

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with David J. Selznick
September 6, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with David J. Selznick, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on September 6, 1990 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 interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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DAVID J. SELZNICK

September 6, 1990

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

01:00:24

Q: Ok, we're ready to begin now. Could you please state your name?

A: My name is David J. Selznick.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in a small village in Lithuania, Aniksht.

Q: And, and where exactly is that located in Lithuania?

A: It, it's located closer to the Latvian border.

Q: And when were you born?

A: I was born two weeks before the big fire, and that's all they knew. There was no papers. I was born in 1912, and in those days they had no documents in my village at all, so my father remembered that I was born two weeks before the big fire. When I became a teenager and about the time to serve in the Lithuanian army, a commission of doctors have moved their hand several times over my face, and with that, they established that I was born in 1912, because my, my face didn't have a beard yet. And they took a date of January first, 1912. And from there on, I was born on January first, 1912.

Q: Could you tell me a little about your childhood?

A: My childhood: I was the youngest son of a family of five sisters. My father was a, a, a peddler going to the vil -- to the farms and exchanging goods. And when I was hardly three years old, my father and mother wrapped me in a tallis and carried me a long distance to the rabbi's house. And there, he sat me down and taught me the Kometz aleph-beys.¹ And as a reward, coins came down from heaven. And the first coin fell down, and -- I was excited and believed. But on the second coin, I lift up my head, I lift up eyes and I notice the rabbi stand over my, over my head, and I realized that it's not from heaven, but it's coming from the rabbi's hand. And that affected for the rest of my life my thinking about every aspect of life.

Q: In what way?

¹ Yiddish alphabet system where pronunciation is "O" under "aleph" (Yiddish).

A: In what way? That whatever you are being told is not necessarily correct.

Q: Can you tell me a little about your education?

A: In those days, the first rabbi -- which I just told you -- started with me to learn the kheder,² the elementary Talmudistic study. After that, in those days -- it's about a hundred years ago, in the Jewish families, a boy was not supposed to have elementary education, and my father wanted me to be a rabbi. So gradually, when I was finished with the kheder, I was sent to a yeshiva. Since my village was too small to have a yeshiva, so I was sent to Vilkomir, a large city where I went to the yeshiva in Vilkomir. Since the custom was in those days that the yeshiva didn't had any cooking facilities, and -- every boy was by himself. And the custom was that the local residents were giving a day to eat. Each family gave one day to a Yeshiva bokher.³ And since my mother had relatives in Vilkomir who were some of the most established and wealthiest people, so I had pretty comfortable every day in the families where I was eating every day, except for Thursday. Thursday was my day with -- where my mother's aunt and cousin, two elderly widows, mother and daughter, who owned half of the property in Vilkomir. But they never gave me anything to eat. And I was arriving about nine o'clock in the morning for breakfast. After staying an hour and a half, and time to go back to the kheder and I was not supposed to be late to the yeshiva, and I was not supposed to be late in the yeshiva. And I was held -- when I was holding the handle in the door to walk out and saying to the Tante,⁴ "A guten Tag, Tante Esther."⁵ That that's -- then, only then, she shouted from the other room, "A guten Tag, Dovid Yankele. Du vilst dokh vos zu essen?"⁶ "Would you want to eat something?" And by then it was too late, and I walked out.

01:05:42

Q: And this happened every Thursday?

A: Every Thursday.

Q: Until what age were you at the yeshiva?

A: I was in the yeshiva until about 12 years, from the age of six. So I was six years. Every, every session was six months. So I had about, about five to six years in the yeshiva, which is about 10 zmanim.⁷

² After-hours Hebrew and religious instruction (Yiddish).

³ Yeshiva student or Yeshiva boy (Yiddish).

⁴ It should be noted that the Yiddish the interviewee speaks displays (as in the Yiddish pronunciation of Lithuanians who lived close to the former east Prussian border) considerable German inflections.

⁵ "Good morning, Aunt Esther." (Yiddish)

⁶ "Good morning, David Jacob. Would you like something to eat?" (Yiddish)

⁷ Semesters (Yiddish)

Q: And what, what happened when you were twelve years old?

A: My father died. My father took sick. He was never sick in his life. He worked like a horse to support his wife and the five daughters. He didn't have to support me then because I was eating days in the yeshiva. And the first week he took sick, he died in three, four days. They sent a horse and buggy -- there was no, no motor vehicles in that time. And if there would have been already a bus or a truck that what would be cruising from Aniksht to Vilkomir, my family didn't have the money to pay. So a horse and buggy who was cruising constantly, twice a week from Aniksht to Vilkomir, picked me up to take me home. When I walked in in the house, the father's bed was standing in the middle of the living room. And I managed to come over to his bed and tell him, "Father, it's me, Dovid Yankele." And he managed to move his hand over my body with affection, and a few minutes later he was dead. The lederer Rov,⁸ the chief rabbi in Aniksht, who was this really holy man, he explain me that my father would have been dead three, four days ago -- the first or the second day he took sick -- except God kept him alive until the moment I arrive, and that's when he passed away.

Q: What happened to your family then?

01:07:59

A: In that time, my father was extremely well-to-do. He had good days and bad days. But in that time, so happened that he had horses and chickens and, and, and, and cows. And the day he died, before the age of 12 or about, I suddenly became the old man of the family, and I had to take care not only of five grown-up sisters of mine and a constantly sick mother, but I had to take care of four horses and six cows and 12 chickens and porcupines. I had my own porcupine, who was still in the house. And I had to take care of all that. And it was a little too much for me. My older sister happened to have had escaped from Lithuania to deep Russia in the First World War, and she came back as a returnee. She had a husband and two children. All three of them died from hunger in her presence, so she was mentally slightly touched off. And when I decided to sell all the cows and all the horses and everything, to liquidate the properties, she became disturbed, and she grabbed a knife, and she was ready to stab me. And I escaped and came to the capital, Kovno, where one of my sisters was married by then already, and I stayed with her. And from there on, I developed myself.

Q: How old were you when you moved to Kovno?

A: Well, that happened within a period of a few weeks or a few months. So I was about 14 -- 13 to 14 when that incident happened, and I came to Kovno.

Q: And once you got to Kovno?

⁸ Rabbi (Yiddish)

A: I stayed for a little while with my married sister. And after that, I got myself a job as a messenger boy in different retail outlets. And from there on, I kept building my life the best way I can. All my other sisters were single, and they all had boyfriends. And all their boyfriends were ready to marry them except they refused to marry them without getting the dowry, which was the custom in the Jewish tradition in those days, which was called nadn.⁹ And without nadn, they weren't ready to marry them. We helped marry off my first sister by issuing "veksels,"¹⁰ which is promissory notes, of five thousand dollars for the two houses which we owned. Both houses were connected to each other, and there was a barn where we kept the cows and the horses in between the houses so you could walk from the inside. It was a valuable property in those days. So the promissory notes that we had, first my mother and I had to sign up to my first brother-in-law, otherwise he would not have married my sister. And he kept the notes in his -- under his pillow in his bed. So with the conniving of my married sister, we took out the notes from him and we gave it to the boyfriend of my second sister, and he married her. From thereon, we repeatedly did that all the time until all my sisters were married.

01:12:10

Q: I see. And when you were living in Kovno, as you got older, what different kinds of jobs did you have?

A: Since I didn't had any schooling; it was forbidden while I was a yeshiva bokher to educate myself. And we were living eight boys in one room, for the sole purpose that the boys should spy on each other, or not one of the boys should do something wrong illegally. And reading a book in any language other than the Gemara was a illegal deed. So I had to have a candle, a lighted candle, covered with my blanket in order to read literature. And I tried to study, to educate myself. I gave up the study in yeshiva, because a student relative of mine in Vilkomir, by the name of Yankel Zibutz (ph) smuggled me in the life of Baruch Spinoza and Israel Acosta (ph). And when I was finished reading those two books under the candlelight covered in my bed at night, in the danger of burning down the whole village and the whole house, I realized that to be a yeshiva bokher and continue is not for me. I became a educated skeptic, and I gave up the study. And by then, my father died and it happened what it happened to me. So without any trade, I was too young for any trade or any occupation. So I was getting jobs in retail outlets to make deliveries, and I joined up a Yiddish cultural night school, where they was teaching people who didn't had the elementary schooling to be educated in the -- at night. And that is my -- what I had. After working for several retail outlets, I finally got myself a job in a office supply retail outlet by a childless couple. And they, more or less, treated me like their own child. And I grew up with them, and became a adult with those people.

Q: Can you tell me what happened as you moved into your 20s?

⁹ Dowry (Hebrew)

¹⁰ Promissory note, IOU (Yiddish)

01:15:00

A: As I moved into my 20s ... I -- being engaged in a office products company, and where the Lithuanian intellectuals, under the leadership of the priests and the, and the educated people started a tremendous antisemitic hate campaign towards the Jews. And the office products company were the first victims, because it was only and primarily the government institutions like the Foreign Ministry and the Diplomatic Ministry and the Internal Ministry, and all the other government agencies who were the prime customers of the office supply companies. And the government and the fascist Siauliaitist party kept sending pickets to picket some of the Jewish stores so gentiles should not come in. And the government instructions was not to buy from Jews. I attempted, with the help of the proprietors of the company, to do something in that respect. And I took a trip to my village, which was Aniksht. And there, I discussed with a gentile former childhood friend of mine by the name of Jonas Kovalisch (ph), and I encouraged him to come to Kovno and to buy out the existing retail outlet. And he lined up a, a, another gentile gentleman by the name of Jonas Svinkeviches (ph), who was a former publisher of the, of dictionaries and other books, and was not engaged in that time in any business. And the two of them bought out the company, and it became a pure Christian company. And they became extremely successful because all the agencies of the government institutions immediately start to buy from them. I still remained with the company as a inside man in the, in the closed, in the -- in the locked -- locked inside quarters, far away from the eye of the public. And yet, the very same purchasing agents of the very same government agencies who were placing the orders, refused to deal with the pure Lithuanian Christian employees, and they dealt only with me.

01:18:15

Q: And this was shortly before the war?

A: That was up until 1933. In 1933, it became more and more difficult, and my position with the company became more and more difficult because people didn't stay in their job very long. People got old. People got married. They moved away. So new employees came in the purchasing departments, and they didn't want to be bothered with buying, with, with taking care of, with me helping them take care of. So my position became more or less obsolete. So Jonas Kowalisch (ph) decided, with my consent, that instead of keeping me in Kovno on the job which I had no, no, no purpose anymore and there was no way how I could get any other existence, he decided to send me on a trip to America. Since the relationship was so good with all the government agencies, he made me make an appointment with the protocol chief of the Foreign Ministry in Kovno. And when I had the appointment with that gentlemen, he told me, "David, I'll give you diplomatic papers that you are a diplomatic courier. I'll give you two suitcases, where you'll deliver to the Lithuanian Embassy in Kovno in New York -- or to the Lithuanian Consulate in New York. And you will travel as a diplomatic courier, and you'll be able to get a visa and come in to the United States. If I will not have -- and I certainly will not have -- any documents to send it to you -- with you. I will put in

newspapers and fill it in." And that's what happened. I got a visa. I arrived to America. I delivered the two suitcases to the Consul General, to the Lithuanian Consul General, in New York. And I went to my, my family from Bedford Hills picked me up, and I stayed there for a short period of time.

Q: But then you went back to Lithuania?

A: No, I did not go back to Lithuania. And then, when my immigration, when my visa time expired, I discovered that if you have fifty dollars in your pocket, you can take any transportation and arrive in Lisbon without any documents, in Lisbon, Portugal, without any visas or any documents. Or maybe they did require some kind of a paper where you would get where you get it in the, in the Portuguese Consulate in New York. I had the fifty dollars. I arranged everything, and I took a boat, and two weeks later, I arrived in Lisbon. And I attempt to get established over there, to build up my existence.

