

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Avraham Tory**  
**September 27, 1991**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Avraham Tory, conducted on September 27, 1991 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

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## **AVRAHAM TORY**

### **September 27, 1991**

A: ...and this is what came from \_\_\_\_\_, Russian \_\_\_\_\_ to Hebrew Tory. It is, you know, from the song of songs, the Bible. Uh \_\_\_\_\_. The ways of the \_\_\_\_\_ is listened in our country, and so my name is Tory. I'm a member of the Tory family.

Q: And where were you born and when?

A: I was born in a very little town Laz...Lazdijiai, L - A - Z - D - I - J - I - A - I. Lazdijiai, and I was born on the 10th of December, nineteen hundred and nine (1909). I would not swear, take under oath that this is exact date of my birth because in the time of the 1st World War, my little town was in fire and all the documents were burned, so I had to go to court after I was already graduated law in order to get a decision of court that I was really born on the 10th of December, nineteen hundred and nine.

Q: Avi, you...you've said that after the Nazi invasion in June of 1941, that you went from the frying pan to the fire. What do you mean by that?

A: No, no. I was a Zionist. At the outbreak of the war between Germany and Poland, I attended the Zionist World Congress, the 1st Zionist World Congress in Geneva, Switzerland, which was the last Congress before the Holocaust. This Congress came to amend on the outbreak of the war between Germany and Poland and then Professor Heim

Weizman (ph), then president of the Zionist organization, his last moving words as a converse I remember till today...we have to...we have to bring it, the Congress to an end. Who knows when we'll met, where we'll meet and who we'll meet, and these was very, very meaningful, especially to me and not only to me, so I went back to Lithuania at that time and uh when I came to Lithuania, it was 1939. The Congress in August and the next June 1940, the Soviets occupied Lithuania and when the Soviets occupied Lithuania, so I was arrested. Not only myself. I was a member of the Zionist Central Committee. At the Congress I was the youngest delegate, the youngest delegate, and nevertheless we were the the general Zionist Youth Movement and I was the chairman of the...so we insisted we were fighters. All the time we were fighters. To have a seat on the Central Committee of the General Zionist in Lithuania, so I became a member of the Central Zionist Committee in Lithuania and when the Ger...when the Communists, when the Soviets occupied Lithuania, they took under arrest the the leaders of the Zionist organization, but they took also even arrest myself and what...what I cannot understand to this very day, they interrogated me and they questioned me. You were at the World Gathering...they didn't say Congress...World Gathering, Zionist. Disclose to us what a...what a \_\_\_\_\_...it means what a...uh what...they say what I am...did you make...what a uh secret...secret plan did you make with Professor Weizman, did I make with Professor Weizman against the Soviet Union? And they didn't believe my innocence and I laughed when...when I laughed I got immediately smacked in the face. While I'm laughing...you should answer when you're being questioned, so I said I don't even know Professor Weizman, so he says you are lying like a dog. That is an expression... expression in

Russian, \_\_\_\_\_. You are lying like a dog. You were...you were at the at the World Gathering of Zionists. Professor Weizman was the president of the Gathering and you say that you don't know Weizman. \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. So I said everybody knows Weizman, Professor Weizman, but Professor Weizman to this very day doesn't know that there exists such a man by the name of Avraham \_\_\_\_\_. But it it didn't help. I should disclose to them what plans of destruction did I have with Professor Weizman against the Soviet Union. Well this is to show you only one second. I as a Zionist and professor...my my patron, my famous and beloved patron, Professor Sigmung Belaski (ph) who was a famous professor at the University of \_\_\_\_\_, which is now \_\_\_\_\_, after the first revolution, he run away from from \_\_\_\_ and he came to Kovno, Lithuania and there he was admitted as a professor of civil law although he was a Jew, although he didn't speak Lithuanian at all, but he was world famous and he wrote several monumental books on the civil war in uh in copyright and so on, and I was lucky enough to write my thesis, my...you know...what you call it in other languages, the doctorate, I wrote with Professor Belaski, and when I...when I passed all the exams and uh I was waiting for the evaluation of my thesis that they submitted to Professor Belaski and then I was invited at his...at his law offices and then he asks me what do you want to do with yourself when you graduate law? I said Professor, I want to be a lawyer. You know what does it mean to be a lawyer. It means...a lawyer means to be twenty-four hours a day a lawyer. So said Professor, how could it be? Even a lawyer has to sleep a little. Yes. This is exactly what I wanted to tell you, that in your dreams, you dream about the mistakes you've done this day and don't repeat it the next day. This is a lawyer,

and when I...several times he asked me and you know and it is very difficult. It's very...so he said are you sure you want to be lawyer. I said yes, Professor. But I wanted to know what is the result of my...of my thesis. I didn't know it yet. So then he takes out from his drawer my thesis, and he hands it over and I see there was written excellent and I (laughing) remember the thesis was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the Roman and Russian War. (Laughter) It was in 1933. So then he says are you sure you want to be lawyer. Tomorrow come to my office and you'll work with me, and this was in 19...by the end of 1933 because in order to work as a lawyer, you had to to have six months preparatory in the court, but then in '39, the Lithuanian minister of justice, he was not...let's say Nazis and the Nazis themselves, and he picked out my professor and myself and they didn't allow any Jews to be uh to be accepted in court even like practitioners, but I was lucky. I was a member of the \_\_\_\_\_, a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ movement and there was in relations, permanent relations with the Lithuanian National Sports Club \_\_\_\_\_, and the man of \_\_\_\_\_ was a...also at the faculty of law, \_\_\_\_\_, and he graduated the very same month like I. He was immediately luminated as the Magistrate Court in my...in my native \_\_\_\_\_, so I went to him since I couldn't get any...in any court. I couldn't get any position, place to to make my my six months \_\_\_\_\_. I went to him and said, \_\_\_\_\_, look, we are both sportsmen. We were so many years together in \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ Sports Club. Would you engage me as your practitioner at your court? We graduated the same month, so he...he couldn't... he couldn't refuse. He said well, it's against all instructions I have, but simply I cannot refuse you. We were so many years in the sports field. We were four years at the same law school, and I just can't refuse. I take the risk.

So I I worked with him for a half a year in the...in the...in this...in the civil court and only then it was I could start practicing at Professor Belaski's office. You understand. And here again Professor Belaski was a great, a great Jewess. In addition, he was a man of esprit, of talent, of of spirit. He he he...in addition to writing his monumental works on civil war that a generation was educated on his books, he wrote also a book, The Man and His Destiny, and this is certain jokes, certain seriously about the man and his destiny. When in the the...he told me, look, you got...you walked in my office. You must not seek only hours of eight to six or from four to eight. You have to do your work. Did you fin...when you finish the work, go home. If you didn't finish, stay until twelve, you see. And you...you know...we had in in this time in those years, we didn't have such \_\_\_\_ like today. You know, we...you had to write in ink and when you wrote with the with the pencil on the on the paper, it used to \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. You don't have to \_\_\_\_\_...finish them all. Do the work. Don't...don't...and he was the best lawyer in Lithuania. He used to appear mostly in the Supreme Court of Lithuania and in the Supreme Military Court and what is important for my beloved patron, he himself escaped from the revolution, from the Communist, escaped to Lithuania, but here in Lithuania, he appeared in the military courts as counsel for the Communists who were were were in...brought to trial for belonging to the Communist Party, leave alone if they would have done some sabotage or something like that, but the very fact that they belonged to the Communist Party, it was enough to give them twelve years in jail. And he defended them. He defended them and he explained it clearly. He he...what he told me a lawyer must be twenty-four hours a lawyer. If somebody goes wrong...have done injustice to somebody, you have to defend.

Every...a murderer has a right to get defense. A lawyer should defend him, for the for the court is to decide whether he is guilt or not guilty, but he has the right to defense, and the same goes for the Communists.

Q: Avraham, tell me...we were talking about writing and how he wrote. When did you start to write your diary?

A: Yes. Well, on the 22nd of June, the war break out. Early in the morning we hear the bombardment and over the radio it was war. The very simple word of war took me and I was all the time attached to the radio and then the Kovno was bombarded and all...first of all the air...the airport and then the military and then all the town was in flames, so we tried to escape and the the Russians, the Soviets were taken by surprise and they rushed out of Kovno. They left the prison closed without any guards, and the prisoners went at night, found that there were no no guards and so from inside they break through and they went to to freedom, but the...I and everybody tried to get any vehicle to run away from the bombardment and I was at that time with my sister at my sister's home and my sister and my my brother-in-law were waiting for a relative of my brother-in-law to take them after midnight with a wagon with horses because when when...if you would go in in daytime, they would take them away, uh these these horses and save them for the military and while waiting there, twelve o'clock, one o'clock, I was so much impressed and overwhelmed of the of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Germans. It was just terrible, so I found a sheet of paper on the table of my brother-in-law and I started to write, and I have it with



me here, for two pages on both sides I have written from twelve to two thirty after midnight when the man came with his wagon to take us out of town and this is the first entry in in my diary and I have it here with me. And then I tried to escape and I did not succeed. On the way what I...I took a bicycle and I almost let's say uh seventy miles I made by bicycle towards the frontier with with Russia but in the meantime the Germans caught us up and I had to go back. The story of going back to Kovno is a story that is radiate with me for another book, that is not include in this diary.

Q: Why? What happened?

A: Because immediately on each and every corner, from each and every \_\_\_\_\_, Lithuanian partisans, so-called partisans, they attacked Jews. They took off from them every valuable. They took the money. The Lithuanians didn't give...didn't sell bread for those retreating and so I saw that it is dangerous to go on the highway, so we...I left the highway and I went through the fields, you know, through gardens, forests, all around. It took me three days to go back to Kovno. Three days and three nights and this is a story. I could be ten times killed because the bombardments were without end. On the way to the frontier and back, and back. It was every time in the \_\_\_\_\_, used to live the...\_\_\_\_\_ with the Red Army soldiers were taking with families, with vehicles, with wagons, with pushcarts, by foot and myself, I am bicycling.

Q: And you were by yourself?

A: By myself, yes. I will tell you why by myself. I was married then, but to be where of the opinion that the only in danger are the men that the Germans might take them to work for the army, and therefore the men used to run away. Others who had to \_\_\_ full families, so I went and I had left my first wife at home because her parents and so on, but I didn't succeed. And so it took me three days to come back to Kovno and these three days, I wrote fifty-four pages how...what happened to me because I went...everyplace I could encounter a a Lithuanian extremist, fascist would kill on the spot. I didn't have the money to pay them for a piece of bread. Before they used to give bread and milk, the Lithuanian, you know. It's no problem...bread...eat. Everybody would offer you bread and milk. But then they paid and then they didn't take the rubles. They asked for coins...uh golden coins and so on. It was a terrible \_\_\_\_, so finally I...to cut a long story short...I finally came to the outskirts of Kovno and it was in...in Kovno there was a famous...a famous and most neglected suburb of Slobodka (ph). The Slobodka is a center...world center of \_\_\_\_\_ scholars of \_\_\_\_\_. But it was a very much neglected suburb and I was supposed to pass this suburb and come to my place. I lived on the hill, so when I came in, I was entirely exhausted. I was full of dust. I didn't wash for three days, leave alone to shave, so I went...I wheeled a uh...I saw a well so I asked from from a distance the Lithuanian woman and she allowed me to wash myself in the well, so she uh tell me that they should come near to her and then she disclosed to me that her son is a partisan, and if he will see me he will kill me, so she let me in somewhere in a in a hiding place and I wash myself \_\_\_\_\_ and I say now tell which way is now to go to

to Slobodka, a suburb of Kovno, you know, \_\_\_\_\_. She said don't go. Don't dare to go to Kovno, to Slobodka. A night before they massacred a thousand Jews in in Slobodka, yes, from 25th to the 26th of June, 1941.

Q: When she told you that, could you believe what she said?

A: I didn't believe but she told me don't go because you will be killed, so it was enough for me. So she said the best thing what you can do, you cross the River Yemen (ph). There is a boat. You will...you are on a boat and it will take you over there and then you go up to the...to...and this is what I've done, and this is the way I rescued my life. And when I came...came back home and uh it was entirely a different Kovno. The Jews were closed themselves up behind the...behind the curtains and closed doors. They didn't go to the...to the shops and to their businesses because the Lithuanians already started to to attack Jews whenever they could met them in the...in the street. They dragged them from their coattails, dumped them from buildings, from their apartments. They used to rape women and it was a terrible situation that that was absolutely...they used to go...the streets of Kovno were full of groups of uh partisans leading groups of Jews in a circle and \_\_\_\_\_ either to prison and when the prison was full, they \_\_\_\_\_ them to certain uh centers and their fortress...the fortresses. Kovno was around with nine fortresses.

Q: Did you see this? Did you see them rounding the different...?

A: Of course I've seen it, because I am not a man to close myself behind...behind the shelter. So I went out in the street and I wanted to know what's going on, what is the community, what is this, what is that? So I...so I was told that the chief rabbi's home, not at his office because the Bolsheviks (ph) annulled all the Jewish institutions at the time of the occupation of the...so I went to the chief rabbi's office and there I could learn that some community leaders are uh are are get together and are consulting, exchanging information, seeing what can be done, and then I I used to come almost everyday to that place and when the the they organized...when the...when the the...when the order came that Jews have to...the expulsion of Jews from Kovno to the ghetto, latest until 15th of October...of uh August 1941. That means within a month's time, all Jews from Kovno, approximately thirty-five thousand but you know, five thousand was killed in the in the unrest before that, so they should be...should be in the ghetto, and on this 15th of August, 1930...1941, Kovno should be Judenrad (ph)...clean of Jews.

Q: How did you hear of that order?

A: This was on all...it was publicized on all the walls, by radio, in the paper, in the daily paper. It was not a secret, but you see I am always have read and read. I took one or two or three with me in the pocket, and this is why I could submit it uh present it to the to the fellow who called him \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ Lithuanian mayor who was nominated by the Nazis as mayor of Kovno and when he was brought to trial and he said I laughed so about Jews, and he...what they talking about...so I presented to the uh to the Federal Court

judge this publication, expulsion...uh uh all the number one from the 10th of July, 1941, saying that the Jews must leave Kovno, old and young, men and women, Lithuanian citizens or Lithuanian citizens, whatever Jew, must go to the ghetto, signed by \_\_\_\_\_ and by the the Lithuanian commandant of Kovno.

Q: How did people react to this? How did you react?

A: Wait a minute. So this is what...at the at the rabbi's...I was a young man. I \_\_\_\_\_ only full of curiosity because of being, you know, maybe being the Russians \_\_\_\_\_ public. You know, they say that there are two kinds of men. People are divided in two, in two sorts, two kinds...whatever you say. One who have \_\_\_\_\_. It means they have an appetite to live, to live in this society. You see, being active in the society means they...in Latin \_\_\_\_\_. This is one group of people. And the other group of people who are \_\_\_\_\_, a men...a man is a wolf, to to...who don't love people, you see. I belong to the first category. And how, as I could prove with what I have done before, many years before and uh especially in the war time.

Q: So when you heard that order...

A: So when I heard that order, I uh I uh...we we went uh as I said three lawyers, young lawyers, and when it was organized a commission...wait a minute...then one day, on the 7th of August, 1941...no, on the 7th of July, 1941...that's more precise in my book...a

Gestapo officer came to the to the chief rabbi's home to take him to the Gestapo, but he was very ill. He had a stomach uh trouble and there was a \_\_\_\_\_ going inside this uh his body to digest, you see, so he showed them that he cannot move, so they told him give us names of uh of public community leaders, so he gave them three names. One was the Garfinkle (ph) who was a member of the parliament. His underworld was Jacob Goldberg, a also a lawyer who was the head of the volunteers for the Lithuanian independence for a officer, and the third one was Dr. Rabinovitch (ph) who was a...he studied in Germany and and he was well-acquainted. He was a physician. So they went and took all three of them separately and brought them to...they didn't tell them where they're taking them, what they take them, what for...nothing. They just brought them to the Gestapo and there where were they summoned before going into the chief of the Gestapo. The chief asked either anyone among these three are rabbis and they say no, so ordered they should bring a rabbi or two so they went and brought two rabbis. One rabbi was the chap...chaplain, the chief chaplain in the Lithuanian army and the other was Schumuckler (ph), Rabbi Schumuckler from \_\_\_\_\_ who was...became very famous later and uh the Rabbi Schumuckler was quiet. The chaplain all the time say uh you know, the prayer before death, you see. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. Because he was sure that they are taking him to death, and when they brought in they they they took them in into the office, there were two gentlemen. One was a General Pole who was the commander of the of the German forces in in Lithuania. The second one was uh \_\_\_\_\_ who was the \_\_\_\_\_ furher of the Gestapo, chief of the Gestapo. And uh the general told them, look. You know what's going on in the city. People are being killed. Jews are being

arrested and these...we came here to bring order and we cannot let this this situation go on. The Lithuanians say they don't want to dwell with you, so you must go to the ghetto. So uh Garfunkle who was a member of the Parliament and he was...said let us talk to the Lithuanians. He says with which Lithuanians do you want to talk? They don't want to talk to you. They don't want to live, to dwell with you. And uh but if...you have to go to the ghetto and the ghetto is near \_\_\_ Slobodka and he had a map calling that all of the area of Slobodka should be earmarked for the ghetto so the Jews said, the commission...in Slobodka lived in the old times eight thousand people while in in Kovno there are thirty thousand Jews. How do you want to squeeze in? So he says alright. Uh you can take another place. Anyhow uh uh so he says we are not authorized to give announcement with regard to to being expelled from the city. We have to think and to explain to to...so he says I give you time until tomorrow at ten o'clock. Bring us...if your reply will be positive, I'll order that this should immediately stop, these killings and and robbing of foods and raping of women...it should stop immediately and in addition, I will order to release three thousand women and children who are in in the prisons and in the fort under arrest and this was a very great incentive to the to the to the thoughts of the Jews, and then they met again at the at the rabbi's office. I was there all the time and they decided...uh said that there's no way out other ways. There was no way. Not they will not go. Said they will expel us, and this is...they gave...order gave that it was from the 10th...formally the 10th of July was published the order in all in all the papers and the radio, on the walls. You know, there are \_\_\_\_\_ so I took...what did I take, several, and what will maybe \_\_\_\_\_ . And then later they gave an order that the Jews

should elect...should nominate an overjuder (ph). It means a a chief Jew. A chief Jew. And all these nominations Altestenrat (ph). Altestenrat means a council of elders, to remind you the elders of Zion. You understand? All these aimed to one, to dehumanize, to to degrade, to hurt the feelings of Jews and \_\_\_\_\_. And this was the most dramatic and the most historic last meeting of the Jewish community in Kovno.

Q: Why?

A: On the 4th of August, 1941, at a school, there set the most prominent leaders of the community were still alive, because many were already killed. Approximately five thousand Jews were killed on the roads, in the city and so on and then they...it was opened...the assembly was opened by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ who one was very veteran leaders of the Jewish community in Kovno...

Q: And you were there?

A: I couldn't be in the assembly with those \_\_\_\_\_. Because I I...you know, I I am telling you I was sitting in the the rabbi's uh apartment and I listened. There was an elder report the first \_\_\_\_\_. When they came back from...

Q: The meeting...



A: When they came back from the committee, I will not enlarge what happened to them. They were arrested on the way from the from the Gestapo to their homes by Lithuanians and they were...and among these uh...there...Goldberg was a mili...a military officer, a high officer in the Lithuanian army. He tried to speak to the military commandant of Kovno who he knew. He was in the same military school and this the night \_\_\_\_\_ we have to make it short, so this Goldberg went to one of his fellows who was well-known. There was established a big new ministry, as if they would gain their independence, the Lithuanians. They sent cables of gratitude to Hitler signed by the Archbishop \_\_\_\_\_, by the Bishop \_\_\_\_\_, thanking him for liberating uh Lithuania from the Soviets, you see, and uh so the Lithuanians were...and they immediately established a cabinet of ministers of Lithuania as if they would gain independence, but the Germans, they never thought of giving them their independence so...

Q: Right. So Avraham, tell me about the assembly, about the....

A: Yes. So the assembly, the the...can we \_\_\_\_\_, the chairman, and he and he spoke in very, very cloudy expressions and cloudy...cloudy, false pictures of the situation outside...outside the school where the where the meeting took place, and he said that the children are being killed, the women are being raped, all men are being taken to slavery, arrested and so on. There was not in the history of Jews a situation like that, but nevertheless there were situations, hard situations, and the Jewish people always...the

\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ in the past, the \_\_\_\_\_ end was so that we survived them and he hoped that omens of this type Hitler will also...his end will be the \_\_\_\_\_ in the history of Jewish people, but nevertheless in describing the terrible situation of the Jews, the desperate situation, he collapsed and he couldn't continue to talk. Then came the problem the order of the Germans is that the Jews have to nominate a chief Jew and if the Jews themselves will not nominate a chief Jew, they will nominate themselves, and we had already the terrible experience of other places where they nominated, you know, a man who has no responsibility, with no background, no way...so there was also among the candidates was Dr. Elkes. The first candidate was, of course, Garfunkle who was a member of the Parliament, the head of the Jewish faction in the Parliament, for instance that Goldberg who had uh was a a a front \_\_\_\_\_, a fighter for Lithuanian independence. They had \_\_\_\_\_ but they they absolutely refused to take over the office because they knew this is going to be a servant \_\_\_\_\_ and into the of the of the Germans or the Nazis, and nobody wanted to be to betray his his his community, the Jewish people. More so that at that time we knew already that the the chief Jew from Vilna (ph), Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, very famous Jewish leader, community leader, he \_\_\_\_\_, so nobody wanted to take over and there was a stalemate. In a way...no way out and nobody would take any office, so then stood up Schumuckler, Rabbi Schumuckler, who was a absolutely unknown rabbi from a suburb of \_\_\_\_\_ and he stood up but yet who was in main kind of way...everybody agreed and everybody wanted that Dr. Elkes. Why Dr. Elkes, Elchanan ELkes. Because he was one of the best physicians in Lithuania. He was the private physician of the German ambassador and of the Soviet ambassador and of all ambassadors, so they thought that he might because of

his relationship being a private doctor for the German ambassador, he might have have some influence and maybe do some good or avoid some hardships and so on, but of course this had nothing to with that.

