Orlin: You are correct. Unfortunately in many countries when the Germans occupied the country, they made collaborators, many collaborators who told them, who were willing. The Germans used to give a lot of collaborators maybe a bottle of whisky or a pound of sugar if they named in a Jewish person. Most of the Jewish people lived

on the main street in my little town because it was a little town, it was only one major street. The synagogue was on the back street but most of the Jewish people lived either on the main street or maybe a street behind it, because there were not that many streets, and so people pointed out, and so the Germans one day decided pretty soon after they arrived, to burn down the Jewish homes, and many people were already taken out and shot in Brok, and some escaped, like my father. My father escaped before the Germans came. So that left my mother, my grandparents, me and my little brother who was 2 years old. So most of the people who could not leave stayed, and we were lucky, maybe about fifty or sixty of us were told to go sit in the church yard which faced my street, where I lived, and I saw my house burning. We spent the entire night in the churchyard, and I have it in my memories as vivid today as it was then. That was 1939. After spending the night in the churchyard, in the Catholic church yard, we actually went out to look at what happened to the synagogue. The synagogue was burnt down. The synagogue was maybe about two blocks away. It was totally burnt down. The synagogue was a little structure, and so it was very very disturbing for me to see all the houses burning, even those that were not Jewish houses were burning because they were next to the Jewish houses. So it was very dramatic.

Christina Holgado: I have read your transcription and I have a question about the many times you went from one city to another with your family, and sometimes you said that the soldiers accompanied you, and sometimes you escaped.

Bill Orlin: The soldiers… After a few days in Brok, we stayed for a few days, and then we went outside Brok to be with some non-Jewish friends. And then, the German authority said that all remaining Jews should assemble by the church. After that, maybe only 15 people assembled, the rest was killed some place, or taken and shot. I read in a paper yesterday that some of the people in my area were taken to a different town, called Malkinia, and they were thrown into the river, told to swim, and they shot them while they were swimming. So, only 12 people showed up. Then, a soldier marched us from Brok to a place called Ostrów-Mazowiecki. That is close to Warsaw. We came to a forest where there was a machine gun, and my mother was pregnant. So, they told us to line up by the machine gun. And we faced the machine gun. The machine gun was ready in the forest, we were standing there, and the German soldiers exchanged conversation, and they let us go. I do not know why they let us go. I have been always thinking, maybe because my mother was pregnant, maybe because the war was so early in the war, or maybe the officer who assigned us to the soldier to march to Ostrów-Mazowiecki had orders to take us to Ostrów-Mazowiecki from Brok, which was about 10 km. away. They let us go. Now, when we came to a T in the road, there was a group of German soldiers, and when they saw my grandfather with a beard, they immediately produced a scissor and cut his beard. This is modus operanda. And that is what they did in a lot of places. They did that to abuse the people. And so my grandfather protested, so they slapped him. My grandfather said to the German, I remember because I was standing next to him, "how can you do this to me? I am a very religious Jew, and I am a man of

God". So he slapped him again. And he said: "*Gott ist mit uns*[3]". I'll never forget that: *Gott ist mit uns*. My grandfather continued protesting, my grandmother asked him to be quiet. They let us go. Like I said, this was September 1939. The war had just started, so maybe some of the German soldiers did not have much hate in them, or maybe they listened to their superiors to care the people. I do not know. I have often thought about it. I have no explanation. So we ended up in Ostrów-Mazowiecki, where we stayed for two months.

Christina Holgado: With the family there?

Bill Orlin: Yes, except my father was not there. My father had to escape before the Germans arrived. Eventually we found him, later.

Christina Holgado: Brok was a very small village. I suppose there was only one Jewish school. How many Jewish schools were there?

Bill Orlin: There was no Jewish school. There was a regular school which was supposed to start on September 1, because the war broke up on September 1. There was just a Jewish *cheder*, a religious school. Most of them were kids. I do not know what the older boys did. I do not know because I did not know the boys. I was 7 years old. Older boys would not play with me.

Christina Holgado: In one of your lectures in the Houston Holocaust Museum you said that the first time you saw someone being shot or dead, it was very shocking for you.

Bill Orlin: Yes, I did not actually see anybody being shot. This happened after we got out from the synagogue, from the Catholic church, and we went to another house to hide there in Brok, in a street called *Ribatzka Street*, which means Fish Street. We stayed there maybe 20 people. Next day we came out, we saw a man lying in the street dead. Somebody shot him. It was an old man with a beard. He was maybe 50 years old, but he was religious and had a beard. I was very shocked. I had never seen a dead body in my life. I was very sad. I truly was wondering why would anybody shoot a man who is that age. Of course, I was shocked.

Christina Holgado: In case you had been captured with your family, and sent to a concentration camp, you know that death was the ordinary life there.

Bill Orlin: Absolutely, because you see, my mother was pregnant, she had two little boys, 7 and 2, and my grandparents were with us. He was an old man probably 65 years old, my grandmother was probably 60 years old. They had no need for us. We would immediately be shot before being sent anywhere. They only used people who could work, and then when they finished working because they couldn't work anymore, because they had no food, and they died, they died. There is no question about it.

Christina Holgado: In another interview that you gave for the Holocaust Houston Museum, you stated, and I quote from your transcription, "the Germans arrived, some of the young men escaped including my father, the reason was that

3. God is with us.

they did not want to be around when the Germans were there, because we had heard different things. I presume that was happening in other countries". What did you hear?

Bill Orlin: A lot of killings. They rounded up Jews, and they killed them because they were Jews. No other reason. I heard nothing from reading because when I was 7, I did not read Polish. When I went to school, I heard conversations from my parents and their friends.

3. Third scene: Scape to Russia, Uzbekistan, and back to Poland

Christina Holgado: You were living for some time in Gurlen, in Uzbekistan, with your mother and your grandmother. There you went to a children's home with your brother. How was the life in a children's home?

Bill Orlin: It is 1946 after the war, and it was organized by the Jewish underground from Palestine. The reason why my parents enrolled me and my brother (I was 14 years old, my brother was 9), it was a different environment, they treated us very nice, we were learning to speak Hebrew, they fed us well, we had different activities. So, it was a very nice life. But we only stayed there for a short time, maybe like 3 or 4 months. But the situation in Poland in 1946 was very bad, both economically and antisemitism. Some Jews came back from concentration camps from Russia, and wanted to stay in Poland, but they started killing Jews, they stopped trains, they produced people off killing and then one day in July 4, 1946 in a place called Selce they had a pogrom, and they actually killed about 47 Jewish people. After that, the Jewish people who were there said: "Poland is no longer a place for us". The school organized the children and we went walking on a highway, all day. We took nothing with us. Just like we were going, just exercise, and we walked all day, most of the night, and next morning we were in Czechoslovakia. So, we, the children, escaped from Poland, the children from a place called in German Waldenburg. So, we escaped from there, eventually my parents escaped Poland the same day. That is where we ended up, the children went to Austria and Vienna, from Vienna to Germany, and then my parents took the same route, and they picked us up from the children's camp in a place called *Rosenheim*, outside of Munich. And then we went to a DP camp[4].

Christina Holgado: Correct me if I am wrong. You were in the Ukraine, in Poltava. There you were attending the school.

Bill Orlin: Absolutely. I attended the school in a community farm. In Russian it is called *kolchoz*[5]. I was in that school. I learnt to speak Ukrainian. I probably was in that school about 10 months. I was the only Jewish student. I entertained the kids…

Christina Holgado: How many years were you living in Russia?

4. Displaced persons camp.
5. Collective farm in the Soviet Union.

Bill Orlin: I was in Russia from 1939 to 1946.

Christina Holgado: Was it nice in Russia?

Bill Orlin: I do not know about nice. The nice part was that we survived. We had to live from the Russian economy just like the rest of the people. My father worked, he was a tailor. We ate what was available. Sometimes we did not eat too well because there was no food. Then in Uzbekistan the same way, in the Ukraine the same way, but at least we were alive. Now, I do not know if you know or not, but Poland had the 2nd largest Jewish population in the world next to the United States, before 1939. This was 3,5 million people. Jewish people in Poland, 90% perished, they were killed. The largest single group of Jewish people to survive was in Russia, 150,000 people. Some Jewish people in Russia did not have it so good because they were sent to Siberia, because in Russia, when you come from another country, like Poland, or Germany, you are considered a spy. So they send you to Siberia. So the Holocaust survivors, even though they survived in Russia, were in Siberia, in camps, because they were considered enemies. Listen, it happened to a lot of German Jews who went to England. They were considered enemies of the state. People in the United States, Japanese people who were born in the United States, were considered enemies of the United States, they were put in camps right here in Texas, not concentration camps, but *Arbeitslager*[6], stuff like that. So, during the war times everybody distrusted everybody. But at least we survived. We had it easier. It depends on where you were. We happened to be here, some people were there. They have different commanders, different government bodies, different things. We ended up in Uzbekistan, some people in Kazajstan, Turkestan, different "-stans", and some ended in Siberia. There were many, many, many refugees in Uzbekistan who were not Jewish. You´ve never asked me if they had encountered antisemitism in Russia. I was a child, and I never encountered anti-Semitism until I came in Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan my mother could not take care of my brother and I, she did not have any food, so she decided to take us to a Polish school. They had a Polish school in Uzbekistan which was about 50 km. away. So we had no shoes, we walked in the dirt road for day and night, and another day, until we came to the school outside a city called Urgench, a big city in that area. It is an old city, it used to be part of the Russian empire. So, she took us to the school, she registered us and left. We came by the highway. So we came to the school, a nice big building operated by the Polish government. As soon as my mother left, the Polish children in Uzbekistan, in the Soviet Union, started to call us things, names, "dirty Jews", all kinds of stuff. I was 10 years old. I told my brother "I am not coming to Uzbekistan to the Polish school to find anti-Semitism". So, I told my brother: "We are not standing here". We saw an open window, it was open to the fields, and we came across a big ditch with a lot of water in it. Somebody put a log, a wooden log. My brother and I walked on it, he fell in the water, I picked him up, we walked and

6. Labor camps.

we went back to where we came from to Gurlen[7]. We walked day and night, and another day. We did not eat anything that entire time, we just drank water from the ditches, and my mother took a long road back by herself. When she came back to Gurlen, we were in the house. She was not very happy with me. She did not forgive me for a long, long, long time.

Christina Holgado: I would like to know how the Polish children knew that you were a Jew.

Bill Orlin: I do not know that. I could not tell you. Maybe when my mother registered us we had to put down that we were Jewish. So maybe one of the people that registered us said: "Oh, we have some Jewish people here". It is the only way I figure out, no one asked me that but that is the only reason, because nobody told me that I was Jewish. I look Italian, Greek, German. Nobody said I look Jewish, because I am blond here, a million freckles. In Germany they told me that I was German. By coming here, in the United States, they told me I came from Louisiana, some think I am Spanish because I have got a moustache, or Italian. You know people asked me. You should not look like German, and I reply: "How am I supposed to look like?"

Christina Holgado: I think this was the Nazi propaganda.

Bill Orlin: Nazi propaganda, because Mr. Goebbels said that Jews have a big nose, big ears and their hair is not combed, they look dirty. All this is a part of the Nazi propaganda. That is all it is, because I guarantee you that I told a bunch of people here. I spoke it in the theater. There was one guy, he was from Israel. He said he was Jewish. I thought he was an Arab. So what I am trying to say is that Jewish people are like all the other people. It depends on where you are. There are people from India, Jewish people look Indian. There are people from China that look Chinese. They intermarried with the Chinese women, so all the Chinese had an oriental look. So, all this bullshit it is all Nazi propaganda.

Christina Holgado: When you were getting older, I mean, 10, 11, 12 years old, did you remember better some comments about what they were doing there?

Bill Orlin: Absolutely, absolutely. When I was primarily in Uzbekistan, because that is where I was spending most of my time, we used to go to the theater to see news clips, to see what is happening in the world. So we saw what was happening in Stalingrad when general Paulus surrendered 19,000 Germans. We saw what was happening there, the battles from the Russian side, and they had some German films too. The Russians played the deliverance stuff and so on. We also heard all the atrocities once they were chased up from the Ukraine that they committed in the Ukraine, for example. They killed a few thousand Jewish people in Kiev. I forget the name of the place now. They took them up aside, and over a period of three days I think they shot 6, 7, 10 thousand people. Also, I remember reading when, in a place called Kharkov, a big city in the Ukraine, when they rounded up Jews, and they said that they were trying to save bul-

7. In Uzbekistan, in the province of Corasmia. Also Gurlan.

lets to kill. So they invented a system of gassing people. So they used to put people in the back of the car, of a truck, cover the truck, and they take connector holes to the pipe carbon monoxide, and put it inside the car, inside the truck, and that is how they killed people. They gassed them. This was the beginning of the gassing of people in Auschwitz, and in other places. They invented *Zyklon B*[8] gas, and that is how they used to kill people. In 1944 when they finally took over Hungary, they took 3,100 Jews in a short time to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and as soon as they got them, most of them were sent to the gas chambers immediately. This was a way of killing many people in a short time. They did not have to use bullets. So, I remember seeing all these things in news strips in the theaters.

Christina Holgado: In Russia, apart from the big community of Jews, you lived there with Christians, with other religions, without any problems.

Bill Orlin: I told you that the only time I encountered by myself anti-Semitism was in the Polish school in Uzbekistan. I was in Russia from 1939 to 1946. There was absolutely no anti-Semitism. At least for me. I cannot speak for other people. You remember that there was no religion technically in Russia, so I never went to the synagogue in Russia. The synagogue in the city I lived in was converted into a warehouse, it was a beautiful building on the outside, and I looked inside, it was beautiful. I was Jewish but I never practised my religion.

Christina Holgado: In each place you came in with your family, did you never see the Star of David on people?

Bill Orlin: No, not in Russia. No, nowhere. They only used that in occupied countries that the Germans occupied: Holland, France, Poland.

Christina Holgado: So I imagine that in Poland, it was afterwards, after you escaped.

Bill Orlin: Yes. That is what happened. That is correct. I never wore it while I was there under the German occupation for 2 months. They started that in 1940, maybe 1941. We were lucky to get out of Poland in 1939.

Christina Holgado: You were in Yelimagura with your family.

Bill Orlin: Yelimagura was a suburb of Badenburg in Poland. This was taken over by the Polish government. It used to be German. It was a little town outside of Walbrzych, and they put us with a German family. That German family had two children. The father was gone, and just the mother and two children. It was a 2-bedroom apartment. The Polish authorities put us in the apartment with them. They had one bedroom with another bedroom, and we shared the kitchen and the dining room, but at last maybe after a week or two they were gone. The Polish government shipped them out of Germany.

Christina Holgado: Why do you think that this German family was there?

8. Pesticide elaborated by IG Farben (Germany). In its origins, it was used during the Operation T4, the euthanasia program, and later on in the gas chambers of concentration camps.

Bill Orlin: It was there because it was their apartment. They put us in there because they had no place to put us. So they did that for other people too. They put refugee families, Jewish families with any family that had a room. They just brought in some people.

4. Fourth scene: Displaced persons camps

Christina Holgado: Tell me about your feelings about the Germans, and are they different to the feelings about the Nazis?

Bill Orlin: Well, you know, I was in Germany from 1946 to 1948 in a DP camp. The German people as a group, they are very intelligent. They are very law-abiding. What I mean by that is when the Nazis were in charge, they listened to what the Nazis said. I do not know if because they were afraid to say anything, but they believe in the system. I was in a DP camp for two years. The German population during my stay in Germany were behaving correctly. We went shopping in German stores, I went to get a hair cut in a German barber shop, … There was no animosity. So, there are obviously a lot of Germans who were Nazis, many Germans were not Nazis. However, many were. And Hitler promised them the moon, so to speak. He said they were superior race, and the Jews, the Polish, the Russians were inferior people. He promised *Deutschland über alles*[9]. *Deutschland* will be the world conqueror. They are going to own everything. And they went to invade Russia to give a *Lebensraum*[10]*, nach Osten*[11] we have *Lebensraum*. And they believed that. For a group that is so intelligent as they are today, to believe all that crap was surprising. They all knew I was in the army, and I went back to Germany. I was part of the occupation forces. The Germans occupied me for two months in 1939, I occupied the Germans for two years as an American soldier. And people asked me "how do you feel?" As a Jew I was cautious, and I had a lot of emotions, and I have views sometimes that I sometimes cannot express. As an American soldier I was an ambassador from the American government to the people of Germany. I treated them as equals. I always tell people, "lucky were the German people who were occupied by the Americans". Those occupied by the Russians, they had problems. Those occupied by the Americans, they were treated like any other human being. The Russians did not give a care. Why? Because the Germans did not care about the Russian people. They killed them. As soon as they came, they burnt the villages, Jews or not-Jews. They killed Jews automatically, but they killed Ukrainians, they killed Russians, because they said that Russians and Polacks were inferior people. So, when the Russians liberated and came into Germany, they took revenge with the women, lots of women. They took revenge on everything. They stole, they burnt, they did not care. The American army does not do that. And I was very proud to serve the American army. In fact, I was in charge where I

9. Germany above all (German National Anthem).
10. Living space.
11. To the east.

was stationed in Hannau, outside of Hannau, I was in charge of the Christmas program in 1954. I was in a big tank battalion, and we decorated the tank with reindeer, and all kinds of stuff. We went to little villages, close to the army base, and we entertained the kids, and we gave them gifts and so on. The fact that I was Jewish was not important. To me the fact that I was an American soldier, that was the important point.

Christina Holgado: The displaced person camp where you were working as an American soldier, was this DP camp for German people?

Bill Orlin: The DP camps were primarily in the American zone. You know, Germany was divided into Russian, American, French and British zones. Most of the people in the DP camps were Jewish. There were DP camps for other people like Polish people, Yugoslavian people, Rumanian people, but the DP camps where we were in, the Jewish people, had their own DP camps in Germany.

Christina Holgado: But did these people escape from cities, like your family?

Bill Orlin: Most of these people were survivors that either came from concentration camps, were hiding some place, or came from Russia. And they had no home. Like we came back to Poland, but Poland could no longer be our home. So that is why we left Poland, and we went some place. We ended up in Germany, in a DP camp. There were a lot of Jewish people in the DP camps, Jewish DP camps. And there were non-Jewish people in non-Jewish DP camps. There were a lot of gipsies in DP camps too, in Hungary.

Christina Holgado: How old were you when you came to the displaced person camp in Germany? Do you remember your age?

Bill Orlin: Of course. I came in 1946. I was 14.

Christina Holgado: This was in Fritzlar[12]**, wasn't it?**

Bill Orlin: Yes. Outside of Kassel.

Christina Holgado: What do you remember of that time? How long were you there?

Bill Orlin: Fritzlar is a DP camp. It was run by people of the committee, Jewish people. It was like a town in itself. We had Jewish schools, there was a synagogue, and I reconnected with my Jewish religion after not having anything to do with Jewish religion from 1939. So in 1946 I started to go to the synagogue, and I joined that Zionist organization. We started to go to school. They were teaching us English and Hebrew. I became a soccer player. I played soccer. We were free to go. We had guards, we had a gate, Jewish guards. They guarded the camp. We lived in German army barracks. I think it was a cavalry base with horses there. Life was more or less normal because I never had a normal life as a teenager. So I went to school, I had many friends, I was a good soccer player. They were teaching us to do things, a Jewish organization called ORT, Organization for Rehabilitation and Training. And the American government for the occupation forces provided food. There was some work. The kids did not work because

12. State of Hesse, 160 km. to the north of Frankfurt.

they went to school. There was a hospital on the camp. That is the most normal life that I had after the war.

Christina Holgado: So, all the life was inside the camp, wasn't it?

Bill Orlin: Inside the camp.

Christina Holgado: Why did they let you go out of the camp?

Bill Orlin: Actually, it was for our benefit to live in the camps rather than being on the German economy because, first of all, they did not have any room for us. The camps were former German army barracks. Some of them were even *Arbeitslager*. So we felt comfortable and secure in there.

5. Fifth scene: Visit camps in 2002, and personal issues

Christina Holgado: How do you feel right now or after many years, when you think back on your lost childhood?

Bill Orlin: I did not have a normal childhood, obviously. I had to grow up fast, and at age 10, probably by age 10, I probably had more experience than most children these days when they get 17, 18 or 19. Because by age 10 I was already, for example, in Uzbekistan. I had been travelling from my little village through Poland, Bialystok, Byelorussia, Minsk, Bobruisk and Uzbekistan. So, I had a lot of experience at age 10. That is an example.

Christina Holgado: In January 2011 you gave an interview. A child interviewed you, and he was asking you if there are many people who do not believe in Holocaust, and what happened. They think that everything was a masquerade, and nowadays, I mean this was four years ago, I have read that there is a movement which is against Holocaust, and this movement tries to deny the Holocaust. What do you think about that?

Bill Orlin: The people who deny the Holocaust, deny it for their own selfish reasons. They are ignorant. They deny it because many of them have a business of denying the Holocaust, because they publish books, they sell books. There is always somebody who does not believe anything. There are people who do not believe that the United States landed a man on the moon because they say all is phoney. They say it is all done in Arizona, that is a place in a dessert. There are people that believe, who want to believe, and some of these people are ignorant, because all the pictures that you see from the concentration camps were taken by the Germans. Nobody had cameras. The Germans documented it all. Not only they documented when they enrolled people in Auschwitz, they knew what kind and how old you are, where you were born, what kind of trade you had, if you were doctor or lawyer or whatever, how many children you had. They had it all documented. And the reason they gave them numbers it is because they wanted to treat you like cattle. They do not want you to be a human being. They gave you a number. They did not call you by the name, they called you by the number. So, anybody that chooses to deny the Holocaust, denies it for his own purposes because

some of these people have a business, and they sell books. Of course, they deny it. The best proof that the Holocaust existed is 6 million Jews got killed, 20 million Russians got killed, 50 million people got killed in World War II. The Germans documented all that. They did the films. They have all the information. It was not done by the Jews, it was done by the Germans.

Christina Holgado: You spoke in that interview in 2011 that the Red Cross visited some concentration camps. You spoke about Theresienstadt[13]**, and I read, about this same topic, that in Birkenau the Red Cross visited the women barracks. When I heard your statements about Theresienstadt and the Red Cross, I remembered a book entitled** *A Woman in Birkenau***. I have always been wondering why the Red Cross did believe the theater, and the representation of what it was, not the reality there. I do not know if they did not notice that one hundred or fifty meters away there were people dying, skeletons with pyjamas. What do you think about this?**

Bill Orlin: I was in Theresienstadt as a tourist in a one-hour tour, in the gas chamber[14], and the cemetery where there are buried Christians and Jews with David stars and crosses. And the tourist guide told us, he showed us a bathroom facility that had been never used, and he said that the German authorities brought in the Red Cross to Theresienstadt. They had a big dinner, they entertained the officials, there were some women too to enjoy, they never visited that bathroom. They told them: " This is how we treat the Jews". They have a nice bathroom, facilities and also Theresienstadt was a show place for the Nazis. They wanted to show the orchestra, the children's schools and so on, but behind the scenes they were killing people in the gas chamber round the corner, from where the Austria-Hungarian barriers used to be, because I was there too, I had films on that and a lot of the people were taken out to the river and shot. The Germans were very good at propaganda, and Mr. Goebbels was *número*[15] *one so they did such a good job. Like I said, they entertained the Red Cross people, and the Red Cross people who went back to Switzerland, and they were probably sympathizers with the Nazis anyhow, so they said "oh nice, nice, nice".*

Christina Holgado: Did the survivors in the American zone tell you about their life in the concentration camps?

Bill Orlin: Absolutely, absolutely. That is how I learnt a lot of stuff. In 2002 I went to Europe, to Treblinka, to Auschwitz, to Theresienstadt, to a camp in Austria. I cannot remember that camp. We went to a number of camps. And we saw what happened, and they showed pictures that the Germans took. The Germans took all the pictures, and the

13. Theresienstadt or Terezin. A ghetto in Czechoslovakia (at the present time, Czech Republic).

14. Note to "in the gas chamber": Theresienstadt was a transit camp, i.e. from there tens of thousands of prisoners were sent to extermination camps. In 1941 Hitler inaugurated this facility, and turned it in a fictitious "holiday resort". It is unlikely to identify gas chambers in Theresienstadt due to the camp category. Probably this implausible gas chamber was confused with a huge bathroom where prisoners were driven to have a shower.

15. Number.

ovens. And we went to Madjanek [16] which is in Lublin. The ovens that burnt people are right still there like they'd just been cleaned up. They look as if they are still operating. It was very sad.

Christina Holgado: Mr. Orlin, it was a pleasure to have a person like you here to share everything with me.

Bill Orlin: I am glad that you talked me for the interview.

Christina Holgado: I have counted the number of places where you were in: These are 14 different places. That is too much for a child.

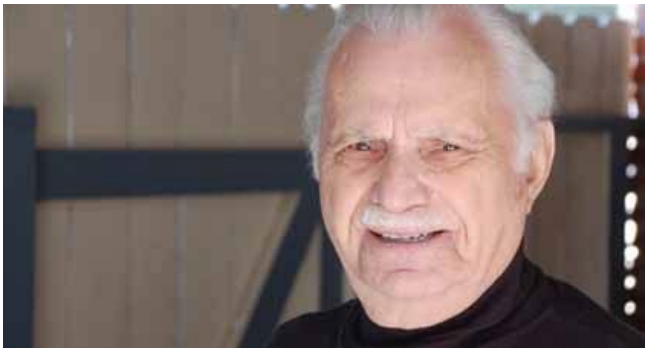
Bill Orlin: It is better than being dead.

Christina Holgado: I agree. But I imagine my son with 7 years old and I pregnant and with another son… I suppose that your mother should have been a very strong person.

Bill Orlin: My mother was a very gentle woman, she had a lot of common sense. If it had not been for my mother, I would not be here today. She was very caring, very loving and, as far as I am concerned, she is the hero of this whole episode. Because without her, my mother,… I go to her grave all the time, I made it two years ago. She was everything to me. I got tears on my eyes now.

Christina Holgado: Thank you so much.

Bill Orlin: Thank you for your interest in me.



William (Bill) Orlin

16. Poland, near the town of Lublin, close to the border with Ukraine.