01:21:40

Q: Um-hm, and what happened then?

A: After a while -- by then it was already closer to 1936. After a while, the sit- the situation in eastern Europe, particularly Lithuania and the three Baltic states -- Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia -- became extremely dangerous. Vul-vulnerable from Hitler's part and from Stalin's part. Those three Baltic countries are like a little kitten squeezed in between a lion and a hippopotamus. And I felt that my five sisters -- I'm sorry -- by then it was only four sisters, because one of my brother-in-laws, my youngest sister Hanke (ph), was a leftist activist in Kovno. And Lithuania was a fascist government under the rule of President Smetona.¹¹ And he was in danger to be arrested and be imprisoned for a long, long time -- escaped to South America, to Uruguay. And three, four months after he arrived in Uruguay, he sent papers for my sister. So the two of them were in Uruguay. So I was left with four sisters. I realized that if anything happens, anything dramatic happens to Kovno or to Lithuania, all my four sisters, with all their four husbands -- each of them had four or five children -- and with all their children -- and my mother, my mother must have been 70 years by then. They will be destroyed in 10 minutes after anything happened, without me and my supervision and my ability to survive. So I voluntarily left Portugal to go back to Lithuania to be with my family.

01:24:00

Q: And what happened when you got back?

A: When I arrived there, I became a volun-- a, a free-lance business representative. I had friends

¹¹ Antanas Smetona was the leader of the fascist Gelezinis Vilkas (Iron Wolf) movement and president of Lithuania since 1926.

in every industry -- in the garment industry, in the office product industry. I had a assistant by the name of Jonas Petronis (ph). He was a pure Christian. And here began the antisemitic drive. The hate towards the Jews became stronger and stronger with the influence of Hitler. And no Jewish office supply storekeeper, or stationery storekeeper, could ever survive anymore. In the hundreds and hundreds of villages in Lithuania, every dru -- every little store was selling school supplies for the schools. The written or non-written instructions -- I don't know which one it is -- came that no school in any community in Lithuania should purchase office products as school supplies from the Jewish storekeepers. So the Catholic hierarchy in Kovno, where it's the headquarters of all the hate towards the Jews, decided to open up a wholesale office product business to supply all the school systems in Lithuania with office products and school supplies and books. By that, they took away by itself automatically all the business from the Jewish store keepers. And my friend, Jonas Petronis (ph) became -- the, the priests and the prelates, they had nothing to do with the office products. What did they know about office products? So he became the general director of all the off -- of all the imports of the office product supplies in Lithuania, for the whole Lithuanian region. And ,naturally, being one of the few non-Jewish-hating Lithuanians, he immediately made me the -- appointed me to be the general representative, or independent dealer, on all the products what they had. I was able to buy wholesale, and I was able to sell to the Jewish retail storekeepers and to the non-Jewish retail, and to provide myself with a decent existence. I, I have to stop for a second.

01:27:12

Q: Sure. Take a drink of water... You can continue when ever you're ready

A: I'm ready.

Q: What, what happened next?

A: That was in about 1936, towards the end of 1936. Where I build myself my existence through the means I just explained you and were as comfortable as anybody could be. I supported all my sisters' families where they were spread out all over Lithuania. One of my sisters remained in Aniksht. Another sister was living in Jonava. A third sister was living in Kovno, in the suburb of Kovno called Slobodka; and a fourth sister was in Aleksotas. And with the grace of Jonas Petronis (ph), I was very successful in my business. I'm sorry, I'd like to correct myself. With the grace of the one of the few decent, non-Jewish-hating Christians, Jonas Petronis (ph), I was able to become very successful and help all my family, and help all the people with whom I was ever involved in business, and many of my friends. Financial resource was no object with me at all.

Q: Were you trying at that point to get your family out of Lithuania?

A: There was no way how to make any attempt to get out the family of Lithuania. The whole world was closed for Lithuanian Jews. As a matter of fact, the day of the ti -- the day of the

out-outbreak of the war between Hitler and Stalin, there were there were extremely wealthy Jews walking around with foreign passports and foreign visas to go in any part of the world. And they couldn't go because Lithuania wouldn't let them out. And the consul of the prospective countries, who gave out the visas because of decency and humane reasons, knew before he gave them the visas that those countries wouldn't let them in. There was no way for me to attempt to take out my family or myself. I came in. I came in to the, to the, to the -- voluntarily from a free country like Portugal to this situation, because I knew that my family would not have survived any difficulty without me. But to attempt to get out, there was no way.

01:30:40

Q: Can you tell me what happened when the war started, when Germany invaded Poland? What happened to you in Lithuania?

A: What happened to me is, in Vilijampole, where my sister in Vilijampole, where my sister lived was the heart of the Jewish poor population in Kovno. The popularity -- the population -- was mostly Jewish. All the great famous yeshivas were there. And when the war broke out, it took three days and three nights that the German were not able to step in in the villages, in Kovno and in other villages, because the fronts were going on fightings between the Russian Army and the German Army. But the civil Russian popula-- government in every community, including Kovno and Vilijampolis, disintegrated within a half a day of the first outbreak of the war, which was the night of June 21st, 1941. In those three days and three nights, with the Russian might disappeared suddenly within one day. All the functionaries of the Russian government and Party had their trucks and their buses and other means of transportation stacked away somewhere. And when it happened, they all packed up their families and they left. And the population was left without any mercy at all. And it's the Lithuanian fascists, who were prepared for all the time since the Russian rule was in Kovno, secretly, by the Nazi agents to have uniforms and ammunition. So the first half a hour after the outbreak of the war that there was no more Russian might, the Lithuanian fascists -- they called themselves Siauliaitists or Siaulitists (ph), I don't know exactly -- the very same organization who before the war was doing all the anti-Jewish activities, they were within one half an hour in uniforms.

01:33:40

And they marched in in Slobodka; and they murdered the most brutal, the most unbelievably inhumanely torturous way almost all the population, the Jewish population, in that community. I was supposed to be there, too, and I was supposed to be murdered. And I know that there's no reason why I would have a better human being than everybody, where all my friends were murdered. Except for one thing. Being a volun -- free. Being a independent representative in the office products field, where I was selling to the retail outlets and I had a tremendous fine relationship with all the employees in the companies with whom I did business. And one of the companies, the employee manager -- a, a Jewish girl by the name of

Hinda – Hindale (ph), she was a member of the Communist Party. She was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party. And as soon as the Communist, Communist rule took over the power in Kovno -- that was about 1940, about a year prior to the outbreak of the war -- she called me. It's about a week and a half, about a week prior to the start of the war. She called me that there's a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and my name was put on to be sent to Siberia. For months and months and months, or weeks and weeks, the secret police used to ring the bell in the, in the most of the Jewish houses, pack them up, send them to the station and send them to Siberia. There was no way of telling who will be next to go. Since of my attitude being extremely polished and friendly with everybody, one of these, one of the highest activists of the Communist Party was constantly imprisoned by the Lithuanian. And he was a, a -- and his background was the office product industry, and his family was known. And Hindale was the one who was collecting money from me to support his family, and to support other families, and the other of the imprisoned political prisoners, Jewish or non-Jewish. I gave to everybody generously, so she knew exactly who I was. And there were a great deal of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party -- Kovno Lithuanian Communist Party, who also knew about my activities as a human being. And she called me and informed me that I am on the list to be taken to Siberia. There was a mi-- a, a minority rule vote against taking me out, but the majority won. And she suggested to me that the person from whose family I helped support -- I don't know his name, he became the head of the rectory of the vacation. He became the Commissioner of the head of the vacation for the whole commercial enterprises in Kovno. And since I was - - had to take a job by then already, because I also was advised by inside information that it's not healthy for me to be a free-lance representative, so they appointed a job for me in one of the retail outlets.

01:38:08

I became the prekiau (ph) zinaviets¹² (ph) -- the merchandise specialist. So she suggested to me I thought I should call that gentleman and ask him to grant me a vacation, because I didn't feel good. I called him in his office, I made an appointment with him the same day to have dinner with him in a restaurant. I explained to him that I don't feel good. I happen physically to suffer from psoriasis. And all I had to do is unroll my sleeve and scratch a little in my, in my, in my joint area that it becomes white, to convince him that I am what I am. And he saw it. He called me the next day, and suggested that there's two openings for me on vacation. One was in Sochi, in Crimo-Cacausus¹³ -- the most luxury resort area in Russia, where Stalin personally had one of his villas. And I certainly shivered away from that. The next place was Druskininkai, a resort area, a very famous resort area which belonged to Lithuania five hundred years ago at the time when Lithuania ruled a great deal of eastern

¹² In Lithuanian, the word for merchandise is “prekes.” The word for knowledge is “zinojimas.” The interviewee’s alteration of the endings of both words is probably due to a vernacular not present in our dictionaries.

¹³ Located on the Black Sea, very near the border between the Russian S.F.S.R. and Georgia.

Europe. And in 1918-20, in the war between the Lithuanian's independent and Poland's independent, a Polish general occupied the whole territory with this Lithuanian capital of Vilna, and it became Polish. And I accepted to go to Druskininkai. Since I am a person of -- I never believed in delaying matters and in being sloppy, whatever I do, I immediately accepted the permit and that was on Monday night. Tuesday, I took the train to Druskininkai. I arrived there late Tuesday night. I registered in the hotel with all the formalities. And Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday night, I was dancing in a nightclub with the, with the wife of a Russian colonel -- the head of the Com-- of the whole Russian Army in that area. And we walked out 12 o'clock midnight, and we hear tremendous thunder. And she said that, "These maneuvers... my husband told me that we may have maneuvers." And I said, "No, that's not maneuvers. That is some kind of a war." And I went straight to the hotel. And a few minutes after I arrived to the hotel, the loudspeaker heard already Molotov's¹⁴ speech that war broke out. I think we'll have a little recess.

Q: Ok, go ahead. The tape, the first tape is going to end in about fifteen minutes, and at that point we can walk around and so forth.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION – PAUSE

01:42:10

Q: Why don't you just continue whenever you're ready. Continue whenever you're ready. What, what happened once the war broke out? What, what happened to you now?

A: I will continue. Oh, sorry. Can I stand up for a minute?

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

01:43:38

Q: Sure. You can go ahead whenever you're ready... Ok, why don't, why don't we pick up about where -- what, what happened to you once --

A: When the war broke out?

Q: When the war broke out.

01:44:15

A: Since I was a fairly well-to-do person, and without a family, as soon as the Communists took over Lithuania, everybody in Lithuania, every -- but everybody had to look like Stalin, to make themselves a Stalin jacket and high boots, and pants with, with -- how do you call it?

¹⁴ Molotov, Vyachelslav (1890-1986)

Rider pants, whatever it was. So I, I had tailor-made luxury black ankle leather coats, with high boots, with Stalinuvka¹⁵ (ph) jackets. And at the time when Molotov's speech was delivered, the tens of thousands of vacationers, they're starting to run around in chaotic -- a mad situation. And nobody know what to do, and nobody knew where to go. And I immediately decided that I will start to escape in the only highway road which was near the resort area. And I walked out with my beautiful black raincoat, dressed in the beautiful boots to look like a commissar. And after 10, 15 minutes walking, my feet were already crippled, and I had to throw away the boots and walk barefoot. I walked for an hour this way. While passing by -- that was in the middle of the night -- there was a water well. And thousands of people were laying around the water well, hanging around. There was a school of Russian students. I don't remember what kind of school. It was a vocational school. And the boys who were who were taking out the water from the well wore uniforms. And the thousands of people had stretched out their hands to get a drink of water. I had some properties with me, and in the properties I had built in two very, very expensive diamonds. I prepared myself for that kind of even-eventuality in many situations. In, in a dry shaving soap container, like a little, like a little roller. And I took that out and stretched out my hand to hand over to the boys; and within two seconds, I got the water. And I continued. Daybreak came, and by then I was half-dead. I couldn't walk anymore. I was on a field where thousands of people were laying stretched out on the field, already half-dead from the same difficulty of walking barefoot.

01:48:00

And the German airplanes came flying over the field. And a lot of people were shoving themselves through their bodies crawling, with the hope that they will be able to crawl closer to the bombs and get killed so they die, but it didn't happen to me. And it just so happened that by then I was near a road where thousands of refugees were running towards Russia. That highway was closer to Russia. Those borders, in those days, the, the, the, the national territories that a little, a little highway, a little road -- here was Poland, five seconds later it was Ukrainia, and, and a little bit further it was Byelorussia. It was all part of the same territories. So I happened to be lying near the, the route, near the road, where a Jewish family with a horse and buggy, with some children and women were on the, on the, on the, on the wagon, and men were walking with the wagon. And one of the women noticed me. And she started to cry and forced the man to put me on the wagon. And on the wagon, they bandaged my feet and powdered it. And I recuperated. And after traveling all day and almost a half a night, wherever we went the Germans were ahead of us. Finally we land up a village in Ukraine. We were in a barn of a, of a Ukrainian farmer house. It was then already forbidden by Jews to take in wandering Jews. So the Ukrainian had mercy with us and took us in the barn. And I remember if it happened today, right now, that his two grown-up sons were busy in the village robbing the Jewish properties. And the old man -- he must have been eighty, ninety years old -- stood for hours in the doorway of his barn where we were laying, with a, with a stick like a baseball stick over his shoulder, ready to beat his sons when they'll be

¹⁵ Stalinká jackets.

finished robbing the Jewish houses in the village and when they will come back home to stop them from going in in the barn and kill us and take away the properties what those people had with whom I was attached. I had no properties again at all anymore, so there was nothing to take from me. All they could do is kill me.

01:57:20

After we left this property, we continued riding further and further and further. And we didn't manage to go very far, where we stopped at another house. And I, I was relaxed already and almost everything in my foot healed, except one area which was bleeding. And I was sitting in the front of the house. I think the house, the people in the house what made me do something in the front -- clean a pot, I don't remember what. And a group of German soldiers stopped and asked me, "Du Jude?"¹⁶ And I said, "Jude." And they took me with them. They took me to a, to a, to a, to a fairly decent-looking residence. And it was vacant, and they made me scrub the floor. It was the headquarters for the commanding general to stopover when he will arrive. They were preparing the headquarters. And since one of the guards noticed my bleeding foot, they called in the military doctor and he bandaged my foot. In the meantime, he bought something to eat. And after I was finished cleaning, they took me back to the place where they picked me up. By then, it was too late to go anywhere, because the routes were bombed and destroyed and the Germans were everywhere. So the family, the family from Grodno to whom I attached myself, decided to go back to Grodno. And it took us several days. And we arrived in Grodno. Shortly before we came to the proper city in Grodno, there was the gendarmes, the military gendarmes, who were controlling the traffic. And they stepped -- they stopped us and identified a whole group as Jews and took us straight to the prison. And from there, they kept us for a day or so. And since the whole family was in Grodno, resident family, they let them all go -- including me. So I stayed for a few days with that family. Shortly afterwards, few -- I rested for a day or so. And then I -- they told me -- I spoke no Polish. So the family with whom I was staying discovered that there are thousands of refugees are lined up in the front of the German commandant to get passes to go back to their homes. Where do you have that many thousands of refugees? Because Druskininkai, the resort area where I was, was a resort area only for, for vacationers. There were dozens of hotels only for vacationers. And there were many other resort hotels in that area. So thousands, and maybe tens of thousands of Russian laborers and employees who had a vacation lined up over there and were caught in the war. And they all lined up in Grodno, in the front of the Kommandantur to get passes to go home. And I did the same thing. The procedure was: there was a big street, no traffic, it was blocked off; across the street of the building of the Kommandantur, the thousands of people were staying and waiting in line. There were several German guards who controlled the traffic of the people. And when a group of 10, 20 people walked out from the Kommandantur, that means they took care of their business. The guards permitted a group of these other 10, 20 people to go in. Since thousands of people were waiting on the other side and the guard doesn't designate who should come in, so the thousands of them was starting to run. So the guards

¹⁶ "Are You a Jew?" (German)

were controlling the outside. They let that many people in, and they did not permit any more. And the rest of them went back. That repeated itself several times a day. I was there for one day, and I think a second day. After that, the rule came out that every Jew should wear a Star of David. And the Grodno family made up Stars of David on the front and on the back, and they made a set of Star of Davids for me, too. So the next morning, six o'clock in the morning, I arrived at the, at the line-up place, already with my Star of David. I am not a tall person. And between the husky big people without the Star of David, I would never had a opportunity to get there because as groups of people got their, their fulfillment, new groups of people arrived to wait for the police. A day passed by. Although nobody ever attempted to offend me at all, while I was standing, but when I started to run with all the other people to get in, that's when they pushed me aside and did not let me go near it. And one day, I think, two days passed by. Early morning on the third day, when I lined up together with all the other people, the German guard walked over to me and said, "Du, Jude, komm."¹⁷ And he walked me through the gate, and while walking he said to me, "Die Schweine, die, die, die Russians! Ich hab gesehen was ist – was angeht, und du hast niemals die Gelegenheit durchzugehen."¹⁸

Q: Can you translate that?

A: I was the only Jew with the Star of David waiting for a permission to go through. And he realized there's so much going on. And he walked me through the Kommandantur. I walked in, in the corridor, and the officer was sitting at the desk. And I explained to him in German that I'm, I'm going to the Kommandantur to ask a permit to go back from Kovno, to go back to Kovno. And he told me to go on the second floor, I'll see the people there, I'll know where to go in. And I did walk in, and my turn came after a little while. And another elderly German officer was sitting at, at the desk, and he and a civilian Pole was standing next to him. Since all the applicants for permission to go home were not Poles -- they were Russian and Ukrainian, and all, all other people and all nationalities. Poles had no need to ask permission to go home, because that was their home at that moment. So, naturally, the Commandant had an interpreter. And I was the only Jew who came over. And the Polish interpreter attempted immediately to explain the Commandant, in his broken Pol—German - - that I am a Communist and I should be shot right away. My ear was very clear then. I stood up like, like "Achtung!" -- you know, like "Attention!" -- and I said to the Commandant, "Der Mann lügt! Ich bin ein, ein, ein -- ich bin hier für Erholung in Druskininkai, und bin in dem middle auf dem Ausbruch, auf dem Krieg, von Kovno, Lithuanien. Und ich bitte dem Commandant erlauben es zurückziehen nach Kovno."¹⁹ The man took a look at me, picked up his stamp, stamped on a paper, and out I was.

¹⁷ "You, Jew, come." (German)

¹⁸ "The swine, the, the, the Russians! I have seen what is going on, and you have no chance to go through." (German)

¹⁹ "The man lies! I have been an, an, an -- I am here for rehabilitation at Druskininkai and have been caught in the middle of the escape from Kovno, Lithuania. And if the commandant will allow, will return to Kovno." (German)

Q: Ok, this is probably a good place to stop. We -- they -- have to change the tapes, so we can take a break now.

02:00:40

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

02:00:30

Q: We're ready to go back on. We left off with your getting permission to go back to Kovno.

A: I went back to the family in Grodno. They, they gave me a little food to go, and the next day in the morning I started off to go on foot towards Lithuania, which people suggested the route I should take. There's not traffic. I was the only one going on that route, and no walkers, nothing. I was just by myself. I walked all day long and rested for a while. It was -- by then, it was in mid-- in mid-July, and it was extremely hot. And from time to time, I rested. I became thirsty, but I had nowhere out to drink. And towards the evening, I arrived at the house. There wasn't even any houses where to stop. But that was a house, and I stopped. And they gave me something to eat and they gave me to drink, and I continued. And late at night I arrived back in Druskininkai. From there, I started off. And by then, was already a rule issued by the German authorities that no local resident should be permitted to take in a strange Jew in their houses, under the penalty of death. Then I stretched out on the sidewalk, laying there ready to die, whatever will happen to me. I was extremely exhausted from the walk. I was already again hungry and thirsty. And early in the morning -- I laid all night like that -- and early in the morning, at time when people were beginning to move around, there were two Jewish girls from Kovno who were also vacationing. They were nurses. I think they were sisters. And they saw me laying on the sidewalk. They recognized me. They came over, and they cried dramatically over me. But they couldn't help me, either. But they brought me some water, and something to eat. And I strengthened myself a little bit. And after a while, I was laying there again. I didn't have the strength to get up. And two girls passed by. And they passed me -- Christian girls -- they passed me by laughing and giggling. And while they passed me by, one of them made a remark. I don't remember why the remark was. And they came back, and that one girl recognized me. In the good days, prior -- about a year, a year and a half ago, when Hitler attacked Poland, thousands of Polish Jewish refugees find themselves in Lithuania. And one person from Warsaw, whom I became very friendly and sheltered him and helped him economically and to survive, happened to be a playboy. And he -- the girls were clinging to him like, like honey to a bee, and he had dates constantly. And since I was a single fellow, too, we had dates together. And I remember one weekend he arranged a date for me with two gentile girls whose sister was married to a Jewish musician in Kovno. And we had a beautiful evening together; but that was about a year ago of the time that I was laying on the sidewalk. And my date, one of the two girls we had a date, was that girl. How do you like that?! And she happened to be the sister of the Lithuanian chief of the organized partisan murderous bands, who were busy in that time not to bother with the Jews.

02:05:12

Because in the Polish Ukrainian villages, the Lithuanian partisans who take over the power

immediately were busy antagonizing or robbing or murdering the Poles. They had not -- they didn't have to bother with the Jews, because the Jews wouldn't run away from them. They had time plenty for the Jews later on. But her brother was the head of the organizers of the murderous partisan bands, who for participated in most of the destructive murders of Kovno -- including Slobodka, primarily Slobodka. Where if I would have been there, what I started to explain you originally. By all counts I should have been there. But because physically I happened to be in Druskininkai, so I wasn't murdered. So he brought me in his house.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then they gave me to eat and to drink, and they gave me some clothing. And he was getting ready to send a transport of additional murderers to Kovno, to continue with the beautiful work they did. And he instructed them to put me in the truck and to take me to Kovno. After all, I was his custody. And he instructed them, and he had told me, that on the highway they will be stopped by a German officer who was the real head chief of the, of the, of the Einsatzkommando.²⁰ And he will give them additional instructions in writing and will converse with them. The German didn't speak Lithuanian, and the Lithuanian didn't speak German. But he will give them instructions what, additional instructions what to do in Kovno. Prior to this stop, where he was supposed to wait for them, the soldiers should put me underneath their feet between the benches. The truck had benches arranged for people to sit. And they should cover me up with their feet. And he explained me, too -- or his sister explained me -- that it will be stopped, and a German officer will talk German. I should not breath or make any sign of anything. I should stay still. And I did, and they passed by. The trip was a pretty long trip. It was almost a whole day. Towards the evening, they stopped in the front of a, of a farmhouse, or a restaurant, where they all went in to eat. And they took me in, too, and I ate with them. When they arrived in Kovno, on Vilna Street -- one of the main streets -- they just let me off. I'm finished. I'm finished, I -- their duty was over. That house was not far of the house where my brother-in-law's brother was living. So I walked in in that house, in their apartment. And there I find my sister with her two children, and my mother, from Jonava, with a niece of mine -- the one who survived. And there they -- I discovered the whole the whole story what happened. I would have been in Slobodka, in my sister's house. And they avoid that the brutal murder of the pogroms on the first three days. On the fourth day, a group of partisans, murderous, decided to go and check out from house to house.