Q: How did he respond to the nomination?

A: He...I will tell you before I answer. He said no because the...according to the Germans, who have to go to the ghetto, there we will have a municipality for ourselves. We will have our own community, a closed community. No Lithuanians will be will be allowed. No no German will be allowed to go inside. You will be free to manage your life as well you can, so each was supposed to be a municipal...a a chairman of a municipal council, so Dr. Elkes says I have no experience at all in municipality, in municipality...municipal work. I never have done anything but physician. He was the head of the interior department of the Jewish big hospital in Lithuania, Bikkur Holim, and he was...I said I was all my life a doctor and I have no any whatsoever experience in in municipal work.

Q: So what persuaded him?

A: So then...so then it was a stalemate. Nobody...and the Germans said if we will not nominate, they will nominate and this was the worst thing that could happen to us and before long in despair, then stood up the the rabbi, Rabbi Schumuckler and he said, \_\_\_\_\_. I appeal to Dr. Elkes. Everybody...since you are the most...are the most

suitable to be a head of whole community in this unusual, unique time of rest...risks and despair. You have the experience as a great doctor. You know the German ambassador and and you...for who you be a chief Jew, a overjuder for us. You will be the respected \_\_\_\_\_, the head of the community, \_\_\_\_\_. Those who will fulfill a mission of \_\_\_\_\_, they can never fail and they can never be harmed and we will be...go with you until the end and we will help you and we will assist you. We will be at your \_\_\_ at anytime, and so though \_\_\_\_\_ or head of the committee here, and you will with God's help...the rabbi of course \_\_\_\_\_ don't repeat it so much...with God's help, you will lead us to the end of the war, and you will lead...take us out from the ghetto which is a \_\_\_\_\_ inside \_\_\_\_\_, and you will bring us to the fatherland and \_\_\_ soil, and there you will be the head of a community and so and so. Everybody was in tears. He was so emotional and he was so persuasive, and Dr. Elkes stood in the corner. He never never stood \_\_\_\_\_, and he stood up and he said, if you all think that I must...it is me that must lead, the chief juden, the overjuden, I'm here. He sacrificed himself for the community \_\_\_\_\_, and when he said I am here, he says you, so this was in great relief in the in in in the whole and everybody stood up on his leg...on their feet and they actually \_\_\_\_\_ and they shake...shook hands with him. It was a a most...a most emotional scene that can never before \_\_\_\_\_ until the rest of my life. And then he took his post as chair...from the chair of the Germans and then I and together with two other lawyers, young lawyers who came to him and said Dr. Elkes, we greet you and we ask...place ourselves from now on to your entire disposition \_\_\_\_\_ be ever be what may need, we are with you and \_\_\_\_\_ young lawyers. I was the speaker.

Q: Why did you that? Did you know him?

A: Because...because I knew...

Q: Why did you have such faith in him?

A: I'll tell you. There was not a person in Lithuania that didn't know the best...the the doctor but in addition I knew Dr. Elkes because the only thing that he was...he was never a mem...member of any Zionist party, was never any committees. He was a doctor one hundred percent, but he was one of the three trustees of the \_\_\_\_\_ found in Lithuania. We both in Lithuania lent and for \_\_\_\_\_, before, prior to making their \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ Israel, they were trained in agricultural in order to prepare them to the life in agriculture.

Q: But tell me why did you have so much faith in him? What kind of person was he?

A: Just a minute. Just a minute. First of all, if you know \_\_\_\_\_ well the three trustees of the \_\_\_\_\_, this is like pioneer, he was also their doctor and \_\_\_\_\_ because we as a Zionist...as a chairman of the Zionist youth movement, I knew him from that \_\_\_\_\_, and meeting with him, and most of the people knew in Israel...in in Lithuania of Dr. Elkes as a very...very broad-minded uh physician. He was the physician of the

president, of the prime minister and of the poorest people who gave medical help without without any pay.

Q: How would you describe him as a person?

A: He...let me tell you. First of all, you should know Elkes was born not far away from my town like Kalvariija (ph) and there he got a very strong religious education. There were no schools in...at that time...he was born in '70...in 1870 more or less. At that time there were no schools. There were only yeshivas for the bigger ones and there were only a rabbi and a hadder, you know, where they they taught the children to learn A - B - C and to pray, you see, and this is...he got a very strong religious...religious education from the very youth and then in his own way he he uh he made, you know, his doctor degree and nobody knows how he...how he managed it, how he went to \_\_\_\_ and he and he and he studied medicine without even prior graduating \_\_\_\_ so he had to make exams special and so on, but this is what he was. He was...he was a very well-known and he was well-known because of his great understanding for the needy and for the poor, for the \_\_\_\_\_, for...and and not only for the Jewish needy. For others. You see, he was a great man and at the same time, he didn't turn his nose up.

Q: He was a generous man?

A: He was a most generous man and known like that. He was a very rich man. He was a very rich man and mind you, I want to jump now...in his...in his last will, in the ghetto he wrote in the ghetto in 1943 in Hebrew language, which he gave...handed over to me before I escaped from the ghetto, he he didn't mention not a single word of his of his richness. It was a very big property in this in this most fashionable part of the city of Kovno. His children he sent, because of being a rich man, he sent his two children, his son and his daughter, to London and this is Professor \_\_\_\_ Elkes who you met in there, he was then in London, and this is the last will that they allowed to him and to his sister, and this is will that to be passed to him (laughter) before I escaped from the ghetto. Nobody knew will I at all succeed in to pass through and so on, so he was a great Zionist, a great Jew, a great devoted Jew with a very deep feeling of Jewish heritage. He had a responsibility and when he took over, he was known only as a physician, only as a great physician and we gave trust in him because of his special relationship with the German ambassador, but then he had shown himself by his day-to-day daily steps, dealing with the Russians. For instance...I'll give you an instance...

Q: Alright. Tell me.

A: In 1940...the very beginning of the ghetto, came to me a Mr. Bronson (ph) who was a director of a Hebrew school and a lawyer who was not a Zionist, \_\_\_\_, and they came to me as secretary of the of the Jewish committee and they told me, look, there is a possibility to buy a gun. Can you speak to to to the Jewish committee that they should

give money to pay, to buy the gun? So I went to Garfunkle, the Deputy. He says good, a gun. What they talking? It is dangerous. It will be dangerous for all the ghetto.

Don't...don't mention it. So I went to Dr. Elkes. So Dr. Elkes said go to the treasurer and tell him that I order that you give to Bronson the money to buy the gun. Both very...I...I most Jews devoted but here is a man of the season, of daring \_\_\_\_\_, most very \_\_\_\_\_, you see. Then the first days when you came in into the ghetto...

Q: Tell me about those. Tell me about the ghetto and the creation of the ghetto.

A: So you see, so when it sees the the the Lithuanians attacks on the Jews in the cities, in their dwellings, in in the stores, in in the streets. They attacked terribly. It was impossible to pass the street for a Jew, and they said...uh we were three lawyers. The second lawyer...one of the three was killed two days after he was elected. On the 6th of August, there was...they killed a thousand Jews on the street, and among them prominent leaders like \_\_\_\_\_, so so we remained two, two of us. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was the elder one so he was the secretary, and I was the deputy secretary. On the 15th of August was the last day to close up the Jews in the ghetto, but because of the riots, day in, day out, in the city Jews left the city already by the end of July because there in this area they run out, the local Jews steps in. You understand. This was the situation. Jews themselves went and then when it came nearer to the ghetto, the Lithuanian municipality ordered that the Jews themselves should build the barbed wire fence around the ghetto, the Jews themselves, and I have a letter in my collection from the from the municipality of...you



are ordered to bring fifty Jews for the building of the of the gate around the...not the gate but the barbed wire around the ghetto, and they should bring material, their own material. The next day you should bring a hundred people, a hundred Jews, and I have a photo where the Jews were building the fence around the ghetto, and this reminds me a very Russian song. I told you I know Russian, so there is a song...brick layer, brick layer...is that one passes by and sees brick layers are laying brick on the buildings that they are building. \_\_\_\_\_ all the buildings, so it says brick layer, brick layer, for whom do you build these...these buildings. For whom are you laying the bricks? So he said you don't disturb me. \_\_\_\_\_ we are very busy in building...they are building...building a prison for themselves. And this what I had in mind when I saw these men building around the...but these were the Lithuanians, not the Germans.

Q: Describe to me what were the living conditions like in the ghetto?

A: What...we are not in the ghetto yet. Wait a minute. So you see, the...already from before the ghetto, they were rationed...Jews were not allowed to appear before ten on the markets, open markets, because let the Lithuanians buy whatever it is and whatever the rest, \_\_\_ were taken to Jews, but then we were now forbidden at all and this order of the 10th of July, 1941, Jews were forbidden to appear in the open markets to buy from non-Jews, to hire vehicles from non-Jews, to use help of non-Jews...absolutely. And they were rationed hundred grams bread a day...hundred grams bread a day. Hundred and twenty-five gram meat a week, fifty grams salt a month so it's clear that on this no one

could could live. Even to starve was nothing left, but what was most important, when the ghetto was closed, there were many Jewish institutions in in social, medical, cultural, yeshiva and all kinds, so but they were all kinder...uh house for orphans, so they brought on the on the 15th of August when it was the the last day of entering the ghetto, the Lithuanians brought in a truck, two trucks load of children from orphans, from Jewish children's home that remained there and they pulled them out on the entrance of the ghetto on the on the on the pavement and they left them.

Q: Did you see this?

A: I was there. First of all you should know what I was not present and what I did not see and what I did not see, you'll not hear from me, because it was...I went back and forth, back and forth, so and then we were all in ghetto.

Q: How did you respond, Avraham, when you saw that? I mean, what did you think? What were some of your...?

A: ...the first thing to do was to allow....

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1

A: ...we had a fire brigade, and the fire brigade came immediately, you know, and to take these children and bring them into where...we didn't have an orphan's home in the ghetto. We didn't have a children's home in the ghetto. Where to bring them? So we brought them in a certain place what was formerly a school just to be able temporarily that they be under a roof. This was how the Lithuanians behaved \_\_\_\_\_ to to orphans, and this was...I...if there is a God, I don't believe, but if there is a God, they should be punished for this. They should never gain their independence. Never...never...never. And then, three days after we were incarcerated in the ghetto, they finished the the the barbed wire fence around the ghetto and the gate and then three days...and they every day they gave Jewish committee head to mobilize Jewish workers for the various German places to to clean the barracks, military barracks and the Gestapo uh building, to clean the pavement, to...tailors, uh pressers and all kinds of things.

Q: Hold up on...are we out of tape? OK.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION.

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

A: ...and then they commence to know what I've said.

Q: Oh, that it's wonderful. They're hearing exactly everything they need to. OK? So what I'd like to start back is on those first days of the ghetto. Tell me about those first days of the ghetto, would you? What was it like?

A: Yes. So first of all, the first terrible blow that we got to to burst out of the children, orphans, on the \_\_\_\_\_ the Lithuanians, but on the third day of the ghetto on the 18th of August...15th of August the ghetto was closed...nobody comes in, nobody goes out...and the 18th of Aug...and they used everyday used to send workers to to town, to various places outside of the ghetto. This was hard work, very hard work that Jews were not used to do, for instance in building...brick... laying bricks or in the barracks to to the the the men's rooms and the the other cleaning dirty things, so they said they need five hundred workers of academic (ph) professions for archives work, so people were so enthusiastic about this opportunity. Instead of going and cleaning the lavatories and and and to build the roads and so on, so there appears five hundred thirty-four, and they took them out from the ghetto and they killed them in the very same day. And when Lithuanians who could see from around the fort...fortress, they there were...the next day came Jewish workers nearby and had to walk to the \_\_\_\_\_ and they showed them...they \_\_\_\_\_ the Jews. We didn't believe. We couldn't believe how can...how can five hundred thirty-four innocent men, reputable then...lawyers, engineers, chemistries, uh physicians...why should they be killed without trial, without interrogation. We couldn't believe it because this was on the third of the ghetto. And then Dr. Elkes

tried to go from one to the other, from one to the other, the dignitaries and not the dignitaries, and the civil...and the civil uh authority and then in the in the in the police...

Q: What was he doing? Was he trying to find out what happened or why?

A: Yes. He said I'm the chairman of the Jewish committee and the overjuden. He spoke in their language and I am responsible for these Jews. I have to give a reply. I I I...please tell me why didn't they come. When will they come? Where are they now? What are they doing, you see? He didn't speak in this tone like I'm talking now, but he...he found always the right expression...first of all not to to hurt their Nazi dignity, and second to force them to to to to answer him first of all, to answer him, and to answer him in a way like a human being, because a Jew is not a human being. You understand? So they...first of all a Jew doesn't deserve that he he should get an answer at all. But Dr. Elkes put it in a way and the...he just told them of his uh relationship with the German ambassador. \_\_\_\_\_ . It worked some...sometimes. Much...not much...uh but nevertheless, but he is a very...is a...was a most courageous man and he always said nothing can happen to me. My sixty-four...five years are behind me and he always kept in his small pocket a poison and he said if worse comes to worse, he will...he will not fall in their hands alive and uh and he...and he asked which was very dangerous. Nobody, no insurance company in the world would give insurance for the life of Dr. Elkes. Yes. Because every small...not don't speak about the the \_\_\_\_\_ commisar or the deputy \_\_\_\_\_ commisar who was responsible for the ghetto was himself a murderer, so a murderer...the the first

ruler of the ghetto from the civil authority was the deputy \_\_\_\_ commisar of Kovno by the name of Jordan (ph), and why the \_\_\_\_\_...he write his name Jordan, but he was just a terrible guy.

Q: Terrible person?

A: Terrible...a mass murderer. He...for instance, he used to come in into the Jewish committee office. He never opened the door. He didn't take the handle of the door and open it. No. Because the handle of the door kept Jews and he cannot make...put his hands on a on a on a handle that the Jews have kept \_\_\_\_\_. It would be dirty, his hands, you see, so he used to open with his boots, push the door...open the door with a with a crash and the very appearance of him was already thunder of \_\_\_\_ and and and unrest and of and of God knows what it brings. And he would be so so uh harsh and that even the superiors in Berlin thought he doesn't know how to behave before his superiors be...because ...not because he was too harsh towards Jews. Towards Jews you cannot be harsh enough because the the final solution is the final solution of every Jew, but he took over certain functions that wasn't in in the in the priority...in the in the authority of his superiors...\_\_\_\_\_, so they sent him to the to the front and he was killed there, you see, and so it turned out that these five hundred and thirty-four, they had to admit to Dr. Elkes finally that they were killed by the thirty-four that sabotaged the Jews too. They were supposed to...in in a in a store of sugar, they poured in gas...gasoline, and so this was why they were killed. Of course, this was the Nazi \_\_\_\_\_ but this is what they said, so in the

first three...after the third day of the ghetto, this is what we learned and what is ghetto all about, because we didn't know what it was about. And these, of course, such things didn't let me rest for several days, and I wrote about it at night. I wanted to start actually our interview with mentioning the famous Jewish historian, \_\_\_\_\_. He wrote monumental books on history of the Jewish people. He lived in \_\_\_\_\_ at the time of the outbreak of the war with Russia, with Germany and when the Nazis came to take him from his home, uh he...the only word that he could spell out before he was taken by surprise, recorded and this I kept in mind all the years, recorded...the Germans never wanted to that the outer world to know what's going on inside the ghetto. They never wanted to know what activities the mass murderers had enforced. It was my inner impulse, a driving...inner driving force to put it in writing because I was myself overwhelmed. I couldn't talk to anybody about this. There was not a possibility to talk because there was so taken the day to day and hour to hour with work in the Jewish community and I I uh I had a secretary and I had to go to the to the German offices uh to in town to ask, for instance, let's say the the least. We had an office. We needed pencils. We needed a typewriter. We needed uh paper for typing and so so I I and the secretary used to go to the stock rooms of \_\_\_\_\_ single authority and ask for this. I have here a form letter order, so we, when you were out of the ghetto with an escort, you know, the first year. The second year was only you had to get a certificate in order to...but we didn't need. You...every every every uh day when I went from the ghetto to the stock commisar, to the government authority, it was approximately for eight kilometers, five miles, six miles. On the way each one could spit you in the face or kill you or or damage

you or whatever it is...you...in German there is a wonderful saying...\_\_\_\_\_. You are free as a bird. Everybody can kill the birds. Nobody will arrest you and so on...you understand? And this is what I felt and to go in a let's say not leave alone the Gestapo, I didn't go much to the Gestapo. In very very rare cases, but mostly I went to the stock commissar or to the general commissar. What is the stock commissar? The commissar for Kovno, the city of Kovno. And the \_\_\_\_\_ commissar is the general for all of all of Lithuanian. If I couldn't get something from from the thing, from the city commissioner, I tried to go in and ask from the from the general commissary and uh and uh there either you meet Lithuanians who look at you like you're...you're run away from a prison, even they spite you or they beat you or they will kick you or whatever it is. Seldom I used to meet a colleague, a former colleague from the law school, a Lithuanian that used to to throw me \_\_\_\_\_. Very very seldom. Very seldom.

Q: What did you if they spit at you?

A: What?

Q: What...what could you do or did you do if they spit at you or kicked you or...?

A: Not at all. I'll give you...for instance, it was a certain period of time that we didn't get even the the hundred grams of bread. We didn't get it for two months and instead they used to send us \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. Terrible. It was stinking, and when we need bread,



again they did not have a \_\_\_\_\_, so went to the to the commander of the ghetto. There was a ghetto commander. He lived inside the ghetto. Was a ghetto commander, German, and he had his sentries to look around that nobody should run away from the ghetto at the main gate, but he was the the commandants mostly were people, elderly people from the police, from the old police that uh I couldn't say that they were...they loved Jews. Certainly not, but they...they could perhaps try to be...not to be as harsh as the others so when uh they they came to the commander, said the people cannot go to work because for two months they have no bread. The people were poor. And it was that from the ghetto each day left the ghetto gates eight thousand to nine thousand people in various places of work. This was the only employment source for the German military offices and installations and the only place alone of the building a military airport. They mobilized from the ghetto five thousand workers, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. It was a terrible slave work in the very beginning of the war.

Q: Avraham, you told me that when you had to move into the ghetto that there were thousands that had to move into a very small area where only seven thousand before lived. Was it crowded? Was it...what did it look like?

A: People remained on the on the on the open air. There was...I used to have several paintings that would show people...first of all, there was a housing committee, but the housing committee couldn't make more buildings than it was. You understand? So uh we first of all everyone...whatever I say I have documentary. We waited until the 31st of

December of '42. I have a list of all the streets of the ghetto, in each street how many buildings, in each building, how many apartments. In each apartment how many people and then you made the average of living space...living...the area per person, per capita...the average 2.95 meters. It means...it means approximately uh...how should I say in...a meter and this is what...inches...inches... approximately six inches, five inches per capita, so this was not a living space so it was absolutely impossible, but we didn't have just the space and we...and we asked them that they should allow us to use...there was a...let's say a a cinema. They should allow us to take the cinema. No. No cinemas.

Q: And people lived in the street?

A: People lived in the street and these thousands...in the first half year of the ghetto, and then little by little...what \_\_\_ little, they killed five hundred and forty. Then they killed thousand two hundred, and then they killed another thousand, and then they killed ten thousand, so then became space.

Q: It was massacre after massacre?

A: Yes. It was...it was just the the most...for instance, my wife. My wife was always at the entrance of the prison gate looking for her husband for...maybe \_\_\_\_\_ maybe among those who they used to take out from prison for work, and she thought maybe she will see him \_\_\_\_\_. But while so waiting and looking for her husband near the prison and then

the 9th fortress, so she didn't take her time to go to the housing committee of the ghetto and get an order for a dwelling, and when she came it was already the last days of the ghetto and there was no dwelling available at all. You understand? So it was only by by chance or by incident, by accident...I don't know...whatever you want to call...that she made some very good friends, they gave her a corner in their dwelling for her and for her little daughter, and all our minds were absorbed to look to to rescue her husband. You can understand it.

Q: So if you were to walk down a street in that ghetto, it was full of people?

A: We...\_\_\_\_\_...there were two two things. Those homeless, we took for instance a a synagogue, and they parade them in hundred, hundred, three hundred, four hundred, five hundred people, old and young and we called it a \_\_\_\_\_, to reserve, to reserve for for homeless, for roofless, and such was the \_\_\_\_\_ were approximately five, six in the ghetto. And then the others plainly were in the courtyards and and in the \_\_\_\_\_. I I have here an excellent drawing by Joseph \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. So uh it was a most terrible time. It was a time of starvation. In order to to to make it more more visible for you, we had in the ghetto vegetable gardens, free, open space so we built the potatoes so that in the harvest, we worked potatoes, but the people were starving so they couldn't wait until the potatoes would be ripe so they were...they all jumped on the on the vegetable uh gardens and they took all the unripe potatoes and they ate them. And I have a...such a painting of Esther \_\_\_\_\_ of those people grabbing, you know, the the vegetables, garden,

the potatoes \_\_\_\_\_ and and this is where they caught...the Jewish caught in the ghetto and they said \_\_\_\_\_, one of the bright spots of the ghetto, because Dr. Elkes tried to keep the ghetto not to turn into animals and not to eat one another so he tried \_\_\_\_\_ Jews , for instance, those who grabbed the potatoes, they brought them to court. We knew that they they are innocent but nevertheless, all of them must be \_\_\_\_\_ and they were brought to court. Who was brought to court? One of one of the pharmacy, one doctor, and five plain, plain families that they had nothing \_\_\_\_\_, but nevertheless they were brought to court and they were...and they were let's say punished by first uh if it would happen another time something else, so and so.

Q: How difficult that must have been for him.

A: They they had a a whole detention, arrest house. People who didn't go...show up to to the work. We call it arbeit (ph) \_\_\_\_\_, and...

Q: And so...I'm sorry.

A: Go ahead.

Q: No. I was saying...I was going to ask you so Elkes did this to maintain order regardless of how difficult, knowing these people were starving?

A: Yes, but so Dr. Elkes, his court was uh was established so there were the...my my patron whom I talk about, Professor Sigmund Belaski, he was nominated president of the court, of the Jewish court and other prominent lawyers were members of the court, so there was a a very \_\_\_\_\_ as far as you can talk about this, \_\_\_\_\_ in the ghetto you see, that it was a very serious joint meeting of the Jewish committee and the members of the Jewish court and then Dr. Elkes told them, he...it was his prerogative to nominate and he was \_\_\_\_\_ and he was order...there was regulations and based on Lithuanian was the \_\_\_\_\_ and he said we are in the ghetto in the most terrible time for Jews, least of all Lithuanian Jews. There are all the possibilities that the court of the \_\_\_\_\_ because of the lack of...terrible lack of food, because the terrible pain of loss of wife and children and mothers, people may loose their \_\_\_\_\_, their divine vision in which we all were born alike. It is the...it is the...it is our joint responsibility entirely in especially in this low... low...in this very terrible conditions in which we live to keep the human minimum dignity in the very base sense of Jewish heritage and this is the joint responsibility and the joint task of the Jewish committee and of the Jewish court. And what I I expect from you, the president of the court and judges of the court, members of the court...there is a \_\_\_\_\_ saying, \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. You should pursue right...justice. Justice pursue. And this is your main task, more so under these horrible times which we are living. And there should be each and every one alive, from me as chairman of the Jewish committee, to the last of these laborers and the the airport workers, and like and you should not any any distinction or because of relations...relations or because of friends and what...the court must be equal for everybody and everyone of the inmates of the ghetto. When they

appear before court, should be given the feeling that is free to talk out to speak of what is in his heart, to explain why he did it what he did, and to explain him what could be the consequences of his deed and that he shouldn't repeat it. This...it was...I want to tell you...it was a a session of the \_\_\_\_\_, of the high spirit in the very best sense of the Jewish tradition and heritage and this was Dr. Elkes who spoke to the court. He was \_\_\_\_\_ when a Spanish man on the Jewish court was rude Dr. Elkes \_\_\_\_\_ can appeal to Dr. Elkes and he can change it or annul it for \_\_\_\_\_, but he would never, never did he did he did he did he take advantage of his rights. He respected every judgment of the court and the...my professor Belaski, president of the court. He responded to him in the most brilliant response that only such a big Jewess and human being as Professor Belaski was. He said we understand fully our responsibilities, who we have coming. There is a Hebrew saying \_\_\_\_\_. With reverence and with \_\_\_\_\_, we take over the task to judge the Jews in the ghetto and we'll do it to the best of our understanding, to the best of our...taking into consideration the specific conditions in the ghetto that nothing was alright, and also their rulings...their rulings they took into finding any law book in the world, and I I...

Q: You know \_\_\_\_\_ and you know Hebrew and you know Russian \_\_\_\_\_.  
Avraham, tell me what was the most memorable advice that Dr. Elkes gave you.?

A: Now look...I want to tell you. I...this morning I spoke about Dr. Elkes and I am prepared to talk more about the ghetto...

Q: OK. Let's talk about the ghetto.

A: ...should not repeat, you see. There...there was as I said in the very same day when \_\_\_\_\_ among the \_\_\_\_\_ assembly of the Jewish community in Kovno when when \_\_\_\_\_. There was also in the very same...after...right after...two hours later, we convened a meeting of four Zionist leaders from the labor Zionists - one, from the \_\_\_\_\_ left-wing Zionists, from the \_\_\_\_\_ right-wing and from the general Zionists. I was one of the four, and we instituted the Zionist underground which was called \_\_\_\_\_ Kovno. \_\_\_\_\_ is Slobodka in Lithuanian is \_\_\_\_\_ and why we decided...because \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ as you know...it's...\_\_\_\_\_ is when you are in stress, when you are in despair. See? And we were a community in despair and this was...and we wanted two things, to achieve we were very very clandestine and very very uh away from sunshine, away away from anything outside \_\_\_\_\_. We wanted first of all to keep the Zionist youth on a certain more, that they were not left alone, that their leadership is with them and that there was a hope, even the mere hope that the time will come and we will...the liberation will come then then \_\_\_\_\_ and we'll proceed with the Zionist work and go to Palestine to make a life there. It shows...the ghetto shows that there is no \_\_\_\_\_ Jews but \_\_\_\_\_ Israel. And this was very important and we kept such meetings on uh on let's say on Hannuaka or on \_\_\_\_\_. We used to make the third seider (ph), seider, \_\_\_\_\_, see, in the clandestine, of course, but this encouraged the youth. We trained them in in how to handle ammunition.

Q: Is this what gave you and others the will to continue to fight and to struggle?

A: Absolutely. First of all, we...the Jewish...the leaders...the Zionist leaders felt a responsibility because, you see, you can see here you have a \_\_\_\_ that you were the leader of them yesterday, a year ago, two years ago, and they look at you and I shouldn't be ashamed when we we we are face to face, so I have to tell you \_\_\_\_...this is...we are fighting and you have to join. You are a real part of the...you are part of this fight and you have to share in this uh extraordinary conditions. Don't give in. Don't forget if you have no sufficient bread, tomorrow we will get more. If you can find a loaf of bread, bring it and share it with you committee and so on. We we we had uh \_\_\_\_\_...how did they come to Pnina? How did they come to Pnina? Pnina was a...her husband was a a a Zionist student fraternity. Not on the same of mine. I was the president of my fraternity, but in the ghetto it was not important whether you are a \_\_\_\_\_ or you are a general Zionist or you are a Labor Zionist or whatever you have...you are a Jew. So we melded together and we worked together and we wouldn't uh collect money for \_\_\_\_ Israel for \_\_\_\_\_. But we did take care of the widows and the orphans of \_\_\_\_\_. You understand? Pnina was not the the only one whom I supported and who came. There was a woman who \_\_\_\_\_. The second secretary who was killed. He left a wife and a child. She...the first thing, she came to me. What shall I do? Do you...remember you, whatever you need sometimes what I can do and there's not very much that I can do. What I can do...here's address and they came.



Pnina didn't come to me. She didn't come to me, but I knew her. I knew her \_\_\_\_\_. I knew her husband from the student fraternities and one day...I worked in the Jewish committee, but as I told you, in order to give it a possibility for the hard works at the airport especially, to take them a day off and we went to work in their stead on the on the construction of the airport, military airport. It was terrible work but this gave them the possibility to take a day off, so and another day was in another working place, so at that place comes a Lithuanian woman and she comes close \_\_\_\_\_. She she wouldn't dare to come inside, but from from across the street she goes...do you know \_\_\_\_\_? I said yes, I know. Will you take a parcel for her? I \_\_\_\_\_. I was the nurse of \_\_\_\_\_, you see, and because her her close connections with \_\_\_\_\_...she she loved her. Tell you the story...must go back. So will you take the parcel she says so she throws a parcel and they grab it, you know, and they hide it and at night when I come back to the to to the ghetto, I go straight to Pnina and I bring her the parcel that I have. Pnina, I have regards from you...for you from the \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_. Says yes, I spoke to her and here's the parcel. And she told me that she has sent you several parcels, but she never got any...any response from you. Did you ever get these parcels? She says no, this is the first parcel that I get, you see, and there were also people like that in the ghetto. They took it or people were taken uh that they couldn't go to to town so they used to trade in a pair of trousers or a or a or a suit or dresses to give people who go \_\_\_\_\_ and they would trade in and bring the bread. Others used to take the the the clothing and never bring back not not the clothing, not the bread, and this \_\_\_\_\_ were brought to the to the Jewish court, you see, so so so people took parcels for Pnina and they never gave it to her.

Q: Avraham, tell me...I know no day was typical.

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: I know that no day was typical in the ghetto, but how would you describe for us what a day was like? I mean what did people do in the evening? What were the streets like during the day?

A: First of all...let me...let me finish with Pnina because this is a very very \_\_\_\_\_. So when I went in and then I saw the conditions. The dwelling...it was winter. It was cold and in the wall between the between the uh...you know, between between the the the woods, there was ice, so I told her, Pnina, don't you have any...we used to give portions of fire wood, very small portions, very small portions, but nevertheless...to go...why didn't you go to ask for for for for fire wood, for a portion of firewood, and since you have a child, you are entitled to another half portion for the child. You understand? And so I started and I helped her. I was instrumental in bringing this and bringing that and one day Pnina went to work and she tried to trade in her...her evening gown for bread and she was caught by the police and she was taken to the Gestapo, to the Lithuanian criminal police and when they they made...the the workers of the brigade where Pnina worked uh came back to the ghetto so they came to me and told me Pnina is under arrest and I tried immediately what can I do. There was a man by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ who was the

foreman of the group of inmates that worked in the building of the Gestapo, so he used to have some contacts, you know. He used to bribe one Gestapo so I ran immediately to his house in the ghetto so he looked. You have \_\_\_\_\_. You have to help. Here is a widow. She left a child. She...the child remains alone. Her father was killed, her mother in jail and you must do everything you can in order to...to cut the long short, long story short, I had some connections with \_\_\_\_\_ that is a special story for himself, so he was...he was instrumental and we didn't disclose to \_\_\_\_\_ that her mother was under arrest so we told her that her mother remained to work the night shift and she will come tomorrow morning and she come only tomorrow a day after tomorrow late. She was two and a half days in jail, and I was instrumental to to to take care of \_\_\_\_\_ and this and that and then and so and that's why we...I dared to ask her whether she would be willing to hide my entries in the diary. I couldn't keep it with myself because in the...it was the office of the...they would...used to come everyday, Germans, Lithuanians. I couldn't keep it at my private home because they would come anyhow to to to look at my private home, and I couldn't give it to anybody else and when I asked Pnina just by chance, I was sure she will say no. Why should she take such a one terrible risk? Find a a entry of diary...this means death. Hundreds percent...no mercy. But she said \_\_\_\_\_. So I said Pnina, think over again. This is a very dangerous thing. I'll hide it. Alright...alright. To cut a long story short, she was hiding it and this messenger that I...we were in the ghetto...he worked with me in the secretariat of the ghetto, he used to bring this every morning under his shirt, you know, the the entry of that day and bring it to her. This young thirty years old...\_\_\_\_\_ is his name, \_\_\_\_\_. He's now in New York, in \_\_\_\_\_ that uh \_\_\_\_\_.

Three years he used to bring from me to Pnina...not one word did he spill out. \_\_\_\_\_.

Not one word and never did he fail and you know, you...of course, from the Germans, even even Jews in the ghetto...so I have all the respect and admiration for this \_\_\_\_\_ and you must not...you will understand whatever I could \_\_\_\_\_ I have done. (laughter)

You see, and this is...I I could see how Pnina with whom he spared, starving for bread. She was a daughter of the richest family in Lithuania. She graduated the university in Vienna before the war. She had a wonderful home, house...luxury home in town.

Q: I know. I will talk to Pnina tomorrow.

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: I think Pnina...we'll talk to Pnina tomorrow.

A: Yes...yes...so I don't want to tell you her background. I knew her from the \_\_\_\_\_ you see but nevertheless, this her hiding and often I used to come there in the evening and I was entirely exhausted. Sometimes I had terrible experience with the Germans in town and I just couldn't take more and I said tonight I am...I cannot write the diary. She said you can not. Dictate to me and she took the pencil and paper and she wrote with me entry for that day, and that's why you'll find in my...in the original, her handwriting. You understand? So this is...so we did not make love so much as one can think, but we made so very much human...human contact, human devotion to each other that that cannot...I

have no words to express it. I had...I must now tell you in my youth...I...it was very dangerous thing for me to meet a girl or go out with out a girl or more than that, but this was not the case with Pnina. Pnina was pure...pure love, devotion and sacrifice, sacrifice. This is what was. And I was lucky that this was \_\_\_\_\_. She returned. Now we had...you asked about the day to day life. It was...it was \_\_\_\_\_. People...what would the the the the agenda of the day. You get up at five o'clock when \_\_\_\_\_, not sunshine, before sunshine. Most of the people in the ghetto have to report to the main ghetto gate and go out to the to work in in town. All the roads and the workshops in the ghetto is \_\_\_\_\_ eight hundred people, and you immediately go in the machinery of slavery, or order, of beating up, of of calling all kinds of names and you you you forget that you are a human being. The only thing is how to get a loaf of bread or Pnina, how to get a a some little bit of milk for for \_\_\_\_\_, and and how come back safe, pass through the ghetto, and when the day is through, you come back. It's already night and until you pass the gate and then they take you away from the gate. They take you to prison or they take you to commandant and when you come home, you are already so exhausted that you fell in bed. This...\_\_\_\_\_ and so on, but also waiting were the police and the and the office and institutions. We were in the very same atmosphere of danger. How many times did I got to town to work? Just because to have a better feeling for myself. You understand? And and there were all kinds of songs. You know and uh of course those in the committee, there was a song...you ask me why I'm not \_\_\_\_\_ the committee. If I wouldn't be in the committee, I wouldn't have this and I wouldn't have that and ...(laughter).

Q: Tell me about the songs. Do you remember some of them?

A: Huh?

Q: Do you remember some of them?

A: I have it in my head. I I have it...I have it in the...I asked...I suggested that they should put in \_\_\_\_ and they didn't put it in, but this wonderful song. For instance, there is a Jewish book of songs, folk songs, \_\_\_\_\_. You know, on \_\_\_\_\_ it means on a small uh...in in kitchen there is a stove and a small stove it is called in this little \_\_\_\_\_ it's more fire is burning. And the house is hot and around the the rabbi with the children teaches them \_\_\_\_\_, but this is, you know, in in Yiddish it's in the song, and on this...on this very song, they do take in in from the ghetto. \_\_\_\_\_. Around the gate, \_\_\_ burns a fire and around his hut Jews are coming with their parcels and the dawn and the Jews are burning, burning, because they take away from them the parcels. I cannot translate it, but this is just one of them, and of course...

Q: Was there humor, Avraham?

A: Huh?

Q: Were there jokes?

A: Oh and how...and how. This was the great thing. For instance, I'll tell you...where to...this was...you asked me about life...this was the daily life in the ghetto, but in addition, we had for instance Pnina, the same Pnina, but from this Pnina would not...there was not another one. As I told you, she had a very tiny place. Then she got a little bigger place and we had a circle, cultural circle, eight to ten people. There was a poet and there were two...two writers and then there was a Jewish writer, a Polish Jewish writer \_\_\_\_\_ who wrote a very great novel and there was a...the head of the cultural department of the ghetto, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and uh there were Garfunkle who is a...was a member of the parliament and myself, so we used to meet once in two weeks for two hours. Where? In Pnina's dwelling. Where did we sit there? You cannot imagine. But there we sit two hours, each one...one used to read all of his poems and we had a journalist, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, who listened to the...to understand radio and he used to report on what's going on the front. And he...he was called around the the the intelligence...military intelligence report. And there was one that was reading from what he had written and sometimes I used to read one of my entries. These were two hours of inspiration, that not everything is lost, that not everything is bread, that not everything is tears, that there is life in in \_\_\_\_\_. In the depths of hopelessness, there is a strife of light and this strife of light in my case it was Pnina, of course, but everyone had a \_\_\_\_\_. Such two hours intellectual, cultural. This was entirely contra to what the ghetto stands for, entirely \_\_\_\_\_ to what is surrounding, but we felt a need in this. You understand. Or for instance, I was, as I told you, one of the founders and leaders of the Zionist underground, so one day I get a call

from the from the ghetto, main ghetto gate. There...there is one woman that speaks...she is...she wants to speak to you. She asked for \_\_\_\_\_ and when we said that \_\_\_\_\_ cannot be reached, she asked for \_\_\_\_\_. I didn't know who who was it, so give it to me. So she tells me \_\_\_\_\_. Yes. I bring regards to you from \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ was a Zionist underground in Vilna that we heard from our correspondence. So I told her, tell him take care and bring her straight to me. Who was it? It was Irena Adamowicz, who is in the book. She was a Polish that was very much close to the \_\_\_\_\_ movement in Poland and she was going from ghetto to ghetto, bringing reports to each other and it was for the first time after a year that we heard \_\_\_\_\_ came. She said I want to talk to you, so I said please talk. She says no, I want to talk you in private. So I went in one of the rooms. She says I come now from Vilna. I am...I bring regards from \_\_\_\_\_ or from this or from this...so of course we cannot talk here. She says alright, so I arranged immediately a meeting of...\_\_\_\_\_ meeting of the committee of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the underground at my private dwelling and I...there were two from the underground \_\_\_\_\_ that said alarm if somebody comes in and all went to to work in my...because they were in my dining room where all the members of the executive of the Zionist underground and in addition Dr. Elkes and Garfinkle, yes, and uh and uh Dr. uh Dr. Shapiro was there. There was a \_\_\_\_\_ who was also a member of the underground. For a half a day long, she reported to us on what's going on in the ghettos. For the first time that it told what could be...you know, something was going on behind the barbed wires. We never had a slightest idea and here comes a woman. She spoke fluently Yiddish, and that's why the gate...they couldn't...they couldn't be suspicious because if she would speak



Polish or something, they wouldn't let her in at all. You understand? And this woman disclosed to us for the first time so open, a little little \_\_\_\_\_ say in Hebrew, in English, \_\_\_\_\_, a little window, a small window to the outer world, what goes on in Warsaw, what goes on in Vilna, what goes on in Lodz. And then we reported to her on what's going on in the ghetto and she was amazed, so this encounter with such a Polish Catholic woman who is exceptional. By the way, she came to Palestine the \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, in '56, and she was \_\_\_\_\_. You cannot imagine what...to tell you...unfortunately none of my sisters uh survived. They all were perished in the war, but even if my sister would come I wouldn't be so happy she was there, and they took her around and everything. I \_\_\_\_\_ out of my way and I look to please her and so on, but she was a Communist. Of course \_\_\_\_\_, and this is where we...where we differed. But this very meeting inside the ghetto with an outsider was in itself a breakthrough, not exactly what the Germans intended...their intention to to close us behind barbed wires, that nothing should be known to us what's going on and nothing should be going out what's going on inside and when the 28th of October...this terrible day, the most terrible day in the ghetto, the selection of 28,000 people, inmates of the ghetto, and they told it...I don't want to repeat because they spoke about it with regard to Dr. Elkes this morning before, so this selection of eight, ten thousand were in one day...all of a sudden we felt that we are...if it can happen in one day that the men \_\_\_\_\_ their own finger in their, \_\_\_\_\_

Q: Pointing.

A: Pointing, since ten thousand today, so we would have been \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: How did this...that happen? Did they call people to the square or...?

A: I beg you pardon? First of all, the the Gestapo said that in ghetto are people who are working hard and there are people who are working less, and people who don't work at all, so we'll know that the portions of food for those who are working is not enough. We know that hundred grams of bread per day per person who works is not enough, so we want to enlarge this portion for those who are working and to leave the portions that are now only for those who don't work in order to make sure who is...these who are working, so we want that you should...all...all the inmates of the ghetto, thirty thousand, should report on the 28th of October on the big square democratic, families-wise and groups of working-wise, you see, and then when they make they make uh divide separately in one place those who are working hard and those get double rations and those who are don't work will get the same rations as now. So Dr. Elkes said if this should be done, he said, we can do it ourselves. We take...give you the list of the people \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves out of department of supply, we'll give double rations to those who are working and give less rations, the same rations to those who are not. For that purpose, you don't need all of the 30,000 inmates of the ghetto to report on on on the democratic square. We we we do not believe that this is the true reason for for that order and Elkes worked very hard and he met twice with Roka (ph). As I told you...and what did they tell Elkes to \_\_\_\_\_.

Mr. Roka, Mr. Commander, may I talk to you as man to man? It is not....

Q: Avraham, let's stop here because we have less than a minute of tape. And I want them to switch the tapes...

END OF TAPE 2

Q: OK, Avraham, you were telling me about the massive selection on that day. You were telling me about the selection.

A: Yes. So uh Dr. Elkes tried to squeeze out from Roka what is the real reason for ordering thirty thousand people, old and young, sick and healthy, uh babies in in in the arms of their...children...why do they have to go to the court? Will..if it's a matter of food rationing, we'll arrange it. So he says no, the Jews are too much uh close to each other and they have...and they aren't very...they aren't very...for each other, they they wouldn't...they they cannot trust others will do it. They'll give to one and they'll share with the others and...to cut a long story short, we did not believe that this is the real reason for for ordering all on the square and a certain...certain members of the of the Jewish community...Jewish committee said that we should not uh give the instructions or we should not make public the order. Why should the Gestapo itself not make public? It should write in public...why would they want us. They wanted because if it would more information and an announcement of the Jewish committee, there would seem that if the Jewish committee is ordering that, and this under no circumstances wanted to do, so

finally they decided that we should ask the...to consult the chief rabbi Shapiro (ph) who was a a scholar of world fame. He was at one time a candidate to be the chief rabbi of \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, and uh we we went to him and he he said that it's a very hard question and he has to check with the...and when we come...he told us to come at eleven...at eleven o'clock night and then he told us to come at five o'clock in the morning and he was not ready, and then to cut a long story short, he came very along and finally he said...he phoned...in in certain conditions that the Jewish community was placed into a a a a situation, that if there is a possibility to rescue part of the community and not the whole community, the Jewish leadership has to do everything in order to rescue the this what is possible. I'll tell you later about the the very famous story about the two went in the desert and had also left one cup of water and it was sufficient only for one of them. If one of them will drink the water, the other will die. If both of them will drink, nobody will...and this is...so after having heard this this uh consultation of the chief rabbi, it was the wording of the of the of the formation of the \_\_\_\_\_...the announcement was in a say that the Gestapo ordered the Jewish population of the ghetto to appear, not that the Jewish committee but the Gestapo ordered the Jewish community...so and those who will not appear at the...at six o'clock in the morning, and those who will not appear at six o'clock in the morning and they will be found in their house, each one which will be found in his house will be killed on the spot. They shall leave open the houses, the doors, the the shutters, everything, and finally uh there were several...uh and where there is a sick man, they should put in writing, they should put in writing that there is a sick man that is immovable, that cannot be transported, and of course all those who were left and

killed...they killed them and at six o'clock in the morning, there was thirty thousand went with \_\_\_\_\_ in their hands, to...from various parts of the ghetto to this square and I \_\_\_\_\_ it as the funeral of the victims themselves. The inmates themselves went to their own funeral, because nobody knew what will happen and who will go and who will not go, and at eight o'clock in the morning, Roka stood up on the top of...

Q: Was the square just packed?

A: Over-crowded...and it was family-wise and work groups-wise. Those...all those who worked at the airport should be all together in one group. Those who worked in cleaning and and in the Gestapo building, they should all in their places of work and the name of the place of work. And the Jewish police separate \_\_\_\_\_ the Jewish uh committee separate with the Jewish and so on, and then Roka started...at eight o'clock, he started...he stood up on the upper hill in order to have a a a overlook all this group and he started \_\_\_\_\_...\_\_\_\_\_ to march forward and they used to pass by him and then he used to say \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, right. And usually the people see that right is the better...better. Left is not good and at this time exactly the opposite to the right and it happened so that people were very lucky that they were sent to the to the right, but the...to the right they sent the old people, the children, those who are not capable of working, who cannot be the..of real...any assistance to the to the to the effort of war, of the German effort of war, and this took place all the day long.

Q: Was there panic?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: Was there panic?

A: Not panic at all, but but but uh let's say uh they waited and nobody know...knew what is going...nobody knew that it's want to be dead, so maybe it's harder work. We are...anyhow, and uh he stood and in one end he said \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, left, right...and with the other hand he kept a sandwich, and he kept handkerchiefs and they ate very tasteful \_\_\_\_\_ but they kept also that his finger should not get uh from the fat from the sandwich he had, \_\_\_\_\_. It was just terrible to see a man without any human feelings at all. He eats with one hand the sandwich and other says left, right, left, right, and Dr. Elkes stood not far away from him and tried to get out somebody from the left to the right side. He said this is a very important carpenter and this is a brick layer and this is a very...a very machinist, artisan and so on. He tried to help but in the end of the day...and and this took all the day long and people, the old men fell on the spot in on the on the democratic square. Old people or sick people, they fainted. They were left there. They didn't even reach the the selection point. They just left where they were, you see. And uh and the uh it it ended approximately that six in the evening when it's already sun...sunshine is down, sunset, and then then thousands of people went straight...they went over to the smaller ghetto that was...which was vacant before from the 4th of

October where they put on fire the hospital with the with the patients, with the doctors and the medical personnel on the 4th of October and they liquidated the small part of the ghetto and this and this vacated part that they killed approximately the thousand people on the 4th of October...they left in the ten thousand people were and Elkes tried and when he...Elkes stood all the day long and didn't want to sip...he didn't want to take a sip...water, nothing. He says oh why should I live up to this day and why...what have I done wrong that destiny just goes...and he stood all day and he didn't move.

Q: What were some of your thoughts?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: What were some of your emotions that you were...?

A: I was close to him.

Q: And what were you thinking?

A: I...I'll tell you why. He was closing and when somebody of the police and there was a very veteran Zionist man over the age of seventy. He was the owner of the Hebrew library \_\_\_\_, so he was alone so I told Dr. Elkes, when \_\_\_\_ passes by, try to rescue him, you know, so we...we just told him. We were busy all the day. I at least you see, but, of

course, he he he rescued that this was a very small part, and in the evening came to Dr. Elkes at his home those who were separated, husband from men and then from children from parents and so on, and they asked him...and then Dr. Elkes uh asked the \_\_\_\_\_, the commander of the police, of the Jewish police, to ask from Roka that they should take home from those 10,000, hundred men who were in to to...in his language these were very important artisan (ph)...this is a very important physician, and this is a very important this...and the next morning when they were all from the small ghetto on their march to the 9th Fortress to the to the \_\_\_\_\_, the the Germans called the 9th Fortress Anihilation (ph) Point Number 2, and of course in their secret uh but I got it, you see, and so Dr. Elkes was permitted to go in and take out the hundred but then they fell upon...all of them, Dr. Elkes rescue us. One took him by his sleeves. Another took him by his foot. Another took him by his head and they take him by by his coat, and then there was a great tumult, you see, and they march them to the 9th Fortress \_\_\_\_\_ all the all the the the ten thousand were mixed up and the Lithuanian partisans entered and they beat up Elkes terribly on his head and he fell and he fainted and then we rushed from the other side of the ghetto uh several people and myself and we we took him on our arms and brought him entirely...he was two days in that place. He was terribly wounded and this is what he he could he could always...they told him if we don't go away from you, we take you to the 9th Fortress. This was a terrible...the most terrible day that there was in ghetto, and another day that I think I should mention...

Q: We have to uh end the interview.



A: End?

Q: Yeah. Your wife is in a car waiting for you outside and we'll have to pick up maybe tomorrow.

A: I am not quarreling with my wife.

Q: Not after forty years. I'll walk down with you.

A: You...you know where I'm at hotel...at the at the uh...what do you call it...embassy...

END OF TAPE 3

Q: Avraham, what I would like to start with is for you to tell us what were some of the the private ways that people decide the Nazi regulations and the Nazi laws in the ghetto?

A: Well, we usually read and hear about the heroic uprising of the Warsaw ghetto, of the Lodz ghetto and so on. Also in Kovno, the uh the escape from the 9th Fortress, the legendary escape from the 9th Fortress that you read later \_\_\_\_\_, so I uh but the main...I always am trying to stress and this is what I've done in my diary I think, to stress the fight of the each individual, of the inmate, the plain man or woman in the ghetto, even the the

boy...child...for survival of one day. Sometimes survival of another hour in the hope that something might happen.

Q: And what did they do when you...?

A: So first of all, the rations that the Germans gave to feed the inmates was a ration for starvation. No one could live on a hundred grams, but also this hundred grams of bread, the uh the inmates didn't...the the the individual inmate didn't get because we had kept secret two thousand souls in the ghetto. Babies that had been born despite the the strict order to cut off pregnancies. Second there were old men or sick men that if you would put them on the register of the in...inmates of the ghetto, they would have been killed, so this two thousand...approximately two thousand had to be...to get food, so we cut off from the general portion that we got uh so everyone got only approximately eighty grams or eighty-five grams of bread so that the others can get also. So each one in his own way tried to get additional food. You couldn't go in in the supermarket and buy it. You couldn't go in because in the ghetto there was nothing, so people used to go to the...to work outside town and there try to get out for ten or fifteen minutes and buy and buy...not buy because nobody sold. It's war time and it were sanctions also in the city but the Lithuanians had enough food but they wanted always to trade in. They would give you a loaf of bread or half a loaf of bread for a pair of trousers or stockings or a jacket or whatever. I...for reason I remember it was the 31st of December, 1942. My present wife sold out...already sold out everything she got, but she...there was left a gown, you know,

for the ball, for very festivity...made big festivities. She was a rich woman, so...but nobody bought a gown in in in time of war, so we had in the opera house in in in Kovno, there were a group of Jewish workers who worked then in the opera house as dressmakers, as uh as to make the haircuts and uh you know, \_\_\_\_\_, and they were also working and cleaning the the opera house so I took Pnina and went as workers in that brigade and she took along with her the gown. It was a wonderful gown, you know, and with the...accordingly also a pair of shoes, you know...elegant, and there on the 31st of the...before...the eve of the New Year, the actresses there jumped on this merchandise, you see, and so she she got some bread and and a little bit of uh of uh sugar, you see, for the gown, which costed hundreds and hundreds. Just in one of the examples of one fought for the survival of another day, more so when she had a small child and she needed...badly needed milk that you couldn't get in the ghetto, leave alone an egg, you see, so this was an opportunity for her to bring milk and then when she got it all and she got rid of her gown and this, it was a problem how to pass the control at the ghetto gate. When...at the ghetto gate there always sentries of the ghetto commandant, the German ghetto commandant, then all the Lithuanians on one side. From inside there were the uh employees of the Jewish labor exchange who used to to arrange the exit of the laborers in the groups from the ghetto out to outside to their places of work and they were...had ways and means to bribe certain sent...sentry or the Lithuanian or the German, and so they keep uh close... close an eye and and they pass by, take part of it and give them as bribe you see, but nevertheless something left, and in this way people tried...tried not to starve, just plainly...very plain words...not to starve. And uh some some others used to to get

a...make this deal of trade in above or through the ghetto fence. There was a barbed wire fence, two meters high. The Lithuanians knew that there is a shortage of food inside the ghetto, so they used to come and from a from a distance show a loaf of bread or show a a sugar or show five eggs, you see, and the and the...from inside the ghetto they used to show a pair of trousers or a jacket or something like that, and when they...when they nod of the of the of the head, they came to to an agreement or they trade in, so when the...along...along the barbed wire always twenty-four hours a day, the sentry used to go back and forth, back and forth, so the moment when the sentry used to go, let's say to the left, they used to throw above...above the the uh fence to the Lithuanians and they used to to send...to throw above the the food, and we used to call it \_\_\_\_\_. A \_\_\_\_\_. You know what is a \_\_\_\_ in the war, a \_\_\_\_\_, and this was a \_\_\_\_\_ merchandise.

Q: Avra...Avraham, tell me, you mentioned the opera house. Is that where the orchestra in the ghetto played or...?

A: No. In Kovno they had a wonderful opera house. It was in the center of the city and they had excellent, excellent Lithuanian...Lithuanian uh singers. Also one Jew was...a Jew...one of the main singers was a Jew, but the orchestra, the musicians mostly were Jews and part of them, those who were not killed before entering the ghetto, they were in the ghetto. First-class musicians. For instance, this soloist of the of the musicians, yes...he was in the ghetto. A soloist, violinist. And several others. The doorman at the uh Jewish committee offices were a first-class pianist. We didn't send them to work

because we wanted to to to save their hands, their fingers, you see, but he was a doorman and was very happy to be a doorman. You understand? Others were policemen, you see. They were such policemen like you were but they...this was the way to keep to keep uh their fingers, you know, that not be entirely...and in addition they were certainly not used to hard labor, you see, and some use...I can switch over...when I talk about the \_\_\_\_\_, I want to finish with regard to the to the fight \_\_\_\_ and then small children were in danger of being killed in the first place because they don't...so what did we do? We arranged a so-called vegetable garden guard of young children of the age of eight to twelve. From the age of twelve they could already get a work and be laborers and and a a card, a labor card which was absolutely vital in the ghetto, but what would we do with the children from eight to twelve, so we organized this. They were a group that was called \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_...the the guards of the gardens. We had only vegetable gardens, and the very \_\_\_\_\_ about about a hundred and yet they had a uniform, you see, and they had an arm band and so in this way we could...and these young...youngsters also wanted to eat, so they used to try, you see, first of all uh when they were in the gardens and the gardens were along the ghetto...the ghetto fence, so they also sometimes...being small children, they used to squeeze through the ope...raise a fence. One keeps the fence...two people comes from both sides. He is a small child so he came through, dig a little bit in the earth, you see, and he went out and brings, sneaks in some bread or something and and he makes in the ghetto, you see, so even small children were cautious of the danger of starvation and they have knowingly lent into danger of life in order to get some food.

Q: How about the kids that were under eight and twelve, the the children...what did they do during the day? You know, the six year olds or five year olds or four year olds?

A: Oh yes...well, you see, so uh fortunately... unfortunately from the beginning we were not...we were not conscious of the great danger of these children because we never thought that they can take children and kill them, but when the the aktion of the 4th of October, 1941, when they put on fire the contagious hospital in the small ghetto with the patients inside, with the uh doctors and with the personnel, medical personnel, all of the them, they were put on fire and they lead...but before they put on fire this building, the adjacent building was a children's home, an orphan's home, and there were approximately five, six hundred children so they took them out from the building in the broad...in the courtyard of the...of the contagious diseases hospital and were just plain put them...I can never forget the picture. There were small children and babies, just babies, in the in the orphan's homes so the Germans when they put them on the on the on the ground, on the ground, and they just kicked them from one side to the other side with their with their boots, the Gestapo men. People like beasts. They behaved just like beef...beasts. They used to kick them...when the children laid, for instance, with their faces up to to heaven, yes, so they kicked them, then turned down, and then again. This was a just terrible, terrible, terrible sight to see it and then they took them from that courtyard straight to the 9th Fortress and they killed them in the very same day together with another thousand uh inmates of the small ghetto, after they put on fire the the the hospital. They did not let...our firemen were very...were the fire brigade in the ghetto...excellent fire...firemen

were trained years and they were ready to to to...but they didn't let them come near to the place, you see. There were Lithuanian fire brigades who came close to the close to the uh ghetto fence, but they came just to safeguard that the fire shouldn't come over to the other side of the of the fence. You understand? And this is...so you see they were just not to to fight the fire but to see that the fire shouldn't grow to the other side and uh this was one of the most tragic days and what...it is worthwhile mentioning, in that very contagious diseases hospital, you see, we were...we didn't have so much space and so many hospitals, so part of this contagious diseases hospital served as a maternity where children...women gave birth to to children. This, of course, was absolutely against...contrary to the to the restrictions of of pregnancy and so on, so when they took out the uh the uh the uh the uh...they took out from their beds many sick people and they brought them in one place where they couldn't \_\_\_ for sure. They shouldn't remain sometimes in \_\_\_\_\_. There was left some part of the building, left after the \_\_\_\_, so in one...they they left...they didn't...they just pass by one room where two women were laying after giving birth to the child, to the babies, and the two babies were on, you know, on the window there is a...big window there is such a...you know, like let's say this is the window and here is such a small...a small wooden...wooden...

Q: Like a ledge...

A: Yes. So at this two...there are the two children, so when they came to control if somebody was left in the room, so they saw the two women and they were about to take

them out, but then one of them saw the children, so he...he came near to the babies and they looked and they looked and they and they...all of a sudden, some human...human feeling came perhaps in in in his in his heart, you see, so he said to the other one, what do you think? Shall we leave these two babies? You see...and in silent they went out and they left the two women with the two children. I...I am telling this to stress that even among the murderers were single, very rare, very rare...but there were sometimes people with human feelings and they behaved sd human beings and not like beasts like all their their comrades. Being with the swastika and over the Nazi, you know, the grey...the grey uniform with the with the swastika with all this...to look at them was...one got frightened, you see, but these men, that they came back and they looked at the faces of the baby, he couldn't withheld from being...they they commit...and these two women and these two babies were the only one that left from from from that hospital, you see, and this is...this is...we always remember it.

Q: Avraham, you brought Esther, the artist...

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: You brought Esther, the artist, to draw scenes from that hospital?

A: Well...so so at that time...at that time, when they liquidated the ghetto, the small ghetto, they took thousand men from the ghetto and they liquidated to the 9th Fortress, so I didn't



have any \_\_\_\_\_ more in '42...it was...in '41 in the beginning I have to say prior to the actions on on human beings, on life, they took...confiscated all the belongings and they were...when the ghetto inmates were ordered under threat of death to give all their gold, their belongings, their silver, furs, \_\_\_\_\_, post stamps, collections...whatever valuables, and there were two stations in the in the...near the Jewish committee where the Jews had to bring bring all their belongings and wherever they...while making the searches inside the houses, each other, and sometimes on the spot killing them and and this brought about the people to run and get rid of their gold, to get rid of their silver, to get rid of their of their of their furs, you see, so we didn't have any cameras anymore. If...in...on the \_\_\_\_\_...it was in August. The the big...the big confiscation, the total confiscation of whatever people had had with them. Others digged it in the earth or somewhere and they didn't...like Mack (ph)...I'll think about them later, but the the overwhelming majority, they were left without a penny and without any valuable, clothing or or furs or whatever it was, so I didn't have a camera anymore, and I thought it is absolutely possible...impossible that this event, that this side should not be somehow eternalized for posterity, but this already...the ghetto, small ghetto was out of bounds. It was cut off from from the ghetto. I'm sorry I didn't take along with me my documents. I would have shown you. So I went to to Esther \_\_\_\_\_, and I told her, Esther, you must draw what remained from the burned hospital, so she said how can we come in. It is it is out of bounds, so I I went to the commandant of the ghetto and I told him that since it was it was October...in in Lithuania in October it is already cold and very cold and we had no firewood in the ghetto and what they used to give us, just like the hundred grams of

bread, this was the same story with the with the firewood, so I told them in the small ghetto, some families left some firewood. Would he allow us to take out from this from these dwellings inside the small ghetto, to take out the firewood? So he he...and I don't remember that I mentioned it yesterday that the commandant of the ghetto, mostly they were elderly men and they were not so, you know, fanatic like this, so they had understanding...he had understanding for this and he tells me alright, I give you two hours, two hours to go in into the into the...so I said I need a uh a wagon, you know, but I didn't need a wagon. I wanted that Esther, so he he gave a wagon and I took Esther and I went in inside there and we stood and we looked where would be the best position geographically for Esther \_\_\_\_\_, to the painter, to stand and to paint it, but to paint from outside would be would be very dangerous because they could have killed us on the spot because all the time the sentries go around the gate...the the fence, so I decided that we should go inside a building and the adjacent building from the left side of the burned hospital was a two-story house so we went into this story...two-story and we arrived on the second floor and Esther from the the window from which she could have a good look on the remain...what remained from the hospital and she painted and she drew and she draw and this is what she have made it, but all of a sudden when...as she paints she...and I am on the outlook...all of a sudden I hear somebody went in in the first floor so I got frightened to death because if they would found us, Esther... probably it would have been the finish for her, and I was responsible. I'm the bad guy that brought her about her about it, you see, and I felt terrible, frightened to death, so I went closer to the staircase in order to see who is there, so that when they heard the...my footsteps so they run out. What

happened? These were Lithuanians who had...who came in just to to to to steal and to take away what the Jews have left, so you see this was also...and this \_\_\_\_\_ but to to learn the moment of danger to death was always there and uh she has done it and, of course, I took her some firewood from the house, from another house and be...behind the firewood I put the the drawings of Esther \_\_\_\_\_ and we safe came back to the to the ghetto. There was another place where I took Esther \_\_\_\_\_. I don't know. I think I mentioned to you that the...were the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lithuanians in the...in Slobodka. This is the very suburb where later was the ghetto, that on on the very beginning, on the...at the night of June 25th to the 26th, the Lithuanians massacred thousand Jews in the Slobodka...in the Slobodka suburb. They just went from street to street and one of the houses...I I...then I I'm always after to see what it looks like, but they closed up the area and nobody could go in and and the and the houses after they have been looted, they closed up with uh wooden blocks and uh and uh and plywood so you couldn't go in inside the the the houses because it was locked from \_\_\_\_\_. Anyhow, I I went in with Esther \_\_\_\_\_ and one house that I knew was a a Zionist leader. He was the director of the \_\_\_\_\_ in in Lithuania. \_\_\_\_\_ was his name, a famous veteran Zionist. His wife was a dentist, and I wanted to know what happened to him, so I took Esther \_\_\_\_\_ again and, you know, I am a sportsman so for me to to, you know, to to \_\_\_\_\_, that was not such a big problem, but for Esther \_\_\_\_\_, it was not easy. So first of all I had to to take off some wooden...how do you call it...the such uh they closed the the doors...

Q: The panels.

A: Panels. Yes. Panels. Board (ph) of panels...but they were only only with nails, not very...not very steady, not very strong so I could easily take it off, you see, and we scurried (ph). First of all I went in and then I made it broader so Esther \_\_\_\_\_ could go in and then I took it again, so from the outside it was as as it was before before we climbed in and we climbed in in the house. What we have seen was a terrible, terrible thing. There were three rooms. In one room was the head of \_\_\_\_\_ and his body was on the on the \_\_\_\_\_. There was blood on the on the walls. Uh you know, all the feathers from the from the from the from the beds and from...it was full in in...and also with with with blood...the feathers from the \_\_\_\_ and from the couches and so on. It was just terrible to look at it, and that the second room was the uh dentist's...his wife was a dentist and there was the the, you know, the dentist's special equipment and this stool and she...the wife was slain on the on the on the on the stool of the dentist and dead. I I can't...when she painted it, she painted the the the one room of of the \_\_\_\_\_ house and we have it in her in her album.

Q: What was your reaction when you saw this?

A: It was terrible. It was just terrible but but but you you had no way out. You had to...so so until until until Esther \_\_\_\_\_...you know, I had to calm her down and to calm myself down first of all, but I brought her in. I'm responsible for her and she's there and she painted it...and she painted it. And she cried and she cried and then she painted and cried again

and this was a terrible thing. Look, there was in the \_\_\_\_ where \_\_\_\_ were, I have a photo, one of my photos, of a yeshiva man on his \_\_\_\_, on his \_\_\_\_\_, on the \_\_\_\_\_...\_\_\_\_\_, and with his talis (ph) on himself. He \_\_\_\_ so killed, so he he remained on it, so this was one of the paintings and there were many other paintings like that that I went on in order to produce visual evidence to what I have writ...I have written, because nobody would would...I said to myself and I told it to myself...who would believe what I am writing. It is out of human understanding and it is out of what any community in the world could think of. A barb...barbarism is not the right word for it. And...but I was lucky enough that Esther \_\_\_\_ and Joseph Schlesinger (ph), and then there was another...another uh...on the 11th of January, 1942, the German Gestapo ordered to the one area of the ghetto, the \_\_\_\_ area, to...they should vacate their their dwellings within four hours and whoever will be found in the in their dwelling in this area after the expires the four hours, you will be shot on the spot without any clarifications and whatever will be remain of their belongings will be confiscated. They said, the Gestapo said that they need the area and these dwellings to settle the Jews who are to come at this very day from Germany and from Austria, five thousand Jews. That area lived only three thousand, but they squeezed...so when we heard, we took it for granted that first of all five thousand Jews are coming to the ghetto and Dr. Elkes, the head of the Jewish Council, said we have to meet them as brothers, give them the feeling they are coming to brothers, so he ordered that the women should prepare hot coffee for them because the terrible cold...in January was the thirty...thirty centigrades below...below uh below uh below...thirty below...the most hard winter in the ghetto was

in 1942. Dr. Elkes himself stood all the day from the beginning whenever we we got word of that five thousand are to come in the ghetto, he stood at the main gate with several people, and with women who were ready to give them...offer them coffee. He felt very much...and he he says I can understand the feeling that these people were taken out from the houses, from the from the countries, and they don't know where they're being brought. At least give them a greeting for...when they will have to cross the gate behind barbed wires, they should...barbed wires they should know that they're coming with brothers. So we...those inmates from this area to be vacated in four hours didn't have any transportation. They were not allowed to to use transportation, horses or wagons, so they dragged, you know, in their hands, bundles on their on their shoulders. They uh...some uh some uh home uh utensils like uh like uh for children to bath, you know, the...it was used to drag it and on the snow. You understand? I I saw the the the the picture of all the people frightened to death to be in time not to remain there after the...it was just...I said this scene I must put on a drawing, and then I didn't find Esther \_\_\_\_\_, so I run to...there was one young...the youngest painter in the ghetto. He was Schmidt. Schmidt, Joseph Schmidt, but we called him \_\_\_\_\_, a a nickname as \_\_\_\_\_, and when I came to \_\_\_\_\_'s home, I found him. I was the happiest man. I said \_\_\_ come quick and take some paint, some pencils with you and paper. We have to to to paint this...we have to rush to the \_\_\_ area, paint the exile, the exile of...the expulsion. And when he didn't...he he was not conscious of the of the urgency. Every minute counts...I would say not minute...but every hour counts, and he slowly...I said \_\_\_\_\_, quick. Have no time...I didn't...nothing. So he he took another coat, of course, as it was very cold, and took some

paper and and and some pen. In addition to the pen and pencil, he took color paints. I said what for does he need these color paints, but he didn't listen to me at all and he took everything, put under his under his overcoat and bring just running. It was far away from his...it was on the other side of the ghetto. Running we came to the site and there I had to find a place where he could stand and make his paintings that should not be seen by the Germans, not even before Jews. You understand? And he stood in a certain place which he found...he found a place we thought for him \_\_\_\_ and I stood on the outlook and then I called for two of our underground...there were...everybody went to this area to help them take out...to help them. Everybody tried to help them, so Esther took two of my known members of the underground and said you, you just cover that his body it \_\_\_\_ that nobody should see him, you see, and I stood on the \_\_\_\_ and he painted and he painted and he painted and I told him, \_\_\_\_\_, quick, finish, \_\_\_\_\_. Every minute can come a Gestapo and then it it will finish not only for your painting but it finish then to you and to me, but he didn't give in and he painted and he painted and this is now one of the most characteristic paintings of the of the Holocaust in Lithuania. It is in my book, with colors, oil painting, so this was \_\_\_\_\_ and this was the the the liquidation of that quarter. The Jews came from Germany, but they were sent straight to the 9th Fortress and were killed the very same day and the part, the area was cut off from the ghetto.

Q: And the three...

A: I beg your pardon.

Q: ...and the three thousand that were moved...where did they go?

A: No. They didn't...they cut off from the ghetto. They had to to squeeze in in in the remaining part of the ghetto. You understand? And the tension was even higher and painful, more painful than it was because three thousand had to squeeze in in anyway \_\_\_\_ of the ghetto.

Q: How did you learn that the five thousand were taken to the fort and just killed?

A: We have seen them. You see, Dr. Elkes at the gate was waiting for their coming, and all day Dr. Elkes didn't drink even not cold water. He was in such shape, tense, waiting, expecting, and they didn't come and they didn't come. In the afternoon, they were brought and you know, the way to the 9th Fortress comes along...it's a half a kilometer, half a mile, from the ghetto fence, up on the hill it goes, and you can see. Everybody in the ghetto could see and we saw them. They came...these five thousand men, and then how did I...we know? As I told you, in the Gestapo building worked a group of Jewish inmates from the ghetto in cleaning, in in \_\_\_\_\_, in in in in the cleaning the the the lavatories, in in uh \_\_\_\_\_ and all kinds of...so they, when they came back, they came the next morning to work, they could see many many suitcases and bundles with names of from Berlin, from Frankfurt, the name of the Jew...you know, the the Gestapo took...they looted their their belongings and they brought...you see, and they threw away the uh the suitcases and the bundles and you could see the names and addresses of the



people who were brought in, so we were...there was no lot of doubt that this were the five thousand who were killed in the very same day on the 9th Fortress.

Q: So what the Gestapo did is they took their things? They took things that they wanted?

A: Always they take. First of all, they take off the rings, the gold and then they take they count the valuables, and they put them in their hip pockets. They don't bring it to the Gestapo. You understand? From the board where the suitcases, on the trucks...so we had always several size that are workers in that building uh used to work and uh this was also one day in the ghetto unexpected. You never knew what the next day will bring you. There is a very nice poetry, Russian language...what does you today or tomorrow bring upon us. \_\_\_\_\_. What expect us...what brings to us the next day? Will it be day of sorrow, of pain, or will it bring to us a new hope, a new joy? It is a very, very nice poet from a very famous uh Russian poet. We don't like the Soviets, but we like very much the poetry and their language and their literature. I am telling you I I I was uh I was...I lived...Lithuania was under under these Russian czars and I studied law, the Russian law, not the Bolshevik law. Come back to the ghetto.

Q: So with that, I mean you never knew what the next day would bring. How did people keep their spirits to go on?

A: So so...you know, there were...there were...there were...there were various kinds of reactions. There were people in the ghetto that didn't...they they thought maybe this is the last day so why not eat? Why not drink, that people will manage to bring in, to smuggle in...we called them \_\_\_\_\_...the smugglers of the gate or the smugglers of the fence. You see, \_\_\_\_\_, in Yiddish, \_\_\_\_\_, and smugglers, when they used to make...they turned it into a trade and they used to make big money. They even got to eat meat and and butter and eggs. Said let's eat. Tomorrow we will not...we will not...even on the eve of the of the 28th of October, people were...most of the people were in tension and and didn't know what is going to happen tomorrow. Others thought this is the last day, so they used to concentrate in their thoughts, in their minds. Others took out everything that they had and said they will eat up everything, not to leave for the Germans the next day anything. You see? It...look...it's thirty thousand people. It is not a...you don't think by order. You don't act as somebody would expect you to act. Everyone in his own way. You understand? And so there was a very very thin...a very thin group of people who ate in meat, in butter, in eggs, a very thin few...those were the smugglers, but they, of course, uh uh rescued their...risked their life. Some of them were killed. You know, you can uh make a \_\_\_\_\_ once, twice, but the third time you...a bullet comes and finish...finishes you. You understand? For instance, Dr. Elkes and all those...he was close to starvation. Although he was very...again and again offered by the smugglers, we'll bring you butter. We'll bring you this. He never accepted not a piece of bread. He used to share with me my my piece of bread, you see, or offer me his piece of bread, but he would never never have any connections with smugglers which we thought

it's...the underground...it's the...what we are trying to fight, just to keep the standard of of human of human behavior, of Jewish heritage, to keep alive even under these terrible circumstances of the ghetto, and this is only thanks to Dr. Elkes and to those leaders who were known as community leaders before the war and they were elected by...elected, and this was the difference, the big difference between the ghetto of Kovno leadership and the leadership in other...in other ghettos.

Q: Avraham, let me ask you quickly...we had gone over to another story and I wanted to ask you, what was done with the children who were under eight years old? What did they do? Were they educated? Were there schools in the ghetto they kept underground?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. A very good question. From the very beginning we didn't have to eat. We didn't have a hospital, but we started immediately with schools. We had wonderful educators, teachers, everything in Hebrew of course. Not only did we have schools, Hebrew schools. We taught reading and and writing, mathematics, geography, but we had also a a special school artisans...artisans and in the ghetto was a...one...an engineer, \_\_\_\_\_ who was the head of \_\_\_\_ schools in Lithuania which is a famous world-wide artisan, Jewish artisan schools, and he was the...heading the artisan schools in the ghetto, and also...but we had to close up the schools in the winter because of lack of firewood, because the lack of firewood. The next time we had to close by order of the Gestapo because it is \_\_\_\_\_...Jews...in their mind the final solution was what do we need schools to learn. What we...\_\_\_\_\_ work as teachers, let them go to work and the

educators, are they going to work. But even after the restricted to half and then liquidated, ordered to liquidate the schools, we had it in clandestine. Had it in clandestine.

Q: How did you...how did...how did you do that?

A: Yes. So first of all, we we said we need to train youngsters to for as artisans that is so much needed for the German war effort, so this they understood, so it was that the school it was a course for preparing of artisans, but it wasn't...for all things and purposes it was...it was a school. Yes. Second, we did it just in in in the underground. You see, in the evenings and so and private groups, they just volunteered. You understand? It was a very hard task, but we had a...the head of the of the cultural department in the ghetto was Dr. Shapiro (ph), \_\_\_\_ Shapiro, who was a a lecturer, senior lecturer at the University on Semitic languages and Semitic literature, you see. When all Jews were go into the ghetto took along with them their bundles, whatever they were allowed...they weren't allowed to take everything, but they had...but some belonged...he came to the committee for the transfer of Jews and asked to transfer to the ghetto his...a newly edited published book, the Hebrew...the history of Hebrew literature in two thousand two hundred pages. A book...you can imagine...where did we have this place to to to keep them in the ghetto or to or to store them, but this is what he was very excited about that he should...it was one of the outstanding monumental work...the history of the modern Hebrew literature and uh

he was the head of the of the cultural department and he...you know, we had also from the children, you see, we tried to keep for them the holidays children should know.

Q: Hold on a second. Do we have tape? Are we...OK...tell me about the holidays?

A: So first of all there was kindergarten. One day comes to me...there was a uh a teacher of the kindergarten, a very well-known Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. She was in the kindergarten before...before the war and in the ghetto she volunteered to to held the kindergarten, of course in clandestine. Very very clandestine. So \_\_\_\_\_, the daughter of my wife, my present wife, she went also to the kindergarten and one day Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ comes to me, \_\_\_\_\_, and says we must arrange for the children, for the poor children, some joy. It's \_\_\_\_\_, wants to be \_\_\_\_\_, and we have to make some festivity of the poem, and for that purpose I need colored paper (laughter)...colored paper because, you know, they have to have colored paper. So I...the way she asked me, I couldn't say no, but where can you get it. I hardly got the paper for...needed for the secretariat, for the for the Jewish office, community offices and the departments, so I used to go to the city and make an order with the with the civil authorities, German civilian authorities, the stock commissar. There was a form that uh you filled out, and I put in there colored paper...red, yellow, so when I came and presented this \_\_\_\_\_...it calls \_\_\_\_\_. It is...you order...an order...a formal order, and the quantities. Said what do you need the colored papers for. So I told them, what do you mean? We need for the...to put the brigades when they go out to cities they should know this is the yellow people, other people...other people said they are in

alphabetical. They don't know, so you have to put a yellow...yellow here and a red one there and green there. To cut a long story short, he gave me half of the portion that I needed, but I was the happiest man to come back in the ghetto (laughter) and she teased me when I gave her the the paper, you see, and then they played...you know, the famous play of \_\_\_\_\_ and Esther \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ was was elected to be the \_\_\_\_\_. She played Esther \_\_\_\_\_. The...the only hall where we could have the the \_\_\_\_ festivities, a hall was from a yeshiva that was empty you see, so in that former yeshiva, there was the festivities and the mothers, mostly widows, mostly widows, could see their children on the stage, you know, dressed in the pretty clothes they had. Everyone could find a little \_\_\_\_\_, you know, to to have their child, and they wept in tears and they listened to these songs and to the play and uh nevertheless the the Dr. Elkes and the mainly Dr. Shapiro, the head of the cultural department introduced what does it mean \_\_\_\_ for the for the...and what did the symbol...the symbolic meaning of poem for nowadays the situation in the ghetto and that it was an \_\_\_\_ and Hitler is nothing...Hitler is nothing else but a new \_\_\_\_ and from...we have to know that his end will be as the end of \_\_\_\_ and those days, so Hitler was a symbol. This was a very very moving...we we we were full of joy of the children, but the tears was in more moving things, you see, and this was the festival of \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: The tears of the mothers?

A: Of the mothers...and not only of the mothers. Not only of the mothers. I was very much close to to \_\_\_\_\_ because of of Pnina. We started then the \_\_\_\_\_ and I tried to help her to get some firewood for her. I told her yesterday that I brought her the first package from the nurse, you see, so and then and then we had also for the adults, for instance, Hannuaka or \_\_\_\_\_. We arranged, for instance, a third \_\_\_\_\_, a third seider (ph). Usually you have two seiders for the \_\_\_\_\_, for the passover, but we arranged a third seider for the Zionist underground, that mainly for the youth, of course, and then Dr. Shapiro...I can remember...

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

A: ...circle that we used to hear what news what's going on in the...

A: ...so many programs and so many hardships in various \_\_\_\_\_ inquisition in Spain and then in Russia and so on. Uh this \_\_\_\_\_ no problem about it, but this was not only the ghetto in the  
the  
public gatherings that we tried to arrange, but in private talk day in, day out, the widows used to come to me...

Q: Hold on one second, Avraham. I'm sorry. We're just changing tapes now. We'll pick up from where you are.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

Q: OK, Avraham, we're going to start with the underground and the Zionist movement, the Zionist resistance movement. Tell me how that was established, what some of your activities were, and who some of the leaders were.

A: Yes. Now uh the the situation prior to our being incarcerated in the ghetto behind barbed wires, the uh terrible attacks and killings of uh Jews in the streets of Kovno, right after the outbreak of the war until the the incarceration in the ghetto, called for immediate resistance because we had a...also even under the Soviet occupation, 1940, June 1940 to June 1941, we had also a clandestine Zionist...Zionist uh movement or leadership let's say it was, but this is entirely different character. While under the Bolsheviks it was our main aim to assist the families economically. Of the leaders we were being arrested right on the first days of occupation, they were arrested. They were taken to Siberia. Second, to try and ourselves try and avoid our own exile to Siberia. It was very clear that uh the...under the Soviet occupation, not only were we were able to to to maintain our Hebrew schools, Hebrew education. They closed up immediately. They closed up...liquidated all the Jewish institutions leave alone the Zionist parties and movement and so on, but what we had is a really in the very sense of the wor...of the word, to try and to keep away from arrest and to keep out hiding. We were hiding. I, for instance, were were hiding from the moment when I was told my brother-in-law was not a Zionist. My sister, means my sister, she was religious and Zionist-minded woman and she was the



oldest sister, \_\_\_\_\_ . She didn't allow me to live in a pri...in a in a...somewhere else but with her, to stay with her all the years that I studied at the University of Kovno law. Yes. She was very much devoted. She was Zionist and she was religious. To the contrary, my my brother-in-law, her husband Benjamin, a very decent, very honest and very fine person, he wasn't...he was uh in the so-called...there was a movement of Jewish left, Bundists (ph)...

Q: Bundists...

A: Bundists. And he was a Bundist. He...there was a Jewish Bundist paper in Lithuania, the the \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ was the name of the Jewish paper which were the organ of the Bundists in in Lithuania.

Q: So how was the Zionist resistance different than that \_\_\_\_? You said they...they supported people economically. Then how...?

A: I'll come immediately. And then we were assisting one another. He told me...my brother know this what I've told you but remember, it was...he told me, look Avraham, you're on the list to be exiled to Siberia, so just try to to to...from the surface...disappear. So I told him wait a minute. I will sleep with you. He says what? You'll sleep with me...if they want to find you, you will...they will come to me. They know that I am your brother-in-law and they know that...your sister. So I finally tried hiding in various places

in the outskirts. I run away to Vilna (ph), to Vilna. Yes...which was then the capital of Lithuania, and in Vilna I found out who...with whom could I make contact, also Zionist leaders, but they themselves were hiding, so we are hiding together in a park, in a in a lane, you know, uh somewhere out...in the outskirts of the city, and it was an absolutely impossible situation. You understand? And to the end, you know, I couldn't...couldn't see any other way out but to come back to Kovno, and when I came back to Kovno, two days later...

Q: The invasion...

A: The invasion...German...German war break out and so as I said yesterday, I went from the from the pot to the to the fire. The the resistance in the ghetto or even before we were incarcerated in the ghetto, was entirely of different character and entirely of different dimensions and entirely different aims so uh when the historic and dramatic meeting or assembly of the Jewish...of the Jews...Jewish leadership of Kovno to elect a over-Juder (ph), a chief Jew, and this...and the committee, in the very same place, in the very same school, former school, two hours later we we held a meeting in another room of this very same school for leaders of the various Zionist groups. Uh there was the...a member of the left-wing \_\_\_\_ movement, pioneer movement, who I recall \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and then there was the labor movement. You had the labor movement, and then was the \_\_\_\_\_ and then were the general Zionists.

Q: Do you remember their names?

A: Oh of course. They were my best friends, so to start with \_\_\_\_\_ Goldschmidt. He is now Sam Goldsmith, Saul Goldsmith in Chicago. Yes. Uh the second one was \_\_\_\_\_ Kohn from the labor. By the way, this Saul Goldsmith was from the very left, uh \_\_\_\_\_. And is now quite a millionaire, you see, and uh the second one was \_\_\_\_\_. Belkahn (ph). Belkahn...he lives in New York. He from the labor movement. The...from the \_\_\_\_\_ were the head, the chairman of the \_\_\_\_\_ movement in Lithuania, \_\_\_\_\_ or as I call him, \_\_\_\_\_, who passed away in Israel two years ago, and uh myself representing the Zionists, general Zionist movement. Three or four. Right after joined us a fifth one, very active. This was \_\_\_\_\_, Issac \_\_\_\_\_. He was most uh instrumental because he was a pharmacy and the...was the head of the oldest pharmacy in the ghetto, and since we considered that the pharmacy is the most place that nobody will think of that there is any hidings or some contra...contrary Nazi activities, so we below the...below the the pharmacy where there was a cellar and in this cellar we arranged uh to have one...to listen to a radio from abroad. The...it was the only...\_\_\_\_\_. This is what you have from the...to listen, you see. \_\_\_\_\_ we used to go down the the the pharmacy in the cellar and listen to radio. Mostly himself would listen but because each one was busy in certain tasks and then we used to come frequently...once a week, even sometimes more...but this was really top secret. Also for all various groups. I never told my \_\_\_\_\_ from general Zionists that we have a leadership of the uh of the for...of the underground

in the ghetto resistance. What I told them is that we have first of all, to be organized ourselves, keep together, be ready to oppose the Nazis. For instance, after the 28th of October, we had a decision of the underground, of the all the the the underground, the Zionist underground was called \_\_\_\_\_ Kovno. \_\_\_\_\_ the the letters, the initials as \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ as you know, the Hebrew...in English to translate it is, in in in distress, in in in uh...not sulk. You are in a very hard position. You cannot move. You are surrounded and you are in in in in in a uh in a very bad situation, let's say...and uh the \_\_\_\_\_, we called \_\_\_\_\_ always to be on the alert, to tell us, to signal us whatever they know in their dwellings or in their working places, what they have heard and what they know, to bring us the news, so we used to concentrate after the day of work when they used to come back from the works from the places, they used to to report to us on what they have heard that day.

Q: Where would you meet, Avraham? Would you meet...be hidden someplace...? How many of you would be...?

A: We...we...first of all, there was only small, very small \_\_\_\_\_, four, five. Not more. Six was the maximum, so we used to...we meet either in a a in a in one's dwelling or somewhere on the vegetable gardens as if we are working those vegetables. Sometimes we meet in the center of the village because...or or in the or in the cellar of the of the uh pharmacy. Because for us was...we were cut off of the outer world. This was exactly the very meaning of the Germans by setting up the ghettos. First of all to keep us behind

barbed wire. We cannot go out. We cannot have any contact. We didn't have telephones, and later when we had telephones, it was also for the...only for the inner...inner communication between the pol...Jewish police and the and the and the German commando of the ghetto for even...for his convenience, not for the convenience of the Jews. Or there was a a telephone in the Jewish committee, in the labor department, and so on, for the convenience of the Germans, not for us. But we knew to exploit also these. For instance, the telephone...there was at the gate, there was a service police station at the at the ghetto gate, Jewish police station. For the other side, outer side, there was a German's and the Lithuanian's police. Inside there was the Jewish police, so whatever...if...whenever some top official of the Gestapo or of the Wermacht or the stock commissar, entered the ghetto immediately they signal by phone to us. In the Jewish committee it was myself. In the labor, we had another man. In the police, we had another man and this used to come \_\_\_\_\_. Immediately...if there...for instance, when Roka came into the ghetto, we were...the the streets were cleaned up. Everybody run away and then so we used first of all together use or information on what is transpiring in the various places of work in the ghetto and what they have heard and there were rumors more than than facts, you see, but even the rumors for us...we...not having any kind of communication with another city. There were three ghettos in Lithuania. The Kovno ghetto, the Vilna ghetto and the \_\_\_\_ ghetto, but there was no communication so the first work what the Zionist underground have done, to establish a communication between the Kovno ghetto underground and the Vilna ghetto underground.

Q: How did you do that? What did you do?

A: Oh, this is a good question. You are a very intelligent interviewer, I will tell you. So you see, there was a Jewish...Jewish worker group...worker...who worked at the railway station in Kovno, and we the the head of this group, usually a group of workers...in in the terminology of the ghetto it was a brigade...a brigade, and the head of the brigade was \_\_\_\_\_ Silverman (ph), who was a member of the underground, so we called him and told him to listen. You are working at the railway station. There are going trains day in, day out from Kovno to Vilna. Try to bribe one of the workers of the of the railway...of the...of the...who are working on the train, yes, so as to get that you could send some letters from Kovno ghetto to the leaders of the underground in the in the Vilna ghetto, whom we knew. And this Silverman succeeded in bribing the man who drive...the driver of the train...how do you call it...the driver of the train...the loco...

Q: Conductor...

A: What?

Q: Conductor of the locomotive. You see? And first I remember he came, right, give me...so we gave him ten letters. Each one of us knew one or two from the Zionist, previous Zionist leaders in the in the in Vilna. For instance, I knew \_\_\_\_\_ was from the youth Zionist general youth movement, so I sent to him a letter. The others sent to

their...to their respective \_\_\_ in Vilna and we and the same Silverman gave these ten letters. Of course, it's not easy to take out ten letters from the ghetto because if they would find...if they would check him on the date when he goes out as head of the brigade and finds the letters, it was the end of him and of all the brigade, so you you you had to be very, very careful. But he succeeded and he and he he bribed this conductor of the locomotive, of the train, and uh he was supposed to give these to one of the underground in the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ was from the, you know, the name. He was one of the leaders of the Vilna ghetto and the Glaserman (ph) was the leader of the \_\_\_\_\_, so each one sent to his man in Vilna, and luckily the next day, he brought letters from them. This was something that opened our eyes and our minds and you couldn't know but of course this was...the the letters were restricted to several lines only because...

Q: What did they say?

A: Yes. So first of all, we are telling them in a in a in a very...in our own language to make them understand that we are trying with them...saying that we are organized, that we are trying to keep \_\_\_ together, and from time to time we meet, and we are trying...we are trying to keep the the mood of \_\_\_\_\_ and give them the feeling they are...they are not alone. They...its give them to renew the sense of belonging so that gives them also more security, more defense, that in case something happens, they know they have to...they...as ever a man to whom they can go and open their arms and their pains and and their problems and so on, and there were, believe me, everyone had a full heart and pains

himself or his family or his parents, or his friends, and that we want to get a \_\_\_\_\_. We didn't say it like that. We want to get from you a \_\_\_\_\_. You understand? And we didn't have to put the more words in the in the few lines that we wrote because we were...had to be ready that it will be detained and then go and explain. And so it was that we got first...the first contact with the with the Zionist underground in the ghetto of Vilna, and we developed later on also to send letters from families from the ghetto of Kovno to families in the ghetto of Vilna.

Q: Avraham, tell me what those first letters from Vilna that came to you...you told us what your letters were to them. What were those first letters to you...?

A: First of all, he tells me, for instance, this is what he said. First of all I am very pleased to hear that you survived, that you live, that you are among the living. Second, I am the same...I am pleased to tell you that I and my wife and my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law and \_\_\_\_ and this, this and this is already...this is in Siberia and this is there and this was killed. The names of the leaders, the former leaders, you see...this is what \_\_\_\_, and even \_\_\_\_ of who is and who is not, and believe me, this was most important. You see? And then uh in the next letters...already we started always your problem...food or is the problem of labor, what are the the possibilities of uh of uh fight...\_\_\_\_...we didn't say fight...\_\_\_\_...you see. We knew...we want to know...again I must say a...quote a Russian saying. They say a man...a a a bird that is in distress knows exactly how to keep a most either shout or cry very aloud the form out express ourselves and tell what...what...what



is...what is their interfering or what is their desire, you see, so the situation brought about to bring our news that we wanted to transfer to the...to the \_\_\_\_\_ in Vilna, was in a very, very masked vocabulary, and we used to say the next time, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, whatever it is, you see, and we used then the slang or just uh new words that wouldn't mean to anything...to any...nothing to anybody but for us it was understood \_\_\_\_\_ Gestapo we didn't mention the name Gestapo would be in another form \_\_\_\_\_ of this.

Q: Did you share information about the deportations or the liquidation of the ghettos?

A: Of course. Of course. This was the first thing which we have done, and we wanted for them to \_\_\_\_\_. Then we wanted to know...certain family when they started to write, they wanted to know about their members...there were certain families that part of them were in the Vilna ghetto and part of them were in the Kovno ghetto. For instance, my wife, her brother, two brothers were in Vilna, and this was the first time that she learned that that he is alive while the other brother was killed, and this was the first time, and the very first uh communications. So when more more letters were sent and we had to distribute the letters to to the to the inmates of the ghetto, we used the...we had an office of statistics in the ghetto, administration. We didn't speak about it but uh statistics. We...they wrote every birth and every passing away from the ghetto, every marriage. We had marriage in the ghetto. Life went on. Of course, a good...there was a bar mitzvah in the ghetto and uh and I want to tell you...I must tell it. Once I was sitting in my office in the Jewish committee and all of a sudden I got a call from the workshop, big workshops in the

ghetto. We had big workshops that worked eighteen hundred, mostly women who could not go out of work from outside the ghetto, and there were a carpentry and tailorship and and plumbers and uh and uh and uh washing, cleaning...all for the German army, but we...and so so uh the German supervisor of the ghetto used to come to the Jewish committee or he used to come straight to the workshop. There for...he liked very much to go to the workshop because he could order a suit for himself, a pair of boots, from his wife he ordered dresses. It didn't cost him money, you know, sent, so all of a sudden I get...I get a call from the workshop, big workshops uh that I should immediately come. Miller is there. Miller was the deputy \_\_\_\_\_ commissar who were at the supervision of the ghetto and when Miller says I should come immediately, I have to come immediately. So on my way from the Jewish Committee to the ghetto workshops, I passed by a small lane, a street... it's not a street...it is a a...

Q: An alley?

A: Huh?

Q: An alley?

A: An alley. Very tiny alley and one takes me by the by the sleeve and he says, \_\_\_\_ come in and and doesn't wait I should come in. He directs me in inside in a \_\_\_\_\_ and the and the...so I told him, \_\_\_\_\_...he was \_\_\_\_\_. He was a Haisidic (ph). In Lithuania, we are

not Haisidic. In Lithuania, mostly...ninety-nine percent were not Haisidic...opposing, but this were several Haisidic. One of them was in the ghetto and he directs me, and I said \_\_\_\_\_, Miller is waiting for me out in the in the workshop. He doesn't want to listen. First of all he says sit down. We have \_\_\_\_\_ today, and he \_\_\_\_\_, you know. It's unbelievable...it was something that incredible. Sit down. You have to make the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. Be blest to God for sitting in the \_\_\_\_\_, you see. This is first of all, and second, and I...\_\_\_\_\_, let me go. The Miller is waiting for me. Wait a minute. Wait, you wait and uh you are...you know you have to to make \_\_\_\_\_. What is \_\_\_\_\_. My son is bar mitzvah today, so you have a mitzvah to to drink \_\_\_\_\_ for his wealth, and I say he'll kill me. \_\_\_\_\_, you...what can I...what will I say to \_\_\_\_\_. He said \_\_\_\_\_. May those who go on a mission of good, the God keeps him and preserves him and will will not give him any harm. This is...and until I said the \_\_\_\_\_, until I said the \_\_\_\_\_, and (laughter) so he let me go and he \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: (Pause) Do you want some water, Avraham? Here. (Pause) What's upsetting you?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: What's upsetting you?

A: So finally he left me off and I came to the uh to the uh to the...

Q: The workshop?

A: To the workshop and I'm (laughter) getting hell. He says, you dirty Jew, do as \_\_\_\_ German uh uh \_\_\_\_\_. As I \_\_\_\_\_ from the party. He was a party man. I have to wait for you Jew \_\_\_\_\_. Where where have you been? I said Miller, I just fell because on the way I run and while running I fell and I got hurt in my in my leg, so I had...I had to to to to...that's why I was late. You see, I find something out but you see, in the most hard times of the ghetto, the spirit, the devotion, the heritage, it is \_\_\_\_\_ today and you have to the say the blessing \_\_\_\_\_ so you can say that you fulfilled the mitzvah (ph) of sitting in a \_\_\_\_\_ and make the blessing, and this...my son is bar mitzvah, so I have to drink...it was...most certainly it was not vodka, but it was something of...there was...I certainly didn't care very much but I was overwhelmed of the spirit. This is, my friend, part of the resistance. It's nothing but revolt against the German order, strict order to press us, to dehumanize us. We shouldn't think of bar mitzvah and we shouldn't think of holy days, and we should think only only slavery, work, on the very hard work that we should think only how to get another piece of bread and not think of \_\_\_\_\_ and not think of holy days and not think of bar mitzvah and so forth and so on. This is the day in, day out resistance of the common man, the inmates inside the ghetto, and this is what kept them alive, because \_\_\_\_\_ is a great meaning. \_\_\_\_\_ is when the...the Jews were in the desert and they had no place to live and they built tents and they were lived forty years but they live in tents where they lived. So we certainly can have \_\_\_\_\_ hope that one day to finish and

this was what meant this \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_. And uh it it keeps...it moves me so innerly to the bottom of my heart when I think of it.

Q: We can stop now. Do you want some more water? (Pause)

A: But of course we had much more serious things to do. We...the four of us or more precisely the five of us, the leaders of the underground, before they found us, \_\_\_\_\_ leadership, we made a final decision...after the 28th of October, no more respond to orders of concentrating on one place of all the...of the all the ghetto or not even part of it. No more. And to resist, to oppose and really it happened so that I think a month or six weeks afterwards, there was the order to report on the very same square. They need five hundred workers to be sent to Riga (ph), from the Kovno ghetto to the Riga ghetto. We believed no more what they say because they said the five hundred, they were to to the archive and they were killed. They said they need to to make order to divide between those who get more bread and those who get less bread, and they killed ten thousand so this \_\_\_ that we had no confidence whatsoever and we made up our minds no more response to...and then they tried...they started to grab people from the street, and they could grab three hundred because most of the people from the ghetto were at work outside the ghetto and when they didn't succeed in getting the people, so they took these three hundred and brought them to the place, to the democratic square. I went there and saw the sight. At that time there was \_\_\_\_\_ and the supervisor of the ghetto in \_\_\_\_\_. He was a mass murderer, and he...all of a sudden I hear that he

says maybe those will want to volunteer to walk to walk to Riga should make five steps ahead, and I was sure nobody will will go, but there were five who stepped ahead, and finally I disclosed that these five were insane or very...not insane but crazy people. For instance, I...one of them was a former high officer of the Lithuanian army and I thought what what...\_\_\_\_\_ was his name...so I said \_\_\_\_\_, why did you volunteer? Do you know...are you sure that you want to to work in Riga? Don't you know what happened with the five hundred. He says he's \_\_\_\_\_. Kovno alone must know that I am a crazy man. \_\_\_\_\_. Let also Riga know that I am \_\_\_\_\_ and this only showed you who you are talking with, and also this type of people were in the ghetto. Now this was one thing. Fir...second, for...when Elkes was going in town to meet the chief of the Gestapo, I always tried to escort him...from a distance, of course, just in case something happens. Now we...we...our clandestine uh uh \_\_\_\_\_ that lasted for five months and then they were caught and the man, \_\_\_\_\_ was put in the Gestapo. He was always almost killed. They arrested the the the main clerks in the Jewish Committee...first of all the secretary of the Jewish Committee, Berenstein (ph). He had not the slightest idea because I have done nothing. They arrested the chief of the statistic bureau although he had no idea but his assistant deputy. They arrested the main uh the main uh clerk \_\_\_\_\_ of the of the office of the altestenrat. They had not the slightest idea but Elkes turned heaven to earth and earth to heaven until he got them free. You see, and this was...but he was not allowed to be any more the secretary of the of the Jewish committee and so I became the secretary in May '42. Then when we had in course of our correspondence we were told that they have partisan groups in the forests around Vilna and this was far behind...from Kovno more

than a hundred kilometers, and that they will be ready to assist if we send a group to those forests so they should come to Vilna and from Vilna they...so we had a contact and then we started very seriously in training our movement, our Zionist underground movement, in in uh weapons and we had among our \_\_\_\_\_ two officers who were officers in the Lithuanian army and were very well-trained in in in ammunition, and they were the instructors that instructed these small groups, of course, in two, in three...not in always in the same place. Always in some other place. You understand? And they...I think I told you yesterday that the first gun that we bought was in 1941 in the beginning when when the \_\_\_\_\_, the teacher...master of the Hebrew school and \_\_\_\_\_, a lawyer from Charlotte (ph), that I knew them very well before...they came to me and said we'll...we have a possibility to buy a gun. Could you provide the money for it? And I went to Garfunkle, the Deputy and he said what are you talking about. It will be a terrible risk for all the ghetto. So I didn't give in. I went to Dr. Elkes. Dr. Elkes didn't say another word. He says go...go to the treasurer and tell him that I ordered to give the money uh to to to \_\_\_\_\_ yes, and \_\_\_\_\_ and this was the first gun we had in the ghetto, but this really was the first but not the last one. And then, little by little, we used to try and how can we bring in weapons to the ghetto. So first of all, \_\_\_\_\_ worked in many places, workshops where they had...especially those who...to repair German weapons in the in German units, to repair weapons, so he is planning to steal and and how did they steal? For instance, they were about thirty or forty people working in that place where they...you know, where the ammunition stores and the Germans, for them it was a uh a

just a lost uh let the Jews try to repair it, so each one of them used to take a part of a gun in the pocket, and when they used to come to the ghetto, they...

Q: Put it together.

A: But to pass with a part of it is also...it was not so...believe me, it was not so easy. Unfortunately, one of our best men was caught with a weapon. He...he dared to take a weapon himself home, and they thrash (ph) him and they killed him on the spot. So we paid very high price, very, very high price, but uh when the...yes...and now I want...when the first group of the Zionist underground was ready to go to the woods, and we knew that there will be the...yes...and we knew that there was a \_\_\_\_ from the Soviet Union in the woods, a top uh officer of the Red Army who trained them and who supervised them, so we knew that they are going in a place where there will be a communist surrounding and there will be also many non-Jews. It was very important for me that they in their leisure time could have talks about Zionism, about \_\_\_\_ Israel, about the events in Jewish history, sing Palestine songs, so I came to some let's say understanding...we didn't sign any contract... with the the communist leader in the ghetto who later as I said they had also their own underground. I said look Heim (ph)...he was a very...he he was an idealist. He was a communist, but he was also one of the circle, of the cultural circle that we met once in two weeks, you see. He was also a writer, so I tell him, Heim, I am sending...we are sending the Zionists, first Zionist group to the partisan woods. I want you to to see to it that in their leisure time they could sit together and hold conversations.



When there is a real Jewish holiday, they could just mark it. They would sing Hebrew songs and they could tell each another, so he says Avraham, of course, of course. We are want to convert them to communism. This is what he said. He was a very honest man and I believed every word that he told me because he was a very, very honest man. But fortunately they came to the to the Vilna ghetto. From there they brought them to the forest, but then a month later I got word that they...not they were to mention Hebrew and not a song of \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, and not mention \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, leave alone prayers and so on. You understand? And I was very much uh disappointed. Yes. We...when the...when in 1943 when the the communists raised also and and organized their their resistance in the ghetto, aided by Heim \_\_\_\_\_, so we made an agreement among us to join forces. For the Germans a Jew is a Jew, whether he is a communist or whether it is religious or whether it is combat or whether...whatever it is, so uh we had a uh joint command. Two from the Zionist underground and two from the communist underground. I together with three \_\_\_\_\_ represented the Zionist underground in the joint command, but after this incident, I said I'm...I know it's not you but we'll...I know you cannot do anything about it but I joined a communist...a command joint with communists. I I I resign. I cannot...it's against my my concept of life. I am a Zionist from early years, and then came in...instead of me came in \_\_\_\_\_ from the the pharmacist. See. There were problems. There were problems. They \_\_\_ their own problems. There were the problem of \_\_\_\_\_ to to...when they when they went a group of thirty, forty, yet to a woods, they had to have clothes. They had to have overcoats. They had to have everything. And how did we do it? We had the Jewish workshops in the ghetto, the big workshops in the ghetto, so we used to

send them to work there. Those who were the first to go to the woods, they should go and work in the place where they repair the German uniforms, see, and then they used to adjust to \_\_\_\_\_. Also, we needed German uniforms just to...you know, as a mask so there they used to take, to measure (laughter) and not plainly fabricated but to measure.

Everyone was equipped with everything. We just stole from the German stores and from the German repair and it worked very good. The...unfortunately, the the main man who led the groups from the Kovno ghetto to the Vilna ghetto to the forest was the leader of the communist \_\_\_\_\_ and uh he used to to dress himself as a as a Wermacht officer, you see, with the all equipment and he came to take a group out of the ghetto, all the partisans, and we hired...was a truck and the and the driver was also dressed in German uniform, so that they came into the ghetto. There was at the ghetto gate there was \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: How did you get a truck?

A: What?

Q: How did you get a truck?

A: Oh, for money you get everything. You see? So we we had the money. I want to tell you...in the ghetto \_\_\_\_\_ I perhaps the only Jewish committee that worked together with the underground. They helped them. They didn't work together but they helped them.

And they...for reasons once so he he was...I want to finish with him. So he used to take the lead and bring them to the forest and come back. It took him, of course, a week, two weeks, so he used to were a German officer. The driver is a German and here were the Jews, workers, so they take...went through clearly through the gate, mounted the uh the truck and went to to the for...to the woods. Some...one day in a such movements, I was going to the city with a permit because as the secretary of the Jewish committee, but Heim \_\_\_\_\_, the head of the all the communists, he used to go in clandestine. He had with him a gun always in in the pocket and one day he was caught by the Germans, and he run away from them. In one \_\_\_\_\_ he jump from one place to the other one and finally they caught him and they brought him to the to the Gestapo. He did not disclose his identity. He never said that he was from the ghetto even. You understand? Caught. And nothing came out of all \_\_\_\_\_. He was killed and this is...he he died as a hero, fighting with his gun against the Germans, in town. So this is...gives you...I can...I can speak about the underground as much as you want but one...one thing I want to say about the part of the Jewish committee in the underground. One...we didn't have the money to to to rent a truck. We didn't find the...the guy...so we came to the \_\_\_\_\_ to send a group to the woods, so I came to to the...Dr. Elkes and I told him, look we need to send out a group of twenty-five and would you permit us to use the wagons...there were wagons in the ghetto...to bring firewood, to bring uh all kinds of supplies from outside to the ghetto. They will go in the morning and they'll come in the evening, the wagons, so we took five wagons...three wagons...excuse me. Three wa...five...five, of course, and they went out and they didn't come back in the evening and they didn't come back the next morning and

they didn't come the next evening. It was a terrible...because where are the wagons? Why don't they fulfill...why don't they come to to town to take the bread, the flour, the firewood. It was a mess, so Elkes said that they uh the something happened after apparently the the wagons after the horses are not well, all kinds of \_\_\_\_\_, and then only at the...well, well, look...if it would be disclosed they all, the altestenrat would be killed but now no excuse whatsoever, no pardon and we didn't sleep the nights. \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_, from the leadership of the partisans and myself especially because we were in close contact with the with the Jewish committee and because of the relationship between me and Dr. Elkes and he agreed to do it, so I had sleepless nights. Don't...don't envy me. In what a position I was these three days. Terrible. And we were on the outlook...they were on the outlook and far away we sent outside the ghetto at the bridge that contact...connects with the Kovno and the and the Slobodka uh and the Slobodka suburb just to see may...if they they are there or something happened to them. We didn't know what happened. Maybe they were caught. And only after we felt...they...after midnight they came back worn out, torn out terribly because they...it was not a journey to go...you have to...you have to stop certain places when you see a German uh...let's say on the road a German squad is going or a Lithuanian partisan or whatever, so that's why it took them very much...because they were succeeded in hiding on on crucial moments on the on the road, and that's why it took three days that took us out the the all all inside...what went inside went outside and you know, there were two rabbis in the in the...I mentioned Rabbi Schumuckler and Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_. They really went and prayed in the synagogue especially for \_\_\_\_\_. You see? So this was a very...nothing \_\_\_\_\_ at all. Not \_\_\_\_\_.

And I must in two words also to mention, we had the confiscation of books which was a terrible...it was aktion not of men but of books, but books. We are the \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: When did that happen?

A: It happened in February 1942. There came a special envoy from Rosenberg \_\_\_\_\_. Rosenberg was the minister for the occupied territories and he was the man that ordered that all books, all printed material that are in the ghetto should be confiscated and taken out and sent to Germany, so uh when they came uh to from the Rosenberg \_\_\_\_\_, Dr. Behnker (ph)...it was in '42. I remember it until today. I'll remember it to the rest of my life. This Dr. Behnker who came to the ghetto and he came to the Jewish committee and said all books should be...and we should write announcement all over the ghetto that they should bring in certain places, concentrate...concentration places to bring the books to be delivered to the to the Germans, and all the wagons of the ghetto were mobilized to bring the books from the various parts of the ghetto to the to be handed over to the Germans, so in the underground, \_\_\_\_\_, we decided the very...most valuable books we want to to rescue, so we mobilized the teachers which will accompany the wagons and take out from the wagons valuable books that they consider of historic value \_\_\_\_\_ and put it in a separate wagon which was accompanied and they would...little children...the..you know, the \_\_\_\_\_, the messengers, so they were not...and you see, and they...and this the wagon where they stood, took these wagons and they used to send it to...bring it to some hiding place for us. I knew that the the yeshiva \_\_\_\_\_ had a very big library and needless to

say for hundreds of years, so I went to the to the to the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ and I told him, Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_, you know that there is an order for the Germans to deliver all the books and uh we are trying to rescue the most important books so may I ask you please, pick up to take out from your library...there were about thirty thousand volumes...thirty thousand volumes of the Yeshiva library for ages...take out the books, valuable books...

END OF TAPE 5

A: ...so he says brother, what are you talking about? All the books of the yeshiva are very important, the most important. So I said, I was myself in the yeshiva in my young days and I know that even in the yeshiva there are books more valuable and less valuable. We have to rescue what we can. We cannot ask the thirty thousand, but we can rescue perhaps five hundred or six hundred. \_\_\_\_\_. So he says...he says \_\_\_\_\_ we will hide ourselves. We know how to hide. If you hide them, they will get our books. I didn't succeed to persuade him...his stubbornness, you know, and the religious Jews, the more they are religious, the more they are stubborn, and you cannot fight in the common language. There is no sense. Common sense. So I told him, Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_, I am very sorry that you don't take advantage of the opportunity of rescuing at least the most important books we have. Go home. Go home. Don't worry about our books. We will worry ourselves. We will rescue all our books, not the part of it. The next day was the was the uh the books had to be delivered and from all parts of the ghetto the wagons took books

and there is...one of the pictures of the children with the wagon they are go, you see, and while we are \_\_\_\_\_, I'm...I was...I was the liaison officer between the Jewish Committee and Dr. Behnker from the Rosenberg \_\_\_\_\_ and before, the day before, he wanted me to show him the the \_\_\_\_\_ from the ghetto, the most important thing what is can be seen in the ghetto, the sights...(laughter). So in the ghetto there was a synagogue that one day the Germans ordered...

Q: OK. Hold on Avraham. We're going to pick up. They have to change tapes again.

A: Good.

Q: OK. Uh let's pick up with the story where we left off on the books and the...

A: Yes. So uh the Germans ordered that all...to bring all cats and hounds in from the ghetto into one Jewish ancient synagogue, the most ancient synagogue in Slobodka, and bring all the cats so people brought every cat \_\_\_\_\_. What did the Germans do? When all the cats and and hounds were there in the synagogue, they killed them, but they didn't allow to take out the the corpses of the of the of the killed cats and hounds, just to make miserable the holy place of Jews, the holy...holy sanctuary of the of the Jews. And one of...just to to to cause terrible pain, because for us a synagogue is a holy place and to bring in in itself cats and...is already a crime but to kill the cats, the cats and hounds and leave them around them stinking for months and months...this was a thing that we

couldn't...for for miles you hear the stink so he...when he told me that he wants me to bring him, to show him the most valuable and sighting of the ghetto, I took him to the synagogue and I and when I came to the entrance of the synagogue, he orders me that I should go in front. So I said no, uh Mr...Dr. Behnker. I cannot go in. The entrance is free. You can go and see what for yourself, and I didn't go in and regardless of his command and you know, this is...it's a mess. He he could kill me on the spot but I said no, here I stay. The doors are open. Everything is open and you can see for yourself and when we...when he went out, and this is a man of culture...this is a man of of of German culture from Berlin which is...it's the capital of world culture, so he understood. He says yeah. \_\_\_\_\_. Yes, I understand you. I am...he understands me. He told...Dr. Behnker told...said to me when he went out from the synagogue, he says he understands me why I didn't...why I couldn't go in. So then the next day we...I was sitting with Dr. Elkes in the Jewish Committee. Only Dr. Elkes was...it was in the morning. It was ten o'clock, and we sat both on the sofa. He didn't sit at his desk. Only the two of us. I didn't want to show up because I had to stay and get reports...only the books had been rescued and...you see and give orders from there go in. I even ordered that we should go and try to talk to \_\_\_\_\_. Maybe in the last minute...no. But while we are sitting in the room with Dr. Elkes, all of a sudden the door cranks out with the boots...with the boots and the body of of...and comes in a a high fat German, red as a as a \_\_\_\_\_, a beer \_\_\_\_\_. Those who drink much beer...this is how red their faces, and not saying anything jumps in...\_\_\_\_\_ we were seeing him for the first time and the second one was was Dr. Behnker whom I knew and announce him and he says, \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_, your head is in \_\_\_\_\_. It



means that you take off my head, and in this moment comes into the room \_\_\_\_\_, escorted by the commander of the ghetto, the German commander of the ghetto, not not a plain sentry. \_\_\_\_\_ was pale like you know, and then I immediately understood what happened. When I saw \_\_\_\_\_ escorted by the commander, \_\_\_\_\_ disclosed their...the the library of the yeshiva. What did they do? They hid hided the the...all thirty thousand books in their horse stable. They thought the Germans are so, you know, clean they will not go to the stable, just \_\_\_\_\_. They looked...the underground has also to have brains. You have to plan. You have to think and to understand the the Nazis who had time enough to learn their mentality, so they disclosed the whole thirty thousand books of the library of the...of the ancient library of of the ghetto and they take, of course, immediately Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ so Dr. Elkes stood up and he said, excuse me, gentlemen. I am here the the the chairman of the Jewish Committee. I am the overjuden in their language. I am responsible. I personally am responsible for all what's going on in the ghetto, so if there is something, talk to me. You see? So he says you don't know me. You will know me. He was...I am the new Deputy of the \_\_\_\_\_ who came instead of Jordan (ph), the former Jordan was the supervisor of the ghetto. \_\_\_\_ Weidman (ph) his name, and you will learn to know me, you dirty Jews, uh crooks, thieves. What \_\_\_\_\_, and you...points out at my finger, and this your heads shaking. It means that they want to kill us, so what happened if I would be a religious Jew, I would say it was something incredible. Dr. Elkes is a doctor. In first place he's a physician and he's a first-class physician, and as soon as Dr. Elkes saw that Dr. Behnker is getting so excited, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ escorted \_\_\_\_\_ I am responsible for this for this for the

library of the of the...\_\_\_\_\_. You are responsible for this for this hiding the books. I'm responsible for hiding the books, but this was no joke. It was no joke. So uh and when he got so hot and crying, crying, crying so Dr. Elkes sees in his eyes, in the eyes of Dr. Behnker that there is something symptoms of a of before an attack...attack of epilepsy, epilepsy. He looked at him and he says...so he gets up and says, \_\_\_\_\_, I...I am...I am the head of the comm...of the Jewish community but I am also a doctor and it is my duty as a doctor to tell you, please calm down, sit down on the sofa, take off your belt. I can...I can see symptoms in your eyes, some symptoms, warning symptoms. He says, what warning symptoms? What they talking about...? You know. He said, I am a doctor and what I can see is in your eyes are signals of a immediate attack of epilepsy, so please let's...first of all. He says what they talking about...epilepsy. I have nothing to with epilepsy but I have a friend of mine who was a...suffering of this illness, so tell me, tell me, tell what you have to do. So Dr. says before I tell you, order that \_\_\_\_\_ and Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ be out of the room. I cannot talk to you in their presence. You see? So he says, out you go. (Laughter) He goes out of the room and Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ and the commandant of the ghetto didn't go out with us. He he he remained here because he's ordered that you should stay here. Behnker ordered. So first of all, Dr. Elkes \_\_\_\_\_ out a little bit aside of the danger, you see, and he says to him, and I can hear every word when Dr. Elkes speaks to him. He says, a doctor...take off your belt. Free your your your collar. Take off your your boots. Lay down. I'll open the window, so you have more fresh air. And then he starts and he tells him, he said and then in minutes...he ordered the commandant of the ghetto...that's why he didn't let him go out with us \_\_\_\_\_ and then ordered

immediately from the from the headquarters of the Gestapo brought a car, an ambulance. The ambulance pulled inside the ghetto and they took away Behnker and and \_\_\_\_\_ and the commander and all went away. The rest of \_\_\_\_\_. I'm telling you...so Dr. Elkes goes out and he tells me, \_\_\_\_\_. Behnker has now...his own worry is to worry about his health, not about you and will not think about you and he was taken straight to Berlin. He wasn't left here. And then because it's true I I...a...a...and so we got this uh Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_. He couldn't meet me at my eyes. To tell you the truth, I couldn't look at his eyes too but at that time it was not to look in his eyes or not to look in his eyes. We were saved all alive, just simple. And \_\_\_\_\_ stood aside and he said the prayers before \_\_\_\_\_ you see, that one was recused of this so he says the prayer, \_\_\_\_\_. And \_\_\_\_\_ and he prayed all the time. You couldn't stop him. Prayed all the time that \_\_\_\_\_ saved us from the ends of the...it was the really a miracle and this is what I said all the time, \_\_\_\_\_ did...was a miracle. And for him it was clear, and you know, this ended the story of the...this I \_\_\_\_\_ the story of the books and now will you want me to talk about...

Q: Avraham...can you tell me about the 9th Fort? The activities at the 9th Fort? What happened at the 9th Fort? We have to do it briefly because...

A: So...the 9th Fort was built two hundred years by the czars of Russia...

Q: No...no. We need...we need...not \_\_\_\_\_. We need to know what happened, the actions.

A: Yes. So the 9th Fort in the time of the Germans used...was their...they they made caves...dugged out big big uh big uh...

Q: Ditches...?

A: Big uh...

Q: Holes...?

A: Holes...uh pits for thousands, for three thousand and there they brought the Jews from the ghetto, from each aktion they brought them straight to the 9th Fortress. They led them in below the surface and there they used to bring them in...hundreds...kill hundreds and then and another hundred above the the bodies of the...and it happened so that the upper part of the bodies were...people that didn't get killed but they did...others the bullet didn't reach, so they they had terrible pain until they and they and they passed away and there was one...one boy of twelve that his mother kept him around her arms and she kept so that he should...can breath, so the mother was dead. The child, the twelve years old child, remained alive and it it's again an unbelievable story. It it...when when the when the aktion was over, you see, he just squeezed out from the from the up...he was in the upper

part of the...went out in the field and went and escaped from the Fortress through the fields far away...the highway, but they're far away. They didn't go...and and they didn't expect him, a child, a boy...and he came into the ghetto. He was the first one to tell about the killings in the 9th Fortress, but we didn't believe him. First of all, it's a twelve child. How couldn it happen? The fort is all around...the all four parts is with high towers of guards with all the time swinging around lights and they are armed in each and every in every in every tower up up a \_\_\_\_\_, there is a guard and a machine gun. Not only with guns. He succeed just because it was...this is the only explanation I can give and you could could give...the boy came, thanks to the mother who kept him so and she wanted that he should have enough space to breathe and to live and so he remained alive and he and he...I \_\_\_ brief...he was the only one we didn't believe. Later on, there was a...all the time groups were being killed or were not killed in the...but sometimes they used to be in the Gestapo and only then brought to the 9th Fortress and then killed.

Q: Groups coming from the ghetto?

A: From the ghetto? Yes. There were also people...uh Jews were caught in black marketing. They used to take them not even back to the ghetto. They used to take them to the 9th Fortress and kill them. So uh so uh but after the 20...the 28th of October, this was the biggest and we were told by the...the pits were were digged by Soviet prisoners of war, \_\_\_\_\_ and uh and one of these prisoners of war was Captain \_\_\_\_\_ whose name was the czar \_\_\_\_\_ and he was a prisoner of war in \_\_\_\_\_ and two years they didn't

disclose until one day they took him to bath and then they discovered that he is a Jew. All the time they said he is a kozak (ph) \_\_\_\_\_ and they brought him straight from the prisoners of war camp to the 9th Fortress, and then it was already 1940...1943 when the Germans were in retreat, so they wanted to...gave the order to dig out from the pits the corpses \_\_\_\_\_ burned them, put them on fire, so that there remained no...no sign of the cruelty and and the murder, so there were I think sixty-four uh Jewish...sixty-three Jews and one Polish woman...sixty-four, and they were in \_\_\_\_\_ five, six in each \_\_\_\_\_. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a cell, very strong, be...below, again below the surface and they used to...used to take them out of the \_\_\_\_\_ in the morning and they used to work while chained. Their feet were in chains while they were digging the the the \_\_\_\_\_...the the corpses. And then Captain \_\_\_\_\_ came. They put a a a row of corpses and a row of wood. They put uh gasoline on the wood and fire, put on fire, and then again a a row of corpses and a row of wood. It was a terrible thing, but before putting them on the fire, they used to take out the golden teeth. They would take out...you see. Some uh some uh they're buried with their clothes, so they used to find sometimes valuables and so on...two kilograms of gold these sixty-four, brought to the ghetto after after...I'll tell you they escaped which was a a legendary escape, so uh \_\_\_\_\_ said from this fort, none...no one of us will will be...can go out alive unless we try to escape. So he told them that from the fortress is a hundred and fifty years nobody escaped, but he was a specialist of fortifications and he just knew how...to cut a long story short, very short...he blocked out a plan and he led all the sixty-four, all the sixty-four on the night of Christmas, on the 25th of December, 1943. They bribed the...they they took...of course, they killed the the watchman and they killed other

ones. Since we are short in time they succeeded to take out all the sixty-four. They prepared ladders from from from from \_\_\_\_\_, you know, to...because the...there was...the outer wall was six meters high, so they prepared the ladders from from and in order not to then they should not be recognized so they went in groups of five, six and keeping aside a white linen so it was the snow and the white linen so they...they were not...nobody could see them. You understand? And this is the way they reached the outer wall and they and they passed over and when they all were outside...outside which for the first time in the history of the fortresses that they escaped. The group...the Jews...the...those who were from the ghetto, they said we have to come to the ghetto and in the ghetto the underground will bring us to the Vilna forest. You know, cause the time they were going was strongly opposed. We just went out from behind...from behind the walls to go into \_\_\_\_\_ but he went to it and when he came, so I was wakened up immediately at 2:30 in the midnight and find \_\_\_\_\_ and we took \_\_\_\_\_, the captain, the one...the leader of the of the escape and we sat him between us. \_\_\_\_\_, she was already out of the ghetto, so we could take the key and they sat all the night by one of our...of our underground \_\_\_\_\_. And we have...all the night the story of the escape from the 9th Fortress which is a legendary story with the unbelievable, but this is the story that I heard from my...with my own eyes in the presence of \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. He passed away only a half a year ago in Vilna. I invited him to come to to to to \_\_\_\_\_ Israel. He had relatives in \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, and this is the story of \_\_\_\_\_, of the escape from the 9th...a legendary escape from the 9th Fortress. Now I have to tell you also...

Q: ....you own escape?

A: Right before that...before I must tell you about the about the the Mack story. Mack was one...a regular boy in the ghetto. He was a jeweler. When all people in the ghetto leave him all their gold and silver and money and valuables, he digged a...below the earth and he remained with two kilos of gold and coins and silver and whatever it is, and he tried to escape from the ghetto. He was in a contact with a Lithuanian group that promised him to take him through the Baltic Sea to Sweden, and paid a lot of money, but they had to go through the ghetto, so he tried...he and another...another friend of him, to go through the barbed wire. They cut down the barbed wire, he...Mack...but what...he was a very short...uh you couldn't see from afar, you see...how do you call it...

Q: You couldn't see from...short-sighted?

A: Short-sided, yes. So he caught...cut the barbed wire and they went out. He just jumped on the commander of the ghetto, Fleishman. And he...even that and this is not enough...he took out a gun from his...from his pocket and says, commandant, get away from here. Otherwise I will...I will shoot. He didn't finish the word and the and the and the commander had already his hand on his gun and everything and it was a mess in all the ghetto. Immediately all the ghetto was surrounded by machine, you know, from the Gestapo and military and police and whatever you say. The Germans brought him to the to the commander of the ghetto and they wanted him to disclose...the other one who was



with him, he retreated inside the ghetto, disappeared. And they wanted from Mack...the name of the man was Mack...and they wanted from Mack that he should disclose who was the second man that uh that retreated, that disappeared. They beat him up. It was just terrible. When when we came...so what did they do? They didn't succeed in in in in getting the name so they so they called the...as hostages took the the Jewish committee, this Garfunkle and Goldberg and Dr. Elkes was sick in bed for...he had a very hard rheumatism, so so the secretary should come, so they took me, so the three of us came, were brought and came here, were brought to the to the to the uh commander of the ghetto and the first thing that they wanted us that we should influence, impose upon Mack that he should disclose who the second was. We had an iron rule in the ghetto...not one Jew be handed over to the Germans by us. So we keep quiet. When I saw Mack in the...in the commander's... commandant's office, you couldn't recognize a person because all his head was a piece of of flesh. You hardly could see his eyes, so was he beaten, and mind you, Mack was not a member of the underground, not of the Zionist and not of the Communists. He was just a plain man, but he did not disclose...more they beaten and beaten and beaten and he didn't open his mouth, so then they said...

Q: Avraham, we have to stop here. I'm sorry. We'll have to pick up...

A: We have to pick up?

Q: We have to pick up later. I'm told that we have to stop at this...

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END OF TAPE 6

## TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Avraham, tell me, if you would, about your escape from Kovno, yours and Pnina's, and the last testament of of Elkes, of Dr. Elkes.

A: That's right. Well, I'm talking...we are talking about the escape from the ghetto and not from Kovno. It is two different things. Well, as I already mentioned before, I was one of the four founders of the Zionist underground movement which was a resistance, and we we...there prepared in the very end when the when the ghetto is...before liquidating the ghetto, the leaders will escape to the woods, to the partisan groups, and this was the planning. It was a matter of timing when should we escape from the ghetto and this was a very important question...which one of the four leaders of the Zionist uh resistance movement were all the positions in the ghetto life, so it wasn't just a matter of once a decision. It had to be a decision with the consent of the chairman of the Jewish committee and so on. But it happened so as I also told you that I was very much engaged in this looking and finding a place of hiding for \_\_\_\_ which was then seven years. When I found such a place and the legendary escape of \_\_\_\_\_ from the ghetto, she fell very ill and when she came into the farm of hiding, it was absolutely necessary that Pnina should go there at least for a week because we couldn't bring a doctor.

Q: OK. Let me...let me back up and if you could tell us on tape that \_\_\_\_\_ was Pnina's daughter, just so we have it and and how she got to the farm.

A: Yes, yes. Well...well, \_\_\_\_\_...Pnina's first husband was killed, was murdered by the Lithuanians...they already in the first days of the outbreak of the war and Pnina went \_\_\_\_ to the ghetto with a small child of five years, her name \_\_\_\_\_...\_\_\_\_\_ less than five years, and she could bring nothing with her from home because her apartment in...a Jewish apartment, a most elegant apartment in Kovno, was taken over by German generals and they didn't let her in when she was taken to prison. All...the all the family was taken to prison. There they were separated. Her husband separated...

Q: We have all that. We have all that from...we have all that from Pnina.

Q: Anyhow, so she remained in the ghetto alone with \_\_\_\_ and uh we uh she's...Pnina was uh hiding my uh my entries in the diary and my collection of documents. I felt I must help uh \_\_\_\_, Pnina in hiding...finding a address for \_\_\_\_, to cut a long story short. Uh it was very difficult but in \_\_\_\_ I I I succeeded in finding a contact with a priest who found a place for her hiding and when I took her out from the ghetto, three times I tried and I didn't succeed. It was...it failed. There always were a a Gestapo officer or somebody else that we we...our plans failed. On the third time I succeeded in taking her out of the ghetto, but in the two first times of trying, it was winter. It was cold so she got a cold. She got a cold and when she finally reached the farm, forty-four kilometers away from Kovno...it's about eighty miles...excuse me, about forty miles...she was entirely sick, \_\_\_\_\_. And only by accident I...it's not here in the places...by accident got to know that she is ill in the farm, and I immediately went to the priest and I told him we must uh...we must give medical help \_\_\_\_\_. No doctor can be...can be brought to \_\_\_\_ to cure

her. At least Pnina would go, take along with her medicine. We had excellent doctors in the ghetto and she took along and the priest was very opposing it because it was the danger. Anyhow, I said it would have meant nothing if she would die, \_\_\_\_\_, from from illness. It's the same we didn't do nothing, so she was there but instead of being there a week, Pnina stayed there four monthses. And she worked there in the farm in all works as was she was considered as a a relative, far relative from town that she run away from Kovno from bombardments and from the war, but she was for all things and purposes worked with the with the family and she got very well acquainted with them and uh it was a woman, a widow whose husband, the boss of the farm, fell from a from a thunder...from a thunderstorm and he was buried in in in this farm, and the widow was a very good-hearted, that was very religious, and that's why the priest could talk her in that she should take the child for hiding and uh and uh then she was really happy that Pnina came because she didn't know what to...\_\_\_\_\_ was crying all the time...Momma, Momma...and uh I...as I said she lived there instead of a week, she stood there for about four, five months and then she was acquainted there...one...one...the the woman, the widow had three daughters and one son. The son was about eighteen years, but because his father was dead so he was the head of the family and around the farm and he couldn't attend school. He was illiterate and he very much wanted to learn to write and to ready, so Pnina told him, look...\_\_\_\_\_ was his name...\_\_\_\_\_, I have a man. He is a lawyer and he is a educated man and he will edu...educate you in writing Lithuanian and uh...

Q: Did this man...did this young man...you helped him. We...we do have to cut it a bit. Did you help him? Did he help you escape?

A: And then he was the one who who agreed that to to...that I should be brought and he himself prepared a special hiding place for me inside the the farm, faraway from everyone, and so I came to the farm. So one day I was surprised by from the priest for me that a wagon will be waiting for for me on the 23rd of February, 1944, for the farm. I was, as I said, prepared to go for the woods but not for the farm, but since I got such a a word from Pnina so it was nothing doing, so I had to escape from the ghetto. The night before...so I told...of course, I told Dr. Elkes about my plans, that I have to escape from the ghetto, and the the last night I spent in the house, in the tiny dwelling of Dr. Elkes, the head of the community, and his deputy Garfunkle and Mrs. Elkes which was a lady in the very full sense of the word. Just a lady, and the two people, I disclosed to them and I told them that my...the hiding place of the five crates of my diary and collection and they should know where it is but Garfunkle, the deputy, said \_\_\_\_, you cannot do it. It is already no ghetto. It's already a concentration camp. And you are going to commit suicide. Who can escape now from the ghetto? And how will you make the fifty-four kilometers? I beg of you, don't do it. It is terrible. It's dangerous. Don't you know the case of Mack. Mack was the one who was caught...they caught at the at the...when he tried to to escape through the barbed wire. He was hanged publicly. Don't you know it? You were there at night, the whole night in the Gestapo together with him in the cell. But Dr. Elkes said go. If you would be my son, I would tell you go because you are the only one who know best what expired in the ghetto. You kept a diary and you have a collection and documentation and it is...you have a mission to go and bring the knowledge to the world, to the outer world that it shall remain to the future

generations...the Germans dugged out the corpses of the sixty thousand that were killed in the 9th Fortress, so that there remain no sign of it. That's why...that's why I think...I'm sure you have courage. You have knowledge. You have the persistence and you will succeed I'm sure about it, so uh in order to encourage me more, he took out from his drawer his last will. His two children...a son, Prof...now Professor Elkes, and a daughter Sarah, were studying in London and he says here is my last will. Give it to my children. I rely upon you. You...your...your wisdom and your courage and I...what you have done in the ghetto for the three years, you have shown that you have enough power will and you'll...you'll make it, and this is what gave me the courage really to escape and it was very, very exciting for us and we embraced and we kissed each other and then I left his home, two...after midnight, two-thirty after midnight. Two hours later I was already at the main ghetto gate and there were my two friends, the...one of the most activists of the underground, Zionist resistance movement. \_\_\_\_\_ was an officer in the Lithuanian army. He trained in in in the underground and he and the second one was \_\_\_\_\_. He's now in New York. He...we called him the savior at the gate. He knew how to bribe the sentries at the gate and when one gate...one sentry will be and what sentry is good, so he fixed it all. At five o'clock in the morning when only one sentry is at the gate...they start only at six o'clock they start move from the ghetto, so you come at five o'clock in the morning and he bribed the the the sentry. He...he \_\_\_\_\_ they were on the on the...we had...at the ghetto gate there was a station of the ghetto Jewish police and of the legal department, so they were officially the ghetto, so they let me through the the gate and and then and this way I escaped from the from the from the ghetto with the wagon of another four people, allegedly to bring from the wagon uh bread for the ghetto.

They returned, of course, without me, but this is how I succeeded...succeeded to pass through the gate and then the very dangerous time when Geck was the liquidator of the ghetto, he would not spare a minute just to put a bullet himself in the \_\_\_\_\_, but when I escaped, I got known later that the Gestapo and the ghetto commander uh announced that they'll...five thousand marks they give the one who disclose where...the whereabouts Avraham \_\_\_\_ or his dead body. Dead or alive we need him. You see? And this will show you how important it was, the great help of my very close friend. \_\_\_\_\_, the policeman was was questioned at the 9th Fortress. He was the one who knew, who saw me last. Where did I go and how did I go? And they beat him to death, but he didn't say a word. Even they took one of his eyes out and then they killed him, but he didn't disclose a word. I want to tell you and when I came...when I escaped from the ghetto, I came to the priest and the priest told me the the the widow, the the the...from the farm, she is here with a wagon and two horses and I should take the wagon and the horses and I should cross the bridge that between Kovno and the and the other and the other suburb, \_\_\_\_\_, which leads to the farm where the where the...they had the farm with the widow, but the the the priest said he wouldn't want to rescue the life of the of the widow, the very good Christian woman in case they are be caught at the at the at the bridge, because on both sides of the bridge were stationed military gendarmes, and they checked each and every one, the documents and everything, so it was not very easy. I had no other choice, so and he said that we will meet two miles after the bridge, after the second part of the bridge, and when we...I came to the horses you know, and they had a very big coat as a a \_\_\_\_ and they came to the bridge. There was a Jew of \_\_\_\_\_ and because they checked and double-checked, each one will take...so I had false documents as a as a



\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, you see. Anyhow, so all of a sudden I see that one \_\_\_\_\_ Jew with his wagon and he passes by the the the sentry, the gendarme and he says heil Hitler, and he passes by and they let him go. So I say, well, wait a minute. I can also say heil Hitler. You see? So...but it was a a...to to decide in a second...this is your life or you live or you possibly don't, but I had nothing to to loose, only to win, so I take out my horse...with the horse my wagon aside and I pass by and I say heil Hitler and with the with the...what weapon I had in my sack then, I showed them below that the wagon is entirely empty. There is nothing, only straw, you see, so \_\_\_\_\_, and I said heil Hitler, and without \_\_\_\_\_, I showed them there is an empty wagon. The wagon is \_\_\_\_\_, in German, and I passed by (laughter) with the greatest of my surprise, you see, and then on the...it's a long bridge and when you come to the second part of the bridge, again the same...the same story. Another sentry and he is checking again, you know, checking again and again I say heil Hitler. The wagon is \_\_\_\_\_, the wagon is \_\_\_\_\_, and they let me go, and this way I couldn't believe what had happened. If one would be a religious man, he would say it is heaven. It is...it is a miracle, but I don't believe in miracles. I believe in persistence, in hard work, in making up your mind and know what you do and know where you go, and don't give in and don't take no as an answer. And they...nothing like that not permitted. What was permitted for us? The German was really...in the ghetto he came in and they saw in in in a dwelling and they saw a woman lying in her bed, so he said why don't you work. What are you so lazy in the bed, so she said, \_\_\_\_\_, I'm ill. I have thirty-nine grade of uh temperature. It was a very high temperature. I must stay in bed, so he tells her, I knew that \_\_\_\_\_. A Jew must die. All others he must not. All others he must not. He must not lie in bed even if he is ill. So uh this is what I knew exactly and uh but

I didn't want to die, so at three miles after the bridge it was...I was...\_\_\_\_\_ I was beating the horses and I was saying \_\_\_\_\_ and when the woman stood there, she didn't believe her eyes. She was...

Q: Which woman?

A: The the widow...the peasant, the owner of the farm. She didn't...the priest didn't want that she should risk her life passing by the control at the both sides of the bridge, so she went by foot and waited there until I come and then she...she mounted the wagon and she took over the horses and we ride. And and and what happened unfortunately happened unhappy... the...there were wonderful good woman, good hearted woman but she was a drunk so she...at every...wherever it was only a a saloon, she stopped and went in and drink and she drank not a regular vodka but homemade which is a terrible thing, so I told her \_\_\_\_\_...her name was \_\_\_\_\_, Maria...Maria, I beg of you, I beg of you. I'm...every...every moment when you go in to a saloon they can...they can...they can arrest us, both you and me.

Q: She was drinking on this journey to the farm?

A: Stopped at the side of the...of the...of the road, went into a saloon and to drink, and I...and it was a matter that continues instead of going it should take us from the morning at mid-day until one or two o'clock we should be already at the farm, but see she stood in every corner and in one place she found relatives, so she took me in into her house with the

rela...to the relatives and she said who...please meet...it is a relative of the of the priest from Kovno, so I was a priest so they offered me eat and and and a whole meal, so I said we are in a hurry. We cannot stay here. To cut a long story short, she was...in the end of the day we came...it was night. It was evening. It it was night and she and she was entirely drunk and she went not the the wrong way and I had to go and to knock on the door of the peasants in order to find out which way we have to go to \_\_\_\_\_. This is the name of the farm, and and we came and when we came only at three after midnight, at three after midnight, and when we came into the farm, Pnina was...she was sure that the Gestapo took us and that's why we didn't come in time. And it was \_\_\_\_\_ in such cases. Well, to tell you...my meeting with Pnina at three o'clock in the midnight...I wanted...from from afar there was some little light. You know, a candle was...and I trust to listen to her. I can see light there. Is this your farm? So she said oh yes, yes, yes, yes. You see she was...but she was drunk and this how we met in the in the farm, of course. The son, Joseph, eight years. He was prepared already for me a hiding in...not in the house where the farmers lived, but where where the storage for winter...for winter uh \_\_\_\_\_, in summer for summer \_\_\_\_\_, the winter \_\_\_ to summer, and I had to go in to squeeze in, you know, like not...less than this space, you see, and I could not stay there in \_\_\_\_\_ hiding. You had to either to seat or to lay down and uh they had in the farm a worker, a hired worker, and he was an anit-Semite terribly and all the time he questioned \_\_\_\_\_ whether she's Jewess and when does she pray and when does she go to church and so on and so on, so he shouldn't...needn't have an idea that I'm hiding in the...

Q: How long were you hiding on the farm?

A: Four consecutive monthses. Six days in the week I didn't go out from the hiding places. Only on Sunday when the hiding...the the man...the the hired laborer went to church. On Sundays I used to go out and breath the air, so when I breathed the fresh air, I was entirely, you know, my my head was...you know, from this...but this is how we were and then one night the the Red Army came closer to the farm and uh all around was bombardments and fire so I couldn't stay in that place, in that hiding, because every moment also this hiding should be...could be on fire, but they had a most strategic uh uh canal in the in...around the whole farm. The farm was, let's say like this...uh longer and then...and around this two rows of high woods, \_\_\_ trees, and between the trees very close was a canal, so I went out from this hiding place and I laid down in the canal at night and I fell asleep. All of a sudden I feel that on my belly a boot presses me very hard, and a and a strong light flash on my eyes. I couldn't see what's in front of me, and I could see only that a gun is before my nose and I could immediately...\_\_\_ but I couldn't see way in front of me or \_\_\_ I couldn't understand that this must be a Russian because we knew that the Russians is coming, the Red Army, so I saw...told him, Russian, don't kill me. I am a Jew. Don't kill me. I am a Jew. But they didn't move and the belly was pressing, so I told him my wife and my child are also hiding. We...I escaped from Kovno, from the Nazis and my wife and my child is also...don't kill me...also in the...they are in the in the house, in the front of the farm. Don't kill me. So then he took away the gun from my nose and he took off the the belly and told me stand up. And I stood up so that...take off your clothes. Entirely naked I stood and then they could see that I am a Jew and then he told me if you escaped from Kovno from the Nazis, what are you doing

here? We already liberated Kovno five days. So I said...I could see that they're very top up top officer of the army, but he looked to me like a Jew but he didn't disclose a word about his Jewishness, so he said, why didn't you go back to Kovno. So I said, how would I know? I'm hiding here. So he said if you'll give me...if you will be kind of enough to give me the the name of the places where I can move because he said there are \_\_\_\_\_ nineteen German tanks are trying to cross to to close the way for the Red Army and are going to break in, so he said \_\_\_\_\_ come exact on the on the German tanks, and could you give me...show the map, your maps, so I'll know which way to go. To my greatest surprise the top...top officer did not have a map with him at all but he said to me you know, you stay here. Don't go anywhere and tell your wife and your child that here will be big fight. This will be the fire line because we are making here...this is a strategic point and this farm exactly suits us to be...have the headquarters of the fire line, so run away as soon as possible but wait two hours. I'll come and then I'll tell you the names of the villages or the farms where you can go on the way to Kovno, and I immediately...when he went away I immediately went to the to the to to the farm, to Maria, and I told her, Maria, I just spoke with a Russian top officer and he said here there will be big fightings and there will be the fire line. Come with us. Take your children. Take your...and and and uh we'll go. You will stay with us in Kovno until the until the the the battle is finished here.

Q: OK. Avraham, I am going to interrupt. Let me ask you a set of questions now, so that we can get some answers that work. OK? OK. Let's change tapes, so we pause. We will change tape and then we will do this.

A: I I appreciate two minutes. You see...

BREAK IN TAPE

Q: ...only a half an hour. We need to know two things. One, we need to know how you got into the Brichah (ph) and we need to know how you go...how you got the letter to Elkes' children.

A: No. First of all, when we came to Kovno, I...we went..we went to the place \_\_\_\_ and then I went to the ghetto to see whether my diary is is there.

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Q: Alright. We are rolling. Uh tell us about uh how you found a truck to get you back to Kovno.

A: When we went...the the peasant, the Maria rejected... they didn't want to leave the farm. Says this is my farm. In is my husband buried that I will not leave my farm, my my my horses...so we we embraced and kissed and we we left the farm and the the officer...when the officer came exact after two hours he came, and he told us five places where we can go, five farms in order not to fall again into the hands of the Germans, and so we did. On the...on the way, we found a truck, a military truck that turned back empty and we

stopped him and he let us in and we stood on the on the in the on the back of the truck and we kept \_\_\_\_\_ in the middle, Pnina on the on the side and I on the other side of \_\_\_\_\_ and we kept so and we say, we are free. We are free. We breath free. We are free. We didn't...we couldn't be more excited than we were that all of a sudden hiding and being afraid...this we will see...this will \_\_\_\_\_...all of a sudden we go and we go to Kovno and then we come to Kovno and the and the and the driver was so polite. He says where are your home? I will bring you home? But neither Pnina nor I didn't want to come to our homes. We felt like absolutely we left the homes and our families are not there. Her husband is not there and my my my wife was also killed by the Nazis, so we couldn't come to to our homes, so there was an empty house where the...where the survivors, they kept kept together in one house and they gave us a room in the house. We needed an apartment. A room for us was a luxury instead of the hiding places and then the first thing we went to the priest and we embraced and Pnina kissed him and he kissed Pnina and we drank wine. We shouldn't drink wine that it was...and it was something that incredible and then I went immediately to the site of the ghetto to see what is about my hiding, my crates, five crates whether with my uh entries of the diary and the and the documentation and I found out that part of the big building, the block C, block C in in the roof of which...in...not in the roof, in the cellar of which two meters below the below the surface that it was entirely in ruins and you cannot get...there is no access, so I uh said I'll come and take shovels and then...but when I came home I was arrested by the \_\_\_\_\_, the the Soviet...the Soviet secret police and they took me in there and they asked that I should give them the diary, so I said what are you talking about, a diary? You got in in the in the room was one of the survivors of the ghetto Kovno. He was a communist and

heard that this \_\_\_\_\_ that had a diary. I want to tell you I was upset like that but don't loose nerves and when he says I should give there, what are you talking about? So the house is ruined, so no diary. There is...there is ruins and there's no access to it all, so they said listen, now you...we are giving you an order. You should not come close to the place, one kilometer...it means three-quarters of a mile, at the place of the block C without being accompanied...escorted by one of the secret police of ours. At the very same day, I said to Pnina we are going that night, after midnight to to to dig out the diary and luckily survived also \_\_\_\_\_ Goldschmidt who helped us in digging in the diary, you see. It was just a happy occasion and all come the news that I am not supposed to to to...I have to give them back the diary, so and I shouldn't go there, so \_\_\_\_\_ asked me, Avraham, did you get the permission from the from the \_\_\_\_\_. I says of course, of course I would...I would take it because I wanted that all the risk and all responsibility should be mine in case we are being caught, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ so he could say I told him that I I have a a permit from the \_\_\_\_\_. And after midnight...\_\_\_\_\_Goldschmidt from one from one side came, from...Pnina from another direction and I from a third direction, each one with a shovel behind the the the overcoat and with a a rucksack each one, and we came and we only came to this...to the place, was after midnight at twelve-thirty...I can remember...\_\_\_\_\_ as if he would be eighteen years old in workshop. \_\_\_\_\_ want start the digging. Here we have the the first crate. Open. Quick check, very rapidly. Quick. We put in a in a in a in a rucksack and then he goes to the second place...in the...he hid the five crates, one, two, three, four, in four corners. In the middle the fifth one, so we count out one, two, and the middle. The other two were on the other side below the \_\_\_\_\_ so immediately the \_\_\_\_\_ and in in ten, fifteen minutes we had all



all the rucksacks full with diaries. I cannot tell you how happy I was. I was the happiest man in the world. Also Pnina, and then we apart go...each one went separately in his direction so that you should not...you see? And so I I...the work of my life, it is my life work. I could...three crates alright and then the next morning I had to hide it because if the...they used to come back every day, the secret police, and they wanted this \_\_\_\_\_, so Pnina had a very good friend of her husband, the town engineer of Kovno, a Lithuanian who were very nice fellow, so his wife was very good uh in best relations with Pnina, so she...Pnina tells her excuse me, I have here Hebrew writings and the the...might be...the Germans might come \_\_\_\_\_, so could you hide it for me for a few days, uh so she said no, no problem and she took it. She hide it in...also in the cellar and until we found a better hiding in the cellar somewhere you see, and until we escaped we...I had to escape from Kovno because all the time they used to question me, where's the diary. What is the diary? And I escaped to Vilna and from Vilna...in Vilna I got work \_\_\_\_\_. This is the...this is my \_\_\_\_\_ highest order \_\_\_\_\_, so I became a member of \_\_\_\_\_. Avraham, just know there is...they arrested the the chairman of the the \_\_\_\_\_ Zionist group and they are going to arrest you. Run away, so I had to leave Pnina and I have to leave \_\_\_\_\_, and I got to run away. Fortunately the same day there was a train load of volunteers to the Polish army. There were many Poles in Lithuanian...

Q: OK. I'm going to interrupt...OK...I am going to interrupt you or we will not finish the tape, so just answer my questions please. OK. One at a time. Where did you eventually escape to?

A: So I escaped from Kovno, escaped by the train...

Q: To where?

A: I escaped through all the Ukraine and \_\_\_\_\_ and others who came and they reached the Poland, Lodz. It was not Lodz. Excuse me. Lublin. This where all the volunteers came and they met us in a...with a military band and the volunteers...

Q: Where did you go from Lublin?

A: And there...in Lublin I waited six weeks until \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and Pnina came from from below and then I was...were became one of the leaders of the of the escape of the Brichah and uh they told me that I cannot take \_\_\_\_\_ because only children above the age of twelve can join the Brichah because it was very risky, so I said I'm not making the move without \_\_\_\_\_ and since you nominated me as the head of this group of the Brichah, I'm responsible, so I said that's not your responsibility, so \_\_\_\_\_ if you fail, the whole Brichah fails but I told them there is no discussion about it and I took \_\_\_\_\_ and really on the way...we had to go by train, by by by wagons and also by foot, so it was happened that I took Pnina...\_\_\_\_\_ to my shoulder and threw away these...not the not the diary, but the...all belongings I threw away and I had \_\_\_\_\_ on my shoulders and then...

Q: Where was the diary?

A: ...to Czechoslovakia \_\_\_\_\_ Romania and finally Austria and to Italy.

Q: OK. Is it from Italy that you sent the letter to uh...the last will and testament of Elchanan Elkes...that had been carried by Pnina through all this?

A: Pnina...Pnina took the last uh will of Elkes in her uh in her bosom and she was...she sweated, the the the danger and everything so it wet, and when we came to Italy we gave word to to to the Professor Elkes that I have the last will and testament from his father, but I didn't send it by post. There was no post because still war, but I went to one of our...a rabbi went...he was the rabbi of the military, British military in Italy, so he went to London so he took the the will and it was...it was a most important historic document uh and he brought it to Elkes and when...since then we are the greatest friends in the world. And in Italy there was instructions at the Palestine office that whenever the first certificates for \_\_\_\_\_ to Palestine arrive, should give it to \_\_\_\_\_ and his family, and there really arrived four hundred certificates, the last ones in in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, so they give it to us, but then came the Palestine Jewish Brigade who were...who took...who arranged their illegal immigration \_\_\_\_\_ from from Italy to Palestine and they kept me and they told me, look, we are in uniform. We are soldiers. We can...we can provide you trucks. We can provide you clothing, but we cannot have contact with the with the Italian police or with the Italian government...

Q: Did you...no, no...I'm going to have cut you. How did you get to Palestine?

A: So I became the secretary of the illegal \_\_\_\_\_ from Palestine and instead of two months \_\_\_\_\_ they kept me two and a half years and finally I came by very special plane, a small plane, because I was with...I got brought from from from Tel Aviv that I should not come on a boat to to to Palestine and that I should arrive by by plane because my name is already in the British intelligence...has my name and they are looking are for me in Haifa and in the in the airport, so I took a...made connections with place Swedish. We called them the \_\_\_\_\_, for \_\_\_\_\_ and I got...uh went...nine hours we flew from from Rome to to Tel Aviv and there were waiting for me the the clandestine \_\_\_\_\_ and immediately the moment we we landed, immediately took us...Pnina...to our homes and Pnina had this brother in Tel Aviv and this we came to Tel Aviv.

Q: Lovely. Avraham, thank you, thank you very very much.

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION