



## **UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – MARTIN BENNETT**

**[Testimony: 1hr 05'. Artefacts: 2'.15'']**

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript. However, no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended only as a guide to the original recording.

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00:00:00:00

**Martin Bennett**

My name is Martin Bennett, née Izbicki. I am born in Poland, year 1925. My number, which was given to me in Auschwitz, is 137,296 if you can see it. It has faded a little bit, so did I.

**[fade to black and back up]**

00:00:42:16

**Interviewer**

Thank you. So can you tell me why you've changed your name?

00:00:45:07

**Martin Bennett**

My daughter went to sch, public school, and of course the name Izbicki, in them days, there were no multi-racial society. The young girls couldn't pronounce her name. They called us all sorts of names, she came home crying sometimes, and I spoke to my cousin, he was a solicitor, he said why don't you change your name by deed of poll? And I thought, I saw in the paper, a name Q. C. Bennett. And this name, I liked because my father was Baruch, start with a B. So, I said Bennett it's going to be, and that's how it was.

00:01:35:01

**Interviewer**

Can you tell me about your family, how many people there were in your family, where you lived, and a little bit about your background?

00:01:43:04

**Martin Bennett**

My family consisted my father, my mother, wonderful strong people. Six brothers, two sisters, and accommodation was very tight. I wondered sometimes how they managed to cope with us. My eldest brother already was a tailor, he was earning money. The rest of us, we were a burden to the family. Just to feed them, I don't know how they managed. And that is the family of mine.

00:02:33:16

**Interviewer**

Can you tell me about your hometown and where you live?

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**Martin Bennett**

My hometown was called Izbicki, Izbicka, sorry.

00:02:42:11



**Interviewer**

Can you say that again, my hometown is

00:02:44:08

**Martin Bennett**

My n, my hometown was called Izbicka. And my name was Izbicki. How it came about apparently, my father told me, that they were the first settlers in this town, so they called their name Izbicka, so they called them self Izbicki. We had a thriving community, a Synagogue, school, cheder.

00:03:14:22

**Interviewer**

When did you become aware that things were changing for your community?

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**Martin Bennett**

Changing for?

00:03:22:14

**Interviewer**

In your community. When were you aware of antisemitism and what was happening in the wider world?

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**Martin Bennett**

Antis, antisemitism was always very ripe. The Catholic people. It was a Catholic country. And there were plenty of incident, antisemitic incident, but we learned to live with, we lived in a separate area, and everything worked fine. We got on with this community, most of them, quite well for years and years and years.

00:03:57:08

**Interviewer**

What happened when the Nazis invaded your hometown in Poland?

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**Martin Bennett**

Well, that is a story of my life. 1939. I came out of cheder, people standing in a restaurant with one wireless. They announced Germany occupied Poland. Some people didn't realize. Some even said, it might be better, because we had no industry, they said the German people are very er, er, it might be better for the town. But it didn't take long. The army arrived, and of course we had many Volksdeutsche living there. They took over, to run the town. They knew exactly where every Jewish person lived. They also took over all the, erm, archives and so on.

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And then, started coming orders. Within a few months, we were ordered, every Jewish person to wear a Star of David in the front, so they can identify a Jewish. We weren't allowed to walk on the pavement anymore, only on the street, on the road. We were excluded from all schools. We couldn't go to the public school anymore and, doctors were struck off. They couldn't practice. The bakers, which were baking



for the town were most of them Jewish people. They were stopped delivery for them. So everything went on the rations. Things became very, very, tight, and difficult.

00:06:04:23

**Interviewer**

Can you remember how you felt at that time?

00:06:07:09

**Martin Bennett**

I beg your pardon.

00:06:08:24

**Interviewer**

Do you remember how you felt? Were you, were you nervous, d, were you aware of what was happening to your community?

00:06:14:07

**Martin Bennett**

No my dear. I h, I was only 14. I never been anywhere. I only could not have been nervous or not. I just listened and followed instructions.

00:06:29:06

**Interviewer**

So what happened next?

00:06:31:00

**Martin Bennett**

Er what happened next? They ordered every young person to assemble the centre of town. We are going to send you to a place to f, of work, to help the war effort and you'll be able to send home money. The lorries arrived to the town. Every house was emptied by Gestapo. They were in every house, getting all the young people out. I stood there, and I know things are getting tight. How can I ever mind help the parents to send home money? I jumped on this lorry, thinking that I will be able to send home money.

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And the last, as the lorries pulled out, my mother noticed me, and she run with a loaf of bread, which supposed to be for the family. She threw it at me, you might be hungry on the way. And that's the last time I've seen any of my family. But and that was the journey to Poznan.

00:07:57:01

When we got there, it was a wired-up camp. I realised from here, you'll never be able to send home money. Thousands of people there already walking around like zombies. Sha, shaven. And, I walk around bewildered, disorientated. All of a sudden, I hear a voice, my brother, Trovier. He said to me "What are you doing here"? I didn't know he went in a, in a different lorry. He told me off of course, but and then he took control over me. He was the greatest help to me. All the years, as we go on, I'll tell you about him more.



00:08:48:23

**Interviewer**

He was your guiding star you say.

00:08:51:04

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely my dear, that was my, I would have given up many times, excuse me, but he was terrific. He was a very strong person. I can't, words can't describe him. As we go along, I tell you more about him.

00:09:11:15

**Interviewer**

So Martin did you not see any members of your family apart from him again?

00:09:16:05

**Martin Bennett**

Nobody.

00:09:17:15

**Interviewer**

Do you know what happened to them?

00:09:19:07

**Martin Bennett**

No. I expect they come along further on. And when we come to the liberation,

00:09:30:04

**Interviewer**

Ok. So, you've given me a bit of a description of Poznan, but can you describe a little bit more about er how, what it looked like. Where did you sleep? How did you spend your days? What was the experience like?

00:09:43:14

**Martin Bennett**

Previous, before the war?

00:09:45:15

**Interviewer**

When you arrived in the camp.

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**Martin Bennett**

Ah, well, in the arrive, when we arrived at Poznan, we were shaven all over and allocated a place which is long, building, with three storey bunks. No mattresses, just a blanket and wooden slots.

And we were every morning, we were given a s, quarter of a, a loaf of bread, and a cup of coffee and marched to work.

00:10:30:03



The work was only d, useless, they only kept us there while our future is being prepared in Auschwitz. We were taken, sent from one place, put another place, and that was the work. And this went on for quite a while, and of course people already started losing their mind, under-nourished, because we were there quite a while.

00:11:01:15

**Interviewer**

Do you know how long you were there?

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**Martin Bennett**

Times are very difficult for me to remember. Quite a, a year at least. And then of course, came an order, we're liquidating this camp, take all your belongings, we're going to take you to a most modern place for work. Our belongings, a blanket, and a tin which we used for drinking, for washing. And we were taken to a station in Poznan, and marched there quite, took about an hour from this place. When we got there, it was a row of w, er wagons, cattle wagons and um, we were stayed a bit dubious why cattle, you know. And the people did ask er, some Gestapos. They said well, the ordinary trains are used for the military. We can only transport you on these sort of,

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They loaded us up on these cattle trucks. The ventilation was only one on top. The door was shut, and that's it, and we moved on. The journey was horrendous. People were suffocated. No toilets. I'm sorry to say to ur, ur, urinate, it became impossible. We travelled for quite a while, a few days. The tracks were still not working so we, they stopped us at many places. We didn't know where we were. At one time they did open and threw in some bread. Me being short, I'm on the floor quick, I managed to grab a loaf of bread. And I survived, to go on.

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Eventually, we arrived at the famous gate of Auschwitz.

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**Interviewer**

Did you know anything about Auschwitz, at that point?

00:13:38:02

**Martin Bennett**

Not, no idea whatsoever.

00:13:41:04

**Interviewer**

What do you remember about that arrival?

00:13:43:12

**Martin Bennett**

Er, a lot. We drove in through the gates. A big platform. Er people from oh, hundreds of people in the train being unloaded. And on the platform, three to four deep, a tremendous amount of people, standing there, waiting to be unloaded. And waiting



for the Gestapo er, the man what looks after the camp.

00:14:20:14

And then the shouting, came along with dogs, frightened people, get, [?] quick, quick, quick. They also brought inmates to help you unload.

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And then, after a little while, with loudspeakers came an order. Any tradesmen, any doctors, any craftsmen, any boot makers, step aside. My brother was a carpenter, he stepped aside. But of course he made sure I'm also a carpenter. I stepped aside. And I didn't realize - I spoke to in Yiddish, in Jewish, to an inmate what's helping there. Said you are lucky. I say what, what's the matter, why am I lucky? Do you realise what's going on here? That's is a time when I was told, the people on this side, you never be seen again. And we, that was the time decision lucky to, to, to live or to die.

00:15:38:20

**Interviewer**

Do you remember the atmosphere with the other people, how they were feeling, what they were saying? Not the guards but your fellow travellers, what, h, how were they reacting to what was happening?

00:15:52:21

**Martin Bennett**

Well there already were, worn out people from the first camps. They just followed like sheeps. They had no choice, they're so bewildered. Some people even ask why didn't anybody rebel? Now what chance have you got with machine guns on top of you? To lift, if you don't lift your arm you, you get shot. There were no reaction because there was no feeling anymore.

00:16:27:14

**Interviewer**

Did you have feeling?

00:16:30:03

**Martin Bennett**

I, as I say before, I was a strange being. I just went along, I went along. Hoping from day to day, and I were thinking, must be a world outside. And I said to my brother, if I wouldn't have my brother, of course I wouldn't, I wouldn't survive. And that's how we were allocated taken first of all, to showers, shaven again, disinfected and numbered. By that time you lost your name, your identity, what you was left with, is the number. And again my brother made sure that I'm in the front, and he has got one number by.

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After this, we were allocated to a place, a barrack, and er, we were fed. It was a soup from kind of, beetroot I don't know. And that was the day, the first day in Auschwitz.

00:17:42:18



**Interviewer**

Can you tell me about the process of being given your number? How d, how did it work, how did people get, get their number?

00:17:51:13

**Martin Bennett**

There were people, inmates, everything was done, The Germans had organised that the camp is run by inmates. There was um about three or four chairs. And there's a guy with a pen bashing. If you get a move, you get a kick. So I stood there, I didn't feel. That's how they done the numbers. They must have had a tally where they were, how many arrive here.

00:18:31:00

**Interviewer**

Can you describe to me Martin, Auschwitz? We've all seen pictures of what it, we think it was like. But can you explain to me, what it was like to be there? What did it smell like, what did it feel like? How big was it? Did you feel,

00:18:48:00

**Martin Bennett**

The. The. Auschwitz is a place, a different place in Birkenau. We were taken to Birkenau. It is a very, very large, hundreds of barracks, wooden barracks and a ladies depart, er part and a gents part. And once you allocated to your barracks, you had no connection with anybody. You only allowed to talk to each other. It was, to describe hell on earth. And, how we managed to keep fighting to go on, that is puzzling me even now. I'm 90 years of age now, and sometimes to ask these questions, are so hard to explain.

00:19:52:15

But anyway we were there for a little while. Then we were sent to Jaworzno. It's a camp nearby, which was a building, er, *I G Farben* was building, and they used the inmates as labour. And we were sent there, but it was also exactly like Birkenau with wires and everything, barracks set up, completely. And how many people died there, you know to construct the building, with no safety measures. If you understand the construction during construction, to screw together things. People fell off for hunger, it doesn't matter, we got plenty more in er, in Birkenau. We s, send new ones.

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My brother again was a carpenter. Before they put the concrete in for the buildings, they had to build mo, mo, m, moulds. He constructed them. And then he said, before we put the concrete in, the mixture got to be tested for strength. So they set me up in a b, in a hut with heating, and I had to go to collect a bucket of cement, put it in a mould, and sit there for two hours. And then they gave me a hammer to test the indentations. When it was deep enough, I went along there and start pouring in the stuff. That was again lucky. I had this job for a, in the heat sitting warm.

**[Cut for direction].**

00:21:45:23

**Interviewer**





Um, at this point you had your brother, Tovia, and nobody else. But you'd come from such a big family, you must have been very concerned for everybody else and where they were?

00:22:00:06

**Martin Bennett**

Yeah well, I didn't believe that they, I said we are only interned. I didn't think that this sort of thing can happen to my family. I expected as I said, when I was liberated, the greatest tragedy for me, you would have thought when you get liberated, you're happy. We made our way back to my hometown. I'm going to see my mother, my father you know I. When I walked into the town, I met a lady which I knew a girl, is a girl, that lived, a neighbour, she told me what happened. And it was impossible to walk any further. But walk we did. The town had administration, gave us a place in a house what belonged to Jewish people.

00:23:03:09

When I got there was already a few survivors, in this house. And what they told me, the question you ask, was I concerned, I had no reason to be concerned. I thought it's only us. My only concerns were me and my brother to survive. But what death they had, I will never, come to term.

00:23:35:16

Can you imagine? My, my family, sitting, they tell them they're taking for a re, re settlement. And I have read on YouTube, they described Chelmno, how the wagons were built, and exactly what kind of death they went through. It's impossible to, for all of the people, the future, for young people to understand or imagine it can happen.

**[Cut for direction]**

00:24:13:21

**Martin Bennett**

[...] These lorries arrived to tell them we're going to take you to a re settlement. Take your belongings. Again, only what you can, and they mounted the lorries. And as soon as they were mounted, on the way they were switched on, and died of suffocation. The driver knew exactly when they're dead. They had a little window, to look back to see how the gas works.

And of course, I went to see this place, Chelmno. It is a horrendous, terrible, memories.

00:25:08:18

**Interviewer**

After everything that you and your brother had been through, that must have been the most terrible discovery.

00:25:15:03

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely. We st, we got through so much. We managed. The journey, even the journey home back to Poland, we had to travel on top of a train because people were travelling, everything was full. When we got there, we started shivering. Who we



going to meet? It is the most, this was the most, upsetting time in my life, and our, my brother and I.

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**Interviewer**

How lucky that you had each other?

00:25:55:06

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely. That was very, very lucky. As I say, I should call myself the lucky boy.

00:26:05:24

**Interviewer**

Why would you say that? With everything that you've been through. Most pe, most people would not say that you have been lucky.

00:26:13:21

**Martin Bennett**

Yeah, I am lucky. And then of course, when we were, arrived, we heard all this t, er terrible, terrible story. We tried to settle down. You know there's a few boy, boys and girls. How can we live here? And even then, we have a letter thrown in, it's a special Nazi party, we don't want you back, you'd better, esca, bes, better go.

00:26:46:05

So we packed up and went to a town Łódź, a big city. There, there was UNRA United Nations Relief Centre which specially, organised to rehabilitate survivors, to help them to some normality. We got there, we were received, numbered.

00:27:17:14

And then they sent us to Austria, Linz, a town called, with a very, very big camp with all council houses like here they call them. A big area, there's hundreds and hundreds of refugees, Russians, soldiers, Jewish which pu, run away. Everything were there. And they tried to help you. You could study or have a trade. But I didn't think of study, I didn't think of a future. And we lived there for quite a while, quite comfortable. We used to go to town, with a bus running from our camp to the centre of town, Linz. We even made friends with people what lived there.

00:28:16:19

**Interviewer**

We'll go on to talk about your rehabilitation a little bit later on. But can I ask you more information Martin about, about the camps, about day to day, what it was like to be there, what did you experience? Can you remember any guards? Can you give us a few stories about your experiences there?

00:28:37:02

**Martin Bennett**

I, one experience I remember, one day the Allied forces advanced, and our camp was bombed. They knew exactly, precisely, where the people live, and where they keep the kitchens and all the er, eating stuff. That was my best day, bread was flying, shrapnels was flying. And th, then we had a little bit of hope. Something is



happening here. And of course, I didn't tell you about the death march of course. There's so much to tell.

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**Interviewer**

Please just tell me the stories as they come into your mind.

00:29:29:01

**Martin Bennett**

And then after this, it really did happen. The camp was liquidated, and they didn't want to leave any living souls. So, they gave orders to march us out from the camp, which we call now the death march. We were marching days, at night sleeping on the fields. Gestapo on each side. Anybody who couldn't walk anymore was shot. As you walked through, you could see people lying on the floor. We walked and walked again; we were on our last.

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And then they took us through, with lorries to Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia. They threw us in there, closed the gates, and that was, people lying on the floors as, already, skeletons. Terrible sight. Again, my brother and I, we were lucky.

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Within a few days, the Russian liberated this part. Again, they treat us, they tried to treat us very, very well. They brought, started bringing in food. All sort of tins of meat. And people started eating, they never had anything before. They died of dysentery, overeating, because they weren't used to eat anymore. As a matter of fact, my, even my brother took ill. And they took him to a military hospital, and he made it. And that's the time without marching home. Sorry I go from one thing to another.

**[Cut for card change]**

00:31:32:02

**Interviewer**

You're doing brilliantly. For somebody who is coming to this for the first time, um, finding it very difficult to understand what actually happened in the camps, can you describe to me again what the experience of being in a camp was actually like, day to day? What did you see? What did you hear? What did you smell? What was it like?

00:31:53:06

**Martin Bennett**

A day in camp: the morning people, in every block we had a *kapo*, a ruthless man with a stick whip walking around, getting the people up six o'clock in the morning. Some of 'em refused to get up. They were worn out, and these people, when we come back, were never seen again and every, even myself, if I wouldn't have my brother, many of times I wouldn't get off on this, um, what's it called? The bunk. Worn out. But he was so strong. "Maybe tomorrow something must happen. Keep going." It is impossible to describe daily. We were so automated to pain. We didn't even know what's happening to us. We were many time on the last bit but somehow, some, from nowhere came new, refreshed strength for another day.



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It's very difficult to describe the horror of a place. Wherever you look around every morning we had to be out, be counted before we go out. This could take an hour, could take a half hour. Many of times the tally didn't add up.

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Many people committed suicide on the wire, the wire, the electric wires until they found them.

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Then we were able to get this little bit of bread and our coffee to march out.

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The journey to this work took us quite a long time and then, on the way back, about three o'clock, was getting dark, this area was tremendous, terrible cold place, Silesia in Poland.

00:34:25:04

We mar, marched home, again counted to make sure everybody's in.

00:34:35:18

One incident where I remember, one day we marched in, we stood there for hours. People were missing. Apparently, it was already a Russian underground movement which grabbed seven survivors, and it was mayhem. We stood there for hours. Eventually they let us go in, but an order came, "Tomorrow is no work." They started building guillotines and picking out people at random to show you and we had to march through with your head up to watch they're being hung. And but also the Gestapo said, "Don't worry, they didn't get away. We got them as well." But they didn't. Incident. These, these sort of things. So is so much happening.

Every morning you got a barrow come with collecting corpses. Now, how can you describe a place like this? And you get so hardened that you, you're not human anymore.

00:36:02:04

**Interviewer**

When you think back on that time you must have been a very, very strong man?

00:36:08:22

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely. You know, I was very, very strong. I used to do a lot of sports and so on as a boy. I was very strong. But of course, under these conditions I, I wonder, uh, my brother, it, it's, somehow, somehow a ghost in me, that I took notice of him. He even many of times gave a bit of his ration, uh, bread to me to survive. It's impossible to describe.

00:36:40:12

But, of course, I didn't tell you, when we parted, when we were sent to Linz to the,



under the United Nations Re Centre we live together. He already found a girlfriend from our hometown, and they got married there. They were, had a synagogue there set up. Everything was like home.

00:37:07:17

All of a sudden, I got a letter from the Red Cross, "You got family in London. They're enquiring if anybody survived. They want to bring 'em over." That was a very hard decision for me to make, to live, leave him. But I said to him, "Look, I'm going to England. I want to see Buckingham Palace." "But, why? Yuh, yuh, yuh." "And I'll come to Israel." I went, he went to Israel. I went to London to this family.

00:37:44:00

They also had three children. It was very hard for me to settle down because they couldn't speak my language and the mother, the parents, showered a lot of affection on me. They got a bit of jealousy as well. A wonderful family.

00:38:04:09

And, of course, my brother went to Israel. He established himself very well. He had a restaurant in Mugrabi, one of the centre in Tel Aviv, and unfortunately, he contracted leukaemia, and he died very young. It was the end of, the last of my, I used to go and visit and the last few days the doctor said, "Mr Bennett, you can't stop here. He can, he may live a day, he may live two days." I went home. I get a, a message he passed away. I couldn't even go back to the funeral. But I went. I got there now a nephew still, which I visit quite often and, uh, that's that.

00:39:03:09

And me, in London, of course, it was very hard for me as well to get established to the, to the English way of life. When I arrived, they asked me, "What can you do?" I said, "I can't do nothing. I haven't," *[Laughs]* I didn't come here to work. I come to, to, you know, uh, I had illusions about London. Because I showed them the pictures. And then they put me into a trade to be a tailor.

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**Interviewer**

I'm, I'm going to talk to you about that in a minute's time but can I,

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**Martin Bennett**

Okay.

00:39:38:18

**Interviewer**

can I just finish off about, about the camp?

00:39:41:02

**Martin Bennett**

Yeah.

00:39:41:18

**Interviewer**



-Martin. Sorry to keep asking you to go back to it. Um, your brother, he saved you again and again and again just because of hope, mainly, because he was so positive. But did you ever lose hope yourself?

00:39:57:15

**Martin Bennett**

No, uh, well, uh, as I say, I didn't know what, I was really dumb, stupid maybe to go along, along, along, along. I, you, you had no, somehow, I dunno myself why I kept going. I couldn't see a tomorrow and, you know, it's very difficult to understand why you could go on. I cannot tell. I wonder myself; I ask myself the same question.

00:40:41:20

It was the most brutal place in the world. If anybody, want to understand horror, that is the place, Birkenau. Six million young children. You have seen young babies arrive and hungry families. Beautiful dressed and everything, and, uh, some of them, they couldn't kill enough quickly. They put 'em in a room to wait, they told 'em to wait to be just, they har, hardly realised in a few minutes they'd be dead. It's, it's so much untold what happened there.

00:41:50:18

I wish I could be more explicit what you're asking me, but I don't know how. Ask me another thing.

00:42:03:12

**Interviewer**

Do you feel like you've blocked a lot in your mind? Have you, have you blocked memories, or do you feel that you've started to process them throughout your life?

00:42:12:20

**Martin Bennett**

I tell you now is my worst time in my life. I've accumulated so much in my computer - my brain. The nights are very, very difficult. It's not a day, not a night, that you fight, you run, you go. I'm lucky I got a person. We have to sh, have different rooms now. I can't put the burden on her. So it's not getting easy. On the contrary, it's so much you go through now. Before, I was younger. We started business. I was busy. Then I took up sport. I was busy. In all the years I've kept busy, away from the horrors. But now I'm getting so weak and only thing what I've got left is, uh, this story. And, of course, a good family.

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**Interviewer**

So the night times you relive the horror still, this many years later?

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**Martin Bennett**

Sorry?

00:43:27:08

**Interviewer**

You said the nights are very bad. What, what happens in the nighttime? You're



having nightmares or you can't sleep or what, what happens at night for you?

00:43:34:15

**Martin Bennett**

Well, I can't sleep. You have to get up, walk around the bed [*Laughs*] and, uh, try to go back. Takes another hour to fall asleep. It is, uh, uh, well, uh, that's how it is.

00:43:46:17

**Interviewer**

Is it because your mind is, your mind is remembering things that you haven't remembered before or because you are having nightmares when you're sleeping?

00:43:53:21

**Martin Bennett**

No. It's what I remember for before. I even think when I came here to prepare my brains for it. [*Chuckles*] And everything is clear. It might not be an aura but it's all there and it's more now than ever, as I said.

00:44:15:19

**Interviewer**

Is there anything that gives you comfort, Martin? What, what, where can you go in your mind that gives you peace?

00:44:22:03

**Martin Bennett**

What gives me peace, is, uh, when I can talk to young people and to share the burden of my burden to them that should not happen again and I have done hundreds of young, thousands, I must say. If they, only one or two remember I know I done well. It gives me peace. And also, I've still got a family now. They come to visit us and that is peace. And I told you the story about I met my wife.

00:45:03:14

**Interviewer**

I've got more questions for you. Are you okay to carry on? Is that,

00:45:06:03

**Martin Bennett**

Yeah.

00:45:06:11

**Interviewer**

is that okay? So can you tell me about the liberation, Martin, when you were liberated? What did that feel like? What actually happened at that, that time?

00:45:14:12

**Martin Bennett**

1945, Russian, as I said before, tanks arrived, opened the gate and we were liberated. We didn't know where we were, who the soldiers are. I didn't know was an English soldier or Russian soldier. And it was, we were bewildered. We didn't know what's happening. But once they start bringing in food, we started getting busy and





this didn't do any good. They meant to be good, but it didn't work out very well. And now I said to my brother, "Now where we go, where where are we? Where we going?" I, we didn't know where it was.

00:45:57:22

We started walking. We met the house, and we found some clothes, civilian clothes and we walked and walked. We took, uh, hitchhikes, farmers, you know, to a town called Bratislava. There they received us. They vetted us first of all that we are survivors because so many Nazis even joined us. And they housed us for a while, clothed us, they gave us clothes to fit, and they said, "There's no trains at the moment but I should imagine a few days you'll be able to go for, carry on where you want to go." It did happen. They told us there's a train coming in.

00:46:53:14

When we got there it's full everywhere. We managed to; people were hanging even the doors to get away. My brother and I laid on the top of the train. Every time we went through a tunnel you could get cap, decapitated. But we travelled like this home. Home. And that was the, amazingly we had to, you could call it home. But when we got home it wasn't home anymore.

00:47:30:09

**Interviewer**

Can you describe what that felt like. I know you have already, but can you tell me again when you went back?

00:47:35:03

**Martin Bennett**

That is the worst, in my life. My brother and I hearing the story about the families with the old adults in the houses, lined them up across the church, which I have got a picture to show, and waiting for the lorries were fitted out as gas chambers and they told me where they took 'em and how they died. That was, uh, you know, we nearly collapsed. We couldn't go any further. That was a, a, never been forgotten. And I can't think to see my little brothers, my two sisters, the brothers, father, sitting there, suffocating.

00:48:39:22

This is the, the worst, my troubles are nothing compared, with this episode.

00:48:53:20

**Interviewer**

What do you think of the Nazis, Martin?

00:48:56:19

**Martin Bennett**

What I think of the Nazis? Now what can I say to you? When I see a person at my age, uh, a German I get a bit dubious. I wonder what he done during the war. But now they're a new generation, young people. They never been there, and I was told in my early years in the Bible you can't put the blame of, of your father upon your son. They're paying a price. And, of course, we're in the Common Market. We've got a State of Israel with their help. The new generation I'm talking about. Now what can





you say how I feel about Germany?

00:49:54:20

We must go forward but we must not forget the past.

00:50:05:07

**Interviewer**

Do you forgive?

00:50:09:00

**Martin Bennett**

The young people? It is very difficult to answer because sometimes they say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I can't forgive. Who am I to forgive? Can, can you ever forgive? Uh, I don't care who it is. When you think of my parents and then we talk about six million children, thrown in. Uh, but to me the worst, as I said to you before, [*clears throat*] to hear what happened to them on this day when they're collected with these lorries to Chelmno and, of course,

00:50:57:13

Chelmno wasn't a concentration camp. It was a crematorium. The corpse arrived to be, burned. And many times were so many coming in they had special digs with corpses laying to be, this is, th, this is, will never be forgotten to me as long as I live. I can cope with what I suffered, with the things, what happened to me. I'm here and I'm functioning. I'm lucky. But this is very, ve, very, uh, can't explain to you.

00:51:55:05

**Interviewer**

The interview that you're giving now will be able to be seen for many years to come - to your grandchildren, their grandchildren and their grandchildren beyond that, I hope.

00:52:06:08

**Martin Bennett**

Yes.

00:52:06:23

**Interviewer**

Do you have a message for them for what you have been through?

00:52:11:21

**Martin Bennett**

They have my message a long time. As I told you, I got two b, grandsons. He, the oldest one is 19 now. He studied in Brighton University. He want to become architecture. He is written, so much about me, as I told you before. One day he comes along. He put his number on his body. He and him, I know, the future be told. I already got enough what he written already.

00:52:54:21

And he knows that I am doing this because we need a memorial, a place where young people can come in and talk about it, listen about it, remembering what



happened and to remember what shouldn't happen and I hope we'll be successful. Natasha, you're a great advocate for our cause. Our Prime Minister I must thank. His great, the speech I heard on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, what he promised that his children, his great-grandchildren would be able to go to this place and see what happened, what the Holocaust was all about.

00:53:48:24

And if I can help a little bit and I say to young people, "If you ever look at me sometimes, please remember I'm 90 years of age now. That is my last testimony for you. I hope you will stand up when you see bigotry, antisemitism, exclusion. Don't walk away. It could happen very easily if everybody doesn't act against it. We already have Nazi Party in Europe. We got great antisemitism, great division between people with religion. But fortunately in England we are lucky. We can all practice our own religions and I'm grateful to be in England this, this period.

00:54:59:13

**Interviewer**

Do you feel like lessons have been learned from the Holocaust?

00:55:04:02

**Martin Bennett**

A lot have been learned but we have got historians which, uh, can deny it didn't happen. You know Irving? One. And if I speak to a person like this, I couldn't look at him. But fortunately we have got a few survivors, live witness, that you can't deny it. And there's so much written by famous people and accepted that its, it did happen.

00:55:43:24

**Interviewer**

I want to talk a little bit about the happier times in your life and Priscilla.

00:55:48:13

**Martin Bennett**

Ah. *[Laughs]*

00:55:49:14

**Interviewer**

Please can you tell us that story,

00:55:50:02

**Martin Bennett**

That's okay.

00:55:50:22

**Interviewer**

because that was a, a joy in your life and you've been married for many years, and she's been your guide and she has helped you come to terms with all the horrors that you've witnessed.

00:56:02:10

**Martin Bennett**



As I say to you once before, I think I mentioned, again I was lucky. Priscilla belonged to a club, a local club and she used to have a boyfriend called Martin. One day some friends of mine took me there - I couldn't speak English with the boys but they took me there - and it's a friend of Priscilla's said, you know, to, uh, uh, Priscilla gave her a message to tell him, tell Martin to come around and she told the wrong Martin. She told me. I bought a bunch of flowers. I went along to see. The mother could speak Jewish and she was so helpful. "Oh, it's okay. So come more, come more." And finish up the other Martin married somebody and I, Priscilla married me. And that was the happiest day.

00:57:16:05

And, of course, she was also a sales lady. I was already a tailor, and we were lucky again. It was a business for sale, ladies wear, and we bought the shop. We didn't have any money. It was a Jewish couple. The wife was having a baby. She can't carry on. So we, lucky, we bought as business. But I haven't got enough money to pay for it. He knew who I am and what I went through. He said, "I tell you, give me what you can, and you pay me a cheque every month". We undertook it. Within a year we paid him off. We had stock and we were in business. The clientele was old gentiles. The local dignitaries used to come in and Priscilla was very, very good with them. One day I wanted to put an advert to *Surrey Comet*: 'We Are Under New Management.' Anyway, a reporter came along. I took him to the pub. We had a drink. He said, "Where do you come from?" He knew, uh, foreigner. He says, "I don't want any money." Uh, he put a front page 'From Auschwitz to North Cheam'. Them days people heard from Auschwitz they come, like a circus, they come into see me. So they bought something. And it puts us [*laughs*], it's amazing, lucky. We, uh, we had the lo, the local Mayor. We were even invited Mayor Making. You know, we had such a good clientele and we been in this business for 30 years and we retired.

00:59:18:24

Lucky. Lucky again. And, of course, the business went quiet because the store has took over. Little shops had no choice anymore, but I was lucky. We had an estate agents next door who says, "There's a property going there for sale." [*Laughs*] Again. You know? And I thought to myself instead of taking out a policy I bought the shop, this, and that's what gave me a living for 30 years. Lucky.

00:59:56:01

**Interviewer**

But I think what your story shows is that you have so much respect, that people understand at least a bit of what you've been through, and they have shown you respect in your life because of your survival. Do you feel respected and treasured in this country?

00:00:15:12

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely. I, wherever I go, As I said, I belong to a golf club. These people are so helpful, so respectful. Every one of 'em. Unfortunately they're now, we are all old now. They were so respectful they decided we have one survivor here. We're going to make him our honorary member in the golf club in that respect. On top of all that I said I want to make a party. "Thank you, no." They laid on a party. We even got the local rabbi from our synagogue to make a Kel Maleh Rachamim to remember



because, as a survivor, they gave me this honour. In the synagogue I have great respect. I have seen through many rabbis. I have no complain. I dunno. I'm very happy with people. I don't hate. Sometimes people are not quite so. Maybe they had a bad day, I think to myself. But, yes, I find people very helpful and respectful.

00:01:43:14

**Interviewer**

Your story is so remarkable. When you talk about everything that you and your brother went through, it, it's, extraordinary that you survived and so it's right that people pay you that honour.

00:01:57:06

**Martin Bennett**

Well, no, no. Is it right or wrong? They don't owe me anything. Nobody owes me anything. But I appreciate what they've done. I appreciate what people do. I appreciate your work, what you do for the future generation.

00:02:15:07

**Interviewer**

Thank you. Do you have any questions that you feel are unanswered when you look back on your life, when you look back at how history is writing about what happened during that time?

00:02:29:14

**Martin Bennett**

[Sighs] It happened so unexpected, so unprepared. Uh, uh, uh, it just happened. I can't, it's no good looking back because it's impossible to describe. I'm a blank, it's a blank now. It did happen and I only hope it never happen, that people will never, young people, the future, future generation, will never, ever experience times like this.

00:03:11:22

**Interviewer**

A last question for you. Um, why have you dedicated so much of your time to telling your story? Why do you feel it's important to do interviews like this and share the story with your grandchildren and with people in the community who want to hear what happened?

00:03:32:06

**Martin Bennett**

I was at one point, a transport came out from Hungary, rabbis and all sort of Talmudists. They degraded them. They cut their beards off, and he spoke to me. He saw me, he saw I'm a little boy, a young boy. He said, "Mordecai." Martins are called Mordecai. "You are a young boy. You will survive. Don't forget to tell them what happened here." They always talk like that. And I feel it's my duty. I survived because, uh, really to tell the story.

00:04:20:20

**Interviewer**



And telling the story gives you peace of a sort, because you feel like you are at least passing on the message, is that right?

00:04:30:03

**Martin Bennett**

Absolutely. I, passing on the message and I hope the future generation will understand what happened in this era under the Nazis.

00:04:52:04

**Interviewer**

Do you feel we have heard you? Do you feel we have heard you? You feel we are listening?

00:05:00:10

**Martin Bennett**

Well, I hope so. I can, can't judge people. Some people are funny. Uh, even the best we will find opposition. If you get 60 percent, we have won.

**- END OF INTERVIEW -**

## **ARTEFACTS**

### **ARTEFACT 1: Scan of photo of pre-war photo of Martin's family**

00:05:21:13

**Martin Bennett**

This photograph was given to me when I returned from the Holocaust from Auschwitz home by a neighbour. That is my family, they ordered them out of the houses assembled them in town near the church and the lorries arrived which were already fixed as gas chambers. I had a worst moment in my life to hear that story and this is the people when my family stand there.

### **ARTEFACT 2: Scan of photo of Martin's brother**

00:06:08:24

**Martin Bennett**

This is my brother which through him I survived. Unfortunately he passed away very young and that's the only person I had left, and it was a very trauma for me to lose my brother.

### **ARTEFACT 3: same image of Martin's brother, different caption**

He was a saving star for me, without him I wouldn't have survived. I look at him as an angel, may he rest in peace forever.

### **ARTEFACT 4: Scan of photo of Martin's original family**

00:07:04:21

No commentary

### **ARTEFACT 5: Scan of photo of Martin in 1947 after arriving in England**

00:07:09:21



No commentary

**ARTEFACT 6: Scan of Martin & Priscilla engagement photo**

00:07:14:22

No Commentary

**ARTEFACT 7: Scan of Martin & Priscilla's wedding photo**

00:07:19:23

No commentary

**ARTEFACT 8: Scan of photo Martin at a school where he had been invited to talk**

00:07:24:24

No commentary

**ARTEFACT 9: Scan of photo Martin with Natasha Kaplinsky**

00:07:30:00

No commentary