02:10:15

My sister happened to have lived in a attic. So the eight, nine men who were hiding were up there in that apartment -- my brother-in-law, his brother, his son and other people -- they're hiding in the attic. It was not the straight down roof where you could fold up. It was a attic roof like areas were straight, where people could lay down there. After they didn't find anybody, they all walked out. And some of the idiots inside decided to look from, on the

²⁰ Task force (German)

balcony, decided to look if it's all over. And the last partisan decided to look up, and they met each other. And they took them all down, and they took them to the Ninth Fortification.²¹ And they murdered them, together with most of the Jews that were murdered. You have to remember that this Fortification, the Seventh and the Ninth Fortification, was fortifications -- you know what a fortification is? Built by the Czarist Russia to pretend -- to prevent -- attacks from German armies in, in 1905. And they were still in existence. And the Lithuanian took them over, and that's where they murdered most of the Jews. They took them there.

Q: What, what happens to you next, now that you're back?

A: The next, the next thing what happened, I happened to have an apartment in Kovno. My mother, when I made the trip to Druskininkai for a vacation, my mother was living with me. She was taking care of the maid I had, and helping her. I didn't want my mother to be by herself. So I gave her money to buy gifts for all her daughters, and travel to visit from one daughter to the other. And the first stop she made was in Jonava, with my sister who had four children. Over there, the first day the Jews were lined up from their apartments, driven to the forest and they were kept for several days. My then-70-years-old mother realized that nothing good will come out from the whole thing. And she grabbed Dinah's (ph) hand -- my oldest niece, my sister's oldest daughter -- and she pushed herself closer and closer to the forest. And when it became dark, she pulled out Dinah and they walked away. They were hiding during the day in the, in the, in the ravinas (ph). Ravina, that's a English word? Between the -- and during the night, they were walking. A woman who couldn't read and write, never went to a school, never know what a map means, managed to go from Janova to Kovno. And that's how they arrived in Kovno. They were hiding during the day, because they would have been caught by the partisans and murdered. And if there weren't any partisans, some of the decent Christians would have fingered them to the partisans and called over a murderer. So they arrived in Kovno. So I had already a built-in family of my sister Chayke (ph), whose husband was murdered in Slobodka, with her little girl, Raisele (ph), and a boy, Alenke (ph). The boy was six years old. The girl was about 12, 14. That was three people. My mother is four, and Dinahle (ph) then is five. So I had five dependents, on whose ability to survive depends on me only. After a while, the rule came out to go into Kovno ghetto. I, on the other hand, the minute when I heard what happened to my brother-in-law and their, and the, the other people -- and that had happened only three, four days before my arrival. Because they didn't murder them in the first three days of the onslaught. It was on the fourth day; and it was three -- it was seven days since the beginning. I decided to walk to the criminal police headquarters to attempt to speak to this chief of the criminal police, Mr. Pomatitis (ph).

02:14:04

My relationship with Pomatitis was as following: while I was the manager, so-called

²¹ Ninth Fort

manager of the new Christian office products store and his office was buying, and he personally was coming and place orders for me for 5,000 dollar carpets and other expensive properties and put in on the invoice "office products" to be sent to his home, it was a personal relationship between him and myself. Since I wasn't some several times for business, and when I became the employee of the government store retail outlet, after the, the Communists took over, because I had to have a job, his wife was coming to the store to buy school supplies for the children. So she told me that he was imprisoned in the Kovno prison, and I realized that they had difficulty to survive. So I gave her money to buy the school supplies. I helped her with food, and I sent quite often hilf²² -- help -- to her house. My logic was, that when he was rel-- freed from prison from the Communists, and became again the chief of the police headquarters in Kovno, my logic was that she would have told him what I did. He knew who I am. And I think I'll take the, I'll take the risk and go to see him, and ask him if he can liberate my brother-in-law and all the people who were kept in that house. And that's what I did. In order to be secure, because it wasn't safe to walk through Kovno for the Lithuanian partisans who didn't know who I am and didn't care who I am, I had a distant relative -- a Jewish distant relative -- who was a former volunteer in the original Lithuanian Army. And that was a big honor by the Lithuanians, and he wore a little button on his-- . With that, we were stopped a couple times going to the, to the police, to this. -- to the chief of police, to Mr. Pomatitis, which was all the way on the, on the, on the new part in Kovno, quite a distant. But we arrived. There were thousands of Jews waiting in the offices for appointments, and hundreds and hundreds of Lithuanian and other minorities who were waiting for their appointment. But when I informed the desk clerk that I came to see Mr. Jonas Pomatitis, the chief of the police headquarters, within two seconds the assistant of the police, chief of police of Mr. Pomatitis came out and asked me my business, and I told him. He went back in; and came out and regretted that Mr. Pomatitis does not have the opportunity to come and speak to me. But he'll do everything he can, but he thinks it may be too late. And that's exactly what it was. It was too late. On the way back, we were stopped again by Lithuanian partisans, who were picking up Jews from all over.

02:18:02

It was still permitted for Jews to walk on the street, but you had to have your star already. Or maybe by then it was not. I don't remember. But it wasn't hard for a Lithuanian to know who is a Jew in Kovno. They looked at the at the little button of my friend, and they pushed him away; and they took me to the prison, to the yellow prison, which was nearby. They kept me there for several hours. And then, with a group of hundreds of other Jews, they took me on the mountains in a former Russian caserne, a military unit. And they made me sort clothing. And when the day was over, they sent me back in Kovno. Then the decree came out that all Jews should go in in ghetto; and I made arrangements with my family to go to the ghetto. Since we had -- didn't have anything to transfer, it was for easier for us just to go Kovno to the apartment of my sister. She lived in ghetto in, in Slobodka, where it was supposed to be. The street she lived was supposed to be part of the ghetto. Before we did that, I decided to go

²² Help (Yiddish).

to my former apartment and see if there was anything I could recuperate. The superintendent of the building was a Russian, a old Russian with a big beard. Nobody persecuted Poles. The Lithuanian had a anger against Poles because of the war between them for so many years. But the Russian were, were kept neutral. Nobody -- the old ones, and not new Russians. They were regular Lithuanian citizens. When I walked in in that apartment, a rifle was hanging on the wall. And he explained me, "You see, I can easily take down the rifle and shoot you dead. But I'm not going to do it." He returned to me a pair of shoes and some underwear, and a loaf of bread. Because I was extremely well-to-do, and because my friend was a former Polish immigrant, he arranged for me to buy from Vilna the most luxury Polish furniture that only nobility could afford to have it -- or multi-millionaires. It was called tonnette (ph) manufacturing. So he became the possessor of all the luxury, with everything I had. And after a few days, we moved into the ghetto. By then, my sister's apartment where she lived was not any more designated to the ghetto, and we had to move in somewhere else. And since every Jew got something, so my family got also some kind of a location together with other Jews. But in the meantime, we were in ghetto. The ghetto was not completely closed up by then. But Jews were constantly moving in. The German authorities gave us, I think, until August 15th to close in the ghetto, where no more, no, no Jews would be in Kovno ghetto.

02:21:35

It should be in Kovno. Free should move in in the ghetto. I had a dear Lithuanian friend, a Chris, a Christian Lithuanian friend -- also a former assistant of mine -- by the name of Kostas (ph). And while I was preparing myself, I was not prepared that Stal-- Hitler will attack Stalin and overnight we will be finished. We were prepared that the Russians will take over Lithuania and stay aside watching Hitler fighting with England and, and France, and nothing will happen in Lithuania. And since the Germans -- the Russians -- might will take over my country, I was prepared with my, with my wealth that I could live for a thousand years by having packages of my properties in different houses of different friends, Jewish and non-Jewish. Whoever was my friends, I supported some of those families for a couple years, in order for them to -- while they are keeping my properties. Because I figured out exactly and precisely, if anything should happen except the war between Hitler and Stalin, I would have enough to live for myself and for all the dozens of families who had my properties. When I say "myself," it's not "I" personally. It's the five families of my, of my sisters. And that could have happened. I left with Kostas a box of British gold pens to be put in in fountain pens. In that time, there was no ball-points. It was only -- no ball-points. It was only pencils and pens. I had a box about that big. In that box was a hundred boxes of a hundred pen in each box. If that property would have been converted successfully, at the time of the transfer from Russian might to German might to the private -- might, it would have been worth millions. Because nobody could have refused a gold pen to put in in their fountain pen, to continue be able to write. I left a whole box of that with Kostas. And when I came, before I got into the ghetto, to pick up from him -- I had dinner with him, and at dinner

they served me with a broken fork and I left. I took a droska²³ back and a droska forth. If I would have been caught riding a droska, I would have been shot on the premises. But I did. I felt I had to do it, because by going in in the ghetto I thought I would be able to help myself survive for a long time with that, with that pens. You know what I'm talking about, that pen? Do you know what I'm saying?

Q: No. No.

A: No, you don't.

Q: Like a fountain pen?

A: Like a foun-- a pen to be put in, in the fountain pen.

Q: That's right. Right, I understand.

02:25:00

A: The most treasured thing in Lithuania or in Russia was a fountain pen. And the pen, the fountain pen, could not function without that pen. I came back to the ghetto. I took in with, with the, with the properties. And I immediately, the next day -- but immediately the next day. Most of the Jewish were permitted to come into the ghetto with all their properties, with the furniture. Some of them hired transportation -- horse and buggies -- and came into the ghetto with everything they had because the Nazis knew that everything the Jewish would bring in in the ghetto, they'll get it later. It was no problem. The Jewish were not running from them anywhere. But I came in with nothing, with five mouths. And the first meal you may manage, the second and the third. What you do with the fourth meal? So the following day, I immediately walked around the streets, where most of the people -- who had everything they needed for the first three, four weeks -- they're hiding, in order not to be captured to be taken to work. Because there's no guarantee that you'll come back. I was walking around looking to be captured, to be taken to work, because that was the only opportunity, by being at work outside the Kovno ghetto, that I may have somehow a possibility to have some kind of food to survive and to bring to my family. That was my motivation. A young member of the, of the same apartment where I lived -- there were several families in one room apartment. I think a young couple. And he followed my footsteps, and he went with me. After walking for 10, 15 minutes, we naturally were captured by Lithuanian guards. One important factor I forgot to tell you. Can I put it in now?

A: Sure.

Q: At a time a when Jewish were still walking back and forth from Kovno ghetto, from Kovno

²³ Horse-drawn buggy. This could be a from a variety of languages: Russian, Polish, or German.

to the ghetto, to, to pick up their things and to bring, I decided one day also to go to Kovno. Maybe I would visit Jonas Petronis, my other Christian real friend, who offered me I should help in the first place. And by then he had a retail book shop in Kovno. I thought I would visit him and take up a couple matters with him to discuss. There was a bridge between Kovno and Slobodka. And when I came near the bridge from the Slobod-- from the ghetto side, from the Slobodka side to go to Kovno, there was a Lithuanian unifor-- a Lithuanian guard with a rifle standing there. I didn't know who it was. I know him standing there, but I didn't know who it was. When I came closer, he captured me. He was the son, the Yiddish-speaking son, of the Lithuanian superintendent in the building where the family for whom I worked had purchased with the help of an American brother of the lady, a multi-millionaire, Mr. Israel Matz (ph). So his father was the superintendent in the building; and he was the son of the superintendent -- who spoke Yiddish as good as I, or more better.

02:29:00

And he captured me. And he shouted to call the guard from the other side. And who was the guard on the other side? His older brother, who was my best friend while, while , while we were, we were on the, on the free side. And both of them decided in my presence, they were debating should they knock me off, throw me in the river, not knock me off. And both of them decided to let me go back to Kovno ghetto. So with that, I, I survived the first incident of destruction. Or, or that wasn't the first incident, but I survived that incident, too. The next morning, I went off with my friend to go to look for work and I was captured. We were taken to shant-- to the military casernes which was a tremendous distant. We walked. When we arrived there, we were half-dead. It was about three, four hundred people altogether. My friend and I was taken to a huge military barrack home. We were given a, a emer²⁴ -- a pail -- and a brush, and we, we were taken to this to the water foun-- sink. And we were told to take water, and lay down and scrub the floor. So we did. We did. We scrubbed the floor until our knees were swollen and bloody. The Lithuanian, the Lithuanian murderous partisan who was in charge of us, every three or four hours came in to watch us. In the meantime, he murdered up -- he and his friends murdered up half of the Jewish over there because the Jewish didn't realize. They mistakenly believed that they are still dealing with human beings, and tried to persuade them not to have them work so hard. And the slightest request of resentment or opposition to the hard work, they immediately took them out and murdered them. I didn't have that case. I laid down on my knees, and I rubbed and scrubbed and rubbed and scrubbed. And the young man who was with me did exactly the same thing. That affected so much the murderous Christian Lithuanian guard that he himself run around to the Lithuanian houses and begged food from them, got food from them, came in and throw it on the floor for us to eat. When we were finished with that, five o'clock we were lined up and we arrived back in ghetto. It just so happened that the houses we got, they are the territory, the neighborhood of the poorest non-sufficient Jewish, who are worth any, nothing to the, to the Jewish administration anyhow. But value nothing. And that's where we got the houses. So there was a long desert to walk, a desert area, a sandy area, to walk to our quarters. Quiet

²⁴ Pail (Yiddish).

walk. We were half-dead already, by the way, while we're arriving. When we arrived at the gate, there was already a organized a Ghattowache²⁵ who were checking the gates for the Jewish who came in. And there was a organized Jewish police community guards, who were guarding on the other side, on the inside of the Ghattowache. The cooperation between the murderous guards and the Jewish guards after a while became pretty, pretty decent, pretty tolerant after a while. The rule had came out already then by the chief Gestapo commander of the ghetto that every Jew who meets a German executive -- civilian or military -- has to bow and take off the hat.

02:33:18

When we walked in the Ghattowache, we were told to be careful. If we will meet a German, we should bow and take off our hats if we had. We didn't have hats then. So we're walking halfway. We are starving. And a Jew was not supposed to walk on the sidewalk, so we didn't walk on the sidewalk in the first place. And we were walking already in the desert area when suddenly, from a corner street, two guards, two armed German military men came out walking towards us. When we came close enough to them, we bowed. And they immediately took down their rifles to shoot at us. And I immediately figured out what's going on, what their thought was. If I would turn around and run back, they would shoot us right away because they would understand that I'm running away. There's no way how I could run away. So I immediately start running backwards, for them to know that my intentions are good, and the other man followed me. After walking backwards 10, 15 steps and we came to their presence, we bowed very deep. And they laughed and walked away. And then, after a while, we came home and relaxed and, and had a little to eat. I think the guards -- the Lithuanian, whom, for whom we worked -- gave us some food to take along with us. And this way, every day I was going out, without waiting for anybody to line up and without waiting to be captured. That young man and I were walking out every morning, and we were waiting to be to be, we were looking for the opportunity to be caught and be taken outside the ghetto where, where eventually we would have had something to eat. The first day, I was taken to a German military unit, to the PX canteen, to wash the floors there and to help put the merchandise on the shelves. When we arrived there, the manager of the canteen -- the German officer, the Christian German-speaking officer in charge of the canteen -- took the two of us in the canteen room. The canteen room was a little like a room as, as, as big as that corner there. He put the pail of water in the front of the door, so when somebody would try to get in they would have to move the pail of water or, or know that it's something there. He was able to see who would come in. If it's something that he's afraid of, he would open the door right away. And if it was somebody not important, he would tell them that the floor is wet. And immediately gave us food to eat, and told us if anything will try to get in in the door and he will tell us to remove the pail, we should put the food in a corner nobody, not, not to be seen. And after eating, we cleaned up everything exactly and precisely, and he invited us for a few more days to come.

²⁵ Ghetto watch (German).

02:36:50

And I had a beautiful, comfortable existence for my family and for other people after, for a few days. Then that was over. And I started again, and, and after three, four days being in bad areas where I had to come back with almost nothing to eat, I lined to work for the Third Police Brigade in the center of the most luxury area in, in Kovno. And I was working in the kitchen peeling potatoes, and, and, and doing all kind of manual work. And I had enough to food to, to eat, and I had enough food to bring for the family and for other people. By then, it must have been already mid, mid, mid, mid -- by end of August, where everything settled in. In the early stages, where it was still permitted to go outside of the ghetto, a great deal of Jewish young men from Slobodka ghetto -- it was easy to go to Jonava because the highway was there. They're running out every morning to go and get some food. Jordan (ph), the chief murderer of the Gestapo, was waiting for them right by the end of the trip and murdered them all. That was going on for three, four days, until some goyim²⁶ -- decent goyim -- were able to come and to tell the Jewish not to go there, because they lined them up and they murdered them on the spot. I was approached several times by very good friends of mine to go with them and buy food. I didn't had any money or any clothing. Immediately thereafter the creation of the ghetto, clothing was the commodity to exchange. I didn't had any. What my superintendent returned to me was not enough for anything -- just a pair of shoes and a pair of socks, and some underwear. So I had no reason to go, and that's why I survived this murderous onslaught. When I lined up in the, in the Third Police Precinct, I think by reading the other memories I know that it was Captain Tornbaum²⁷ who was in charge. After three, four days working there, the, the, the chief himself, the chef himself, for whom we were actually working and giving us instructions, didn't bother with us one day or another. He gave us the instructions; we did them. He gave us to eat, and, and he had nothing to do with us one way or another. But one day, some more soldiers came to us, took one other man and me on a, on a, on a step on a attic in, in one of the houses, and took us over to a corner where two huge sacks of sugar was standing.

02:40:18

He instructed us to take the sacks, to bring them to the kitchen. I immediately came over to the sack and started to grab it, and grabbed and grabbed and grabbed, and I couldn't even get near the sack. And the other guy started to argue with him. It's too heavy for him. So he told me, "Stay here." He walked over to him, slapped him around several times, and he grabbed the sack and run down like, like, like anything, came back with him upstairs, dragged my sack and they came down. Because that that, that soldier realized that I couldn't even, even, even, even wrap around the sack. And that was the end of the incident. After a while, it organized work brigades for the Jewish to go to the outside of the ghetto working. The best units were in the area where I was working, because there were a lot of, the complete population was filled up with Lithuanians. They immediately took over the luxury

²⁶ Gentiles (Yiddish).

²⁷ Captain Alfred Tornbaum

apartments from the Jews. And they immediately started to peddle with the Jewish, bartering food for clothing. And the Germans there, after, after a while getting used to the way of their slaves, probably keep their eye closed or didn't bother or whatever it is. It was going on a, a business like a regular business. Clothing became a very expensive commodity to take out from Kovno ghetto. But the black marketeers, to them bring in food was not such a big thing. To them was important to buy expensive food -- like saccharine. You know what saccharine is? Sweeteners. Or sugar or fat or butter. And that, at one time or another, it was pretty comfortable to get in, bring it in. But after a while, it became extremely, extremely dangerous to bring in food of any value. And in that time, the German Nazis put up a Lithuanian Wachmeister²⁸ who was a tall, slim person. By five o'clock in the afternoon, the street to enter Kovno ghetto was lined up with thirty-five thousand Jews -- everyone broken down by their brigades, lined up five in a row to march in to the ghetto after a day's work. That Wachmeister was purposely hired to catch the black marketeers. I had a contract in the work brigade, in that time, with a strong Jewish, physically strong Jew by the name of Chaimke Lipman (ph).

02:43:43

He was extremely strong, powerful man. I was buying a sack of potatoes, because a sack of potatoes was a tool for me to bring in in Kovno ghetto. And at the entrance, by then a lot of people who were brought in some food were already starving. So by then it was already seven, eight months, or five, six months in the existence of the ghetto. And things changed dramatically. And the el-- the elderly people who couldn't go out to work were giving their clothes to the black marketeers to bring, to bring in food for them they to have something to eat. And that Wachmeister had a certain morality in his own frame of mind. If you come in even with a big sack of potatoes, it had no monetary value at all. He didn't bother you. If you had the biggest loaf of bread on you, he didn't bother you. If you had barley or any other, or any other of the vegetables, or cucumbers, or any other of those fruits or vegetables, it had no value. He didn't bother you. But he was looking for sugar, butter, saccharine and other, and chocolate, and for schnapps -- any other expensive things. So I had a contract with Chaimke Lipschitz (ph). I was buying a big sack of potatoes. I couldn't even move the sack from the, from the, from the spot where I bought it. Chaimke, it was after the line-up to go to work, Chaimke was picking up my sack of potatoes, carried all the five, six miles, carried in the ghetto. I had my niece waiting with a little buggy, with a little dolly -- and dropped it in the dolly. I didn't have much farth-- very far to go with this sack of potatoes because on both sides of the ghetto, inside of the ghetto and after the gate, after Jewish walked in there were two lines of Jewish stretched out with their hands to beg. Among them was the famous writer, Joseph Garr (ph). Within seconds, half of my sack of potatoes was emptied out. Because it was my human duty to give it to them. And the rest of it was easy to haul with a little more simply, with a little wagon, to my house. And there my neighbors got, and my family got. I, on the other hand, was carrying a little box of a thousand boxes of saccharine. And there was five hundred saccharine in each box. That product, brought in in ghetto, was

²⁸ Watchmaster (German).

converted to millions, probably, in that time. You could have gotten twenty-five suits. You could have gotten gold and diamonds, all for that little box. So I was carried this -- the box was not as long as these, as light as this, but only that thin. So I was carrying under my arm, and dancing like a prima donna with that little box. Except one thing. You do realize that if I were caught with that little box getting in the gate, I would have been brutally beaten up and shot right there on the premises. And Chaimke Lipman (ph) would have had no punishment at all for bringing in my sack of potatoes, because they saw his sack of potatoes.

Q: What happened,

A: I think I would like to rest for a few minutes. Can we?

Q: Sure. We can take a break. Help yourself to some water.

02:48:00

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

03:00:20

Q: Ok, we're back on. We're being taped again. We were, we were with when you're coming back into the ghetto.

A: One morning, I went out again to be, to be wait, to look for the opportunity to be captured and taken to units outside the ghetto that I would be able to bring in some food. I was captured soon enough. I was taken inside the ghetto to the new ghetto Kommandantur, where there were a group of barracks -- seven, eight single-story houses. And it happened to be isolated away from the residents of the ghetto. The only next building closest was the Jewish police precinct. I was taken to the Kommandantur. A Jewish woman by the name of Luba, who was working there already, took me to the barn, pointed her finger to a big shovel and a broom and an axe and a saw to saw woods, and told me to clean the yard. Then told me to clean the toilets. When I was finished with that, I was sawing the woods, and when I was finished with sawing the woods, I was chopping the woods. Luba was the maid for the Commandant. The new Commandant was by the name of Ritter. He was there every second morning. He arrived every second morning, one o'clock in the afternoon, stayed there for, for the next, one afternoon, one o'clock in the afternoon. Stayed there until the next and the following afternoon, for two afternoons. And one o'clock arrived, his former, his friend Tschich, who was on duty as Commandant -- both of them, they're former police officers in Vienna. And while I worked the first day and cleaned the toilets and cleaned out everything - - the street, the, the, the, the yard. I realized that thanks to Luba and Esther, the two main maids of the Kommandantur, I will have the opportunity if nothing else will happen to feed my family and several other families. Because this is the outlet that I have the opportunity to get food. After a while, I trained myself to be so fast with all the other work that I was through by half day; and the rest of the half day, I was polishing the boots and the belt buckles and the belts of the soldiers. The Ghetto wache contained of about seven, eight individual story combined barracks with two rooms with one entrance. And all entrances was on one side.

03:03:49

On the other side was the living room, with a window in the living room but no door to get in. After a short period of time, under Luba's and Esther's influence, the Commandant instructed me to bring in all the confis-- almost all the confiscated food that was taken away from the Jewish in the evening when they came in from the work on the outside brigade, working brigades. And it was all lined up in my hands to take care of and being in charge of separating, to bring in almost all the food in the bedroom of the Commandant Ritter. The Jewish police precinct was only a short distance away. The Chief of Third Jewish Police Precinct was a certain Kamse (ph), or Tarsis (ph) -- I don't remember. A former good friend of mine from the wars, from the days before the war. I had made arrangements with him. He

was sending twenty to twenty-four policemen, lined up behind the window of the, of the bedroom of the Commandant. I was opening the window, putting up the window or opening it, and hand over the first package to the first policeman who was standing behind the window. He turned and gave it to the next, until it land up in the precinct. And there, the Commandant was calling in, the Chief of Police called in the victims from whom the merchandise was taken away and returned to them. After a while, Commandant Ritter instructed me to go to the Chief of Police and tell him that the Jewish who are coming in from the outside brigade should sew in initials on their bags, on their shopping bags, which was confiscated. So they should be able to get in return their own properties. All, all the Gestapo used to come and pick up some food for themselves from, from Kovno. They were coming in a small black Volkswagen. Luba is the one who prepared everything for them. Also, the food for the Ghattowache -- primarily, the Commandant -- was cooked with the confiscated food. After a while -- but, but after a while, what's going on was while I was returning the food to the Jews, the Lithuanian Ghattowache started to mumble that they don't have enough food. And where would they have enough food? Because some of the food was returned to the victims, and it wasn't enough to cook for them, so they had to bring in foods for themselves. The Wache was hanging on, the Lithuanian and the German Ghattowache was hanging on the premises because the duty around the fences was only for two hours.

03:07:15

After the two hours, they were free for four hours. They couldn't possibly go home and then come back in the four hours, or three hours, or two and two -- I just don't remember exactly. It was not enough time for them to go home and then come back on duty. So they were laying around in the outer barracks recuperating and resting and sewing their stockings, and do any of the other things there necessary while they were waiting to go back on duty. In order to prevent any of the guards -- the Jewish or the German -- or any outside German who would come into the ghetto to catch what I'm doing. Because if it would have been discovered what I'm doing, I would have been the second to be shot. Commandant Ritter would have been the first to be shot. For the period of the time when I was bringing in the food in his bedroom from the, from the barns opposite, he lined them all up in front on the garden, on the lawn up front, and personally conducted with all of them physical exercise. Up and down, and down and up, and up and down, and down and up. Some of them were getting so exhausted that they couldn't move every time. And the only time when I walked around with my big broom and shovel twice around the yard, that was the signal to him that it's all over, and he released them. That was going on for two days. After that Tschich came, and he was for two days. Although Tschich, Commandant Tschich, never harmed me at all -- he was rather decent to me -- but he told me from the first day that if he, if he will ever catch me returning anything to the, of the confiscated food to the Jews, he will shot me right there and then. And I followed his rule. He never caught me returning anything and everything. When I was finished with the actual duty of helping in the kitchen and peeling potatoes and cleaning the latrines, I was shining the buckles and the boots. You can be assured that the most beautiful polished boots in the whole world was Commandant Ritter's. And his buckle -- so was his buckle. I had invented a special invention. I took a

glass, a empty glass. And with the back side of the glass I rubbed in the polish on the boot and the buckle, let it dry out for awhile. And then, when the, with the, with the, with bottom side of the glass I circular rubbed all away. And I'm not sure that if anybody in the world would have had such a beautiful shoes. After a while -- I think it was about four or five months -- and Ritter and Tschich, the whole unit -- the whole unit moved away. And a new unit came in. And the commandant of that new unit was a German by the name of Schultz.

03:11:12

He did not instruct me to repeat the same things what I did with Commander Ritter, except he instructed me something else. At that time, the Gestapo permitted to form a Volksküche²⁹ -- a kitchen to give the starving Jews, those that were starving, to give soup during the day free of charge. And that volksküche needed food to cook. And there was a former Hebrew teacher, I think by the name of Schulgasser (ph), who would come, who was coming with a horse and buggy. And he fill down, the horse, I fill down for him the horse and buggy with the food, and they took away. After a short period of time, I am sure that there was -- again, under the influence of Luba and Esther -- he, he instructed me to go to the Chief of the Third Precinct, Police Precinct, Mr. Tomason (ph), and tell him he should arrange that Schulgasser should have a second horse and buggy similar to the first horse. If the first horse was a white horse, so the second one should be a white horse. And stay a distant away. And when he was filled up with the first one and the first one came out from the territory of the Ghetto wache territory, to bring in the second one and filling in the second one. Schultz, at the time when it became already very, very difficult, and at a time when it was known that Obersturmbannführer Goecke³⁰ is coming to liquidate the Kovno ghetto -- and Goecke was known by all Jews that he was the liquidator. He started from the furthest part in Russia, and when the German armies were stepping back toward Germany, he was liquidating ghetto after ghetto after ghetto. At the time it was known that Goecke is coming with units of liquidating the Kovno ghetto, I was helping sew a rucksack for the Commandant Schultz to put in Luba's blonde four, five years old boy and carry him over through the gates at night with the flashlight of the signals. They had flashlights with three different colors, that there was a signal, a specia-- a separate signal that the commandant is going, to better to go climb through the ghetto and take the baby in the village, where one of the Lithuanian guards -- they are by then already in the beginning of '44, 1944, even some of the worst murde-- Lithuanian murderers became already friendly with Jews because they were looking already for a ticket. So one of the Lithuanians offered to survive and Luba's son, and the Commandant Schultz carried over personally the son to the Lithuanian's house.

03:15:10

After a short period of time, the Ghetto wache disappeared, and a new Ghetto wache arrived. And they didn't have anymore the quarters in Kovno ghetto. They had the quarters already in

²⁹ Common kitchen (German).

³⁰ Lieutenant Colonel (German); Wilhelm Goecke

a school, in a former school outside the Kovno ghetto which is about 15, 20 minutes by, by car away from the ghetto. There I was again called in to be the slave of the, of the Ghattowache kitchen. It was the unit of Obersturmbannführer Goethe -- Goecke. It was the unit of the Obersturmbannführer Goecke, who arrived for the process of liquidating the Kovno ghetto. He immediately converted the Kovno ghetto to a Kon, to a Konzentrationslager³¹ Kaunas. And the restrictions became extremely severe for the Jews in every level. I and all the other slaves for the Ghattowache were immediately taken away from the ghetto, and they built special bungalows, special quarters, upstairs of this of this school for us to be there and to stay there and not to go back to the ghetto. By then it was a big kitchen with maybe several hundred SS guards, and it required more people to work. And quite a few Jews managed to get themselves in the brigade. And while they were there, they were locked in together with me, and they became permanent laborers, slave laborers, for the Ghattowache. The, the chef of the kitchen was Ober, or Unter, or Oberscharführer³² Blaufuchs. He was a, a, a, a, they had -- he was not the chef. He was the head of the kitchen. The chef was somebody else. And he was the direct boss of Luba and Esther, and direct my boss. I continued with the same duties of cleaning the toilets, cleaning the rooms, peeling potatoes, peeling beans for the kitchen, and all other manual labor work. In addition to that, Wagner was one of the, of the PX managers. And he had a bicycle, and he constantly instructed me to clean his bicycles. The physical appearance of the location was as following: a small walking gate was from the main street.

03:18:38

Well, about 15 blocks further was the Ghattowache, the ghetto. And it was the low, lower gate in the ghetto. The ghetto had two entrances. By then, they built a second entrance which was closer to the school where the Ghattowache was located. And there, there was a constant guard standing with a rifle on the sidewalk of the, of the walking entrance. And any time Goecke was about to arrive about one o'clock in the afternoon, that guard was giving signals that Goecke is arriving. And with those signals, even high ranking officers of the SS attempted, if they could, to shy away from the premises, because nobody wanted to stumble into Goecke. The only person who had a strong influence on him in a relationship to the, to the, to the dining room was Unter-- Oberscharführer Blaufuchs, the head of the kitchen, because he was putting food in his stomach. I, by habit, didn't want to get rich. I couldn't get anymore to my family at all. I couldn't do anything. I didn't want to go out and, and, and do business on the black market. As several Jews, from time to time -- arranged by the admin-- Jewish Judenrat³³ -- they're coming to the Wache to, to beg and to buy themselves food. Because every outside work brigade had the opportunity to buy food, except the airport. And a lot of people who worked on the airport get passes to go to the other work brigades, in order to be able to get themselves food; because the airport slave labor was the real slave labor. And the whole existence of the ghetto depended on the airports. If the general in

³¹ Concentration camp (German).

³² Sergeant (German).

³³ Jewish Council (German).

charge of the airports would decided to liquidate the airports brigade, probably the ghetto would have been liquidated immediately. So it was very important for the Judenrat to have the, the, the Flug-- the Flughafen³⁴ functioning. One time somebody asked me to buy medicine for a child. I just don't remember what it was. And I walked out outside of the gates, outside of the premises, in the next gentile house, Christian house, where everybody was communicating there constantly except I. I never did, but to do somebody a very important favor, I did walk out. The premises of the, of the, of the, of the school was that on the front on the main street was the walking entrance, but on the side street was the driving entrance. And the gate was constantly open to driving entrance, because there was a danger the Goecke may drive in any time. And how would it be that gate is closed, and he had to beep, blow the horn to be let in? So it was constantly open.

03:22:15

I walked out to that house next to, close enough to the Ghattowache, and discussed with the farmer, with the gentile family about the question I was, I came to ask. And I, I was about ready to go back, and two Lithuanian policemen arrived. And one of them sat down to write the protocol to take me to the Gestapo where I would have been immediately shot because they got a bonus for bringing me there. And the other was walking around from door, from the door to the middle of the room, while the first one was writing the protocol. I was standing as shivering like, like, like, like hell for a few seconds, and then it dawned on me, "What am I shivering?" I looked around, and I saw that the door was a push-out from the outside. I waited on the next turn when the guard, the policeman, was coming closer to the inside. And I run to the door. I pushed with my foot. I start running. They shoot at me, but they didn't got me. And I was immediately, through the open wide gate, in on the premises, I immediately came to Luba. She immediately informed Oberscharführer Blaufuchs and he within seconds took me, put me upstairs, put a guard over there. And a few minutes later, the two Lithuanian came to look for me, and he chased them out. His chasing them out was it was only a momentary victory, a moment, a momen-- a momentarily victory. The higher powers over him were of the Gestapo. And those two Lithuanian policeman were, were the employees of the Gestapo. It was their business to capture the Jewish on the outside so they could have reported to the Gestapo and get, and Gestapo could have come and find me there. And Obersturmbann-- Ober, Oberscharführer Blaufuchs could not have helped a bit in that case. But within seconds, he lined up a closed truck, got two guards shipped out with me inside, took me to the ghetto. And in the ghetto, where will they find me? The next day, I came back to work. At one time I was called in, in, in, in, in Blaufuchs's apartment to clean his apartment, because his wife was coming to visit him. And while I was cleaning the floor and everything else, she arrived. And when she arrived, he hardly kissed her and introduced her to me and said, "David, du kannst ausstrecken deine Hand zu meiner Frau."³⁵ I can shake hands with his Frau. And I shook hands with her. My job was finished then, and, and, and I disappeared.

³⁴ Airport (German).

³⁵ "David, you can shake hands with my wife." (German)

03:25:30

The, the, the liquidation of the Kovno ghetto got closer and closer and closer by the day. It was going on by the day. It took probably about five, six months from the time Goecke arrived until he started to liquidate. All that depended on the front. If the front got closer, then he liquidated faster. In the meantime, he started to organize the Konzentrationslager Kovno. In the meantime, he had the Kinder³⁶ and the woman and the old people liquidation, where all the children and all the old people were in one day lined up and taken to be destroyed. In that action, my little seven years old nephew and my almost 75 years old mother was taken out. They told me afterwards. It's a German Wachmeister, one of the units. When he came back, cried when he told me in torturous murder, how they destroyed the people, the old people. Mothers, mothers, mothers, mothers were, were, were, were falling, kneeling for them, kissing their feet, not to take their child. So they killed the mother with the child. They were taking children. The main action of liquidating, it was in the front of the three big brick buildings. They were taking children, the, the, the Ukrainian and Lithuanian murderers were going up to the third floor. It was a three story building. They were finding children on the top floor, and dropping them down through the window to the Ukrainian or Lithuanian guard who was standing downstairs on the street. And he picked them up and knocked his head on the wall, choking up, until the child was dead. The German Wachmeister who told me the brutality told me how a woman was find, a elderly woman was find in a toilet. The toilets were wooden house, wooden bungalows-like. And she was hiding, and it was almost all over. And she mistakenly stuck out her head to see if it is all over and the Gestapo man saw her. They were walking with big sticks exactly for that purpose, with wide, with wide handles. My stick doesn't have a wide handle, but their stick had special wide curves in order to grab a, a person's neck and pull them like that. So the Wachmeister cried for me, in telling me how brutally elderly woman was dragged with the stick on the sidewalk until she was dead before she was thrown in the truck. When I came back after, when they started to liquidate the ghetto and brought me back in the ghetto, my sister told me that that old lady was my mother. That's the way she was, she was taken out.

03:29:30

At the start of the liquidation of Kovno ghetto, the last few days Goecke, personally, and, and, and Berman (ph) or Breller (ph), his assistant -- I don't really remember him. In the book their whole names, but it's not important for us. They, personally, they're driving around the areas where groups of young people they're trying to escape. Everybody knew it's the end. And they caught them and shot them on the streets, on the field -- wherever they caught them -- without any mercy. Immediately, they murdered them. I was brought in in Kovno ghetto, back in KZ Kovno, back to be prepared for the liquidation. But then they sent in a new group of guards, and that new group of guards needed service. They needed to prepare straw, straw mattresses for them. And I was called in with the other former workers

³⁶ Children (German).

to prepare the sacks for them. In those days they were building -- there was a barn where the wood was located, and all the tools. It was old rotten wood. They were building new barracks up to the last minute to prevent the Jewish to go through the, to cut through, dig out and, and -- because the wood was all then rotten, to, to break it out and go, and go through. So I, I, I, I, with the five, six other Jewish workers there, practically the last couple days before the liquidation of our camp, attempted to do that. We attempted to dig out in the side that was still rotten. You pull it out from under the earth. You dug out the earth. And there was a religious Jew by the name of Portnoy (ph). He had already his family outside, and he had prepared his place for himself outside. And when he noticed that, he came to the kitchen and informed on us. So you should see this scene, how the cook, and the assistant cook, and Wagner and, and, and, and Blaufuchs all came out to help us dig back in, so those who would see and kill us immediately they should not be able to see anything that were not smooth. It was not smooth. There was a guard, Schmittus (ph). One of the guards was a man by the name of Schmittus. I was told that he was a Ger—a, a, a, Ger, a Volksdeutsche³⁷ in Budapest. You know what a Volksdeutsche, Volksdeutsche is? And the Nazis recognized Volksdeutsche as Deutsche³⁸.

03:32:55

Some of the Volksdeutsche were the worst murderers, and some of them were decent people -- like all people are bad and good, except the good were in a very small minority. Probably amongst 10 thousands, you could have find one or two decent people. Schmittus tried, made so many efforts to help me. Schmittus was constantly arguing with Blaufuchs against the treatment of, the bad treatment of the Jews. But he was arguing with the wrong person, because Blaufuchs didn't have any better, any other opinion than he had. The day before we were liqui-- before we were taken back to Kovno ghetto, and few days before the total liquidation, I was doing my work and Wagner called me over. His bicycle was standing in the front of the entrance to the kitchen. The entrance of the kitchen was here, and the open gates to drive in was here. And Goecke, when he was driving in, was driving in to, to the other wall, turn around, faced his car to get out, and walked to the kitchen. So Wagner told me to clean his bicycle suddenly. It was the hour in the day when nobody would expect Goecke to come to the dining room. He had his own headquarters in, in the ghetto, and he had his own headquarters in the Gestapo headquarters. He used to come to that, to the guard unit only for dinner, for, for lunch. And it was about 11 o'clock in the morning, or 11:30, when nobody would ever suspect or dream that he would come. The guard who was constantly stationed on the, on the front of the main street with the sidewalk entrance was a, a, a, a -- also a Volksdeutsche. A little confused human being, you know, but a very decent person. We taught him that when you see danger -- Goecke, or Gestapo, or any other officer -- he should knock on the sidewalk with the rifle and shout twice, "Yaveh (ph) v'yavo"³⁹.

³⁷ Ethnic German (German).

³⁸ German (German).

³⁹ This phrase (actually pronounced "Ya-aleh" v'yavo in Hebrew), meaning "He's arising and coming," comes originally from part of a Hebrew prayer. In the ghetto, "ya-aleh"

That's the Hebrew words: "He comes, he's here."

03:35:40

And when he shout, he couldn't pronounce both words, but "Yahveh" he remember very well. But when he shouted, "Yahveh!" everything disappeared from the, from the front area. That day he wasn't there. Somebody else -- a stranger who was not under our influence. And Wagner told me to clean his bicycle. And I removed my beautiful blue jacket with the stars of David on the front and the back in order not to make dirty, and I took the bicycle. I was walking with the bicycle from the area where Wagner gave it to me towards the, towards the barn, where I had my tools. And I passed by the area of the open gate and in drives in Goecke with a lady. Turns around. Gets out of the car. Walks over to me. Pulls out a gun. And he was ready to shoot. And I, and I stood up like a military person. I clicked my feet. I was wearing galoshes. In July, I was wearing galoshes. But I made movement like I'm clicking my feet, and I shouted loud and clear, "Obersturmbannführer Goecke! Das ist nicht mein Schuld -- mein Schuld, dass ich keine Star of David habe. Der Wagner verlangte ich soll sein Fahrrad saubermachen, (and) um nicht zu verschmutzen die Jacke mit die gelbe Stern ... hab ich runtergenommen und ich ging mit dem Fahrrad zu der Bahn um meine Gezeig zu nehmen."⁴⁰ In that moment, he lowered down the revolver. And within, in, in that moment, Blaufuchs was already near him. That's the only person whom he'll listen to. Wagner was on the other side, and other high ranking SS officers. There was a new man who came a few days ago -- a huge person, a SS officer. He probably was the head of the transportation. And he saw what's going on, and everybody testified on my behalf, that I was not attempting to escape with the bicycle. I was just going to the other area to clean it. It, it took minutes, and Goecke gave a shout to me, "Verschwinden!" And I immediately "verschwind." You know what "verschwind" is -- disappear. And I disappeared. He went to have lunch. He walked out from his lunch. Blaufuchs was right behind him. And he shouted, "Wo ist die Jude mit die blaue Jacke?!"⁴¹ And I immediately was there standing, like, like, like "Attention!" And he delivered this small speech to me, and he explained that the "Blaue Jacke ist beschlagnahmt."⁴² It's confiscated. And again shouted to me, "Andreten!"⁴³ And I walked away, and he drove away. And the same day, we were taken back to the ghetto and it started the liquidation.

03:39:00

meant "bigshot" and was used by ghetto inhabitants to announce warnings; for example, an approaching German guard.

⁴⁰ "Lieutenant Colonel Goecke, it is not my fault, my fault that I have no Star of David. Mr. Wagner demanded that I clean his bicycle, and so as not to stain the jacket with the yellow star ... I have taken it off and I went to the rail with my stuff." (German)

⁴¹ "Where is the Jew with the blue jacket?" (German)

⁴² "Blue jacket is confiscated." (German)

⁴³ Attention (German)

I arrived Saturday night back in Kovno, never to go back to the, to the Ghattowache. I slept over the night. I, I had my niece then. My mother and the baby, Alenke was already murdered. By the way, people told me when I arrived in the ghetto that that was the day when Goecke murdered, caught and murdered four or five group of young people -- a total of six, seven people per group. About thirty, forty people were murdered that day. And that's when they permitted me to be saved from Goecke, in a situation like that. Couldn't happen in a million years anything like that. And Sunday morning the Wache started already to catch us and to put us in a cage. Shortly before I left the Kovno ghetto, two or three weeks before, to to and never came to come back to work for the Ghattowache, I noticed that Jewish were building near the Kaisergasse (ph), a gate -- a, a, a fence, a fenced a, a, a wire fence, a wire bu-- a wire partition like -- four or five times as big as this here, on the field in the ghetto. And somehow I thought maybe, maybe, maybe that will be to, to drive in Jews before the liquidation. Anyhow, Sunday morning the liquidation started, and I was caught by one of the new guards. And -- no, I'm sorry. I was -- I begged my sister to go with me whatever will be happened, and my niece to go with me. But she got permission to go in a bunker which one of the most prominent Jewish people build. She was a friend of the man's wife, and they permitted her to stay until. And we figured it's only for three or four days, and in three or four days Russians were coming. And they permitted my niece, after a while, to going in. And while I was running to look for directions they had -- Mongrel (ph) was his name -- came out from the bunker and invited me, too. I am a, I am a breathing difficulty.

03:42:00

I was then, and I am today. So after being there for a couple of seconds, the bunker was built for maybe 12, 14 people. By when I came in -- the last one, I and my niece there was already -- I was already the 67th or the 68th. It was burning hot in July. It was the first week in July, so how long could I have stayed in that place? After a few seconds, I started to cough and I got out. I forced Dinah, my niece, also to get out. Somehow, she listened to me. And we were captured right away on the street, and put in the enclosed wire fence that was fenced. We were one of the few in the beginning, but as the day progressed, it became thousands of them. People were stepping on each other already. We were laying there for three days and three nights. On the second day, the transportation of the Kovno ghetto took place in three groups. The first group went out Sunday afternoon without any incident. They went out, and they were taken to Germany. The second group was my transportation. But the Jewish that they find on the street, they lined them up and safely under the fence. But they were going with Jewish men, Jewish policemen, from building, house to house, fish out the people in the hiding places. And there, the woman were laying nude just in a garden, and the men were practically nude, and brought them all to the to the encampment. So from an area that it could house maximum a hundred or 200 people, there were already two-- 3000 people concentrated. And it became a tremendous situation. You had to do your bowel movements right there and then on the premises because you couldn't go anywhere. And the stink from the smell from the bowels was not to be believed. I think we were laying there for three, four days or more, because they couldn't get transportation for us to go to the ghetto, to go to the, to the train. Anyhow, in those days, Schmittus was crawling from body -- person to person

over the people to look for "the David." I am "the David." I am David. And when he find, "Who would know is 'the David'?" Only the few Jews who worked with me knew that they called "the David." There must have been fifty Davids there. Who would know? He finally find me. And when he find me, he told me that I, when, to-- tonight or the next night, they wake us all up to march out. And at that time, I should try to be the very last line, and I instructed my niece to be the very one with me. And other people who were near me, I instructed them the same way. He said, by being the very last line, he and Wagner and two other additional people will close up the line of guards. They will be the last guards. And as soon as they get out from the ghetto, I should escape.

03:45:49

He said naturally I should not get concerned that all four of them will, will kneel and shoot at me. But they wouldn't shoot at me. I should keep running. I instructed my sister, my niece to do that, too. I was ready to two eventualities. I wanted to escape anyhow. I was ready, I hoped for two things may happen while I'm escaping. Maybe I'll escape and be an escapee; or while escaping I'll be shot in the rear. Without pain, I'll be dead. I happened to walk out Sunday morning in a clean, bright shirt. And while laying the few days in the field, I find the brother of my brother-in-law, who happened to have had a brown shirt, a dark shirt. And I exchanged with him. I gave him my shirt, and he gave me his shirt. I, I, I had a silly logic that if I'll have to run in the middle of the night, the guards may see my white shirt and shoot me. The brown shirt, they will not see, because I planned to run out. I had a German bag, a bread bag. It's a linen bread bag by a hanging strap where they were carrying their loaf of bread, and I had a razor there and a couple of small things, and that's all. I was ready to escape, to be shot. That's all I wanted. I felt I'll never wind up in concentration camp. And I instructed my niece to do that, too. When they marched out, about four o'clock in the, early in the morning, I tried to be the last line, and I was about in the last line. I was about the closest to the right side to be able to run in a, in a, in a private house garden. It was through a little gate. I planned to do that, but I realized that Schmittus was not in the back and he's not the one to decide in the first place where he would stay. And all he did is tried to sell me a bill of goods I should try to save myself and believe him. And with that, I may, I may survive. And that's all that he wanted: to help me to survive. As soon as we walked out, Christa Kartigas (ph) took us -- I think it was Christa Kartigas. We walked out maybe twenty steps from the ghetto. I saw an open gate, that little pri-- that little gateway to a private house. You, you know what I mean. I ran in, and I ran through the garden. And a Lithuanian was working in the garden, and he followed me and he caught me. And I loosened myself, and he remained with the same jacket that was supposed to be "beschlagnahm" and the sleeves of the shirt, in his hands. And I was already away from him. And I kept running and running and running, until I came to a big fence that was -- the, the Lithuanian government had had built up a huge animal, animal in -- animal, animal treatment for -- how do you call it? A, a -- to, to, to cure animals. Oh, my God. I forgot. I forgot.

03:49:40

Q: Oh, like an animal treatment center.

A: Ok, yeah. And it was a huge tall gate. And I couldn't, I couldn't possibly climb over the -- in my height. It just happened that a pile of garbage was laying right there where I find myself. I climbed up on the garbage, climbed over the gate. And halfway on my -- halfway to the building, I see there are hundreds of German soldiers. So I ran back, climbed over -- from the inside, it was easier to climb because there are the two planks, the bottom plank and the top plank. It was easy for me to climb back in, and I continued walking. I walked all day long. And a tremendous rain storm broke out. And I hid in the corn to hide myself from the rain. How much I can hide myself from the rain, I don't know. But I, I was, I was like a animal, really. My mind was like a animal. And the four guards, when I escaped with -- and, and, and when I walked out from the corn, my body was all smeared up in clay. And I, I slept the night over in a, in a, in a, in a forest. And the next morning, I continued. By then I was hungry and thirsty, and I was making up my mind which house I should attempt to go in and ask for something. And I noticed a big looking house, a big building, and I thought maybe, maybe, maybe a owner of property -- they call it pomeschchik,⁴⁴ in that time -- and most of them were Poles. They, they're land owners. The rich land owners were Poles. And the Poles were not so hot with the Lithuanians, and he may have been willing to help me, give me some food. So I started to go to that house, because I thought it's the owner of a rich man, because it's a bigger house than the average. When I came close enough, I noticed it's the Ninth Fortification. And I went back, and I started again walking. About noontime, I fall asleep -- weak and hungry, and smeared out in clay like, like, like a stray cat. And while I fall asleep, I heard voices of children -- Lithuanian voices saying, "Zydu"⁴⁵! Zydu! Ectu (ph) Gestapo!" -- "Run to Gestapo!" So I got up, and I went away. I, I, I, I just didn't had enough strength to continue from hunger and thirst. So I walked in, in a yard of another house. I took the next best house which to walk in, and I walked in. It just so happened that the house was up front, and the barn was all the way in the back. So it took me a distant to go to the barn. And halfway to the barn, the whole barn was full with German soldiers retreating from the army down the hill. And the proprietor was a old Russian farmer, a gentile, Christian. And he saw me, measured up the situation right there and then, came over towards me and embraced me like he was, he caught a new relative who just came to visit him. Pushed me out from the area, walked in the house, gave me a piece of bread. And I continued walking.

03:52:24

I walked for quite a distance. Then I came to a highway where a lot of Lithuanians were escaping from the war. The war was coming nearer, closer and closer. And I lined up and I and I lined myself up with the horse and buggy of a Lithuanian with a family, and he gave me something to eat and let me walk with him. But he told me if the Germans should come and look for, he will tell me -- he will tell them -- that I am a Jew. So after I relaxed and thought on this moment for a few minutes, I continued to walk by myself on the upper hill of

⁴⁴ Landowner (Russian)

⁴⁵ Jew (Lithuanian)

the, of the forest-like highway. It was no forest. It was little trees. And towards late at night, again it started to rain, and I was terribly wet. I walked in, in a house. It was a man and two women -- brother and two sisters. They gave me milk and bread. I, I ate fancy foods all over the world. Nothing tasted as good as that bread and milk. They took me to the barn. They dug out a, a wagon full of hay which they had prepared from the field. They put me in the, in the hay, and they covered it back up. I slept half a night, and early in the morning I continued to walking. I walked all day, practical all day. Again hungry, without any food. And suddenly I'm facing three roads: one, two, three. And what do I do? Where do you go? So I pick a grass. You know when you were a child, a grass -- "You love me, you don't love me." And I pulled the grass, and I designated this one is this grass, this one is this one. And it fall on the one I went. I went originally to the straight one. And I continued. Late in the evening, I came to a house and the woman took me in and told me that her husband is hiding Jews in the forest, and I should. After she gave me to eat, she, she sent me upstairs in the attic. And this early in the morning, he came home, he woke me up, and we started to go to the forest. He was looking for signals. He was removing trees and looking for signals. And we find after a while he did find a signal. And the most amazing thing, in the midst of the darkest area, well, now you couldn't see any further, any further, he, he bend down two trees, two branches. And we walked in, and we find ourself in the midst of a field with Jewish men and Jewish women and children. Was a group of maybe 20, 30 people. And they had dug out a, a, a hole and covered with, with, with grass. And anytime there was a danger, everybody walked down in the hole and, and, and they stayed down there. I stayed there for the first day, the second day. It was already in mid-July. That was already the third week, or the second.

03:56:48

Q: There's only four or five minutes left, so we should try to -- there's only four or five minutes left so --

A: We have only four or five minutes?

Q: Yeah, so maybe we should usually get moving.

A: Little bit. Anyhow, then we had to move from there, because the front was coming closer and the Germans were coming closer. Then we, we, we couldn't get anymore, the farmer couldn't get to us. And we didn't had any food. We had to go by, we had to go in turns to the farmers to beg for food. And there were German soldiers walked out from one side of the house, and we walked in the whole, in the other side of the house. Both had the same purpose -- to beg for food. And after three, four weeks -- after three weeks, exactly on July 4th, the war was over, and I was liberated. And I came back to Kovno, and that's it.

Q: Ok. Is there anything else that you'd like to, in this last couple of minutes, is there anything? I know there's many, many details that you'd want to add. But is there any particular thought?

A: I don't know what details I can add, except for while I -- and I immediately took off to go back to Kovno, and I didn't wait for the ceremonies and parades. And while there was a curvy highway, and while I was going down the curve, suddenly a, a, a rifle is in my stomach. I lift up my hands and shouted who I am. And the soldier removed his rifle. It was a Russian soldier, and he didn't know what to speak to me. I didn't know how to speak to him. But he called over a Jewish soldier, and I told the Jew who I am. And he cried and all the other soldiers cried, and everybody else cried then. After a couple of hours crying, I, after a half hour, I relaxed and went back to Kovno, and went, went to Kovno.

03:58:55

Q: So that was your first encounter?

A: My first encounter with the liberating army, yes. That were my first encounter.

Q: And how long did you remain in Kovno?

A: I was liberated August first. And I, and I made the arrangements. I met Jonas Petronis, my former associate and my former friend, who became again the manager of all the office product properties. And within the first two weeks, I was walking around from garbage can to garbage can in the Lithuanian houses to try to get some food. And from the day I met him, I became a multi-millionaire. I became so rich. He was taking up properties, car loads of properties, from the Communist hands -- which was originally my own merchandise, or part of my own. And I was selling it on the black market. I was walking out on the street with a pencil in my hand. I had three Jewish with big suitcases standing behind me in the gate, and a young officer was running by, and behind him two soldiers, Russian officer, behind him two soldiers. And we passed him by. And then he cursed, and cursed word, "Blatzky rod! Karandashi, Karandashi!"⁴⁶ A pencil. It dawned on him what I have. And he run back, and he saw my pencil and what, wanted to know how many I have and how much, how many I have and how much. And he shouted to the Russian, to the soldiers to come over. And they should pour over all the money in my suitcase, and I poured over all the -- within a week's time, I became a multi-millionaire. It's went all to the devil, but that's beside the point. I opened a kitchen immediately and hired two Jewish woman to cook for the hungry Jews -- free of charge, naturally, knowing myself the way I am. And I was running around in the city, and I selling, inviting people to come and eat. I met a rabbi, a older man, Mordchai Pagramanski (ph). And when I was liberated, he came to the, to the forest where we were. What happened to him is not to be believed. They decided -- the Germans were, were exp--throwing bombs over the buildings, to destroy the hiding Jews. And when it came to his part, they decided that then, the officer said, "Mittagszeit, Feierabend."⁴⁷ And they stopped, and they went to eat, and they didn't came back the same day. So they decided to escape, and they delegated him to go to the German guards to ask permission to run away. And while

⁴⁶ "Fuck your family! Pencils! Pencils!" (Russian)

⁴⁷ "Midday, break time." (German)

going to look for the German guard, he stumbled in on somebody, and that somebody was the German guard, dead drunk. And he decided if the guard is dead drunk, he does not have to ask him permission. And they all started to go. And they marched dozens of kilometers, crossing over the whole German Army, with the big beards -- seven, eight Jews with the big beards. And they all arrived at the same place.

Q: Ok, I think the tape just ended.

04:02:13

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview