

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Bernard Pasternak
April 20, 1994
RG-50.030*0177**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Bernard Pasternak, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on April 20, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Bernard Pasternak

April 20, 1994

Q: Would you please tell me your name, how you were born, your birth name, and when and where you were born?

A: My name is Bertna Belle Pasternak. Now, my name is Bernard. It went from Belle to Bernard. I was born in a place. It was Martimorish (ph). It's in Romania, and the city is Visho. In Visho, when Romania was there it was Vishosimos. And also, they called that city Feldesisho because the Hungarians were there. The area where I was born was surrounded with mountains around. We had high peaks of mountains over there which there was snow almost all year around. About September the snow melted, something like this and then a month later the snow came back. The area was a beautiful area surrounded with water. We had water. We had everything over there. We were there, approximately a few thousand Jews. There was a few thousand Germans and also a few thousands Rumanians and Hungarians. We all had areas, different areas. The Jews had their Jewish quarter. The Rumanians the other quarter, the Germans the other quarter and the Hungarians. The Germans were not the same type of Germans as in Germany. They all speak German, but they call them Sipser (ph), a Shwab, some kind of a Shwab name. There was a lot of them, and we all understand each other and we got along great. In the city, in the Visho, as a matter of fact, the Jewish life was so great over there that on Friday, we had a whistle blowing when the Shobot comes, three times. The first whistle meant close the store. The second whistle meant you should be home by now, and the third one to light candles. That was the greatest thing to happen. We also had a _____ there which children were coming from all around learning and that _____ by us. We had five schools. They named them number one, number three, number four and five. We also had about four or five shulls, and we all belonged to different area. Everybody had a different way to go wherever he wanted to go. We were assigned to go to school number one which it was I would say about a half a mile. The area there -- there was no transportation like you have over here. We walked to school. The school wasn't so bad to walk except there were hills when you got to the school there. Also there was another system too over there. We went to Hebrew in the morning until 9:30, from 7:00 until about 9:30. At 9:30 we went to the Romanian school. We had lunch a little bit, about a half an hour, and then in the afternoon until 4:00. 4:00 we went back to Hebrew school until about 8:00. Now, what did we do over there all this time, you know, with the children when they're grown up? Industrial life, there was only how should I say, wood factories. We had a lot of wood. All the time, when the Hungarians were before the First World War, and the Austrian life was very beautiful over there, very great. On the beginning on the 18th century, the beginning of the 18th century, the first Jew came over from Poland. He settled in Martimorish because there wasn't such a good life there so they kept on coming and coming. They settled. But after the Romanians took over, after the first world war, the Romanians took over and life turned sour because the Rumanians didn't need any wood and there was no other industry so it wasn't so great for everybody over there. Their lives started to be very poor, but what we grew over there and the

mountains, there was potatoes, beans, corns, so almost everybody had a little farm. We stored away the food for the wintertime. We put it in basements, whoever had basements and we kept on going day by day. We had no telephone of course. We had no radios and things like this. It was like in the early 1900 century. It didn't change much, the life. There was a lot of poor people in the area also because I came from a five sisters and two brothers, but most of the families were much larger, and it was not easy to keep up so many people to feed the people. The father only had the work over there. The mothers over there, like the Jewish mothers, they always took care of their children. They were trying to do the best they can to see that everybody is nourished the right way and lived the right way. But there were other kinds of things over there, the life was very harsh, the way it happened there. It started with beatings. No matter what you do, you got a beating. You went to Hadre, you didn't know the thing, you got a beating. You walked in the street, if there was an older man and you didn't give him the right of way, he give you a beating. You went to school which the principal from the school, his name was Hugar. He was standing in the steps just wait for children to come in and he pulled their hair so much until the kid collapsed. Then we went in the school. We sit down, there must be a least 300 children approximately. Now, the teacher came in. When the teacher came in, you could drop a pin, and it was so quiet nobody made a move. The teacher walked around and they didn't like any child or whatever it is, you got a beating. So, that's the way life was in school. Unfortunately I was a lefty, and I could not write with my right hand because I was a lefty. So, the teacher was watching most of the people who were lefties. She had a big stick, I would say at least one inch thick, short stick. When I had to write, I grabbed the pencil with the left hand, and I wanted to do what I have to do from the work. When the teacher noticed, she came over with that stick and it almost broke my arm. But there was no other way. I had to learn how to write with my right hand, which by the way away now, I do write with my right hand. It's the same thing with the food. If you're a lefty, of course you take the spoon and start eating with your left hand. You got a beating that time, too, because you're supposed to eat with your right hand. Everything came out with force just to do with the right hand. When I grow up a little bit bigger, I went to learn at a tin smith and he only had to shear with right hand shears. I had to learn how to cut with my right hand because there was no left hand shears. Like I was saying, life was going on with the Romanians, I was working during the day. Whenever I had time, sometimes in between sometimes I was working, helped out a little bit until 1940 when the Hungarians came in. The Romanians went out and the Hungarians came in. Once the Hungarians came in, the old timers used to tell us how good it was by the Hungarians before the World War so we should be happy that the Hungarians came in. Life would be different. What happened, there was a few soldiers, Jewish soldiers and they came over to us and they said this is not the same Hungarians that the older people know. This is a different type of Hungarians. All right. In the beginning it was not too bad. A year or two or something, it was not too bad. By the way, in schooling, in the thirties, the late thirties, there was a Romanian, there was a party, an anti-Semitic party. Koozar was the name of the minister and the Prime Minster was Googar. Koozer and Googar. In the late thirties they came in to make the pogroms, and we were so worried they were going to come to Visho because we know they're coming to Visho to make the

pogrom. What happened when it came to the area, the Visho left, they turned right and they went to Warsaw. They burned the whole town. They killed a lot of people there. They destroyed everything over there. That was in the late thirties. At that time, the anti-semitic thing was so big, all the things were so big, that I couldn't go to school any more. All my schooling was four years. I could not go to school any more due to the fact that I was a Jew. My parents whatever they could they give us a little private lesson, whatever we could just to keep up the thing. My father was a singer on the weddings. He was also a canter, and he was one of the greatest men from the area. They used to call him all around the area for states to sing and things. He used to put words together. If he would have been here in this country he would be the greatest man in the country as a singer. So, it was very hard to even keep up with the families so he also had a job -- like we had horse and wagon, which almost everybody had that thing. We had a little farm there to try and grow some food things like that, but life was very hard, very hard life. When the Hungarians were in already for a few years, then we saw the true colors from the Hungarians. First of all, they put us, we have to give a day's work, everybody has to give a free day's work. So, I went to work. I give them a day's work, so the thing of it is you could have worked for somebody else too, if they pay you, you could work for somebody else too. So, I worked five days a week so we didn't feel like going to work. The people who had stores think like this. I used to get paid and go to work. What was the work? Most of the work was preparation for the war. We went out to work on the volleys. We dig big holes. We put trenches around the tanks should not come through. The Russian tanks should not be able to come through the area. So, we worked day in and day out. After the Hungarians decided why should there be one day where everybody goes to work, so they put us to working more days. So, really we had the most miserable life of the Hungarians for the past few years. They took away everything whatever we had. If somebody had a cow, they took it away. If they had a horse, they took it away. They left you flat with everything. The area where I was with all the people who we got along so great all those years, they looked the other way. I don't think there was one person who survived over there that somebody should hide that person. There was not such a thing.

Q: This was from what period?

A: That was the period since the Hungarians came in. I would say from 1942 to 1944, because the first, in the beginning it was not too bad with the Hungarians, like I said. They needed the wood and there was a wood factory. I worked in the mountains where they sawed the wood and we cleaned off, you know around the wood they had that black thing around the wood, we chopped it off to clean the wood to be able to bring it down to prepare if for wood. So, it was a very hard life. We got paid very little. We got paid -- talking about child labor. You were 15, 16 and you put in eight, ten, twelve hours a day. It was the same thing with almost with everybody had to go through the same thing.

Q: I'm going to ask you now to tell me before the forming of the Ghetto, tell me how much your family knew about what was going on with the war and with Jews in other parts of Europe. Did they know what was happening? Did they know about concentration camps?

- A. After, I would say in '43, we already it got very, very bad in general. Very bad for everybody for every Jew. If a Hungarian soldier passed on the street, the first thing he called over a Jew and he hit them. No reason. He went to the horses, they were riding horses, he would beat them up. Then later on, we heard something, that something is going on in Poland. There was something, a daughter-in-law was from Poland and she wrote a letter. She was in Poland and her husband was in Visho. They couldn't get together because the war started already. So, she wrote a letter and it was censored so bad, that he couldn't write anything what's going on there. So, I will never forget this woman was a rabbi's daughter-in-law. So, she wrote for her husband and which I said for the rabbi, she wrote in the letter we should know what's going on there. She wrote like this. There is _____ that means money, _____ is no more. It doesn't exit any more. So we know from that two words we started to figure out what's going on in Poland. There was no radio or any other communication. We didn't know. Later on, the situation got very bad. We heard, first of all before the state came, they called to the Army. They were calling all the Jewish children who were at age at that time, who were 17, 18 19 to go to the Army. In the Army they used those Jewish kids. They used them to bring ammution to the front line to do all kind of work for the Hungarian Army. The Army -- they had uniformed Army, they had yellow around the arms -- armband, yellow. This way they recognized them as Jews. There was also another group where they had white arm bands. That means they were not pure Jews. The mother was Jewish or the father was Jewish. So, they had two type of things. I did not go -- I'm supposed to go to the Army at that time, my father says to me, you don't have to go, let's go together because we don't know what happened. He also told me something -- he told me it looks like something is going on terrible in the world. I don't think you're going to be a Hungarian soldier. I think you are going to be some other place. Then, we all got together. They called us. How did they get the people together? There were drums. If you know when sometimes they have a drum and they bang on the drum and they got the people together, that was a sign that the whole town to get together because there is some news to tell. Then they tell us that everybody there's going to be a round up and they have to go in this and this area like but us on the street. There was the Jewish street and they started making the Ghetto all around. The Jewish street over there and the Romanian street's name was _____, the number was 25. The Hungarian name was _____ 32. So, the reason is because I tell you this is because when they got us all together they told us which street to get in together. So this was the word the guy was using to get us there. And the same thing they got all around the town all around the little towns and they got all these people together and they bring them in and that's street around the area. We had so many people in the room that there was no room where to sleep or where to go or what to do anything because one was on top of the other one. The time wasn't too long in there. We was about a month in there. They were-- who was watching the Ghetto was the Hungarians and the Germans, the local people was watching in there. The food was very scarce. There was no food in there. My father used to know all those big shots in there from the town and he used to help a lot of people out. If they were having a problem, he used to help them out. He used to go there, so he went over to one of those guards and he said, "look we are all together in one place." Those people

they had farms - the Jewish people and they put away their food for the winter time. They have them in the basement there. Let's bring it in. Let's feed them otherwise it's going to rot away anyhow. And so how some way my father convinced them and we started bringing in all the food from around. I got permission to go out of the Ghetto and I went out of course I bring back the food so there was also other people they brought in the food and it started to get a little bit better. Mostly what we brought in was potatoes, things like this because corn there was a lot of them. Then I saw a little later on I saw German soldiers began in the ghetto. They were already probably got their orders to round us out and start shipping out. They put us in the line, find out how many people there are and they made four transports. My father was -- when they round them up, when the German soldier passed, he give him some kind of a salute, so the guy looked at him and he asked him, he said, "Are you a military man?" He said, "Yes I am, this and this front and I am an officer." Do you have a _____ -- well, he didn't do anything he just bypassed and to find out that information. They made like I said four transports. We had two stations train stations. One stations they called it the small station where the train used to stop and drop off people, and the one station was a bigger station where the railroad came in. I also want to say that before all those things, I worked for the Hungarians. We took apart the tracks, the Romanian tracks, you know from the trains, and we send them into Hungary. So, I was loading and unloading the tracks. There was two Hungarian officers and they are not supposed to hire Jewish children for the job. When I went in there and applied for the job, he asked me the name, he asked me what your name, I said Bernard Pasternak. He said that sounds too Jewish, so he changed my name for Pasteronish. That's a real Hungarian name, and I got the job. They paid very good. We had it very good for a few months. The job only lasted for a few months because there wasn't so many tracks to pick apart and we loaded them. We did not load them in the same town, in Visho from the same city, we had to go about 50 miles away where they loaded those tracks. So we went with the big trucks and we unloaded. That was before the Ghetto and all those things happened. We -- due to the fact they were short on box cars, so they made four transports and we were going on the fourth transport. When they got together everybody, they told them don't take anything, just take what you could take with you because you have on other things over there and you wouldn't need them. To that point, we didn't know what was going on -- absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, they told us we were going to working camps until the war is over for security reasons or whatever they want. We arrived with the fourth transport. With the other three transports, I mean it was about two days apart, so the other three transports left. When we got to our transport, I saw the box car and we saw all those things what happened. People on there with small children crying throwing packets down on the Hungarian soldiers and the collaborators pulling the bags out of the family they are taking away everything. They didn't need it anyhow, but we didn't know. So finally, we went in the boxcars. I don't know, probably must have been 20 or 30 boxcars in there. We went in that car. He push you in, maybe seventy, eighty people. You can't tell how many you have with children, older ladies and things like this, and then they close the door and they locked it with a lock on the outside. The only air you had in that boxcar was if you see a boxcar, the ones you see in the Holocaust Museum, the same boxcar was

the same one they were taking away. All you could see _____ is the same thing you see there. First we were going for about a day or so and then they opened the door for everybody and says there is water in the station here because those days all the trains were going with water, so they had to pump in the water. So, they opened the door and they were watching us like the biggest criminals with guns and says only one to leave the car and go fill up with water for the rest of the people. It happened I was the one and my father was the one. We tried to supply water, whatever we could to the other cars, and then my father saw a hatch on the boxcar, because every boxcar had a hatch probably for the _____. He took that _____ so nobody should see it. We finish with the water, then close the boxcar and we started going. Then my father called my over and said, "Let's dig a hole in there. Let's break the floor there to make a facility." We worked quite a while. It was very dark and we carted through and we made a facility there to go out like a _____ thing. Everybody was using this. We were putting something around there so people would have a little privacy. It took quite a few days before we got to Auschwitz, but the middle of the way there was a few guys in the boxcar they told me, if you could pay attention, are we turning left or right and Hungary. I says to the guy, no we are turning left, he says that's bad news because right is to Hungary, left is to Poland. It's the one other area. I don't remember if it took five days or six days. When we got off in Auschwitz, first of all in that time when I was taking the water there was a couple of dead children already, which I took them out and there was somebody going through with a carriage or wagon and I put them in the wagon because there was a lot of sick children already and they caught already. Nothing in there was no food, no nothing, very little things whatever we had. And the car, like my mother will know something.

Q: I want to ask you some questions about the Ghetto?

A: All right.

Q: Who gave you permission to leave, or did you sneak out?

A: No. You couldn't sneak out because the Ghetto was surrounded by corroborators to make sure nobody was out. And besides that, which I did not mention, you already had the yellow star. You had the yellow star, and if they caught you without wearing the yellow star you were finished. So, right away they know you. And I think all the things that my father knew so many of those guys and they hand picked a few of the people to go out of the Ghetto to bring in the stuff. It wasn't -- the neighborhood was quite a ride, maybe thirty, forty miles in some area until we got all the food together and brought it in in the tank. Like I was saying, in the car, my mother put her hands around and squeezed me. She said, "I hope you remember me." I did not know what she meant because we were so naive we didn't know what's going on until the last minute. When we got off of the train, first what I saw it was sickening just to see. Our boxcar had the only one facility from all the 40 or 50 wagons, whatever it was. They opened the door, all the dirt came out when they opened the door. People were half to the waist with that dirt around from the train because there was no other way. You had to go from so many days. Only one time I

remember they opened for water and after that they did not open for water. The trains were going so fast. Usually in those days a train in Romania those days was going about 30 miles an hour. You couldn't go any more because you had to put the water in, the coal, all those things. It took a very long time for those trains until they reached the destination. But when we went in those boxcars, the trains were going so fast, my God, it must have been 60 or 70 miles an hour. We thought the train is going to flap over, things like this, because he was carrying animals in there. What difference does it make what happened to the train. Now, when we arrived already in Auschwitz, there was a lot of people over there came to the train. People were already in the camp. They came over and they say, if you have small child, give it to an older lady. So, my sister said to the guy, I have a small child and my mother. He said, "Give it to your mother." So, I had a little sister and my mother and of course my nephew, they went with my mother on the one side. They looked, I saw a guy over there was looking and he put his hand out and he make like this. After I find out there was _____. I didn't even know who that is. After I find out that that was the guy who did all those things. He selected them. I was very worried because the younger one they put them all with the older people so I was pretty worried because I see what they're doing. I said something is going on because they are selecting the older people and the younger ones and the other ones they left go to work. They put them in another area for work. So, finally I was dressed, you know, at that time we had clothes from the Ghetto, people had so much clothes, so I had some kind of a coat at that time and I put a coat on and I looked a little older and I was sent on the side where they send the people to work. That's what happened after. And that time there is other guys they came over and they says to us, "Do you see over there, the smoke over there?" And I said yes, what's going on over there? What are they doing there? He says, "They're burning people there." I said, burning people? He said yes, they call it a crematorium and they're burning people over there. Then he said to me do you see all those people they are going over there. This is the people who were there already. We went from there, we went in the camp from there. First, we had to take the clothes off and throw it in the corner there. I took my coat and I throw it in the corner there. I figure it's going to be over soon and I'll take my coat back. It never happened. So, then we went to the camp. We went in the inside where they told the people what to do, where to go. We were lined up over there, and they first of all the guy who commanded the whole thing came out. He made an appeal, an appeal they call it, to see how many people he has in his jurisdiction. Then another guy came over and he says, I was with my father, near my father at that time, he came over and he said is there here any mechanics, any electricians. I was a tin smith and mechanic right away I want to be. The other people said good for you you're going to be a mechanic and you're going to do better than we were doing. My father says to me why go over. Let's be all together. Let's go together. The people in the barracks they were saying, why don't you let him go as a mechanic. Why -- suppose we go in another place. We could see already what's going on. Let him go over there. So finally my father says okay, go ahead. We went to another place in the camp there in Auschwitz. The whole thing was only a few days. We went to another place and then all those mechanics they had we got round up and we were taking by big trucks to _____. We did not know at that time they took us to _____. We

figured there is the mechanics thing and there we were going to work. We arrived in _____. There was a camp over there already prepared. You got your place over there and everything and then we find out we're going to work in a coal mine. That's what they did with all of the mechanics. They put us in the coal mine. The next day we went already to work which they were putting it --- there was three shifts. There was a morning shift, a noon shift and a night shift. We went to the coal mine there and there was two types of mines in there. First one was about 1,000 feet and one was about 1500 or 1600 feet. I was working in the lower one, about 1500 feet. We came down there. They give you a light. They give you a light to go to be able to see because it's so dark. They gave me a lantern. The number was 4400. Also, when I go back, when I was in Auschwitz the time before I went to the camp, they give me they tattoo it, I got a tattoo in my arm because most of the people they sent to work they put a tattoo in my arm. I got the tattoo and I was so naive at that time. I was there with my cousin and we still didn't know what was going on. I saw they give numbers and I saw some people get smaller number and bigger number and I went to where they give a bigger number. Because we were naive we said let's have a bigger number. What they did to my cousin, I got 84 whatever I got number and he got a number after mine and something went wrong there and they put his head in a drum of water and they drowned him and he died on the spot over there. You never lasted more than a day over there in the camp. Then when we were going back, we went down to the coal mine --

Q: Wait, let's go back once more. When you were in Auschwitz and you were going through registration, you were still with your father in registration, and did you know what had happened to your mother then?

A: No, we did not know what happened to my mother until after I find out a few days later. Even they pointed out to us, we could not believe it. Then some people were talking about the people and who worked in the crematorium, they call it the _____. They were saying to me, that's the _____ living in that barracks over there, they have everything over there because they are doing such a special job. Well, we did not know after a while they got rid of the _____ and took new people. We didn't know that. Then we find out after what happened and who the _____ was and what they did after a while. With my father, I was there after the first line up, the first appeal after that. Then, I went to the place where the coal mine was and my father wasn't at that place, and I never heard from him after. I never heard what happened. We went down in the coal mine, like I said, my lantern was 4400 and we were working with civilian Polish people. The light --my light had a red stripe around and the civilian had white. We also to recognize us, in the center of the hat there was a cut in straight, this way they recognize you right away in case you run away someplace. They put me to work in the coal mine, which I never heard of a coal mine. I never saw a coal mine. A coal mine is this way. The one I was it was approximately four or five feet high. That doesn't mean there's coal in the whole thing. The coal is only about two feet in the middle. In order to get the coal out, you have to have some kind of supporters to hold up, to be able to take the coal out. They dynamite the coal and if you wouldn't have had

supporters, the whole thing would fall down. So, you had to have special supporters to hold up and then to dig the coal out to get the coal out. Once we got the coal out from there, you took it out with a shovel and there was something not far from where you throw the shovel there, it was something, it was going up and down, five inches up, five inches down, you know it was shaking until the coal went down, because it was a little down hill over there. There was one day when they come to inspect it looks like the Germans didn't get enough coal and they came to inspect the mines. What happened how come there is no more coming out. I saw some people from far away, but I didn't pay much attention who they are, but they did look to me like they're civilians, Polish civilians, work in the mine. They come around and they stop everybody over there who were working there. Some of them they said report to the office, which I never saw those people again anymore. So they took them off the line and they got new people. Then I was told they eliminated them because they didn't do the job. Somehow, for some reason I don't know I always worked very hard all my life and I saw there is no way out. You really have to work if you want to survive. So, I picked up work, kept on working the right way and they come around, the inspectors, the Nazi inspector, they came around and they checked me out, how I worked. Then the guy asked me, what is your number. I showed him my tattoo and so the other guy says to me, you know you're going to have a lot of problems because they took your number down like the other guy. No, it was the other way around, believe it or not. They gave me a premium of a bottle of wine because I was a good worker. I took the bottle of wine and turned it in for a piece of bread. I gave it to one of the kapos inside. They gave me a piece of bread for it, which I wouldn't drink it anyhow. Also, for the good workers, they also give two cigarettes a day. I also turned in my cigarettes for a little soup or whatever they could. There were some people who were chain smokers, they give away their food for the cigarettes. There was quite a few prisoners of war, Russian prisoners of war, and most of them they give away the cigarettes for the thing. What did we eat when going into the mine? In the morning, we had black coffee with a little piece of bread. Of course there was no lunch. Lunch you were at the mercy of the civilians. If you find a good civilian there, he'd throw you a piece of bread. If you find a civilian who didn't have or he didn't care, you were there with bread, without a little piece of bread. Somehow, somehow I managed to recognize the guys a little bit, I always had a piece of bread. We were working until 6:00 at night. From 8:00 in the morning until about 6:00 at night. Something like that. Like I was saying, there was a morning and a noon shift and a night shift. The night shift, the people who brought the SS who escorted the morning shift had to take back the noon shift from the camp. They always took back a shift because we didn't walk back to the camp without a Nazi guard, which I would say it was a 15, 20 minute to half hour walk. At night they had to take us back, they brought another shift and they had to take us back to the camp there. What happened? We had something to finish and those Germans did not wait for us. We were sitting in that coal mine until the next evening. No food, absolutely no food, no nothing, only the mercy, whatever the civilian throw you a piece of bread of things like this. I also, on Sunday we did not work. We worked six days a week. On Sunday I also volunteer to clean the barracks a little bit for that I got another little soup. I always tried to manage somehow to get a little more. When we went in the coal mine, the kapos

they were carrying the lights to see where to go. I used to carry it for them or for that when I went back to the camp they give me another little piece of bread. So, I was trying to look around to see how I should be able to get a little bit more than I could get.

Q: When you were working in the coal mine, if you missed the SS going back to the camp, and you spent the whole night in the coal mine, were there guards there that you couldn't have left a night, you were locked in the coal mines? Did you work if you got stuck there?

A: No, you did not work when you got stuck there and you couldn't leave the coal mine because you had 1500 feet to go up by elevator. The lift took you down, so you couldn't leave anyhow and there was guards over there and a lot of corroborators. You couldn't go no place and you had to stay right in there. It was pretty cool too, it was July, August and it was pretty cool. There was horses and wagons in there. There was little wagons not with the train, you pushed it by hand the railroad train. There was a lot of things going on in that mine. When you came out of that mine, you know it almost blinded you. I had to keep my hand for a few minutes on my eyes because down in the mine, I saw very well like it was daylight, once you get used to it. Then when you came out, you have to be prepared otherwise you would lose your eyes. When we went back to the camp, like I said, you have to take a shower every night. The place, I would describe it, it wasn't a dirty place. Really, they kept it very clean and we were forced to keep it clean. In the morning when we get up, we had to make our bed. It was a three bunk bed and when you make the bed the one was helping the other one. If there was a little bit uneven they came they take it apart and you have to go all over again. Sometimes you couldn't even mix a little piece of bread with coffee, black coffee, because you had to make sure the bed is all right. When we came home, we took a shower and in this camp there was also other people who did not work in the coal mines. They called them _____. That means they were working outside in the fields. We were getting different soap than the _____ was getting. They got a little piece of white soap, and we got a piece of yellow soap. The white soap did not take off the dirt, the coal dirt, because when we came out from there we were black, coal black. We were --for two or three days we were spitting black. So, this yellow soap was very good soap. It did the job. It cleaned everything off. Somehow, we got together with some people over there and we saw that piece of yellow soap, I would describe it it was about four by three inches and maybe one inch thick. Four by three approximately. And that soap was written a R-I-F. We didn't know. We always said one to the other one give me RIF soap, give me a piece of RIF because it's better. You also had to be careful because they only give you a certain time, they give you the soap it should last you a certain time, but when you bend down, you know, sometimes they stole the piece of soap. That soap, the civilian used to buy it. You know, you could put it in the pocket and bring it out, you got an extra piece of bread. So, you had to be very careful it shouldn't be stolen. But later on, I was told that the R-I-F meant _____ fat, pure Jewish fat. That was what I was told.

Q: Who told you that?

- A: The people who were watching in there in the coal mine. They told us that at the end already. Now, the situation, in that camp in there by the coal mine in _____. The situation when we were not working on Sundays, we had three meals a day. In the morning, like I said, we had a piece of bread and coffee. Lunch we had a little soup, no bread, and in the evening we had soup and a piece of bread when we came from the coal mine. If you knew a kapo, like I was carrying his lamp and things like this, so he couldn't do much for me, the only one thing when he dig in the spoon to put it in my plate, the food, it was full to the top so I already got awarded. I had a little more food in there. Once in a while there was some kind of a piece of a meat. I don't think it weighed a tenth of one ounce. So, sometimes I take two pieces of that thing because I was carrying the light. We had a lot of shooting around the area. We had a lot of bombs dropping in there and then we figured something is going on. We saw a lot of planes coming around, flying over. We saw a lot of captured pilots when we looked out of the thing, they brought them in. Then we know something is going on.
- Q: Can we go back to some of the details. This period of time that you're talking about in that coal mine is from probably May through December. Tell me about what you had to wear and tell me about how hot it was or how cold it was?
- A: Are you talking about in the mine?
- Q: In the mine and in the barracks.
- A: In the barracks we had that stripe uniforms like everybody else. They were clean. We cleaned them. There was laundry things. They were clean. In the mines when we come in we had to change clothes. The next day we had another pair of clothes. They were pretty clean. So, it wasn't cold. I don't remember being cold in the barracks at that time. We were very important workers because they. needed the coal so bad and the trains were coming and going back and forth so that mine was working 24 hours so they want to keep us in good shape. When the inspectors came and they didn't like who somebody was they took them off and they put new people, then we find out that they eliminated those people. They took them out of camp. Sometime they could pick out 50 to 100 people in one day. The next day you saw brand new people around. So, too many old people under six months were in there, only those who did their day's work, did more than a day's work they could work and the others they just picked them up like they were nothing.
- Q: You were about 20 at this time, right?
- A: Yes, I was about 20.
- Q: What was the age range of the people who were in that camp, and do you know about how many people went with you every day?

A: There was I would say at least 100 150 people at one time going. There was of course, when we moved out from the camp, from the barracks, we went to the mine. We walked, and there was SS on both sides watching us. You also, you didn't walk the right way, you walked like a soldier. You know you had to go, the steps had to be even, if you didn't pay attention, it just happen you didn't pay attention to the step the guy came over and put his leg between the leg and you fall down, you know in the face, then you know right away you didn't go on the step. All the way, most of the time you used to say "one two, one two _____". That's what they kept us to make the step there. The SS they did not come in in the barracks. They stayed on the outside until we get in the barracks. So, we came to the barracks and music was playing. We walked in. There was a band and we came in and there was right away _____ they called it, they counted the people. A lot of the time there was a disappearing too because there was local, let's say people, who knew the language, the Polish language, who know that language at that time. They disappeared. The thing was if they caught someone who ran away, they make you watch the hanging. They were hanging them on the spot. They got him, and then they would -- let's say we got home at 6:00 at night and then this they put you around and the hanging thing was in the center and you couldn't put your head down because they knocked your teeth out. You had to look straight up the way they were hanging the people. There was quite a few hangings over there. I only remember one guy that before they hanged him he said in Polish "_____", that's what it is. And I never forget that voice what he said. There was about three or four hangings in that evening. And then we went to our business like go to the shower and go to the food and like this. But most of the time when we came home, we said oh boy another hanging, you know. They put, if you ever watch those movies the way they hang things like this, you have to wait until the guy is blue, you could not put down your head for five or ten minutes until the guy finished when they figured he was real dead they let us go to our business.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: In your time in the Ghetto and in your time in the coal mines and the camp, did you form friendships? Did you have relationships with people that were especially close to you?

A: Are we talking about the Ghetto?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, in the Ghetto, most of the people we know from the area. We had a pretty close relationship with most of the people in there. I wouldn't say one had the other one thing like this because it was a thing like disaster thing, you know everyone was trying to cooperate and see whatever we could work out. Like home where I was, my mother she had the kitchen there so there was I go in one day I see two three, four women in there they are all cooking in the same place. You were cooking there with wood. You had to chop wood and all those things, light up the wood and things like this. Of course, the whole kitchen was full of smoke in the beginning until the wood started burning a little bit. But I would say most of them cooperate one with the other one.

Q: What about prayer?

A: Prayer is this way. Most of which the religion was so great it was one of the main things in the town is the religion. Everything, whatever the rabbi said, things like this, had to be from the religion. As a matter of fact, in the late thirties there was a lot of pioneers, they went to Israel. That day it was Palestine. They went at that time they got all together, and I also was in Batar (ph). The Batar, you know that's the right wing body. I was there, and I was ready. I went to meetings, and I was ready to emigrate to Israel, because I am one -- there are a lot of people like this, which I love Israel and I love Zionist. I love the things. I was ready to emigrate to Israel, but our rabbis said you cannot go to Israel, to Palestine because there's strife over there and your a non-Jew over there so they forbid us to go to Israel in those days. So, we just had to take our things whatever and we had to stick with whatever they told us. There was a few people who didn't listen and they went to Israel.

Q: Do you remember if people prayed in the cattle cars in the first transport, did they know where they were going?

A: Well afterwards I said you turn right you go to Hungary, you turn left and you go to Poland. That time we know something is wrong, that they are taking us some place. Yes, there were people, they had little bibles in the pocket. As a matter of fact, there was one guy with me from Czechoslovakia he had a little bible. I couldn't believe it. It must be seven by seven by two, a very thin one and he asked me -- it was on Rosh Hoshanna -- he asked me if I wanted to pray and I said yes, I took the little bible and we were praying. He was passing around that thing. I don't know if there were any more but people were praying, the religion was one of the greatest things. Everybody was doing, just following

the religion.

Q: Were you punished for that in the camp if they found out, or was that not part of it in the camp. You had so many different people?

A: Well, most of the people in the camp, in the coal mine, there wasn't only Jews, there was a lot of people, a lot of prisoners of war, a lot of French prisoners of war a lot of other type of prisoners of war, and the camp we could did pray a little bit. As a matter of fact, there was one day I remember on Yom Kippur we got all together in a corner and someone was leading the services between all the people. The Germans didn't come in. The Nazis weren't there and the way how we got our food in the camp is they took your number down. One guy -- his name was Max, he was French, a prisoner of war. I don't know. He had a board and he put down all the names from the barracks. We were there maybe 5200 people in the barrack, he put down all the numbers from everybody, and when you went to get the food, he just looked at you. He knew exactly your number and he marked it off. If he didn't know your number, he asked you. Is this and this your number and then you pass by him and he marked you off on that board. So, the relationship inside I wouldn't say -- we had some Greeks there, some Greek prisoners of war because I heard so many different languages. That's the way I picked up a little Russian a little Polish things like this. When the Hungarians came in in 1940 I speak very little Hungarian, almost nothing. Now, I'm very good in Hungarian and also of course Romania. I went to Romania school and then German, I had German when the Germans were there. After the war, I was in Italy. I picked up Italian and then I picked up Spanish. I picked up about six or seven languages now which I could talk about it.

Q: Tell me more about whether you think your parents knew more than they told you. Do you think they protected you from knowing?

A: No. I don't think my mother knew but I think my father had a very good idea of what's going on. It's a possibility he was told from his friends what happened. He didn't pass it on. I could just tell you one more time. My father was one of the greatest man there was in that area with his knowledge and smarting. I don't think there was a second man. Anyone had a problem or something, they used to go to him. He spoke perfect Hungarian at that time, which he was in the Army. He was an officer in the Army. Then, it looks like the Germans find out in the camp that he was an officer in their Army in World War I. They sent him to _____. _____ was like a model of the camps they said in Germany. He was there with a friend. He was a druggist. So, between both of them, the friend who was a druggist which my father know about horses, they became a veteran doctor for the German horses in the camp. It wasn't too bad until about a month before, which we keep the _____, that's the day when he dies is the first day of _____ after Passover. The first day after Passover. Why do we know? Because people who liberated from there they told us exactly all those things which I tell you now. How did he die? The bombs. There was such a tremendous bombing at that time and he got killed with the bombs because probably they wanted to

wipe out Germans. They had a lot of military things in there and they wiped him out. He was going to work, and other ones were going to work, so they all got killed, one month before the liberation. That's why we know exactly that date. We keep that date and time. We have the tablets from his memorial thing. We have it in Israel. There's a rabbi _____. We grew up together. We helped him build the schull over there and we put all the memorial tablets in his schull at _____.

Q: Let's now, I think we covered the coal mine. When do you think the death march began?

A: Now.

Q: Tell me how you knew it was coming, or did you know, or was it just sudden?

A: When we saw so many bombs falling --- during the night, during the day we only heard boom, boom, boom, you know. You couldn't even sleep. If you wanted to sleep you couldn't sleep because you heard so many bombs falling, so many shots and things like this. Then we figured we know it's the Russians at that time because we know it from home that the Russians were invading at that time and we know what happened. So, we know that the Russians are close. So, they closed off the camp and at that time, they got everybody together and we started moving out. It was December or January. We started walking. Whoever had a good pair of shoes had a good pair of shoes. Whoever had most of the time we had that wooden shoe on. That's most of the time you were wearing. But sometimes, some people had regular pair of shoes. I don't know how they got it, but they got it so we were walking most of the time with a wooden shoe. We start up it was I could tell you now it was in the evening during dark. We started walking. I would estimate 5,000 people, 6,000 people. We started walking. Walked all night. We walked all day, no stop. On the afternoon of the second day, they took us in to a farm, a farm area and they scattered us all around there in an open field where nobody could run away and they had all the SS surrounding us. I also heard the SS talking Romania, some were talking Hungarian, some were talking Polish, most were corroborators. So, when we got in that open field, I saw a place where there was a lot of hay and the farms packed it up over there probably for their animals, things like this. I went in that hay. I made myself a little hole in there. I went in there, the first thing I did I took the shoes off I put my feet in the hay, I took my shoes off and the socks were soaked and wet and frozen. I put it around my waist all around and tried to dry them off a little bit. I kept them there for an hour or so, two hours, and then put them back on and started looking for food, whatever you could find. There was a lot of fields with different type of food packed up over there. They put it away for winter. Some people broke in, they took it out, they never came out. They killed them. I was lucky somehow over there which I find some dry beets things like this, whatever is left and things like this and that's what I ate the next day. Now, if you don't eat for so many days you get weak and weaker and weaker. The order looks like it was from the commanding officer there. Anybody who could not walk, you had to eliminate them. And those collaborators with the Germans they did a good job. Anybody who could follow, they shoot them. They kill them on the spot. At the time when we

walked, we saw so many dead bodies on both sides, females, male, when we saw those things we tried to pull off a pair of shoes, things like this and that's the way I got my shoes in there. I took it off of a dead body. I took a coat off, some kind of a blanket, so, we kept on walking. We walked for another few days. We --when I say walk, we did not walk. We dragged the legs because you could not raise your leg more than an half an inch. There was no strength to raise your feet a little bit, so you were dragging him until you came in Czechoslovakia to a railroad station and they were looking for boxcars. It was January at that time already and Europe is very cold this time of the year. So, they were looking for boxcar and they came around the Germans they say the language I had no problem because I spoke the language. So they said there is no more boxcars we had to go in open cars. So there was some open cars over there and there was some snow then maybe two feet of snow was inside in those cars. It looks like they didn't use them for a long time. The first thing we did was a few guys over there with the little strength we had we pushed the snow to the center a little bit. We went in maybe eighty ninety people in that open car. Some of the people you know we were all around, sitting all around that car but some of the people had no room to get in there so they were staying in the center of the car, of that boxcar. We were leaning one to the other one just to try to get a little warm in there. We were going maybe another day or so then we stopped in the station and then one guy was hollering from down there he asked is there anybody that could hear us or see us, so with a little strength I had I went up and looked down. So, he was saying in German how many people are in that car. I counted and there was I think 82 or 84, but I remember counting. I told him how many people. They told them I would say approximately about a pound of bread, a little loaf of bread, the same thing about a pound of margarine. When I give it out to everybody, there was nothing left. It was exactly what I said. So, we were going for another few days, we were driving in the car for another few days and the only food we had was like a piece a bread and the margarine. The margarine was so hard that I was nibbling in the margarine. It was hard. We didn't know where we were going, of course. Finally the destination was Buchenwald. We arrived at Buchenwald. Came to the railroad station and there is everybody out from the 80 people I think 20 went out. The rest of them froze to death on the car there. We went out from that car where we could. We went in the camp there. They had some soup for us, arrived in there, which I remember we had some soup. We went in there, we got a little soup. They give us showers over there. Of course, they cut our hair. Cut everything, you know, undress completely, cut everything. Went under the shower and then they give us a new number because the Auschwitz number, the tattoo number was no good for Buchenwald. So, they give us a new number, and we have to go by the number now because nobody had a name. My new number 117,682 so wherever you went you had to know the number because that was your life. There was a few days we were over there in Buchenwald, so we rested a little bit. The barracks wasn't too bad. In there, it was a little warm in that barrack at that time, and we had a little soup, things like this. We were able to stand on our legs. There came big trucks and they took us to _____ to another camp _____. That camp wasn't the same camp where we were in the coal mine thing. That was one of the filthiest camp in there. It was so bad in there there was no where to lay down in there. You had to sleep and go lay down wherever you could in there. The

lice were eating you up. You could take them away with your hand. You could take a whole bunch with one hand and push them away. Wherever you turn around, it's like mosquitos, where you go in a place with mosquitos around. That's the way the lice were around you. So, they got us together again and they put us to work in the next town. The next town's name was _____. We went to work there in a mine, a stone mine. We were digging stones, we were digging dirt out. That's the job they gave us. I don't know really what they were doing over there, but we were working in the mine in there, taking stones out. Then I saw there were little wagons in there and there was a lot of _____ and I said to myself you know, maybe I could find out if they had any mechanic work over here and I shouldn't have to dig and shovel rocks out of there. I went down there. You couldn't run away because you had Nazis all around watching you. You couldn't go far. You could only go where you were working. I went over there and there was two guys, one German, heavyset guy. He was as bad as hell. But there was another guy, a shorter fellow, his name was Max. I said to him in German, I said, I am a mechanic and you have so many of those guns, the drill guns, maybe you want me to help you out with this. So, there was a Russian guy also, a prisoner of war, and that guy, he understood that kind of work. He got the job. So, this guy says to me, this guy Max, he says, you know what, he says he's better in this, I have another job for you. Go back up to the mines and whatever you see needs a little oil, a little fixing, so be the mechanic there and make sure everything runs smooth. I was very happy he gave me some tools. I don't think the tools weighed two pounds. I couldn't even carry the tools. I was so weak I couldn't even carry those tools, but some how, some way I carried the tools up there, and I was trying to fix whatever I can until the day passed, and then we walked back to the camp whatever, the way we could walk back. We went back to the camp which it was _____ because we were working in _____. We passed a lot of the town. We walked through the town, which it was written in some hotel, this hotel is only for people who want to gain a little weight. In German it was written. That hotel is known for _____. It was written over there in the town. When we went through the town, the Germans, they came out and they brought some food for the SS. They feed them food. God forbid if one was trying to grab the food. He didn't make it back to the camp. We went back to the camp. It went on for a little while going back and forth. Then we saw a lot of bombs, airplanes with a lot of things flying around. Then we say, something is going on and something will happen. From there, it wasn't a long time - it was only a few months in that camp. Then we started walking back to Buchenwald. That was the second death march. That was the most miserable death march anyone could witness. We left a few thousand people. The way we left and the way we were going. I don't think we arrived a few hundred people. I don't think so. On the way we were going, the bombs were so great and the artillery fired was so severe, things like this, the Germans were so afraid that they are going to kill them. At that time, we had the striped clothes and of course we had some coats, too, striped coats. While you were walking, the way you were walking and the planes they come so low, they could have picked you off with a machine gun. The Germans I had two Germans under my coat. They were hiding under really my coat they shouldn't be able to be picked up. They survived that way, too. I wasn't the only one. Only the other people were the same way,

they did to the other people the same thing. We were hiding. I saw on the way the supply landing strip, with trucks, with food burning. We were running to the truck to see if maybe there was some kind of a food leftover, which did not burn. When you run to the truck, the Germans killed you. You couldn't even go to the truck. There was also a lot of farm there was a lot of food from the farm. There was apples things like this on both sides. If you run down to grab an apple the Germans killed you. You didn't have to wait for the Nazis to kill you, they killed you once you stepped out of line. It came to a point, I was so weak, I really could not go any more. I saw a truck over there where they picked up, it was in town, they picked up all the people who could not walk anymore, really could not walk, they tell them to go in the truck and they carry them in the truck and they put them flat in a German flat truck. When I went over there, I got a beating from the Germans with a rifle. I got hit over the head and I got hit in the stomach and the side and he says to me in German _____. I still could walk. We walked for another few hours. That truck, which I'm supposed to be on they blew it up with grenades out of town. They blew the whole truck up with all the people inside there. Finally, we arrive in Buchenwald.

Q: Who blew it up?

A: The Germans, the Germans blew it up. When I saw, before we arrived in Buchenwald, I never saw a plane how it looks until it came so long, which actually, they waved at us the people over there. That low they came down. I really couldn't make out what kind of a plane they were, whether they were British or which Allies they were, but I did find out. They were American planes. I did find out that after the war. Then finally we arrived in Buchenwald. In Buchenwald when we arrived it was one of the miserable things that ever happened to anybody in there. You arrived in there. You were laying flat. You go in there and first of all you couldn't do nothing. You were laying in there. You were sick. All kind of sickness you had in there. Then a day later they were giving you some soup. Now, you had to stay in the line to get some food. There was no such thing anymore about names and numbers. You went over to get the soup. You were lined up a few thousand people because there was camp from before. They brought in other camps in that center camp. You lined up by the time you took the food -- when they give you the food, by the time a few feet away, they grabbed it from you already. The people themselves, the hungry people, they grabbed you. You had to be very lucky to eat the food they give it to you over there because somebody would grab it. When I saw what happened when it came to my turn, as soon as they put it in, I swallowed it on the spot. I didn't even carry it further down. Sometimes I was lucky and I went twice in the lines. Sometimes I could go twice. A few days later we heard again shouting and we saw planes flying on top of us. We heard a lot of shouting going on and that's the time the Germans already came into the camp, the Nazis. They already came into the camp and they started grabbing everybody because there was one place which was still in German hands. They wanted to get the people there. They were still grabbing people and whoever they could, they came in with a gun, and whoever couldn't make it, they shot him on the spot, which before, like I said, a German never came into the camp. And they shot so many people on the spot over

there, I saw what happened. It came to my mind very fast. I had a _____ in my nose, which it was bleeding all the time. I had to touch my nose it was bleeding. So, I was laying down on the ground and I touch my nose and whatever blood I had I had in my mouth, put it in my mouth and lay down flat on my back with the eyes turned over. I was so skinny. I don't know how many pounds I have, maybe 50, 60, 40. I don't know how many pounds I had. I was laying and then I saw the dead bodies how they look, so I was imitating the dead bodies over there. When the Germans came, two, three, four. They all come around, and they first they shot all around whoever made a little move. When they came around and the guy was loading the guns he says here's another one. The other said, don't waste your bullets he's _____. He shouldn't shoot anymore. I was laying there, maybe an hour, an hour and a half. I didn't even want to open my eyes to see who was around. Then a guy walks around and says whoever can get up get because the Germans are gone, the Americans are here, at that time. Now we tried to get up whatever we could. I saw American soldiers. Several of them were speaking Yiddish. They came around and they talk in Yiddish. That was one of the greatest things. American soldier to come over to me and say in Yiddish, is there more Jews around? I said they're all Jews. Most of them are all Jews around. They were trying to do whatever they can. They did not touch us because we were all sick. Not to get any disease from that thing. I see more soldiers and more soldiers coming around and checking out what's going on. Later on, a while later I find out that guy who was watching and looking there it was General Patton's third army. Those people liberated us. It took a little while until everybody come to himself. It was one of the biggest mistake that our own people in the camps did. They went and emptied out all the food that the Germans had accumulated. They brought it in to the camp. Nobody told us be careful, your stomach has shrunk. We started eating whatever we could. I got a hole in a box of dog dishes and I kept on eating dog dishes until I got typhus. I got so sick they took me in a hospital, in the camp hospital, which it was a Nazi hospital and guess who was the doctor? The Nazis. The German Nazis who wanted to destroy me, they are the ones that treated me in the camp because they were prisoners of war. It took quite a while until I came to myself but I could tell you one thing. I had a headache for five years. I couldn't get rid of the headache day and night from that typhus. What happened to the other people? Most of them died from overeating after the war. They were eating -- there were so many things to eat it was a very few people who understand. Then the German doctor told me in German, don't eat so much because your stomach is not strong enough. We felt a little better. We went out of the city which the next city near Buchenwald was Vilmar. That's a city. We saw so many American soldiers over there. I don't know, there were thousands and thousands. And they all were trying to help us, to give us something. One guy was giving candy, another guy a box of chocolate. What they did over there was trying to help us out to stay on our legs. That wasn't so good either. You wouldn't get it, we would get sick with so much food. I got a hold of a box of chewing gum. I took the box of chewing gum and I take one and oh, that tastes good. I take another one, that tastes good. Then I took four or five at the time and oh, that tastes good. I swallowed it. I must have swallowed a few hundred chewing gums. Then I had the stomach cramps. I went back to the hospital and they had to pump my stomach because it was full of chewing gums. Then the American comes

over, a Jewish soldier comes over and he says to me in Yiddish, _____, you chew that thing, you don't eat it. I said how do you chew it. So he showed me how you chew it. When I went out again in the city, I saw so many people chewing that we recognize right away our people because they were chewing so funny. We know right away from looking around everybody wanted to be an American to chew the gum at that time. So we were over there I'd say about a month or two months. Then they had lists over there of where your family and friends from other camps. You could go in there and take a look and if you recognize anybody. I saw my three sisters in a camp not far from there, in _____. There was busses provided by the Americans. Inside there was no more room, so I was riding on the roof, on top. So, I got there to _____ it's a city. _____ half of the _____ was the American side. So, finally I found then my sisters went to the Berger-meister to the mayor in there and my sisters told him -- I went there with another friend from my town. So the Berger-meister made sure that we had food and he gave us a place over there, and he put over there in another place so this was the way we were all together at that time. So that time we were together with three sisters, and I ask my sisters, because we had four sisters. One sister I know, the younger one, they went with my mother I know. So, I asked my other one, I said where is Esther, my younger sister? So, she says, she died of the typhus, and they kept her where she was dead. So, I saw we were together and then we made all the preparation to go back to Romania to find out to see maybe somebody is left to see us start life out again. That is the time they made the agreement the way how Germany between the British, the Americans and Russians. Due to the fact that the Russians were in Berlin, so the Americans had to go there too, so they gave up all the area over there to the Russians. And the Americans pulled in. We was still in the camp in _____ because we wanted to make preparation to go back to Romania to see who's left. As the gang comes over, Jewish soldiers, and they said to us, all right, let's go in because we're going to leave the area and this is the Russians. When we were children we were told how good communism, how good the Russians are, how good everything is so you could have such a nice life. You don't have to work, you get everything for nothing. When the guy told us this, I said what are you talking about. We were told how good it is by the Russians. Why should we leave them. They're in the area we're going to stay. That Jewish captain, because he had some stripes, he says it's not what they told you, it's what it is. We were there. The Americans left. Boy were we sorry the next day what happened. That comes around, a bunch of Russians, dirty with watches on their arms, five or six watches, running after the girls which they couldn't stand on their legs how weak they are, saying if you step out of the line, we'll send you to Siberia. That was the thank you when they saw us over there. We're going to send you to different type of work now, if you don't behave and things like this. So, we started making preparations to go back. We took trains, whatever they had the trains, from one place to another one. It took weeks and weeks from Germany to Czechoslovaks to _____ and to Budapest. We arrived in Budapest. We find already some collaborators from our town, and we tried to turn them in to the Russian. We told them what happened with them and then we kept on _____ and we went back to Romania. We went back to my home town. There was nothing left in there in my hometown, just a few people came back. We tried to see

what we could do. We couldn't work it out. We packed up whatever we had and we turned back. The turning back was not so easy because you had to go out of the Russian zone. We went in -- from Romania we went into Hungary. We were staying in the field all day long because the Russians should not catch us to take us back to Siberia. Finally we went into Hungary and from Hungary we went to Budapest and Budapest there was already operating a kitchen from _____. We had food in there. We had shelter in there. Our destination was not Budapest. Our destination was further down to Israel, whatever we go. So, we went to the border by Austria-Hungary border. There was a Russian guy. His name was Sashka. We sold something home in Wishno, whatever we had, and we got a little money in there. This guy Sashka had truck and for a fee he took you over to Austria, because he couldn't cross the border. This guy filled up a truck with people like cattle flat down, and we went across to Austria. We went to Vienna. When we went to Vienna there was already in the American zone, and we had to stay there a little bit in Vienna until they got all the trains ready. Then we went to Salzburg. When we went through the border, the Russians had to examine everybody. If they're not some of them were running away from the Army, which there was a lot of Russian Jewish officers. They came with us because they went to Israel. So, they wanted to see if there were any deserters and things like this. So, we said we were all Greeks. We went on that plane as all Greeks from the war. They came around _____ no, we're Greek. So, finally we cross the border and went into Lenz. From Lenz, that's right over the border and we went over to Salzburg. Then we settled in Salzburg. I had one sister, she did not leave Romania so my brother went back from Salzburg to bring him back into Salzburg. We were in Salzburg for a little while. In the meantime, I was training myself to be a soldier, and Israeli soldier. I was training _____. I was very good in the training thing, which they told me I do very good. My sister find out from my aunt, we had a few aunts, a couple aunts in New York. She remembers the others where they are, so she wrote a letter to them, and they got back a letter with some money in the envelope in there. He says, don't go to Israel. You have time to go to Israel. First come to America and then you go to Israel. Let's come over here first and settle. I was ready to go to Israel, so we had a big debate, and she told us how good America is. They said they have everything you could find even money on the street. I said to myself and to my brother, I said listen, look they have the Marshall plan, they got everything for nothing. Couldn't you imagine if you get everything over here for nothing. Couldn't you imagine if you go to the source. So, finally we decided we go to America. I came with the boat with General Greeley. It was an American boat. I came in December 1949. It took over a week to get to the country. I worked in the ship, also. I worked in the kitchen, which I couldn't work too much because I was so seasick for a few days but then I felt better and I went to work. We arrived in New York which the aunts picked us up. So I was in a hotel, and also when they picked us up there was a taxi driver and he put six in the taxi to take us over. I was the last one to get out of the taxi and I looked down and I looked all over and so the guy asked me in Yiddish he says, _____, what are you looking for. I said I look for dollars. He says, boy if you come for that, he says you don't know how you're going to get here until you get a dollar. That was the hello in America. So, then I went to the hotel, and then I got through friends, I got a job. I was in the hotel only a few months.

There's a lot I left out. When we went back with the trains to ride back into Budapest, there was no room inside of the trains. We were riding on the slate roofs on top of the trains for days. When a bridge came, you had to lay down flat before you know, you could get killed and things like this. To go back, we arrived in New York, like I said, I got a job. I got a job in the metal factory. First I did odd jobs all over and then I got a job in a metal factory. I was doing pretty good for about a year or so. It was very hard work, and then the boss came over to me. He looked at me and he says whatever I do, I just happen to do right. He calls me over and he says how would you like to take over the area, to be the lead man. I was in the union at that time. So, I says, I'm in the union, they give you pension, all those things. I started with the union. He says, I'm not going to touch your union, just take over the job as a lead man. I took over the job as a lead man, and I corrected a lot of mistakes in the department and that department started booming. The boss comes again and he says, how about doing this and this and things like this. So, finally I became the research and the developing machinery. I know that because I was a mechanic so I had a lot of knowledge of machinery. I was the one who went to buy machines all over the country for cleaning machines, cleaning special metal. Like a metal engineer. They even give me the title metal engineer. I traveled all over. I got machines in there. As a matter of fact, there was one time, one of the bosses was a German Jew decent and he went to Frankfurt. He bought a machine there, and I had to go there and check out that machine there in Frankfurt. Which I said I'd never go back there, but I said a job is a job so I went back to Germany, checked out the machine on its progress and everything worked out good. There was a time when I had over 200 people taking care over there. There was an operation working day and night, brought in a lot of machines. Then the place was sold to another corporation that wasn't so good, everything. Then a few years later, I figure it's already time for me to look around. I was already in my late 20s. I start to look around and get married and bring up a family. So, I went to places where young people got together, especially all the people who came from the other side. We had a place. There was the Hotel Diplomat and other places we used to get together. So, I went there with some friends and I asked my friend, who is that girl over there. Oh she said, my friend, would you like to know her? I go over there and I start talking a little bit and I asked her where she comes. She also comes from the area where I came, and she became my wife. We got to know each other. She became my wife, so we got married. We lived in the Bronx in New York for a little while and then we moved to Yonkers, which I still there but in different places. We grow up we have three sons now. They went to school. They all went to Hebrew university. They went to chivas. All their lives they went to school. I worked at least 12,14 hours a day, and when I came home, my wife was a real estate broker, she went to work, so a lot of times we only saw each other a few hours. We worked very hard to educate the kids and it worked very good. My three boys they are all attorneys, which one lives in the Washington area. One lives in New Jersey and one is still home, not married. We have two grandchildren, two little girls in Jersey and we have a boy and a girl here in the Washington area, and they all are doing very good. We are very happy the way it worked out. Now, I'm retired and have a lot of happiness with my grandchildren.

- Q: Now, I want you to talk to me for just a few more minutes about the legacy that you and the other survivors bring to us. What is that legacy. What is it that you want the world not just the people that are here now, but children, your children's children?
- A: I would like very much this information to be passed on for schooling to students to see what happened and also to be passed on for other generations because they should see whatever happen at a time like this when one of the most civilized countries in the world could do something like this to another human being. I want people to see it. I want people to know it, and the bottom line I want never never to forget and just to keep on showing it, looking and see whatever happened to the Jewish people.
- Q: What are you say to the people who deny that it ever happened, what do you say about that? People say it didn't happen.
- A: The people that are denying that it never happened, who are we talking about? Skinheads, Nazis? What are we talking about. Most of the world they know it happened. Most of the world knows what happened. They all see it. It's just a few of those people which make all the problems for everybody else. I wouldn't even pay attention what they say. You can't even convince those people because they're always going to tell you it not happen. Prove it to me, even if you prove it to them, they will say it never happened. Even if you take them there they're going to say they died from a disease or something like this. You cannot convince those people. Those are a little minority, just a few of those people, so I don't say you shouldn't pay attention to them because from a minority could grow a majority, so you have to keep a check not to let it go out of hand.
- Q: What about the scale of what happened that was begun by a civilized country but then was perpetrated by a whole continent became involved?
- A: Well, you know, the thing is this, if anyone was looking for adventures, that was the time for other countries to look at the adventurous things. The corroborators because at that time they had a free hand they could do anything they wanted, and most of the time which it causes those problems. Then you take other governments, they became Nazis and all those things because for adventurous things, for their own adventures. Then they picked out really the most the Jewish people. They picked them out because they know they're not going to fight back because their religion was so great that you're not supposed to fight back even. You're not supposed to say anything. You're supposed to do the right thing all the time. You're supposed to be a good man all the time. You're not supposed to -- that's why it make me go to the _____, because if you see something that is not right, stand up for it. Don't let it go.
- Q: Now, the tape that you brought, is that the kind of music your father did or is that different music? Let's talk for just a minute and I don't know if we're going to -- tell me about your father?

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0177

24

A: My father was a singer at the weddings. Anybody -- I mean if people get married and things like this, they used to call him to sing. He used to put words together all the time. I have some music over here which they were playing in those days exactly the same type of music they were playing at weddings. This music goes back to the thirties and the early forties. So, my father was not only the singer, he was a comedian too. He was known all over Romania and Hungary. He was called all the time to perform all the things. He also knows some famous people and he also did a lot of good things for the Jewish community in the time when we had the big problems all the time.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

A: This is the music you heard now as the type of music they used to play in the weddings in Visho from where I came. Also, this is the type of music they were playing all around the area, which my father was one of the greatest entertainers in the area. He was called around Romania around the state when it was Hungary he was called around the state to perform weddings. He was singing not only in Yiddish, he was singing in all kinds of languages. The way he put the words together was the words match one with the other one it was amazing to hear. He had one of the nicest voice to sing those things. He also was a good _____ when he was in the schull. So, it was something, the greatest thing if they could get my father to perform at the wedding because he had so many invitations to go around and perform ceremonies those kinds of weddings that he couldn't make them all. And also, the transportation wasn't the right way. If you had to go forty miles away, it took you a couple of days to get there. Most of the traveling was done by horse and wagon. They also had a train. The train used to take you from one place to another one. The trains if you see the old type of trains you have to put water in and locomotive you have to put the coal in. You have to wait until it heats up good enough. On the train it was written 45 kilometers an hour. That's about 30 miles, a little less. But it never made that much. Sometimes you feel like you could run faster than the train. This is part of the music which I'll stop for a couple of seconds, I want you to listen to that type of music, you can't get it no place and only in the _____ places. That's the time when they went around the bride, going around the bride and pick up you know you call it in Jewish _____. The husband comes around and looks at the bride and uncovers her and then covers her, leaves the cover on again. That's gypsies Hungarian music. When they had a wedding in those days, it started in the afternoon and it went on late late at night. What type of music they were playing, because they had no notes, they are playing straight without notes and it sounds so beautiful. Not only the Jewish wedding, my father was also called to other types of weddings because like I said he knows all kinds of language to put those words together. He was like his own songwriter from the head. He never had to use a piece of paper to write a song or think like this. It just came out straight. That's the time when they went to the _____. Due to the fact that my father was such a music lover, I think of him as music. I'm retired now and my hobby is music. Different type of music, Hebrew music, international music. I could listen to music 24 hours and never get tired. Sometimes I take music before I take the food. This picture is when I'm in the second grade. All those children around me, they did not survive. The teachers which I'm standing near the teacher her name was _____. She was one of the meanest teachers we ever had. There probably was in that class a few hundred children, but she was so mean that there wasn't one day that I did not get beaten up. I got beaten up day by day. It wasn't only me, it was everybody else, too.

Q: About what year is this?

A: On the second grade let's say, it's in the thirties, the early thirties.

Q: Which person are you in the picture?

A: I am over there with the white shirt and tie. What happened was there was a special day in Romanian history and everybody had to get dressed with a white shirt and with something to look like a special person. The reason I had that was my neighbor had it and my sister went in to borrow it and then I got it to wear it to school. I was so afraid of the teacher that I shouldn't get a beating I told my sister when I came back I wish I wouldn't have that white shirt, I wouldn't have to stay near the teacher, because that much I was afraid.

(Showing pictures on the video)

It's a possibility that some of them which I don't know may survive and live in different places and different countries, but I wouldn't know for sure that. But it's a good possibility that some of them are in other countries.

Q: Are most of them Jewish?

A: Most of them are Jewish but not all.

Q: How about the teacher?

A: The teacher wasn't Jewish, with a name like this. No, she was wasn't. I look at the picture now more and there is one guy which I recognize and he's in New York, one fellow. I also was told another fellow, the girl on the left side I was told she is in Uruguay but I have no information. This picture was made in 1936, I would say I was in the fourth grade over there. The fellow on my left side I think he's around in the New York area, which when I came to this country I talked to him. I saw him. The other people I don't know if they survived.

Q: So tell me about this class?

A: This class I would say it's mixed, half Jews, half all types like Hungarians, Romanians, Germans and the teacher is right there in front. She wasn't too bad. She only beat me up a couple times a week compared to the other one which she beat the kids every day, twice a day or more than that too. This teacher's name was _____. She was also a good teacher for learning. This picture was taken before the war in Visho. I'm standing in an area. Somebody passed over their head a camera and asked if he wanted a picture, say yes, so he took the picture. It was already cold. So, this picture was taken before the war, before the Ghetto.

Q: You were maybe 17?

A: I must have been 17 or 18 something like this, nothing more. This picture was also taken before the war. I'm on the right side and my brother, Israel was on the left side, the left side of my hand. It was also taken in Visho. My brother is here. He lives in Elmont. This was my sister, it was my sister Rose and my brother _____. My sister Rose was in the concentration camp. She got liberated too, and we all came together to Budapest, but in that time she was so sick already from all the suffering they got reunited with her husband in Austria. They had a child before the war which is the child I said she gave to my mother and she died about 12 years ago. 1972 she died. This picture was also taken just before we went into the Ghetto. I was working. That's the time I was working for the Hungarians and we took the train so we were working in the railroad but the railroad we took all the tracks off and we send them into Hungary so there was a few children, three or four children we were working and that was the uniform I was wearing at that time when I did the work over there. This picture was taken in the Visho Ghetto. If you look close, you can see the yellow star that we were wearing already. The two girls on the two sides are in the Ghetto. They were from another town. When they brought them in the Ghetto they were in our area over there, so we were taking this picture. When I went back I found that picture.

Q: Was there torture in the Ghetto?

A: No, there was no time. It was one month time. We only had problems from the local people. This was my father when he was in the Hungarian Army as an officer. This picture when we came to the United States, some relative of ours had that picture and they gave it to us and we enlarged it a little bit and that's the only picture we have of him as a soldier, as an officer. This is my father. It was taken just before the deportation time, before the Ghetto. It also was a little picture we got it here in the United States from some relative, small, and we enlarged it. I want to say something. It's my father I was told, I don't remember, he had a blue eye and a brown eye, which it is very unusual for a person to have two types of eyes. I wanted to tell you he had beautiful eyes, blue and brown. This is my mother and she was a real Jewish mother trying very hard to raise a family of seven. If you see the hair, that's a week because the religion as you know, you have to cut your hair once you're married. This is my grandmother, my mother's mother, which we didn't live far one from the other one. My grandfather he was used to make clothes and this is the way my mother knew how to sew. She learned it from her father. She used to sew her own clothes for the children. She did a lot of things, repairing clothes. She was one of the greatest mom's I had. This is my original document after the liberation in Buchenwald. That was the first day I got back my name. I did not go by number, which the number at that time was 117,682. All the stamps you see there are from the United States Army. Twenty-fifth of May 1945. In Europe they put the day first, before the month, that's why you see 25, May, 1945. That was the liberation day, which you can see Buchenwald right in the top there. My father is there on top of the carriage. The fellow riding in the carriage when we went back to our city a few years back, he gave us a small picture and we enlarged it a little bit. As a matter of fact this is the only picture of him being in that carriage over there. This is the carriage, the transportation

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0177

28

carriage we went from one place to another one.

Q: Your father is driving?

A: My father is the driver.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

A: Soon we arrived in Auschwitz after it was the selection and they already told me that I'm going to work as a mechanic which it was not true. They put me in the coal mine and the first thing they did was they tattoo my arm. So they had different types of tattoos. Smaller and larger things and I went to the place where the bigger one is because I didn't even know what it was all about. When they started tattooing, it was such a painful a lot of people collapsed in there and some of them never even got up. When they got through with the tattooing my arm was so swollen but a little while later it came down and it's something there which ever goes away. My tattoo number is A 9384 and it looks like I live forever with this kind of number. Each time I go down from bath or whatever I do, I take my shirt off, it reminds me of the past whatever happened to me.

Conclusion of Interview