United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Michael Wertman
March 20, 2002
RG-50.030*0464

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Michael Wertman, conducted on March 20, 2002 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.

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

MICHAEL WERTMAN
March 20, 2002

Beginning Tape One

Question: Good morning, Michael.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: Welcome, welcome to the Washington area.

A: Pleasure to be here.

Q: Now, can you tell me when you were born?

A: Yes. I was born on a -- August the 30th, 1928.

Q: And where?

A: In the city of L'vov.

Q: And your name was not Michael Wertman [indecipherable]

A: No, it was not.

Q: -- was it?

A: Actually, I was born Abraham Wertman, but never called Abraham, never, never and I tried to find out why, and I was never given a straight answer. It seems that some distant relative that they honored, but my parents never called me Abraham, my ca -- I was called Mundek, M-u-n-d-e-k, which is a nickname mostly used by Polish Jews, you know, it's not a typical Polish nickname, and it was Mundek, M-u-n-d-e-k, and that was my name, I was known as Mundek. But I have a document to show -- actually, I received a copy of my birth certificate in 1993 from the Polish authorities in Warsaw, and they had actually -- were able to get a copy for me, so it did --

Q: And it said Mundek?

A: It says ab -- Abraham.

Q: It says Abraham on it?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, indeed, yeah.

Q: Oh, well that's interesting.

A: Yes.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your -- your family, your father --

A: Sure.

Q: -- and your mother --

A: Sure.

Q: -- during this period before the war.

A: Before the war, yes. Well, I -- I had a very happy childhood. I was the -- my mother's only child, and there were two other brothers, but they were half brothers whose mother died when she was very young, of a brain tumor. But we were very, very close, so I was never -- til about nine years of age, I wasn't aware that they were not my real brothers, I mean I -- were on -- half -- half brothers. And my fi -- so I was the only one who was born actually in L'vov. I was sort of the city born child. The others were born in smaller t -- in small towns a -- where my father came from. My father was in the dairy business. We had a small dairy plant where he would manufacture milk products like cheeses and heavy creams and butter and that sort of thing, and get up four in the morning to receive the milk from the farms, and then produce it and manufacture it and also have a small retail store as well. Hard work and -- and we also had a cousin living with us and I have a photo of the place that I was born, I was able to obtain that, too.

Q: Oh, that's great.

A: And so I had a relative -- very happy childhood, until about -- when I was about eight years old, my parents divorced.

Q: Now, can we go back -- let's go back a little bit be -- before then. You -- your father's name is Henry.

A: Henry, which actually Chuna is the -- is the name -- is the -- would be the n --

Q: The real name.

A: -- the po -- the real name.

Q: Right.

A: Yes, Henry is correct.

Q: And you were close with your father?

A: Yeah, very close, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And my mother too, you -- I mean, you know, I have a very happy memories of their -- of them -- of their marriage until -- until about the age of seven or eight when -- when things didn't work out.

Q: How would you describe this personality and your mother's personality?

A: Well, let's see. My father was a very hard working -- very, I would say authoritarian, sor -- you know, very disciplined, always concerned about -- about making a good living. A good provider. My mother was 10 years younger and she was, I would say maybe a little more worldly than my father. And perhaps the trouble began when she felt that perhaps there was more to life than just working an -- all the time, and so difficulties develo -- [indecipherable]

Q: Did you feel that as a child? Did you feel the difficulties?

A: I began to -- to see some discord there, but I wasn't that close, I was very young at the time, you know, and I guess I didn't pay that much attention, although I did feel there's some tension there and I would overhear arguments, etcetera. Now my -- my mother's family -- and she had three sisters and two brothers, lived in Danzig, which is Gdansk. Was a freest city of Danzig. And I remember she would take me -- she took me once when I -- before the divorce and also after the divorce I stayed with her for about a year in Danzig cause she wanted to have me close by. And of course, then the war intervened, and things went really bad, you know.

Q: Was it difficult for you when they divorced? Was that a --

A: Was very difficult.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was difficult from the point of view that -- that my father was middle class, fairly well-to-do. My mother was left penniless because under Polish law there was no division of property, anything like that, and -- and I didn't -- he did not really give her any -- give her much support at all, if any. [indecipherable] part of the other presumed feelings about the divorce. So -- so I felt badly about it and my mother decided to leave me with my father cause she felt that I could be cared for better in the -- you know, in the --

Q: Right.

A: -- with my father s -- and the rest of the family.

Q: Did you then see her on a regular basis? [indecipherable]

A: I saw her from pi -- yes, I saw her from time -- while she was still in -- in L'vov, you know, until -- until close of the war, you know [indecipherable]

Q: And did she remarry?

A: She did not remarry.

Q: She didn't.

A: No, she did not, but she went back to her small town of Tarnogrod just after the -- 1939, war broke out, you know.

Q: So how -- what was her name, her first name?

A: Her name was -- was Leah, or what would be Lisa --

Q: Right.

A: -- in [indecipherable]

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And maiden name Truk, T-r-u-k.

Q: Uh-huh. And how old was your older stepbrother?

A: Okay, I had two.

Q: Or how much older than you. You had two --

A: Seven years older, the middle one and then the other one 10 years older.

Q: Uh-huh, and what was the -- the names of the two boys?

A: Okay, the -- one was Mo -- Moshe -- or Moses, and the oldest one was Mordechai.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And we called them Mordtku and Moshku was the -- was the nicknames in polan -- in Polish.

Q: And even though there was such a big difference in age, were you close?

A: I was very, very close to mi -- the middle one, you know, the -- my next, we are very, very close.

Q: Moshe, uh-huh.

A: In fact, he always claimed that a -- that my mother was like a true mother to him.

Q: Right.

A: She was -- because he was like five years old when his mother died. So we were very close and -- so it was a generally the pretty happy home environment, and I was -- we were spoiled [indecipherable]

Q: You were spoiled?

A: I was spoiled.

Q: Right. Was it a religious household?

A: Not very, no. My father came from a very Orthodox -- as most Jews of his generation. Back on [indecipherable] I don't think he ever had any public school education, his education was mainly in the Jewish, you know, s -- studies and so forth and -- and I have an early picture of him with [indecipherable] beard and hat, which I'll show you later.

Q: Right.

A: So he was more of, I would say, more worldly, although -- excuse me.

Q: Sure.

A: We did have a -- a kosher household, per se, but my father shaved, you know, and he would go to services occasionally. But he was beginning to question himself the -- the -- the -- the real Orthodoxy. He -- he tried to be more modern, living in the big city, you know, feeling free from the constraints of his small town and close relatives that he lived with, so he felt more free to do that.

Q: Do you remember celebrating holidays?

A: Oh yes, indeed, yeah, we did, and my father would -- on Friday night he would use -- you know, make a Kiddush, he had a good voice, which he was proud of, so he used it to full advantage, you know, to -- to sing a fancy, you know, Kiddush, and we had the usual chicken soups and --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- Gefilte fish, and all that sort of thing, and he would ca -- take me occasionally to services, you know, and -- but -- but generally I don't think -- I don't remember him actually even using the daily prayer, the tefillin, you know, that you would use. I don't think he bothered with that, if I remember. So he was really going far --

Q: Right.

A: -- far away from the -- you know --

Q: So what was the Jewish commu -- were -- were you living amongst mainly Jews, or was it fairly mixed?

A: Yes, I lived on a street called Pilnikarska, which was several apartment buildings, almost close to the center of the city, and we lived in a two story building. The upper story was a set of rooms, and the business itself was downstairs, you know with the little factory there. And there was actually a stable with a couple of horses because the milk was being picked up at the railroad station early in the morning, so we had a couple of workers there, we had also workers in the factory. And most of the neighbors on our street were Jewish, was fair -- heavily Jewish because L'vov actually had a population of 110,000. Actually, later on it swelled to oh -- to a 150,000 more. So all a total population of 340, so it's only one-third, you know, was the third largest Jewish community i-in Poland. So -- so that was a very heavy population there. And so the kids that I would play with were mostly Jewish, wi -- you know, and -- and interestingly also that -- which we'll -- we'll get back to later, when I begin to assume a different identity, is that actually my native language was Polish. I like -- like families today, you know, where the -- first generation, you know, they speak Polish, and their parents speak Chine -- I mean peak -- speak English and the parents speak Chinese, or whatever. Well, I spoke Polish, and of course, my

parents spoke Yiddish. So I did understand everything they said, but I would always answer in Polish, which helped me a lot later on, because my Polish was very, very good, and very clean and very native Polish, unlike many others, who -- you know, from smaller towns, who did not have that -- that advantage.

Q: Now was this -- was this kind of thing fairly typical of the Jewish community, the kids were going to a public school, not a Jewish school?

A: Public school, yes.

Q: Right.

A: That was typical maybe of the larger cities like L'vov.

Q: Right.

A: Not of the smaller communities so much. In the smaller communities they may -- may have gone to some public school, but they would also go to the cheder, you know, to study, you know, the Talmud, and the --

Q: Right.

A: -- the [indecipherable] kind of thing.

Q: And that -- and that you didn't do?

A: No, no, not at all, no, no.

Q: Were there Jewish youth groups in L'vov, or not?

A: There were some Jewish youth groups, I was very young, I didn't belong to any. My -- my brother did, you know, he was -- he belonged to organization called Betar, which was -- which I was kind of a -- unhappy about as I gre -- grow and understood because I was [indecipherable] to the right of center, you know, Jewish organization. But he was -- he belonged to Betar and -- and was fairly active in that. That wasn't -- you know, they had some uniforms of their own, all that.

But that was early -- in the early stages, later on became much more difficult, even before the war, because the -- there was a lot of -- obviously some anti-Semitism that -- it was prevalent. And incidentally, L'vov also had a very, very high Ukrainian population. It was one third Jewish, one third Ukrainian, one th-third Polish. And L'vov being western Ukraine was a cradle of -- of Ukrainian nationalism and was a -- a lot of animosity between the Poles, and the Ukrainian and the Jews. So the Jews basically, a lot of the Jews had a -- had a kind of a double -- double whammy, they were obviously hated by the Ukrainians and of course, a lot of the Poles were also, you know, anti -- anti-Semites. So -- so that was a big problem for the L'vov Jewish population.

Q: Did -- did you feel that as a child growing up?

A: I felt it occasionally, in public school, when sometimes a teacher would make some funny Jewish, you know, imitating Jewish words, or -- or one of the kids would speak maybe a little bit of a what I would call a Jewish Polish, you know, he would kind of make some f-fun of that and all that, but generally I did not feel a direct -- direct thing. I was never, you know, accosted or attacked or anything like that or -- or by -- by -- by other kids because we were pretty -- in a pretty heavily Jewish population where I -- where I lived, you know.

Q: Right. And do you recall your brothers talking about that at all? Ha-having any experience?

A: Well -- well, there were restrictions in getting to a higher education. You know, there were quotas involved and all that, and so my brother went to -- to a -- a commerce high school, you know, tried to get a degree there, and that didn't last very long, but my father -- my brother never mentioned any -- any overt or direct confrontations as such, because again, the Jewish community, even though it wasn't a modern city like L'vov, was still very, very closely knit, you know, and there was very little interaction, except for the -- some the servants that would work,

or some workers that would come to work, etcetera. So that was a -- a -- socially fairly isolated, I would say.

Q: Would you have called yourself upper middle class, do you think?

A: I would say middle class, maybe not upper, but middle. Certainly comfortably middle, not upper.

Q: How -- how did you find out that your parents were going to get divorced? Did your mother come to you, your father come to you, or they just --

A: Well, I knew -- I knew that there were difficulties, I knew there were problems, and I knew when my mother took me with her to Danzig, to Gdansk, I knew that I -- that things were wrong, things were bad. My mother never told me directly that she was -- that she was going to be divorced, so sh -- but I found out si -- very shortly after, especially when my father began to look for another -- for a new companion, you know, to -- to try to remarry.

Q: Did you resent that?

A: Well, I did resent it to some degree, because he never told me that he would do that, and he married a woman who actually was a housekeeper, was 22 years younger than --

Q: Wow.

A: -- he, and that was very, very hard. Tha-that -- I resented that he never told -- told us that, he came one day, left with her, and then he came back and says, “Well, meet your new mother.” You know.

Q: Really?

A: Y-Yeah. Which was very, very hard, that was -- that was very hard, and -- and also the fact that he wouldn’t support my mother, that -- that -- that --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- that both -- that hurt, because I was living in a fairly comfortable household, and yet my mother was in a very small apartment, she had to -- she tried to do some physical therapy to earn a living. So that was very, very hard. Yeah, I -- I kind of never forgave him for that.

Q: Right. And I guess your older brothers also felt similarly.

A: Oh very much so, because he really was very close to my mother, you know.

Q: Right.

A: My -- the oldest brother was -- I wasn't very close to him because he was a little bit, I would say what you might call today, learning disadvantaged, or slow learning. Mordechai. And he basically helped my father in th -- in -- in the -- in the shop and in the s -- business. So I wasn't that close to him, even though he was a very gentle soul, I didn't have much to do with him, per se. But with Moshe who is now George, we were -- we were close, yeah, we quite often slept together, and you know, in the -- and of course our house -- our home was always full of visitors because you know, the big city. They would come from the small shtetl as it were, you know, and -- and visit the big city, you know, that was a big thing for them. So we had visitors because my -- my father had four brothers and one sister, spread in many places in Poland. None survived, incidentally.

Q: None?

A: None, none, n-nor their families.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: So your mother leaves when? You think it's 1937? 1936 --

A: By 1936 --

Q: -- or '37?

A: -- I -- there's [indecipherable] she -- that's when they were divorced and [indecipherable] and she went --

Q: So you're like seven years old? Six, seven?

A: Yeah well, she was born in -- in 1905, so she was about 30 -- 31 - 32 years old.

Q: And you keep in touch with her until '39, or '41, at -- at whi --

A: No, no, actually, actually -- actually, til about 1940 - '41 because under the -- as you may recall, in 1939, when Hitler attacked Poland, the Germans were on the outskirts, close to L'vov --

Q: Right.

A: -- and we fully expected them to come, and then overnight, all of a sudden you see the Russians are here. So from 1939 to '41 --

Q: Right.

A: -- we were under the Soviets [indecipherable]

Q: And was that a big change for your life?

A: Oh, enormous change --

Q: Enormous change.

A: Enormous change.

Q: And how -- can you say --

A: Personally, through myself, it was -- well, the change was that first of all my father lost his business because the Russian -- there was no private enterprise allowed, so that -- so ac -- everything was expropriated. All the -- all -- you know, so my father lost -- they did allow us to stay in the apartment, which was -- which was in a way unusual, because [indecipherable] they would chase you out.

Q: Right.

A: And my father lost everything, you know, he lost his business, they took away everything from him, and they even searched the apartment to see whether there's any -- any monies or valuables, or whatever, they would appropriate, because to them that was the you -- you know, they were called the -- the kulogs, you know, the exploiters of the masses. Fortunately, the workers actually did say that -- they did speak well of my father. So that helped, you know, in some ways. But he lost it. So from -- so that was a -- a -- obviously a total loss, and -- and then my father tried to make a living, you know, or black market was a -- was the -- was the thing to do to try to, you know, scrape up a living and get a work permit, everybody had to work, you know, my -- my brother worked for the railroad doing some -- he was mechanically inclined so he did some locomotive repairs, and -- and I went to school, you know, I went to -- to a school and -- and then I -- all of a sudden the -- the Ukraine became the foreign language. Incidentally, before the war, before 1939, the foreign language was German, ironically, and the reason why it was German is because for Poland, German was a very important language because it was a language of science, of technology, which Poland always lacked. You know, like tools and implements and machinery was -- was always in German. Moreover, L'vov itself was under Austria for 150 years, so there was a lot of German influence in the -- in the -- in that area, too. In fact, L'vov was known as Lemberg, in German. And in Yiddish always Lemberg, you know, for the Yiddish speaking. Like I would refer it to L'wow, which is the Polish way of saying L'wow, L-w-o-w. But my father would always say Lemberg.

Q: Lemberg.

A: Yeah, right. So -- but then when this -- when the Russians took over that part of Poland, we went to school and instead of German, it was Ukrainian.

Q: So you were speaking German in school?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: As a language of --

A: That was -- that was the foreign language that we were taught. No, no, Polish was the language.

Q: Uh-huh, I see, okay.

A: But we started early on [indecipherable] on a pla -- you know. He -- we started actually in grade four we started already a foreign language, and that was German, was the foreign language.

Q: So now the foreign language was Ukrainian?

A: Wa -- was Ukrainian, the -- the [indecipherable]. So Ukrainian because that became the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, you know, from 1939 to ’41.

Q: Right. And was this -- was this harsh for you? I mean, the fact that your father loses his business, that means there’s much less money coming in.

A: Oh sure.

Q: So your life changes in a radical way.

A: It’s change -- changed -- i-it changed in a way that -- that -- that we were not sure of food, but -- but we -- but there was no extravagance, there was no -- we had to kind of pull in a little bit, but my father was very, very entrepreneurial and very adept in -- in scraping things up and so forth and got very into -- into doing all kinds of things. So we were not really that badly off, actually. We’ll manage to -- to -- you know, to live fairly comfortably, fairly comfortably.

Q: And his second -- well, his third wife now.

A: Yes.

Q: What’s her name?

A: Eugenia, Genya, Eugenia.

Q: Eugenia -- you -- do you then become somewhat clo -- I mean, was she nice to you, as kids?

A: We had big problems.

Q: You had big problems.

A: Because she was only about five years older than my brother. And being -- and being -- and being a housekeeper, you know, when you're young, you -- you don't have that sense of -- of -- of -- of appreciation, of -- of a new role that -- that someone assumed, especially with my mother still alive, and to be told here's a new mother, you know, i-is -- is kind of -- is hard. And she came from a very small town in the pro -- in provinces, and -- and she tried to please my father by being very frugal, you know, to my father, the epitome of -- of womanhood was to be a good housekeeper, and you know, a good -- a good -- frugal housekeeper and of course a very devoted wife, you know, and so he didn't ask us whether we would -- what we would th-think about her, you know, being the new -- the new lady of the home, as it were. He just decided to do it, that was his way of doing things. So we had some -- we had real problems with that, you know, serious --

Q: And it probably was difficult for her, though you would not necessarily have known that, because she's walking into this --

A: Right, sure. And she, of course, tried to assume authority, you know, she trying to assert herself now that she assumed that role from a housekeeper or servant to the actual lady to the -- to the -- of the household, you know, to be in charge of it and so forth. So it -- she tr -- had to -- you know, and so it just didn't mesh at all, didn't mesh, you know. It was not -- it was that lack of sensitivity and -- perhaps on both parts, although we were kind of blaming her because she was the adult and we were the kids --

Q: Sure.

A: -- you know, so we kind of expected, perhaps her, to -- to understand the situation better, but --

Q: And even more so your father.

A: Yes, indeed. Well, my father was totally becoming detached from it, you know, so --

Q: Was he an affectionate man?

A: To very young children, yes. Very much so, when we were very, very young, he was very affectionate. When we got older, not so much, you know.

Q: I see.

A: We were more of a -- his favorite expression would be, what did you accomplish today? You know, at the end of the day that was -- that was his way of -- of ma-making sure that you -- that you were hard working and responsible and all that, you know, and -- and it's -- it's a tough life, you know, that was his -- his way. And of course he did come from a very modest background. And so in one way, you know -- but he didn't have that balance, you know, he didn't have that balance, but -- but he loved music, you know, he had a good voice, he -- he was very, very intelligent, very bright. He knew the Scriptures really well, he knew the Talmud inside out, you know. His favorite oc-occupation was to get into some -- some dialog with some -- some rabbis you know, to show off his own knowledge of it, and -- and find some faults or errors in their -- in their knowledge, you know, of it. So that was one of his favorite pa -- you know, things that he would -- and he read a lot, Jewish newspapers and so -- but no, he was very good to me when I was very, very young. He'd always have some candy in his pocket and all that. But then when I was -- and -- and I was the only child of -- of my mother so he kind of doted on me. But -- but that was when I was very, very young.

Q: And so when would it stop, when you're four or five?

A: Well no, no, no, it stopped later on, much --

Q: [indecipherable] earlier -- oh, later. Oh, oh.

A: -- much later, much later, yeah. Much later, yeah.

Q: So during these two -- '39 until '41 when Germany attacks and -- and occupies L'vov.

A: Right.

Q: Do you begin, even as a young person, to hear what's going on --

A: Oh, oh, absolutely.

Q: -- elsewhere and --

A: Well, let me give you a -- give you a -- it comes back to me. In 1939 when -- when Germany -- I think it was in June 22nd when they attack, and then by the end of the month they were -- they actually were in -- I'm sorry -- I'm sorry. In September, I -- I want to go back. In September when -- when the Germans attacked Poland, and they were on the outskirts of [indecipherable] we were fully prepared for the -- for the Germans to arrive, you know? And then the Russians came overnight, and they came with this huge, huge tanks, tore up the streets, you know, the cobblestones, and the overhead electrical for the -- you know, for streetcars, and because they had these -- these lumbering, monstrous tanks. So -- so that was our first encounter with them. And -- and things have changed, you know? Now, we became very soon aware of the problems. We already heard obviously before -- before the -- the -- the -- you know, bef -- before this whole thing happened, all the problems of the war, and th -- obviously in the attack on Poland. As you know, it was their -- their German blitzkrieg, which is a lightning war, with the chivalrous Polish cavalry attacking German tanks, you know, which was -- that was one of the things that was so sad, you know, they just didn't -- they -- they -- just they couldn't fight the

Germans at all, I mean they were just -- and so we had many, many refugees in L'vov. In fact our house was full of refugees. We had one time -- there was my -- my -- my brother's mother's family. I remember that one time there was a family with six children cou -- staying with us in our -- in our home as refugees. And there were -- at one time, I think the record showed that there was like a -- maybe a hundred thousand Jews that actually migrated or escaped from the -- from the other side into -- into L'vov, you know. And one of the ironies of war, which may be not that well known, is that those refugees who came to L'vov, desperately tried to stay in L'vov. They wanted to stay at L'vov under the -- you know, because they felt they may be safe under the Russians. But the Russians issued an edict that any Jew who did not -- was not a resident prior to 1939, had to be evacuated, had to leave. So they forcefully evacuated thousands and thousands of Jews from L'vov to the far east of Russia. And these survived --

Q: Yes.

A: -- you see. And yet many of them desperately tried -- they we -- tried to bribe authorities, they tried to get false papers and all that. And that didn't work at all, I mean, the Russians were very, very strict. And I recall my father sending parcels to these relatives that were actually, you know, taking ba -- taking it to -- to Russia, and these actually survived. And I remember them after the war, you know, that they actually survived. So -- so there's one of those ironies, if you will, of the war that people that didn't know what to do, with so much confusion and so forth and they actually survived, and the native, or the local people perished [indecipherable]

Q: We're going to have to stop and change the tape.

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Michael, let's -- let m -- let me go back to my last question. Wh-When the Russians have occupied L'vov, do you hear what's going on in the German occupied part of Poland?

A: We -- we -- we heard --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- we heard from the -- from those refugees and we also heard of just -- just generally about -- about some of the atrocities, of course, or that -- you know, and from the -- the ghettos and -- and some of the killings and so forth. But not, at that point we were not aware of the full extent of the Holocaust in terms of the -- of the crematoria and the -- and the mass slaughter. And the -- at least I did not personally hear that, or was aware of it. We were -- we knew that the Germans were definitely destroying the Jewish people, I mean there -- there were -- that -- that we knew, that we knew that they were -- they had basically a -- a -- a policy if you will, or an active policy of -- of --

Q: So you thought that then, that they were -- because they weren't killing Jews en masse --

A: No, they were not.

Q: -- until '41 --

A: But they were -- but they were already -- they -- there was wanton, there was lot of wanton --

Q: Right.

A: -- killings.

Q: Right.

A: There were some of these pogroms as it were, you know --

Q: Right.

A: -- although -- although the pogroms were more -- a more part of the eastern part of Poland, you know, peop -- you know, and so forth, because of the history of pogroms. But we did know about -- about the -- all the restrictions, you know, on the -- and the yellow stars and the -- and taking, you know, property confiscations, you know. Don't forget Kristallnacht was the beginning in Germany of it, you know, the -- the -- the -- you know -- we knew that -- that -- that the Jews were not losson -- you know, businesses, you know, with other, you know, properties were taken away. So we knew there was a definite movement, if you will, to restrict, to -- to -- to diminish, to -- you know, to -- not so much perhaps annihilate in terms of a -- of the final solution, you know, [indecipherable] you know, the final solution as it were. But certainly we w -- we knew that and we dreaded that. And we -- we -- we -- you know, we knew that -- that it was getting worse and worse.

Q: So were you frightened as a chi -- I mean, by this time, when the Russians take over, you're nine years old, about nine years old. And then --

A: Well, in 1939 I was 11 years old. I was born in '28.

Q: '28, okay.

A: Right.

Q: So you were 11.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you hear things from other kids? Are you frightened yourself? Are you having bad dreams?

A: Well, we -- we -- I wasn't frightened myself and I didn't have bad dreams, although because at that time, in the beginning, in 1939 when this -- when this partition took place, we didn't actually know what would happen. We did not believe that it would last. We -- we knew that this

was maybe just a -- because my father would make comments. You know, we had this short wave radio -- radio, and -- and wasn't -- was middle waves, actually, and we listened to BBC, right, London, this is London calling, you know. And we had all these -- you know, and also there was an émigré Polish government in -- in London, so there were some Polish broadcasts as well. A -- so we heard commentaries about that fact that there's -- you know, there's -- there's maybe just a -- a pause for the Germans, you know, that this was not going to last. We -- in fact, we didn't believe it. When it happened, it was a -- just a total surprise, seeing Russians in L'vov was just -- because we fully expected the Germans to -- to arrive. And of course there was also the gener -- still a disbelief that the Germans would go that far, you know. We thought that perhaps this was a -- a -- a temporary prob -- you know, thing that the Germans were -- were revenged themselves because of the Versailles Treaty of the first World War, you know, because they felt they were mistreated by the allies, and -- and they trying to use the Jews as scapegoats, and of course that -- and there's always this history of Jewish persecution and -- and sc -- so there was this mixed feeling because -- because the feeling was that the Germans with that high culture, with that -- with a tremendous contribution to civilization, how could they possibly be -- be prone to -- to -- to -- to do that, you know, to really try to destroy a people. We just thought that this was maybe part of the overall war effort as it were, and the Jews were considered also as being communists, you know, a lot of Jews belonged to the left or -- you know, socialists an -- organizations, so the Germans may have been using this as an excuse to -- you know, to restrict and confine the Jews and so forth, and using that as a -- as a -- as a -- as a co -- so there were a lot of mixed, mixed feelings. There was -- there was still a kind of a -- the way I remember hearing adults talk -- I me -- I -- obviously I was too young to participate, is that there was a kind

of a disbelief that -- that this was going to get that much -- much worse, you know, that this was maybe part of the overall war situation as it were, until a little later.

Q: Yes, but was there an expectation that the Germans would attack, or did you think the Russians are here and that's going to --

A: Well, I -- I think there was an -- for the -- for a -- for awhile there was a mixed bag, but with the German successes in the west, you know, when they overran all of Europe practically, okay, and also with the -- with the London, you know, blitz, too, and all that, and knowing the history of the relationship between Germany and Russia you know, and -- and -- and knowing the -- the -- the German ne -- expansionism and need -- needing the Ukraine as -- as their breadbasket, you know, to -- to f -- fuel the war effort. The feeling was that this may -- might not last it, you know, I mean. When and how we didn't know, of course, you know.

Q: Were you listening to the radio broadcasts as we --

A: I was -- I would listen to -- oh yeah, I was very curious, to me that was a -- it was like, you know, the war was almost like a -- you know, to -- to hear a f -- broadcast all the way [indecipherable] oh, we're all kind of around the radio, yeah, sure. And some of it we -- were also concerns because the Russian didn't like it, you know, we had to be careful about that.

Q: But they didn't confiscate the radio?

A: No, they didn't, no. No, no. I don't whether they -- actually whether we had the radio at the time when they -- you know, the confiscated business, or whether my father acquired one. I'm not sure, but we -- I know we did have one.

Q: And what about newspapers, did you read newspapers? Were there any?

A: There were -- no, there was Ukrainian newspapers. Yiddish newspapers were eventually -- they were published later on, but obviously with their -- with a Soviet tinge, as it were.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Cause the Russian actually did allow native languages, you know, in -- in their republics and all that.

Q: Right.

A: Although -- as long as the official language was Russian or Ukrainian, they did. So there was no restriction per se in terms of -- of that, you know. But of course the old -- the old newspapers were all gone, you know, that -- that my father would read and so forth. But my father was -- could read Polish very well, you know, and he was actually quite -- quite fluent in -- in his own way, you know, with -- with the Polish language.

Q: An-And how was school during these couple of years before the Germans --

A: Well, the -- the school is basically an indoctrination into the Soviet system. You know, the young kids were all asked to be pioneers, you know, and -- and -- and, you know, you are the future and we are blah, blah, you know, and all that typical Soviet propaganda. And the quality was not b -- as far as education itself, it wasn't bad, you know, the usual subjects, the geometry, the -- the algebra and -- and all that, you know, and so -- but there was this -- this constant -- you know, always we had th -- the constant propaganda was always there, and of course the city was full of -- of -- as you know, of posters of Stalin and -- and then the, you know, workers of the world uni -- wer -- unite, you know and that type of thing, you know, that's o -- you saw it all over. They were very good at that, you know, there were banners all over the place, you know, in there.

Q: Right.

A: And the Russians always tried to be nice to the children because that was part of their propaganda, so they were very friendly, they -- they were -- the soldiers would talk to the children, you know

Q: Really?

A: Oh yes, they were very, very friendly, they tried to -- especially to children, you know, they were -- they were always very friendly to children, so -- but -- but of course the Poles, and -- had not much, you know, much love for the Russians obviously, they always make -- made fun of their primitive, you know, culture, as it were. Not so much culture, but that -- their -- their social ril -- you know, activities and the -- and the sanitation and all that kind of stuff, you know. The Polish all -- Poles always felt superior to the --

Q: To the Russians.

A: -- to the Russians, yeah.

Q: Did you like these Russians, the Russian soldiers, and the Russians that you --

A: Well, I didn't really sort of -- I was curious about them, you know. I did like the Russian language, because we also took Russian.

Q: Right.

A: But -- but what I did like, incidentally, was kind of interesting is that the -- that the Russians liked opera very much, you know, and they had translations of classical operas in Russian. And I remember we went s -- once wents -- went to the Russian opera -- I mean, to the -- to the L'vov opera house for a performance, I believe it was "Aida," if I'm not mistaken, in Russian, you know, because the Russians liked to listen to operas in translation, not in the original. So that was kind of impressive, that part of it, but -- but of course for my father and for his generation was -- was tough.

Q: Was tough.

A: I mean, to lose your business, you know, to lose your livelihood and all that was -- was very -- it was hard. But based on the -- on the refugees and their comments, was -- we were pretty -- pretty well off, you know, as far as we could -- they -- they lost everything, you know, they just -- everything.

Q: So when June '41 happens, when you -- when the Germans attacked --

A: Well the end of June, July, you know, of course the -- the Russians left and my oldest brother Mordechai was drafted. The Russians took him with them and he never came back, we never heard from him. Of course that was -- that was, of course a -- that was very frightening when the Germans arrived, you know, with their armor, you know, and with their -- I mean, they were by comparison to the Russians they looked like 25th century as opposed to middle ages, you know, in terms of their armor, and in terms of their -- their -- the power that was overwhelming, it was actually frightening. I remember seeing them as they entered the city, you know, and they -- with their sidecar motorcycles, with their heavy breastplates, you know, with their -- when their what do you call, huge helmets, you know, with those big helmets. We called them reverse urinals, you know, when we -- when we saw those.

Q: Did you see them outside, or were you s -- inside the house?

A: Oh, right in the city.

Q: You -- you were standing outside

A: Well, no, I mean, I was next -- next -- the -- you know, the main street was just about a half a block away.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So -- so that was -- that was really frightening. That was really -- that was sort of the -- just incredible, it was -- it was a very -- a frightening sight, you know, I mean, not just a -- I remember that vividly and -- and of course within days, you know, this -- everything started in terms of the --

Q: The pogroms started.

A: -- of the Jews, you know, and -- in fact, the pogroms started right away, as you know, because the Ukrainians blamed the Jews for the -- for some of their prisoners who were -- who were killed by the -- by the Russians, by the NKVD, but they blamed the Jews for it. Any kind of excuse and -- and the Ukrainian nationalists -- not all Ukrainians, but the Ukrainian nationalists were encouraged, of course, by the Germans and they became very willing collaborators and police and everything and thousands of Jews were immediately killed, and -- and by I think was July 15th, we had to wear armbands. So the Germans had very good experience, two years of experience of dealing with Jews, so they didn't waste any time at all, in terms of their --

Q: Do you remember these early pogroms, because when they come into the city, within days there's the Petlura Aktion.

A: Oh I -- oh sure, wi -- Petlura and then -- and Pandera, I -- I remember -- I remember the -- heard the shooting, and the -- in fact, there was the -- they destroyed -- there was a -- right ne- near us there was a temple called Stary Rynek in the old -- the old marketplace, and that was destroyed and -- and there were thousand -- thousands of Jews at that time were leaving. There was like a -- a real rampage of a -- a vicious -- vicious killing and so forth.

Q: And where were you -- were you hiding in the house, I mean, what was the --

A: Well, we were in the house, you know, they -- they -- they were actually picking up people from the street --

Q: Street.

A: -- they didn't go from house to house as such, but there was plenty of -- remember, with 110,000 Jews, I mean, like every third person Jewish, it wasn't hard for them to -- to pick out the Jews, you know, and so that was -- that was a -- a very -- quite a shock and very traumatic. Even -- even -- even from the -- from -- from a viewpoint of a -- of a young boy like myself, you know, I was only at that time, what, 1941 I was 13 years old. I -- I was overwhelmed by that, you know. It was that -- that fear, you know, was -- was very palpable.

Q: Has your sister been born by now?

A: Yes, she was born -- Helen was born right -- soon after the Germans came, you know, and that was a -- like a late, very late child of my father. Course, Genya, she was young enough to have one --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- and she was born, yes, which was kind of difficult, too, and --

Q: I would imagine during that period --

A: I know, was very difficult, very, very hard. And so we just expected the worst, you know, we just didn't know what to do. We were trapped and --

Q: And Moshe is still home -- George is still home?

A: Okay, now George is -- George is still home, but --

Q: But he --

A: -- but --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- about two months later he was -- there were -- there were all kinds of round-ups, you know, for -- for young Jews as workers, and he was caught in one of those round-ups and was told that

they just needed him for a couple of hours to do some work. And he ended up in a camp in Winniki, which was a suburb of L'vov, where he spent over two years in -- in the -- in this, which was a -- like a concentration camp, actually a forced labor camp. And he had a very tough time with that, you know, he -- so he -- he was never in the -- in the ghetto, you know, because the ghetto didn't open til November, is when they opened the ghetto and herded everybody into the ghetto. So he was -- and ironically that was done -- I think it was the Jewish police that -- cause they didn't know, they were just told to s -- you know, we need some workers, you know, for a few hours and so he ended up in the camp.

Q: How did you find out that he was --

A: Oh, we had contacts, you know, there still we -- how do I find -- how do we find out?

Q: How did you find out that he was sent to this camp?

A: Oh, because we a -- we hear -- he let out word, you know, by a -- for mothers that -- that were still -- the ghetto was still open. In fact, I was able to even bring him some food. He was this -- the camp consisted of about -- male only, but of -- about 250 approximately, inmates in that camp. And they were doing roadwork, they were in a quarry, breaking stones manually for road building. So the ghetto was still open and I was able to get out of the ghetto and bring him some food, and also actually was one oth -- one -- one time I actually went into his camp, I was allowed to go inside. I think one of the -- this was in the early stages, one of the Ukrainian guards let me in. So I remember seeing the -- the -- actually the inside of the camp with the ter --

Q: So is he picked up before the ghetto?

A: Before the ghetto.

Q: Before the ghetto.

A: Before the ghetto.

Q: So --

A: Before November, it was like --

Q: Right. [indecipherable] September.

A: He was picked up maybe like in September.

Q: Right.

A: [indecipherable] July, August, yeah, a couple of months after -- after the Germans came.

Q: So that must have been an additional fright, I mean, because everything is starting to fall apart.

A: Oh absolutely, oh yes, oh yes indeed. It was a -- it was just -- just -- yeah, like the world was coming to an end, you know, I mean it was total, total -- was chaos, you know, people don't know what to do. The -- the Germans required tribute, you know, of monies, and gold, and so forth, and they established this Jewish council called the Judenrat, you know, through whom they channeled the -- all their demands. And of course, the Judenrat hoped that they would be a buffer to help, you know, mitigate some of these things, and so -- and then in November is when we started to go into the ghetto, and they gave us [indecipherable] a deadline of 30 days or 35 days, but they extended that because they just couldn't manage to get everybody in that they -- and then on the way to the ghetto, they would pick out older people. I remember an incident -- and these things come to mind as you -- as you speak, is that my brother's, Moshe George, grandmother was with us at that time, and we were crossing a bridge on Peltewna Street into the ghetto, and what they were doing is they were picking out old people, or frail people and wouldn't even let them into the ghetto, they just took them out and -- took them away and shot them. So I -- so I have this grandmother put a kerchief on and I was talking to her in Ukrainian as we were crossing, as we walk -- because there was a lot of traffic back and forth. And of course,

I was blonde and blue eyed, didn't look Jewish at all. So I spoke to her in Ukrainian and we were -- we just crossed, you know, I mean they didn't pay attention to us because there was so much movement, so I was able to get her into the ghetto and she subsequently died a natural death while in the ghetto. So --

Q: S-So during these few months between July when they come in to L'vov and November, December, there's no school [indecipherable]

A: Oh no, there's no school.

Q: There's nothing.

A: Nothing.

Q: Are you going outside and playing with friends at all, or are you basically staying inside?

A: Oh no, no. We're basically staying inside as much. I mean, there was some movement, sometimes I -- my father would send me out to try to fetch something, or a -- there was still some movement, because you know there just -- there was a lot of co-mingling still between the Poles, Ukrainians and the Jews. And of course anybody, any Jew who was -- who wore the traditional hat and beard and all that, would certainly risk a -- a -- a beating, if not a killing, you know, and so forth, so they stayed at home. Younger people [indecipherable] moved around. So there was still quite a bit of movement, you know. Streetcars were operating, actually the streetcars were even operating inside the ghetto until the -- until later on, you know, because of still a lot of movement into the ghetto, from the ghetto. So -- so that was -- I mean, there was no school, no -- there was no education, there was nothing. It was just a matter of -- of trying to -- to live from one day to the next.

Q: Do you see any of your friends?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: We had very little contact, everybody was kind of on their own. There was a boy across the street, was a baker's son, I remember seeing him briefly. I don't know what happened, what they -- where they went. Everybody was trying to -- to do whatever they could to --

Q: So how did you sp --

A: -- to protect themselves.

Q: -- how did you spend your day? What did you do? Do you remember?

A: Nothing.

Q: Nothing.

A: I mean, just -- you didn't, you just -- you just did nothing at all.

Q: Did you read?

A: I would read something, you know, I would read, I would try to -- to maybe play some, you know, some bi -- some -- some -- do some -- some games, or whatever it was, manual things, but there was really -- really nothing, nothing, we just [indecipherable]

Q: Did you write --

A: -- wait --

Q: -- about what was happening to you?

A: No, no I didn't wrote at that time, no I did not. There were -- no, it was just -- just a totally -- total loss of a -- of a -- of reality as it were, you know, a sense of -- you know, from day to day.

Q: Right.

A: And we fully expected of course to -- we knew there was a ghetto opening up, so we -- we were kind of waiting for that, you know, cause they announced that, and --

Q: Was your father working?

A: No.

Q: No. So how did you eat?

A: Well, was whatever he could buy on the black market. Black market was the thing, you know. Used to try to get some food. We had some -- I remember he had some potatoes stashed in the basement from before, you know, and some canned stuff. And -- and we tried to do -- to eat that, of course. You know, food was scarce, was -- was a -- was a big problem.

Q: And how in heaven's name did they feed Helen, this new baby?

A: Was very hard. She was breastfeeding, and did the best she could.

Q: That must have been difficult.

A: Very difficult.

Q: Yeah.

A: Was very difficult. Was very, very, very difficult. It was a kind of suspense of belief if you will -- if you -- if you -- what I mean -- I mean not believing that this is really happening, this is re-real, you know? So --

Q: Do you now have nightmares?

A: No.

Q: You still don't have nightmares?

A: No.

Q: You're sleeping okay.

A: Sleeping okay. I was able to -- I do have, you know, feelings of a -- of remembering some of these things and -- and that terrible sense of loss, and the terrible sense of inhumanity, injustice, and regret about the human condition as a whole, you know?

Q: Did it ma --

A: Cause I'm a humanist at heart --

Q: Right.

A: -- really, and I'm an optimist in terms of hoping that perhaps centuries from now maybe -- maybe the human -- human kind will come to its senses. Maybe.

Q: Maybe.

A: Maybe.

Q: Did it destroy something in you when you saw all of these people --

A: I would not say that it destroyed, I was young. You know, when you're that young, you don't have that sense of danger as it were, you know. You have a sense, of course, of terrible disappointment and terrible hurt and injury. But I never feared for my life, per se, you know? I guess when you're very young, you -- you don't have those feelings of -- of eminent -- imminent danger as it were. I mean, I had more fear later on when I tried to be somebody else. But I did wear my armband, of course, because I was 13 years old in August, you know.

Q: So you --

A: So I did wear an armband and -- and I recall incidentally that because of my looks -- we were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk in L'vov. When you wore an armband you had to walk on the roadway and dodge whatever traffic there was, horse drawn or -- or -- or -- or cars, you know. Not many -- many civilian cars, but you know, German cars, or what. And I remember a lot -- some of the Polish people looking at me kind of surprised because they were wondering whether I was just playing games or something, or trying to imitate a Jew. Because here was this -- this -- this blonde, you know, blue eyed kid that absolutely didn't look Jewish at all, you know, wearing this armband with a -- with a Star of David, you know, and -- and I thought that was, you know, kind of strange, but --

Q: What was that like for you to put on that arm -- do you remember the first time you put it on?

A: Yeah, I -- I kind of felt tainted, you know, I felt like I was -- you know, like I was -- I felt like anybody could spit at me, anybody could -- could kick me or beat me up, anything like that. That was a very bad feeling, you know.

Q: Did it happen?

A: No, fortunately not, no I did not have that problem. I did -- I did lose my bicycle, that was just taken away from me. Of course, that was soon as the -- you know, they -- I had a bicycle which I was very proud of, was given to me a -- maybe -- I think it was under the Russians that my father obtained a bicycle somehow. And that was, you know, I wa -- I was ripped off, you know, that was taken away. I didn't try to ride it, it was just in the -- stayed there in the -- in [indecipherable] the house. But no, I -- I -- I don't remember being a -- being accosted personally, you know, although I saw a lot of beatings a-and -- and this kind of, you know, atrocities, especially in the ghetto, you know, that was really bad.

Q: Did you see people being shot?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You did?

A: Oh yes. I saw people -- I mean that was -- that was wanton. I mean, you know, I saw -- I remember turning the corner and I -- and we saw this Ukraine pulling down and shooting an old woman. You know, just -- just -- I don't know whether it was target practice for him or what, you know, but he just -- just did that, you know, and that -- and then I remember -- I didn't actually see the actual hanging, but I remember once coming into the ghetto from the outside and there was this -- there were about seven or eight like lamp posts, you know, and there was hanging, you know, there was a public, you know, it was public hanging of -- of Jews right --

hanging from the lamp post. They left them there for about -- I think couple of days, just to frighten the people.

Q: And what did that do to you?

A: Terrible, was just very, very scary. Very scary. Just horrible. Was hard to describe.

Q: Did you talk about it with your father?

A: Oh, I mentioned it, I mention it to him when I saw him later on and I said -- and he heard about it, cause it was be -- it was well-known. It was one of those Aktions, they called that [indecipherable] Aktions that the Germans did from time to time just to s -- just to keep everybody in check, just to -- to frighten the populace, and whatever pretext they could use to do that, you know. But at that time, even in the ghetto, we still -- I did not he -- I was not aware -- I was -- know there were transports. We knew there were people taken on the train to be sent somewhere. But I-I don't -- did not hear about the crematoria, about the Auschwitz, or the Buchenwalds, or the Treblinkas and all that. At that time, didn't hear that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That was still not -- people still felt that they were going somewhere, possibly to some labor camps and all that, because there were labor camps surrounding the city.

Q: We're going to change the tape.

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: Okay. Michael, before I ask you about going into the -- the ghetto in L'vov, do you remember people selling furniture and bringing clothes and having to bring fur because the Germans were asking for -- they were --

A: Well, it was mainly, mainly there was collections of that, you know, for -- from -- but mainly the Germans were much more interested in -- in -- in -- in money and jewelry and gold, you know. Precious metals. Art objects, you know, and stuff like that. Basic clothing, I don't remember that as being a priority for them. But -- but it was a s -- just horrible in a sense that there was, you know, there was never enough, you know, there was constantly -- and what I think what the Germans tried to do is to get as much as they could before they -- before herding everybody into the ghetto, you know, because that was a time where they could actually grab things and you were not allowed to bring anything to the ghetto than what you can carry. You know, there was no -- no carriages of any kind, or -- or bicycles, anything like that. Whatever you could car -- drag on your ba -- you know, hold on your back or suitcases and stuff. So there was no [indecipherable] like -- occasionally I think they may have been able to hire maybe a -- a -- a -- a Pole or a Ukrainian with a -- with a cart or something like that if they could a -- if you could pay for it, but generally you could see mass -- just procession of people just going into it with -- with their basic belongings.

Q: How -- how did you find out that you were supposed to go into the ghetto?

A: All right, de -- there was announcements made, you know, there were pol -- you know, in -- in -- in Poland the basic announcement that was made was not made on the radio or anything that, they usually by -- by placards and by -- you know, they called aficias, you know, they put on -- on -- on kiosks, you know, on -- on walls and all that. And it was just an announcement

made that as of that date, which was in November, everybody must -- must -- you know, they were -- they were establish a district, you know, which is down the Zulkeyewska-Zamarstynowska district, kind of a poor section of town, that everybody has to go into that area, that was the ghetto. And -- and people were aware of the ghetto coming because there were ghettos already established in the other part of Poland, which was under the Germans for two years, you know, they started with the ghetto. So that -- so it was not totally unexpected that you have to go into a ghetto. But it was very traumatic because people just have to leave everything behind, you know, I mean even though they knew that -- they knew that they would, just the fact that they had to do it, and when you do it, when you leave all of your lifetime belongings, all your precious things, you -- you know, we didn't even have enough room for photographs, tha -- that -- I the -- there was no family photographs of when I was -- I remember I s -- I -- I had baby photographs, you know, like you know, with my bare bottom on a -- on a -- on a bare rug, and all these photographs taken as baby -- a ba -- and childhood pictures, nothing, I mean, because there -- because this was -- this was just a burden, you know, you had to -- clothing and -- and -- and whatever you could take with you, you know, you took, but you didn't take albums or -- or -- or -- or -- or books, or anything like that, you know, that was just a -- something that you couldn't -- couldn't handle even. So that was totally lost, you know, all the family photographs, any kind of personal belongings, mementos, whatever, what you will.

Q: So who made -- how much time did you have once you saw the notice? Did you have weeks, or --

A: They have about -- they ta -- they said originally I believe it was like 30 days or 40 days, 45 days, and I guess it was extended because they just couldn't handle all of it. But by -- I would say by -- probably by mid-December, most of the -- most of the Jews were -- there were still

some Jews left outside by papers, who had connections as it were, with the Judenrat or were specially singled out by the Germans as desirable to -- you know, to -- for want some work to be done, or -- or special work to be done and so forth. They were very selective about who they considered desirable and who not. So -- so by, I would say, by the -- by the end of December or so, you know, close to that, most of the -- of the Jews were in the ghetto, but that was still left open, it was still open back and forth and -- and Jews with work permits could leave the ghetto, they wer -- worked outside the ghetto, they -- there were all kinds of laborer camps established, you know, within the city, to work for the German, you know, ni -- whatever it was, clothing manufacturer, all kinds of manufacturing. Cause the Germans took advantage of every -- of every able body since all of their -- their men were in the army, you know, so they used Poles and Jews and Ukrainians, and -- for whatever labors -- requirements they had, or they felt was -- was necessary for the war effort, you know.

Q: Do you remember the day you left your house and went into the ghetto?

A: I don't remember the exact day. I remember making two trips. I remember one trip with -- with -- I mentioned to you, with my brother's grandmother, and then I came back and then I -- I may have gone maybe once or twice, you know, because you were able -- you were allowed to go in and out, you know, so you could make several trips before your domicile was empty and looted, or whatever, so you were able to -- to do that. So I -- it may have been more than one trip, maybe several trips, bringing in as much as a -- you know, could by -- but by that time you see, there was no help, my brother was already in the camp, my -- my oldest was in the army, the Russian army. So there was just my father, Mose -- Genya, and -- and Helen, and then there was also a cousin. My brother's sister's son, Chana Koch was her name, from Tomaszow. And so she was -- she was with us too, and so she kind of -- and she also spoke Ukrainian, and she kind of

looked like a peasant, you know, with a kerchief. You did everything to hide your -- you know, your identity, as it were. And you took a chance by taking your armband off, and -- which I did several times, just to be able to move around, you know, to be more -- more -- more free. And then eventually just ended up in the ghetto finally, you know.

Q: So how -- how were the decisions made as to what to take? Or was --

A: Whatever you are allowed to take.

Q: What --

A: You were just allowed to take what you could carry with you. And -- and if you could get some help, if you could get somebody to -- to -- to -- to -- to a cart, or he -- not your so -- not your own, but if you can hire somebody, and pay with whatever, with your watch or with your money, or with ev -- then they would do that, you know, but --

Q: And you can bring more in.

A: Can bring more in.

Q: But now how -- how was it decided where you were going to stay?

A: Oh, that was basically you tried to -- my -- m-my father tried to find a place. You tried to -- to get into the ghetto and locate a place, and we found a place which is like a -- an old house where we used a downstairs and another family used upstairs. These were homes that were vacated, obviously by -- by the residents who -- who, you know, ventured out for much better quarters, and it was a good deal, you know, a good swap for them. So there were a lot of them were just -- just left, even with some of the -- some of the old furniture, or old cots, or old, you know, straw mats, you know, mattresses and stuff like that. So we find that -- you know, you find that place that --

Q: This is going to sound naïve, but I'm -- I -- I -- I -- how does one just sort of say, well this is mine? Do you put a sign on the door?

A: Well, a --

Q: [indecipherable] have it --

A: -- s-some of them were assigned.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And some of them, you know, some were just open and you just -- you just -- you just went -- got in there and --

Q: And stayed.

A: -- and took it, yeah, yeah.

Q: And the -- did the Judenrat have anything to do with the assignments of these places?

A: Some of it did, I think they probably -- they -- they -- they tried to assign a lot of the people, able bodied workers, you know, into si -- into quarters that they felt were easier to access in terms of getting in -- you know, to f -- to work and so forth. So there were some -- some of it was by the Judenrat and some of it was a -- just on your own. You just tried to find whatever you could on your own. Because, you see, there was still a lot of movement available, you know, if you -- as long as you wore an armband at that time, you still could move. You could move into the ci -- out and in -- out of the city and so forth. Now, you had to have papers where you could have been stopped at any moment. If you didn't have papers you were -- you'd have been taken away or shot or beaten up, or whatever. You had to have work papers. And the first thing that my father did, being entrepreneurial as he was, he got some work papers. He never -- he didn't work, but he got the pap -- papers, he paid for them. So he had always a work paper, you know. Ar -- Arbeitschein, you know. But he didn't work, no, no, he was able to get away with it.

Q: Now, you said there were a number of times when you -- you'd leave the ghetto area, and take off your -- your badge.

A: Well, s-sometimes when I -- when I wanted to carry something, or -- or -- or get something, you know, like buy some -- some food or something, to be sure that I wasn't -- you know, that it wasn't taken away from me, I would take the armband off surreptitiously, and then once I was in the ghetto, I would put it on again, you know. But I had to be very careful about that, you know. I mean, if I had been spotted by somebody doing that, I would have been in real trouble. But you know, again, when you're young, you -- you -- you -- you're fearless in a way, you know. And to me it was -- was daring and I -- I -- I mean, I feel like every time I would take it off, I feel like I -- like I vanquished some -- you know, like I was getting even, as it were, you know? And I was proud of myself that I -- that I was able to do that, even though I was -- I was scared, obviously. So -- and -- so these are carn -- now -- now there is -- now I'm coming to a very, very traumatic experience, which is our very first close call in the ghetto, if I may. One day, the door burst open, a Ukrainian came in with his gun and said, "Come with me." My father was away, he was doing something somewhere, was just Genya and Helen and I. Didn't allow to take anything with us, and was walking us to a transport. There was a railroad station Zamarstynowska, and we know by the direction that we are going to a transport [indecipherable] there were -- at that time that was already starting to load people to wherever the destination they decided. He -- and he pulled a gun, and with the gun he was walking us towards that. That was one time when I felt it was -- was the end, was the beginning of the end. Genya was holding Helen in her arms and started to speak Ukrainian to the guard, and begging him to let us go. And she said, "For the fear of God, please let us go. Look at this child in my arms, look at this young boy." She said, "Do please let us go. We don't," -- you know, "why -- why don't you do that?" And then he spotted a gold

watch on Genya's wrist, and he took the -- the watch and he said, "Go away." We were about maybe 10 minutes away from the railroad station. Now that was one time when I cried, really cried, because I saw this poor Helen and Genya, and -- and I thought myself, what will my father do when he comes home and we're gone? Cause this happened so often, you know, that a worker would go, you know, to a -- to a camp, to a labor camp -- these were workshops, you know, within the ghetto. He would come home and -- and his family would be gone. He'd never know -- you didn't know from one hour to the next. You didn't know whether you would come back from work. Because if you did something that they didn't like, didn't like the way you looked, or the way this, that was it, you know, they took you away, or -- or you never -- you d -- you disappeared. So this was one time when I really broke down. So there's one -- one of many close calls. But this was one that was a -- that was our really first call, especially with that gun drawn, you know, where we're facing, really facing -- and then we didn't even -- I didn't even know whether he was going to shoot us on the way to, which he could have easily done, because there were shootings all over, you know, I mean, it's almost like -- like hearing sirens, and the fire -- fire engines in New York City when you live in Manhattan, you know, after a while you just -- you just hear it, and -- and you don't hear it, you know, the gunshots and -- and -- and -- and screams, or whatever, you know. And -- so I thought -- I didn't know whether he was going to even bother with us -- taking us to the -- to the -- to the railroad station, to the yards, or whether he was going to shoot us right on the way to. So that was really bad, that was really bad. That was when I began to really, really began to feel the -- the -- the -- the depth of that -- of that -- of that atrocity, the depth of that -- of that human degradation, you know? And that total feeling of helplessness, you know, totally -- totally helpless, you know. Totally at the mercy of -- of -- of a whim, of -- of a want, and you know, just as -- just -- just is -- is incredible when you think about

it, you know? That you could just -- anybody -- anybody that could just do whatever they wanted with you. Whatever they wanted. With no restraint. No restrictions. So the life in the ghetto, you know, was -- was very hard. Food was very, very scarce, people were starving. My father, again, was able to scrape up things. We did not -- maybe had one meal a day. Frozen potato peels were at a premium. Frozen potato peels. The things that were discarded, you know, by the -- by the restaurants, or by the place, whatever, you know, by others. But we managed. We didn't starve to death. I'd -- I was, you know, hungry at times, but -- but I didn't -- didn't really starve, per se, where I -- where I couldn't sleep because I was too hungry to sleep. And -- and then there was a time, too, when my father establish a contact with a gentleman from Warsaw by the name of Zaremba -- Zaremba, who would come into the ghetto, and he would trade with -- in gold and in -- and in gold coins and all that, because the people trying to -- to buy -- be able to buy food on the black market, would sell whatever they could salvage of their personal jewelry, valuables, gold coins and sell it to [indecipherable]. So he would come into this -- to -- to -- into the ghetto, was still wide open, and my father would do business with him, you know, by trading, and then in some ways helping those people to -- to get money to be able to buy things, and also, of course, trying to make some money for himself. So this Mr. Zaremba, that was the contact that I'm using -- mention [indecipherable] advisory, because that has a tremendous impact on my future survival, as it were.

Q: Before we go into the details of that, what is -- Eugenya -- is Eugen -- Eugenia or Genya --

A: Oh Genya, [indecipherable] be called as Genya, yeah.

Q: Was her voice -- when she talked to this Ukrainian guard, as calm as yours?

A: It was a pleading voice. I didn't say anything. I would -- I didn't know --

Q: So [indecipherable] yeah.

A: -- she was -- it -- it was a -- it was a really pleading, begging for mercy. Just ya -- and saying to him, yeah I remember her say, “Boitishe Bokha,” have fear of God, and I was appealing to his -- whatever religious, you know -- and they were religious, ironically, very religious, the Ukrainians. That was the Ukrainian or -- Catholic Orthodox church, Catholic church -- Orthodox -- somewhat Orthodox -- Eastern Orthodox. And saying, “Please, please, let us go. Why do you -- why do you n-need us? Please let us go.” Says -- says, “Look at -- look at this baby here, and this little boy here.” And -- and he did.

Q: Amazing.

A: He just did. He just took --

Q: One would wonder, if he hadn’t seen the gold watch, would he have -- who knows?

A: He could have taken the gold watch and -- and -- and -- and shoot us, but you know, maybe he was ambivalent, or maybe he was -- maybe he was taken by the fact that she spoke Ukrainian, instead of begging in Yiddish, as some might, you know, who did not speak Ukrainian [indecipherable] probably spoke Ukrainian. There were many Jews in -- in -- in -- in -- in L’vov, many who didn’t speak even a g -- decent Polish.

Q: Right.

A: Who betrayed themselves as Jews even though they may have worn, you know, worn clothing, and -- and shaved and everything, just opening their mouth, just saying a few words, you knew right away they were Jewish, which is hard, some f -- some people understand that, but that what language does.

Q: Did you run back to the ghetto once -- once he said go back, did you --

A: No, no, it was ru -- go back home, he meant, you know --

Q: Yes.

A: -- we -- we're still in the ghetto.

Q: Oh you're still in the ghetto?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Oh, you hadn't --

A: Oh, no, no, no, no, that was right in the ghetto. No, we weren't -- we weren't outside it. See, the ghetto was still open at the time. So there was on border, per se, there was no enclosure.

Q: And the railroad tracks were very close?

A: Well, they weren't very far, I think we walked may have -- maybe for about 15 minutes. Another 10 minutes we would have been at the railroad --

Q: Now did you know the trains were going to Belzec?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you know by this time?

A: W-We knew the trains were going. We -- I didn't know where they were going.

Q: You didn't?

A: No. We didn't know, I di -- I did not know, maybe my par -- maybe -- maybe my father knew. I did not personally know, although I heard later on. Of course they were de -- they had many choices, I mean, it was just Belzec, it could have been anywhere. Could have been Majdanek, Treblinka, depending on the -- on the workload and -- and -- and the capacity of the -- of the trains and the -- and the -- and the -- the cars available and the distances involved and so forth. So -- but I know there were actually any -- they were herding people into -- into -- into those railroad cars.

Q: And I -- did you cry when you got home?

A: Yes.

Q: And did they --

A: I'm cry -- I was crying on the way home.

Q: On the way home.

A: And she was hysterical.

Q: She was hysterical?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: And did she comfort you at all, or just you were both sort of emotional --

A: No, I -- I was just crying, I mean, you know, we are both, you know, there was nothing to be said, you know, it was just -- it was just another day and then -- then when my father came home, he found out all about that too, and he was obviously very upset about it and distraught, and --

Q: Right.

A: -- and yeah, he wasn't -- I don't know what would have happened if he had been home. I do -- I really don't know. I don't know whether that -- whether -- whether he would have let -- let all of us go, because remember what -- when -- w-what was a -- when -- an adult male was always a target, you know, whether he would have felt that he co -- y-you know, he would have scared to let -- let my fa -- I don't -- I don't know what he would have done. It's so hard to speculate, you know --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- about something like that. So that was what my very, very first encounter with -- with -- with this kind of doom, as it were, you know, feeling that things were really -- you know, was -- was the end of it, yeah.

Q: Was there a kind of social hierarchy in the ghetto so people -- you know, were wealthier people, people [indecipherable]

A: Definitely.

Q: -- and -- and other difference --

A: There were -- well, there was the Judenrat, you know, and the -- and the Judenrat had a lot of people working with them. And I guess, by virtue of their -- their work, which -- and I'm not trying to be critical now, I'm just trying to say that -- that -- that they try -- they thought they were helping, you know, and then since they weren't, they obviously had a more privileged status that the Germans didn't bother them. I mean they let them live, as it were, and they let them maybe give them some rations of food or whatever, you know, a helper. And there were also, of course, people that were well off. They had the monies to -- to obtain things in the black market. They had monies to maybe buy a -- a -- a labor permit like my father had, you know. On the other hand there were many, many very poor ones, you know. I mean, the higher -- the -- the social structure of the Jews involved was typical of -- of -- of -- of social structures and maybe even like nowadays here at home in the States, there were -- they were not just merchants, they were cobblers, they were tailors, they were -- and in street where I live, you know, there was a baker across the street. There was a -- a -- a -- a -- a -- you know, a shoemaker. There was even -- even one that -- that had a horse and buggy, you know, that -- they call them fiacres, you know, they were -- they were like taxis, you know, horse -- horse drawn taxis, you know, the old type you know with the -- that you see in Stanley Park, you know, in New York. And so there were all stratas. In fact, we even have a couple Jewish prostitutes that we knew of.

Q: In the ghetto?

A: In -- no, no, no, in L'vov.

Q: In L'vov.

A: In L'vov. Now I-I'm using this advisorly because -- because to -- to res -- to respond to your question about the strata of the social structure, there was -- there were all kinds of different structures, unlike the small shtetls where you had only maybe a few merchants and maybe a cobbler or something. In the big cities they -- you had all classes of society, represented by the Jews, which is not ba -- maybe that well known. So -- so as a result, these people who went into the ghetto were obviously the same -- same groups, of social groups. And the ones that -- that -- that were poor obviously the ones -- the first ones to -- to -- too poor to die of -- of -- of -- of starvation, of san -- poor sanitation, of lack of clothing. You know, winters can be very se -- very severe in Poland, you know, it's got a severe, you know, si -- a kind of a -- you know, northern Canadian, if you will, climate, you know, like a climate of like a Winnipeg. Very, very below zero temperatures. In fact, I remember I got once frostbite, that was before the war, on my toes, just going to school and going back, because I -- because the school was closed and I insisted on going to school because I felt a sense of duty, I must go to school, I must go to school. My parents insisted I don't go, well sure enough I went and by the time I came back, I had frostbite on two of my toes, you know, and I was sick for several days, you know, and long healing process. So -- so that what happened, you know, the -- the ones that were -- and of course many [indecipherable] of the young men, maybe some of the poor [indecipherable] Jewish police of the ghetto, they felt that they could -- this is one -- there was one way of -- of also prolonging the survivals -- prolonging the -- the -- the -- the way of life, or trying to, you know, trying to -- to -- to manage not to be sent away. So they were [indecipherable] they were policemen that they -- they used -- that they used by the Germans as Jewish police to keep order or carry out, you know, some of the orders that the Germans used, especially in rounding up people, you know, for -- for the labor camps and checking documents and so forth.

Q: Were they hated in the ghetto, the Jewish police?

A: They were not liked in the ghetto. No, they're definitely not liked in the ghetto at all. In fact, I would say probably most of them were hated. Because they were -- they were -- they saw them doing the kind of things that -- that they were and -- and I don't think -- th-they were hated. They were basically hated, I'm sure. And I -- and I'm su -- I'm sure many of them thought they were doing good things, th-they -- they were helping, like the Judenrat, you know? But in the end of it, they didn't, obviously. They didn't help, no, nothing helps. Nothing helped.

Q: And did people -- were they angry at the Judenrat as well, that they didn't like what they were doing, there was [indecipherable]

A: I don't think that was generally -- I think that the feeling was that the Judenrat was -- was trying to help, but I don't think that they were -- they were thinking that they were doing any good, per se. From what I know my -- my father didn't have a very high opinion of the Judenrat. He felt that they were just -- just being a mouthpiece for the Germans, or you know, trying to keep things together. And so historically one could argue that perhaps they did help, you know, in some ways to prolong the -- the -- the agony as it were, you know.

Q: And did you notice people being selfish, corrupt, stealing from each other. I mean, what did you notice about the --

A: Well, that -- I've been thinking about that all, and you know, I came to the conclusion that -- that a lot -- some of them just -- just trying to survive did some very unspeakable things. Can you blame them for it? I really don't know. I don't know what I could really say that they did it on purpose. They did it because they -- they felt that that --as that was one way of surviving. And one of the things that I remember my father commenting about some of the Jewish police -- I didn't see it myself, but commenting, that actually they would, in rounding up old people, those

are the priorities, getting the old and the sick and get ri -- getting rid of them. That he actually saw it himself, that they were actually taking their parents and marching them off because they were told to round up old people and so forth. And that was -- I'm sure that was not done a lot. Was an aberration, but it only was a -- it was an example of -- of what can be done, how -- you know, to -- to the psyche of a human under -- under these terrible conditions, you know. How it destroys any sense of -- of propriety, any sense of -- of reason and then -- and family feelings and you know, like that. Self preservation, misguided, sick.

Q: Okay, we're going to change the tape now.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Okay. Michael, when we ended in the last tape, we were -- I was asking you about a kind of hierarchy in the -- in the ghetto, and I wanted to know whether -- you spoke about your father telling a story about police -- Jewish police taking their parents. I want to know if you ever saw anything, people mistreating each other. Di -- not that you heard of it, but you were watching what people were doing and how they were behaving.

A: I have not really seen myself, actual, any kind of physical violence against one another. What I saw is people with anguish on their faces, obviously people were hungry. People also not knowing who was who, you know, having -- look -- having -- looking with fear, looking with distrust, with apprehension. You know, when this happens day after day after day after day, it wears and it becomes a -- almost a way of life, you know, you -- you -- you feel hunted and haunted and so I saw that, you know. I -- I mean there was -- certainly there wasn't ever any kind of humor, or any kind of -- of -- of -- of what shall I say, feeling of relax -- of relaxation in any way, everything was tense. The air was tense, and -- and because the ghetto was open, you see, it was open to everybody to go in and out, in fact the streetcar was going all the way to the end of the line, which I used later on when I left the ghetto, and -- so anybody could come in, you know, and they -- and you looked and you didn't know who was who. Obviously people who -- the Jews wore -- wore armbands, but when you ra -- walked the street and you ran into somebody without one, who was that person? Was a Ukrainian, was it a Pole, was it a friend, was it a foe? Was it a secret police, you know, because they use a lot of secret police without -- no uniforms. What would happen next, you know? You -- yo-you -- you walk to -- you know, you try to -- to avoid that -- that person. So it was just a -- a kind of a -- a feeling of siege, a feeling of a -- a siege mentality, okay? With hunger, with -- with -- you know, and -- and -- and one of the things

that I -- I saw is a lot of the -- of the hearses, you know, that that -- you saw a lot of that horse drawn -- cause they were collecting bodies. And that, of course, that did it to Jews who worked on the -- so you saw that, and that be -- that was a common scene. You know, you turn the corner, you walk the street and there was an-another one hearse, and -- and a -- maybe another one somewhere else. So you saw that, you know, and -- but -- but as far as overt mistreating per se, I did not see that.

Q: I mean even psychologically, not necessarily physically. You say people didn't -- there was no humor. Do -- do you remember your mood?

A: Well, my mood was basically one of -- of -- of anger, some fear. Sometimes feeling of hunger, and basically also a feeling of loneliness, you know, I was -- I was -- I didn't have any friends, I didn't have anybody to -- to associate with, and I lost all my -- the contact with all my -- my playmates, my -- my classmates, you know. So I was totally alone, you know, and when you're 13 years old, you need companionship, you need -- you need to -- to you know, you -- you want to -- to -- to play, you want to associate with somebody because you're not a grown-up, you know, you don't have much in common with the adults, you know. So there was this feeling of isolation and loneliness, you know, this [indecipherable] living from one day to the next, not knowing what's going to happen next.

Q: But there were other kids in the ghetto?

A: There were other kids in the ghetto, but -- but -- but there was not much -- much [indecipherable]. Everybody was just -- was just a survival feeling, you know. I mean, that -- that -- you didn't play in the streets, no way. You wouldn't dare to do that, you wouldn't want to do that. I think if you played and had fun probably somebody would descend on you -- even on the kids, you know, and then and so there was -- there was not -- none of that. I mean, I would walk,

you know, I would maybe take a walk and -- and go there and look around and -- and so forth, but I -- I had no -- there was no way of -- of having, at least in my area where I was, no playmates, nobody to really exchange any thoughts or ideas or whatever, you know. And you didn't even dare to talk about it, you know, you didn't know whom you were talking to.

Q: Did you see a change in your father and in Genya, did their personalities become harsher in their way of behaving different than you had seen before?

A: Well, they -- I think -- I think my father never showed much of that himself, he was always sort of tough and survival type of, you know, person. Genya, I would say was probably more -- more affected, more distraught. She was -- I think she was -- she took it very hard when -- when Helen was given away, losing her child. But that was the only way, that was, you know, my father had this -- this -- always a sense of trying to see what can be -- can be done to survive, you know, that was one of his -- was always this -- this -- he had that very strong survival instinct and --

Q: So it was his idea to do that?

A: Oh, I'm sure, oh definitely, I -- we had to pay for it too, you know, this was not done for free. So -- so that was that feeling, too. So she was -- she was very -- very badly -- t-took -- it was very bad for her to do that. And also, my father was out, you know, since he had a work permit, he could mingle, he could go out there and he could scrounge and do whatever he could, while she was always at home, you know, I mean, she was -- she didn't -- she didn't work. So therefore she -- she was basically just as much alone as I was, you know? My brother was already in camp, you know, so -- so there was just like the days -- from one day to the next, you know, I mean just -- you lose a sense of time, you lose a sense of -- of balance and -- and then you -- you -- down the street you see some people that lived there and all of a sudden they're -- they're gone, you

know. So -- so it was basically as I said before, it was just a total feeling of -- of a -- of a siege mentality, of a -- you know, being totally -- being sort of a -- a hopelessness, you know, if you will.

Q: Where did the food come from when you went to Winniki, to -- to bring food to your brother?

A: Okay, now Genya would prepare some food, you know, she would make it and she would put in a -- in a cardboard container. And then I would go out of the ghetto, the ghetto was still open at the time, and -- actually even with the armband, and I would go all the way out. I would walk. It was maybe 10 miles or so, but for a young kid 10 miles isn't that far. Or more, maybe more, I'm not exactly the distance.

Q: One way?

A: But most of the time -- one way -- but most of the time it was not Winniki, it was -- it was actually -- in Winniki I think it was maybe once or twice, but maybe half a dozen times I went to the opposite direction, actually in the direction of the Janowska lager -- Janowska camp, I should say. And there there was a quarry where my brother George was working in a -- with a group of other inmates, and as I said before, he -- by hand, you know, they were actually breaking up boulders and stones and crushing them to create the -- the -- the gravel for the -- for the roads because that's what the -- the Germans were always trying to keep their roads, you know, going, you know, for the -- for the armies, for the -- the troops and for the -- and so forth. So he was there, you know, and that was -- that was a terrible sight to see these men who were not -- you know, not even used to this hard physical labor, you know, they were -- to be able to all day long, can you imagine all day long standing there and -- and with hammers breaking -- breaking stones with very little breaks, you know, maybe four minutes at a time. And like eight or 10 hours a day, you know. So many died, you know, my -- my -- my George relates the -- the -- the

fact that many who couldn't -- who were weak, you know, or cou -- or wou -- couldn't -- you know, couldn't make it, you know, were just shot and so I remember that, so that's why we got the food and that was -- that helped them a lot. But then -- course when I -- when I left, and of course when they would -- they wouldn't allow food later on and he made some contacts with some local peasants where he -- they were helping him out a little bit too, but -- but he had a very, very rough time of it. He had typhoid fever in the camp, he was almost shot because of that. There was an outbreak of typhoid fever, which kind of decimated the camp that he was in and they brought in new people into the camp. So that's how -- that's what happened with the -- with that.

Q: Was it -- was it dangerous for you to walk on [indecipherable]

A: At that time it wasn't that dangerous because the ghetto was still open, there was still a lot of communication. And when I brought the food, at that time the guards allowed food. They still allowed food at that early stage. They just didn't bother, you know, with that, and I was a young kid, you know, so I just went over. And -- and you can imagine what the other -- when they saw food, what happened. Of course my brother would share some of it with them, too, you know, because they were -- everybody was hungry there. They gave them food but obviously nowhere near enough for the physical exertion and the fill of hard labor. I mean you -- just incredible when you -- just the sight of those poor -- poor people doing that. It was just like a deliberate way of -- of, you know, of killing them with -- with -- with -- with forced labor, because how much could they accomplish, you know, by -- by breaking up stones, you know, manually, you know, I mean there's just a -- we just -- but they did, you know, and they -- they built the roads and -- and my brother eventually ended up on a -- on a steamroller, you know, and so forth, he's a -- he has his own story to tell about that.

Q: Were you a -- were you able to spend a little time with your brother, or you came with food and you left?

A: Oh no, no, I just came with food, and -- and when he finished eating I would bring -- I would take the -- the pots, they -- there was a couple stacked up back --

Q: Right.

A: -- and I just watched him eat, which took very little time, believe me, you know, he just gulped it down, practically. And then I would just bring it back and I was able to do it a few times. I think maybe no more than maybe three or four times.

Q: I see, so this wasn't a long term --

A: Yeah, oh, no, no, no, it wasn't an ongoing thing, no, you couldn't -- I couldn't do that.

Q: This must have been hard on you. I don't mean the walk, but seeing him in that place.

A: Oh God, it was horrible, was just horrible to see him because you know, was horrible. And to see all these other young -- young men, they -- they se -- they selected those, you know, for -- for the labor and -- and was just a -- t -- horrible sight. I feel sorry for -- I p -- feel badly for my -- I mean from one trip to the next, I didn't even know whether he would survive, you know, whether I would see him again.

Q: Right.

A: Cause you didn't know. And then the -- and then they had occasions when they were marching back to the camp from the day's work, sometimes they would get stopped, and at random they would pick out some of these and -- and shoot them. In fact, they had a -- they -- they -- one of those camp com -- commandants had a rule that for every inmate that tried to escape, even if he was caught, they would sic -- shoot six -- six of -- of the -- of the -- of the

inmates in the camp, and that's -- so -- so that happened too, and he almost got shot, so -- so he -- he had a really tough time of it, but he managed just to survive.

Q: So how did it happen that you were going to leave L'vov ghetto? Is there something that [indecipherable]

A: Okay, okay, now my father obviously realized, you know, that something -- that how -- how we -- how are we going to survive, you know. He didn't know what -- what -- you know, he tried to work out something. Escaping from the ghetto was impossible. Even when there was open, you know, there was no way. He couldn't do it himself because he would be immediately recognized as being a Jew. Genya wouldn't leave my father. And so he came upon this idea, and one morning he said -- he prepared, you know, getting prepared a little backpack, and he sa -- and he gave me a birth certificate in Latin, with the name of Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn. And he said, "You take this, you go to the railroad station, you buy a ticket for Warsaw, and you're going to go to Mr. Zaremba's apartment." So he did arrange with Mr. Zaremba, the business associate of his to -- for me to at least get to him. Whether he was -- I was going to stay with him or not I didn't know that, but that was the address he gave me in Warsaw.

Q: So there's no preparation [indecipherable] nothing.

A: There was absolutely no preparation, no, my father wasn't like that, he said, hey, this is it. He didn't ask me am I afraid to go, or -- or what to do. He said, this is what you have to do, this is what you do. And he obtained this birth certificate, I guess, on the black market, whatever it was. It looked very, very authentic, as it will be evident later on from my -- from my talk here. And -- and that's what I did. I remember taking that little backpack. He gave me enou -- gave me money for the railroad ticket. Then he told me that in my jacket there was a sewn in gold coin, the purpose of which I didn't know exactly what he wanted for, but I realized later on what it was

for. And I remember taking the backpack, and we were on a -- a -- our ghetto was on a street called Sienna, S-i-e-n-n-a, Sienna Street. And just about two blocks away was the last stop of the streetcar, and that was like in the spring of ’42, I don’t know exactly the date, but it was before the ghetto was closed, you know. I believe the ghetto was closed in August, I believe, of ’42, right? That was before then. It was a nice day, warm day. And I remember before I turned the corner, I took off my armband and threw it away, jumped on the streetcar and went straight to the railroad station. Bought a ticket for Warsaw. Nobody questioned, there was a lot of movement there, I mean, you know. After all, you’re not a li -- little baby when you’re 13 year old, you’re a young boy. And I got on the train and went towards Warsaw. And this is when I had my second close call, very, very close call. As we were riding on the train, all of a sudden the train was stopped. It was somewhere near Lublin, which is a city in the Lublin province, okay? Everybody out. The whole train was emptied out. And here were the Germans, SS with some civilians, setting up a table. Everybody out? Everybody in line? And everybody show documents. And then they would say left and right. Right were older people, women with documents, Poles, Ukrainians, you name it, whatever. Maybe even some civilian Germans who were let go right away. On the left they [indecipherable] some young men -- many young men. And then I heard the murmur, the talk among those that this another one of those round-ups for Polish workers that the Germans periodically would grab to send them to their factories, wherever it was, whether it’s in Poland or Germany or any place, to work in their factories because they were short of manpower, because everybody was in the -- on the -- you know, in the army, the German army. So I had no choice, I had to go in. So I showed my -- my birth certificate, he looked at me, left. I guess they felt that I was old enough to maybe be a worker, too. I was in good shape. So, what’s next then? Okay, I asked around, they said well -- one of the guys said,

what they do is they take you into a staging area overnight and in the morning you go to a public bath because they want to -- to delouse you, as they called it, you know, before you go anywhere else, you know, and so forth. And then you -- and then they ship you out. And these guys, you know, they didn't care, they were Poles you know, so they were -- some of them had -- had vodka with them and this and that, you know, and there were -- there were [indecipherable] say well, that's what we have to do, we have to ta -- these are the ones that obviously didn't have any papers, working papers. So I spend a kind of a sleepless night because I knew that if I went to a public bath my anatomy would immediately betray me and that would be the end of it, the end of it. Whether they would have informed on me, or whether they would just kick me out you know, and -- but the guards were there, you know, they were -- they obviously didn't want anybody to run away. So in the morning, as we were -- and I left my backpack behind, of course, because you would -- after the bath you would go back to the camp again, right, and then from there they would transport you and load you on a train and wherever they -- you know, they ship. So as we were walking towards the bathhouse, and I thought okay, here is the end of that, right? At the bathhouse, one of the guys, he said, "Run away, run away." Because they kind of -- there was another guard, there was one of the people there, because I was the kid, I was the youngest, there was nobody in my age in that group. In fact, I guess they probably thought what is he doing here? You know, I mean, this young kid doesn't belong. And one of the Ukrainian guards kind of -- was turned his back -- and this was a busy area, and the guy says, "Go, run away." And I just ran. And I ran right across the street, left my -- my -- my backpack, still had my ticket wa -- on me, fortunately I didn't leave it in my backpack. And went on the next train, continued to Warsaw. You know, when you think about it -- when I think about it, it just seems unreal. Just unreal. And then on the train --

Q: Wait, one second. How come you weren't scared to just run? What -- what did --

A: Because I had no choice.

Q: There's one -- uh-huh.

A: I had no -- I had no choice. In fact, when I ran I thought I was going to hear a shot behind me. I -- I just ran. I mean what -- there was nothing that I could do. I thought myself, this is it. I had to do that. You know, cause I was still -- I didn't do it on my own, I was kind of encouraged, I say hey, run, go, go, go, go. It was -- I mean, I had no choice because -- because I'm sure that if I -- if -- if they had discovered, there were enough of them whoever it was that would -- would have informed on me. Some may -- would have not, maybe some would have just, you know, said tha -- but somebody sure would have, cause there were just too many of them not to have at least one or two that would have said, hey this -- this Jewish kid, you know, he -- he da -- has no right to live, you know, I mean, kill him. I had no choice. When you have no choice you just do it.

Q: And what was in your backpack that you left?

A: Just some belong -- some underwear, you know, a sweater, [indecipherable] nothing -- nothing of any --

Q: So you have the jacket with the --

A: Jacket --

Q: -- the gold coin.

A: -- gold coin sewn into the lining of the jacket.

Q: Right.

A: And the ticket in my pocket.

Q: Right.

A: And my -- and my birth certificate --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, on me. And I'm --

Q: So you [indecipherable] on the train again.

A: -- on a train to Warsaw. And then I'm in -- on the train to Warsaw, and I sit in this -- in this -- in this cabin, you know, there was like -- on the train. And that was pretty crowded. And then there was this woman looking at me sort of askance. She didn't know what to make of me, you know, she thought, you know. So she asked me, cross yourself. Now, this not a simple thing. Most Jewish kids wouldn't know how to do it, even, or if they did it they wouldn't do it right. I happened to have known how to do that. Because in Poland what you have to do is you have go this, this, this, this and this. You have to close your hands. Just going this way is not enough. This is how you do it, you go this way and that. And left and right, not right and left, to cross yourself. So I did that. And I guess she thought, well if this kid were Jewish, he wouldn't be doing that, you know. They have these -- these ideas, you know, that a Jew on penalty of death maybe wouldn't cross himself, you know, because I [indecipherable] you know. But any rate, I did that, and that was it, so she just let go. So that was, you know, another one of those incidents. So I arrive in Warsaw on a beautiful, warm day. Big Warsaw railroad station. Big sign in German, wheels must turn for victory.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yeah, that was a very common slogan. "Räder müssen rollen für den Sieg," you know. And then another big sign saying, "Deutschlands Sieg an allen Fronten." Deutsch -- German victory on all fronts. Okay? So I go out there, busy, busy Warsaw. And as I turn the corner, I see placards, which I never saw before, in Polish. Any person hiding, harboring or abetting, or

facilitating a Jew is punishable by death. That was the first time that I ever saw this, I never saw this in L'vov. I guess they wa -- didn't need the -- the -- you know, it was to [indecipherable] there, you know. So that was -- that's the way I -- that was my greeting in Warsaw just -- just as soon as I turned the corner, without any backpack and so forth. And I knocked on the door of the Zarembas and of course they took me in. And they knew I was coming. And I stayed with the Zarembas for about two or three days. And I didn't know what to expect. But there's one thing I did instinctively. I gave them the gold coin. Because it crossed my mind that I couldn't do anything with it, and it -- I -- it crossed my mind that my father probably did that on purpose, he didn't tell me to do that, to give them -- give him the gold coin, maybe in payment or -- or just -- just to reward him for the fact that he took it upon himself for me to -- to see him, you know, to -- because after all, it was very dangerous you know, for anybody to -- you know, this Mr. Zaremba, his wife was -- was known as a Volksdeutscher. Now, do you know what that is?

Q: Why don't you explain it?

A: Volksdeutscher was a category that the Germans established for any Poles that had German ancestry, that had any kind of German ca -- German -- in their blood, so to speak. So they were kind of folk Germans. They were given special privileges, status, you know, preferential work and all that. So she was a Volksdeutscher and they often had German visitors because of that. Sometimes army people, military. It seems to me -- and I was never told this -- that they were a little bit concerned about me, since people that they knew they had no children. All of a sudden, who is this kid? What's this kid doing here? I don't know for sure, but Zaremba had a plan for me, and within about three or four days, he introduced me to a new life in Warsaw.

Q: All right, that's a perfect ending for this part of the tape. We'll move on to the next tape.

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: Michael, I want to go back a little bit. First of all, how easy was it for you to find the house of the Zarembas?

A: Wasn't very hard. Th-They lived right near the railroad station, and I j -- I just asked somebody, you know, in the street as to where it is and they just pointed it out to me and so forth.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because I didn't have any luggage with me, and so I was like a kid, maybe they thought I was on an errand, or I was --

Q: Right.

A: -- picking something up, whatever, you know. So I went to the Zaremba, fortunately they were home, you know, I knocked on the door and there they were.

Q: And were they warm people, were they --

A: They were friend -- oh yes, they were very nice, very warm people. Of course, Zaremba knew my father, she -- she met me -- his wife met me for the first time --

Q: Right.

A: -- she was really nice. They had no children, and they had German visitors in uniform and [indecipherable] and of course Zaremba took advantage of this by, you know, doing all kinds of black marketeering and stuff. But I don't f -- I didn't feel that comfortable. I wa -- not so much I was af -- afraid, it's just the proximity of them, you know, really bothered me. I -- I just didn't want to -- didn't want to be in the same room, you know, as it were, you know, and all this, with their -- you know, drinking and talking and then the -- all that, you know, and so forth. And enjoying their victories, you know, and the -- and the -- etcetera. So --

Q: Did they talk about what was going on with Jews?

A: No.

Q: Did they say anything about that?

A: No, no.

Q: They didn't.

A: No, I -- I -- I [indecipherable] I did knew German quite well, you know, even though I was a kid, which be -- which will be interesting comment I'll make later on about -- about how I had to curtail my German. But -- so about -- oh, about three days or four days, he took me to this place which was a workshop, a little plant by the name of Boleslaw Konarski, I mention the address, and I'll spell it later. And introduced me as a distant relative's son, a half-orphan from the province of Tarnopol -- cause that's where my birth certificate, and he knew about the birth certificate -- who wants to learn a trade. Who wants to learn a trade, you know. Now it was very common to have orphans or kids that didn't go to high school to learn a trade. And the way it worked was that you actually lived on the premises, you ate and slept on the premises, and you worked on the premises. And I slept on a loft with a couple of other kids about my age, and I was put to work. Now, Polish which was perfect was a L'vov Polish. And the L'vov Polish dialect was very much divided by the Warsaw people. It was sort of analogous to let's say a Chicago English versus Brooklyn English, okay? With Warsaw English being clipped, sort of you know, short and clipped, whereas as you know the Brooklyn is the singsong and all those yishes, and all that. So they kind of identified almost the -- the L'vov Polish with Jews, with Jewish Poles. And I caught this right away, they -- where they kind of started to kind of laugh at me, you know, they -- there's some jokes about that in Polish about the -- about the L'vov dialect. And this was a dialect spoken not only by -- by, you know, lower classes, was just a -- a typical, you know,

even -- even in the -- you know, in New York, a good New York English is not like a -- like a Midwestern English, even -- even the -- you know, among the intellectuals. So I had to quickly learn the Warsaw dialect. I was very conscious of that, I was very concerned because I knew I wou -- I was afraid that they may question that, that I may have -- you know. And my biggest, biggest problem was again being circumcised. That preyed on my mind virtually 24 hours a day, because when you live with young -- wa -- other boys, you know, and you associate with them, and you -- and you -- and you there, you know, boys tend to play games, you know. They'd li -- sometimes they compare anatomies, you know, and all that. And I was very, very concerned about that because the minute that would happen, you know, I -- I often thought to myself, what would they do if they were to discover -- what would they -- what would they do. And I didn't think that they would inform on me because they were very, very pate -- you know, Poles were very anti-German. But they would definitely kick me out, you know. I mean, they would not kick me, because I mean, they could be all killed for that, you know. Or maybe some of them -- maybe some of the, you know, workers would actually maybe even inform on me, because we lived in this place where there were -- at first there were three apprentices, and there were four journeymen as they called them. These are the foremen, the journeymen, th-the ones that the -- that they knew their trade and all that. And was hard to tell among them, who -- who would be, you know, who would be the one that would actually -- would actually denounce me or -- to the -- to the authorities being Jewish. So that was constantly on my mind, and I was very concerned about that. And fortunately I -- I -- we never got into that. You know, I ended up with -- with only one. There were two more boys, and there was one -- one apprentice by the name of Janek. And he was kind of, you know, h-he -- he -- he was a little bit of a -- how shall I say? Quiet and -- and not so outgoing. So I -- we never had occasion to [indecipherable]. We slept in the same --

on the same loft, and -- and we worked, you know. And the -- the place of work -- what they manufactured there, or manufactured was rawhide harnesses for the utility workers on -- on poles, you know, they climbed the poles. Rawhide harnesses. Was very, very hard work, you know, to si -- you had to sew it by hand. They were -- they used underarm holsters for the secret police. That was one of the jobs too, that they had to -- to -- to work on. All kinds of bags, and wallets and this kind of stuff, okay. The owners lived on the sa -- everything was on one level, you know, the owners, their qua -- you know, their bedroom, their workshop and everything was on the same level. And not too long after I started there, because of my age, 13 years old, I was going to be 14 in the fall, there was a law that you had to get a Kennkarte. A Kennkarte means in German -- Kenn is to know, and karte was like a i -- I.D. na -- I.D. card, okay? And you had to go to the local authorities to pick it up, to the police, to the Gestapo, you know. So what do you do now? I had no choice, I had to go. I couldn't say I wouldn't -- I'm not going to go. I didn't know what they were doing there, whether they had suspi -- you know, whether they were screening people for the -- for the -- for the -- and I went. I showed them my birth certificate, I told them I was working for the firm of Boleslaw Konarski. Boom, I got a Kennkarte. So here I was officially now an official Aryan. No phony, no, no, you know [indecipherable] I was officially an Aryan, no more Jewish, you know, right? Except for my anatomy I was no more Jewish. And living in Warsaw at that time, I encountered a number of things -- that was even before -- before the following year, before the ghetto. In other words, when you're on the streets of Warsaw -- after work, you know, I and this kid, we were just roaming around, you know, and so forth. They had these -- the police was walking down the street and they would periodically stop people and ask for I.D.s and round-ups. And what they were looking for basically is undocumented Poles. They were looking also for resistance because Warsaw already had a

strong resistance movement at that time. And of course they're looking for Jews, or people that were trying to escape, Jews who tried to -- to -- to escape from the ghetto, who were -- were out of the ghetto. And what they would do is -- oh, and incidentally, in addition to those placards which said harboring a Jew, you know, is -- i-it would be death penalty, they had placards showing how to identify a Jew. And they were showing -- presumably that was all developed by -- by this -- I think it was Rosenberg was the German guy who pr -- who apparently claimed that there are certain anatomical features in the Jewish face which are 100 percent Jewish, okay? By virtue of the shape of the nose, by virtue of the shape of the ears. By some bone structure, by the cranial structure, whatever it was, with very elaborate charts, you know, as to how to identify the Jews. And that was done in Polish, so that Poles who were inclined to do so, you know, would be -- or Ukrainians, whoever it was -- and there were a lot of Estonians and Latvians too at that time, cause they were the guards of the -- many of them were guards of the ghetto, would be able to identify a Jew and maybe report him to the -- to the Germans, who would be very grateful for it, I'm sure, you know. So that was another thing. So what they would do is as they were walking down the streets, and they were -- have these quick round-ups. If the -- if somebody looks suspicious, you know, a -- a male, of course, they would take him around the corner and let him drop his pants, you know, to check to see whether he was circumcised. Now circumcision was like a hundred percent giveaway in Poland, which is very hard to understand here, because I mean we know that -- and I -- I-I know the trend today is maybe not to do it as much, but I know that virtually -- and especially the United States, I mean, mer -- many hun -- millions of men are circumcised, of whatever background, wha -- you know, right? Whether it's Muslim or ca -- or Catholic, Protestant and so forth. In Poland, this was not done. In fact, I remember hearing a story that if someone who was not Jewish was circumcised, had to have some iron proof

documentation that for medical reasons, and whatever -- I don't know whether that person, you know, ever -- how he -- how they -- they managed to sur -- to -- to live, you know, to have -- to prove that -- that he was not Jewish, because that was -- they would -- there was no questions asked, you know. I mean, that was it. Was kind of ironical. In fact, in fact, I heard of cases where some Jewish men tried to go through surgery to create some kind of false foreskin, or enlarge the skin, which always failed, you know, in order to hide the fact they were circumcised. You may have heard about that. So that was another fact, and now come April 1943, the ghetto uprising in Warsaw. And I was not far from the ghetto in terms of -- of being able to actually see the smoke and the shooting. And sometimes I would see a column of me -- of people, of Jews from the ghetto being marched out for -- obviously to be taken somewhere to a transport, to a concentration camp. And I believe that lasted for about three or four, three weeks or so, when the ghetto was obviously destroyed, and -- and that wa -- that made a tremendous impact on me, I mean I was -- I kind of felt helpless. I -- I felt -- that was when I really felt a sense of great guilt, that here I was, you know, on the outside, you know, and I was getting away with it, and here were these people [indecipherable] they were fighting for their lives and so forth, there was nothing I could do about it. I mean, I certainly wasn't brave enough, or thinking that I would just run into the ghetto and join them, you know. That would have tote -- it would have been -- you know, I mean I -- you had to try to survive, you know, and tha -- and that was my fortune that I was able to be on the other side, even though not knowing what the next day would bring for me, you know. So that was very bad, that was -- that was -- and we knew about it actually, you know, that was known that it was a ghetto uprising, even though there wasn't much talked about it where I worked, you know. But peop -- that -- you know, there wa -- it was known that there was an uprising in the ghetto.

Q: And did you hear things about the ghetto prior to the uprising, and about the deportations? I mean, by this time, is it clear to you that there are death camps, or you still don't know?

A: Yes, I did know about it. I did know about a death camp of Auschwitz, because -- because the son of the ow -- well, the woman who was -- of the -- of the firm, she was a common law wife of this -- this master of the shop. Her son was actually a Pole. He was in -- he was in Auschwitz for a short while, they had a section for non-Jews, you know, near -- near ausch -- Auschwitz. And he was -- he came back from Auschwitz, and he mentioned that Auschwitz was, you know, there was a concentration camp in Auschwitz, and so on, so he did talk about that, about -- briefly about his experiences. And he said, "Oh, there's a lot of Jews there, s -- they're getting all killed," you know, but -- yeah.

Q: And you believed this?

A: Oh yes, oh absolutely.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Absolutely. But I didn't -- he -- he just mentioned that in general, you know. So I -- I knew, I knew. By that time I already knew -- knew about that there's a -- there was a concentration camp in Auschwitz.

Q: And by this time, by April '43, you're in Warsaw for how long?

A: Well, it was just about --

Q: From the spring of '42.

A: -- the spring of '42, yeah.

Q: So it's almost a year?

A: Almost a year, exactly, exactly, I was there.

Q: Do you start feeling somewhat safer, or you continue --

A: I felt safer in the sense that I was kind of established there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: You know, that I was -- I was accepted, and of course I was -- I was part of that -- of that -- of that ambience. I would go to church, you know, I -- I -- I -- my -- this kid who -- who was with me, Janek, you know, we learned how to skip confession, you know, when -- cause the woman, she was very, very religious, so she was chase us out, you know, always to go to church on Sunday. So we went in and out, you know, cause a kid was not interested. And when the time was for confession we would go to the -- pretend like to the confession, we found a booth that wasn't occupied, so we pretended like we are at the -- you know, doing confe -- going into confession, kneeling there, you know, and then after a little while, you know, cro -- go up, cross ourselves, and -- and leave, you know. So -- so I was kind of accepted as part of the -- of that -- of that working family, as it were. But -- but I was always, always, always concerned about discovery. I wa -- that was always on my mind. Why? Because -- because there were the -- the customers who came in, there were a lot of secret police guys that came in to pick up holsters, there were -- and -- and -- and they saw me working, you know, and all that. And you never knew who would kind of look at me and say wait a minute, this kid looks more like -- he must be Jewish, or something like that. You know, or he looks Jewish, or -- even though I really didn't, you know. But who knows, you know, I mean you -- you never knew that, what would happen. So -- so I was -- there's always that -- that lingering concern, as it were, on my mind you know, and fear as well, that I may be discovered. But of course, I had a much easier time of it than -- than like -- than say my brother was in the -- in the camp, you know, so I was -- felt -- felt in some ways fortunate that -- you know, that I was where I was, you know --

Q: Were you ever in a situation where you came close -- someone came close to seeing that you were circumcised?

A: No.

Q: No. So you were very careful how you dressed and undressed --

A: Careful how I dress and undress and all that, and don't forget I -- we never -- we never based [indecipherable] always had this -- you know there were just a -- just you wash your -- th-the lower part of your body didn't get much -- much sanitation as it were, you know. You just washed the upper body, the feet or legs and this and that, so -- so I never -- th-there -- there was no -- there was no shower, you know, and then --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- or bath or anything like that. But -- but when I undress, sure, at night, dressi -- undressing and dressing, always -- because that was there, it was there, I -- I knew, I was aware of it, and -- and there was no doubt about it, that --

Q: And nobody questioned you that you were doing some -- you were dressing and undressing in a way --

A: Not at all, no --

Q: No.

A: -- you see, that was why I had to learn to be very casual about it, you know, that's one of the things that the -- the -- the survival instincts, I guess, teaches you. At the same time I had to behave casually and at the same time in a guarded way, you know. And with ke -- you know, I lived on the -- you know, in -- in the loft there, and that was dark, you know, and we would climb up the ladder and go to -- go to sleep. You know, you don't -- when you're young you don't sleep tha -- you don't need that much sleep, so it was very late, usually in the evening, and

-- and so forth, and I -- and then on Sundays we were free, and -- and I remember one incidence which reminds me that one of the friends of this -- this owner of the firm, by the name of Boleslaw Konarski was the owner, he -- she ran the business, only he was kind of a -- an alcoholic, you know, would go on two, three day binges, was away, you know. And then would come back home with -- you know, with -- with no -- penniless and all that. And one of his friends once came in, I believe, and he made a comment in Polish what really scared me. He says, “He must be -- he must be part Jewish,” to this Boleslaw Konarski. Just like that. He is from a Jew, in Polish, he said. [indecipherable] he must be somewhat from a Jew. He didn’t say I was Jewish, but maybe from a Jew. And then Boleslaw said, oh come on, no, no. Do not be ridiculous. Something like that. That was the end of that. That was another true incident. I still remember the way the words that he used. I think he is a little bit of a -- from a Jew. But other than that -- and then -- so these sights in Warsaw were very, very, very bad, you know, they -- they -- they -- this whole idea of a -- of -- just constant round-ups of people. But life went on, you know, and Warsaw is a very, very busy city. And then I befriended a family who are relatives of the owner of this -- of this -- of this pl -- workshop. There was a family of four daughters living ap -- in a small, little village outside of Warsaw, on the other side of the Vistula, on the roo -- east bank of the Vistula, near Praga. Praga was basically part of Warsaw, it was -- it’s called Praga, not Prague, Czechoslovakia, Praga. Was like part of the Warsaw, but that was called Praga, which was the -- was one side of the -- of the river. And there was one -- one of the daughters who I was very smitten with, she was about two, three years older.

Q: This is Danka?

A: Danka, Danielle, Danka, exactly. And -- and I guess that saved me -- saved my life, that my knowledge of Danka will save my life, too. Because I would visit them occasionally on -- on

Sundays I would go out there with the commuter railroad, maybe a 15 minute trip. And the father, he was a carpenter, and there were four daughters. And I [indecipherable] I befriended her and we were very friendly and I was -- so I would stay there for the day, some days overnight and take a very early -- early commuter back into the city. And I think this was going on for about maybe six, seven months and one weekend, one weekend -- not weekend, but it was a sun -- I think it was late Saturday maybe, I was able to get away. I was there, and the next day the Polish uprising broke out in Warsaw. Here I am again, no belongings, no clothing, just visiting this family. No way to get back to Warsaw because it was the uprising, was the Polish uprising. Was a massive, massive uprising in August of 1944. Huge uprising. The city was just -- I mean, oh my God, I mean it was tremendous -- you could actually hear it, even 10 - 12 miles away, you could hear the explosion and -- and so forth. And the Russians were not -- nearby. They weren't very far at all. Now as you know, what happened in the Polish uprising was that it lasted for about two months. It was totally destroyed. Warsaw the city was destroyed. The population was evacuated. And if I had stayed in Warsaw, who knows what would have happened? I would have maybe run into the same business of being taken somewhere and wo -- to a work camp, maybe going to another bathhouse, or who the hell knows what, you know. Or killed maybe in the uprising itself, cause it was a very massive uprising. Tens of thousands you know, of -- of underground force there. But we were just observers from th -- you know, from the suburbs, as -- you know. And this co -- this oh -- this -- this father of that family, by the name of Bozym was his last name, B-o-z - dot - y-m, Bozym. There was an field artillery unit, a German field artillery unit camped right in that little village up the hill to [indecipherable] farm. You know, what they would do, they would just -- wherever they want they just took over a farm, killed the -- the -- you know, confiscated the -- the -- the -- the livestock you know, and butchered it for their own

use, and so on. So they a -- took over the farm. And Mr. Bozym was a [indecipherable] that was looking for work obviously, to do something, and that field artillery unit needed some repairs to be made on their -- some of their storage equipment, whatever it was. And he took with me as an assistant, an apprentice. Not apprentice, but an assistant. So we worked there for a few days while this was still going on in Warsaw. And we worked a circular saw. Equipment was very rusty. There was no guard on the circular saw at all. And I had a narrow piece of wood which I was trying to cut and I cut off half of my finger on it. Okay? And the blade clo -- was so close to this, I almost lost a second finger, too. Cut my finger and I was bleeding. So the German who was in charge, the staff -- staff sergeant there, grabbed one of -- grabbed a -- a car, and took me -- and they asked one of the s-soldiers there to take me to the field hospital, which was only about maybe a mile away, th-the German field hospital, because that finger was still hanging on it, you know, it wasn't cut off completely, just hanging, just by the skin. So here I am in the German field hospital with all these wounded from the f -- the front was nearby -- wounded, and I was sitting there waiting cause there were m -- there were priorities, you know, there were people with li -- you know, all kinds of, you know, with -- with si -- major operations and all that, and I was waiting my turn. So they looked at me, they grabbed me because this German said, well this is a Polish worker that worked those -- and they cut off the rest of that finger, and they dropped my pants because they gave me a shot. You know, it was a form of either antibiotic, or something, for just a minute. And I was turned away from the guy who gave me the shot, you know, just on that side. And here I am again, exposed, you know. Is somebody watching over me? I don't believe it. Somebody else might be -- feel that way. At any rate -- so I was all bandaged up, you know, and went back. And -- and this was something that's very, very hard to believe, but when I went back, and I reported back to the -- that -- to th-that German place, this

guy asked me to wait. He was the -- the -- his name was Gabe Reuter -- Gabe Reuter. [indecipherable] meister Gabe Reuter. He was a field artillery staff commandant. And he gave me this piece of paper. Of course, I st -- I knew German. And I'll translate for you that piece of paper and you won't believe what it says. It said in it, the Polish worker Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn was injured while working for our unit, and he intends after his recovery, to join the German army as a -- as a volunteer. As a volunteer. Now here [indecipherable] nice Jewish kid from -- from L'vov, you know, volunteering into the German army, right? Now he did that as a big favor to me, because he felt by having this piece of paper, I will be able to get some, you know, privileges, you know, I would maybe get some bread or something. He was -- he just tha -- totally on his own. I certainly wouldn't have asked him for it. Would never even occurred to me. I didn't even know there was such a thing as being able to volunteer into the German army, but maybe by that time they were desperate for volunteers because, you know, the front was moving, they were moving, moving, moving, you know, west. So here I have this document, now -- now I'm a real, true Aryan with a -- with a -- with a Kennkarte, you know, and on top of that, I have this document that says here is a live wire for the German army, you know. And actually th-that did help me. I was able to get some bread from some of the German youths, cause we were scrounging for food, and I would show it, and I -- and I wore this for a long, long time, even after I was healed pretty much, I still wore this, you know, in a kind of, you know, in a sling, as a -- you know, right? And I actually helped the family, you know, that they -- the -- the family, because I was able to get some bread, and etcetera. So that was my -- my injury, as it were, you know, and fortunately I didn't get an infection because, you know, with the bandages and so here I am as a -- so that was ano -- another close call that I had.

Q: I think we have to stop the tape now.

A: Okay.

Q: And to go the next tape.

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: I want to go back a little bit, before the -- the uprising on the -- on the -- on the Aryan side -- Polish side. You have no contact with your family, I take it

A: None whatsoever.

Q: None whatsoever.

A: None whatsoever.

Q: So you hear nothing --

A: I had no idea who li -- who survived. I ha-had no -- no knowledge on -- I didn't know about my brother, I didn't know about my father, about Genya, Helen, my mother. I knew that my mother, of course, was not in L'vov because she left, yo -- you know, when the Russians arrived, she left for the small town where she originally came from, Tarnogrod. So I had absolutely no contact whatso -- it was impossible.

Q: Did -- did Zaremba fi -- the fi -- husband and wife keep in touch with you at all, or once you got to the leather factory --

A: Oh, I would visit them occasionally.

Q: You would?

A: Yeah. But I tried to avoid that. I -- I knew that they were not necessarily that comfortable and I -- and I was -- you know, when I -- when I would see them, they were friendly but I didn't feel like they were saying, well, why don't you come back tomorrow, have dinner with us, anything like that, you know. So -- so after awhile I just -- just didn't bother to stop there.

Q: So they were the only people in Warsaw to know who you were?

A: The only people. The only people who knew.

Q: Did you ever think any of the other boys in the leather factory were Jewish?

A: Oh, definitely not.

Q: They definitely weren't?

A: Oh, no, no, no, there's no way, no, no.

Q: No.

A: No, I mean -- I mean, I -- I -- I don't th -- I -- I can't imagine -- I don't know how many there were, I don't know whether there's any record of it.

Q: Right.

A: As to how many Jewish boys actually survived in Warsaw as Aryans. I really don't know, I have no record of it. In fact, I don't know whether the museum may have a record of any -- any who survived that way.

Q: Right, I mean --

A: I know women --

Q: Yes, more --

A: -- some women had a better time of it --

Q: Yes.

A: -- because they didn't have that problem. And actually some women even ended up in Germany in work ca -- in wor -- as workers. That I know.

Q: That's right.

A: But men -- male -- male Jews, I -- I certainly am not aware of it at all, no.

Q: Did you become close with any of these boys in any way? No. You were always afraid to --

A: Well, we were close only in the sense that we are co-workers, you know --

Q: Right.

A: -- that we worked together, and we would just go, you know, have some fun outside, you know, maybe a -- had a little money so we would buy some ice cream or anything like that. But we never talked about ourselves, we never talked about our -- our -- you know, anything like that, no. There was only one left. I mean, there were two more, but then towards -- later on, there was only one other boy that was with me in [indecipherable]

Q: And all the rest were --

A: And the rest were all the adult workers, the journeymen, yeah.

Q: I see. So, essentially you were alone.

A: Oh absolutely.

Q: All this whole time.

A: Well, I -- until -- until I met Danka, you know, of course --

Q: Yes.

A: -- and that helped, you know, I had -- I had a family to go to, you know, and -- and so forth. And I was welcome there, you know, and -- and they were very friendly.

Q: And does sh -- did she ever ask you questions about your f --

A: Oh no.

Q: No.

A: She didn't know that either. She didn't know.

Q: So she didn't ask you about your family?

A: Well, I would mention that, you know, that I was a half orphan from a small --

Q: I see.

A: -- you know, but to -- but you know, to the Poles in Warsaw, lo -- Tarnopol was like -- like, you know, the -- the -- the -- an unknown world, practically, you know, cause this was the capital

of the city, you know, it's like -- it's like talking about maybe a -- you know, like New Yorker east of the Hudson, you know, type of thing, you know, a -- a small town somewhere. So they were -- there wasn't that -- that important to them at all, because they knew that I was working for the firm, and I was there already for awhile, and -- and --

Q: You didn't --

A: -- I was learning a trade, you know, it's -- and stuff like that, you know.

Q: Did you grow up -- grow up very fast, or did you feel by the time you were 13, given what you had gone through, you were sort of adult by then?

A: Oh yeah, I felt grown up, sure I did.

Q: You did?

A: Oh yeah, I -- I certainly did. And -- and the interesting part too, speaking I -- I made a -- allusions to German, my German language. I learned how to speak a broken German Polish, you know, just -- in other words, I -- just throwing in a word of German here and there, which was known that some kids would learn German in public school. So instead of really speaking German the way I knew German, since I also lived in Danzig, you may recall, I would kind of speak a broken [indecipherable] German, which helped me also to get some bread, you know, from the Germans or some food when I had my -- my paper as a vol -- as a future volunteer, you know, in German army. So that was also kind of -- I -- I kind of thought that was really funny in some times, because here I am trying to speak, straining to speak German, you know, a few words here and there, to ingratiate myself so I could, you know, get some food. But then of course, trouble began again because the front was approaching. Now, you may recall that the Russians deliberately stopped on the outskirts of Praga because the Warsaw uprising was not sponsored by the Communist Polish exiled regime, by the London regime, okay? Which was --

which was the -- the -- th-the other side. So they decided, and it's, I think, historically documented, to let the Poles kill themselves, you know, before they had their own Polish army, which is part of the Russian army, take Warsaw. And of course, that was a complete catastrophe, disaster because of course the -- the Polish uprising finally failed, and the Germans regained, you know, the -- the -- the front and so forth. And while the uprising was finished by -- perhaps by beginning of October, started in August, the -- the pol -- the -- the -- the Russians began to advance towards the Vistula River, and we had to leave, you know, they had to evacuate all the civilian population. And that's why really tough times started, too. That was another period of great hunger for us, because we crossed the -- we had to cross the river, into -- onto the other side, you know, because the Russian was -- were advancing. And that was still during the uprising it's se -- that happen, because the Russians were moving -- inching up. And I remember like today, we are walking through a field and all of a sudden we saw these thousands of parachutes, what looked like thousands of parachutes, which was one of those big drops that the allied -- you know, the Americans dropped on Warsaw. And as you know, 90 percent or more of it fell into the German hands. That was one of those terrible, terrible blunders, you know, of the -- of the -- of this whole operation. And wa -- where the -- where the Polish resistance hoped to get all of that -- all these ammunition supplies and the Germans got all pri -- virtually all of it. And actually, we were wal -- as we were walking, we saw th -- the sky was almost dark. There must have been thousands of these drop -- of the parachutes coming down. So that was one -- another experience. And -- and then we tried to walk from one village to another village, trying to get some food, we were hungry. In fact, I w -- the one episode is where we actually -- I slept on the cemetery, you know, on the na -- on the graves, you know, because we had no other place to sleep. It was cold. And -- and that was a very tough time. We were very, very -- we had no

food. We maybe ate once a day. Sometimes we would eat some -- some potatoes and -- and then -- and cucumbers there was [indecipherable]

Q: And you were with Danka and her family [indecipherable]

A: I was with the family, right, right. The -- there was -- there was Danka and her sister -- younger sister. The two oldest sisters went away and they -- they -- they went separately somewhere. And there were there just the parents and the -- and the two sisters and myself. And there were other families, you know, sometimes we went a group together. And sometimes the -- the -- the local farmers would take pity on us and let us sleep in the barn, you know, and there was no food, and -- and -- and I remember where there was a cow, soon enough the Germans came and took away the farmer's cow, you know, so there was no -- no milk, and -- and no food, so it was very, very tough. And that lasted through that period of -- of -- of December and January, just the begin -- towards the end of December, and one night we wake up and who do we see? Russians, on their trucks, you know? Then I said to myself, okay, I'm alive. I made it. I made it. January 1945 is when Warsaw is liberated, finally, after being totally wiped out. And I never told the family that I was Jewish, but I did tell Danka that I was. And she wasn't shocked. Was surpri -- I would never -- she may have been s-surprised. But I soon realized that actually this was not a -- a true lang -- lasting romance. You know, she was older than I, and what was infatuation was not really a -- a real -- something that it was going to last, even though I would, if she were willing, I probably would have want it to last, maybe, at -- at that time, anyway. And -- and there were different Russians from the Russians that were, you know, retreating in -- in 1941, I mean, those were victorious Russians. And they were trying to give out food, and finally got -- we got some food from the -- from one of the -- some of the Russians, they were friendly. They could -- they recognized right away the -- what the -- they didn't know whether they were

Jews, necessary, but they -- they could see they're -- they're refugees and just hungry, starving people, and all that. So -- so that's how -- how I ended being Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn.

Q: And became Mundek --

A: And became Mundek Wertman again, you know, later on.

Q: But you had no papers to say that you were Wertman.

A: I had no papers. I had no papers. They had to take my word for it, the Jewish authority, Jewish agency, you know, had to take my word for it. My first notion was obviously to try to find family. And the movement of the front was such that the -- there was constantly Russians driving back and forth in their trucks, so forth. So I left the fam -- the -- the -- the Bozym family, jumped on one of the trucks and just went east, you know. And my intention was to go to Lublin because L'vov was already taken over by the Russians there, and they had a border, you know, they -- they -- they did not let people in, so L'vov became -- you know, they annexed L'vov to the -- to the Ukrainian Republic, even at that time they already established a -- a border. But I knew I had an uncle in Lublin, one of my father's brothers, who had a bakery. And of my father's four brothers and a sister, I only knew two of the -- of his siblings. One was the uncle in Lublin, and the other one was the sister on to -- Tomaszow, because when I was a little boy I would visit her. The other three brothers I never met. And they were spread out, you know, in different parts of Poland. And I remember checking into Lublin, and already at -- by that time -- and it may have been weeks -- few weeks after, they already had some established now, the Jewish agencies started to -- you know, to help out, you know, in establishing a registry of survivors. There was the HIAS, H-I-A-S, and the AJDC, you know, it [indecipherable] agency. And there was a registry and I went into this re -- first I was asking about my uncle and they said no, he is de -- he is -- he is not al -- he perished, you know, they didn't have any record of him.

And then I checked with the registry and lo and behold I see my father's name. I see Genya's name, I see my brother's name, I see Helen's name and I see my cousin's name, my -- my -- you know, my cousin's. I just couldn't believe it. I thought maybe this was registry of the dead, not of the living. And they had an address there, and I went there and sure enough, there was Genya, and there's Helen. And my father wasn't in on that day. And that was the first time that I took a real bath in I don't know how many years, three years, four years, a real bath, because I was really dirty. And -- and then I found out the story as to how my father survived, and how my brother survived. And I didn't know anything about my mother. There was no -- no -- no record of it until -- much later I found out what happened to her. And the way my father survived was that before the ghetto closed in July, I believe -- in June, I believe, in 1943, when the ghetto was closed, just before it closed, my father arranged with a Polish vegetable gardener to be hidden. And of course he paid them money for it. But he had some money stashed away, he would pay monthly because he was afraid to give him up front because the guy would probably spend it and -- you know, and so forth. And for 18 months my father didn't see the sun, the daylight. He was hidden there with Genya, Helen was given away, and with that cousin, with this Chana Koch, in a small area, was like a cubicle. And was given food maybe like once a day or something. The gardener would bring food. And in that same building there were German railroad workers that actually lived in that building. And they were separated just by a very thin wall from the places where the German railroas -- railroad workers would congregate and -- you know, and have fun and have their -- their drinking parties and all kinds of things. So he had to keep very, very quiet when the workers were there. There was no sanitation, there was no toilet. They just -- whatever water they could get, they would use that, and -- so -- so they ha -- instead of using -- using a toilet, you use something else and then get rid of it at night, da -- in the dark of night. My brother

George was fortunate he was able to live outside the camp itself because he was on a steamroller that I mentioned before, working it. But towards the end of the -- he knew what was going on because he was outside, so he could hear the -- what they were talking about, th-the guards and the -- the Germans and the Ukrainians. He knew that the camp was going to be liquidated. And he happened to know where my father was hidden because one of my father's friends, who had happened to be a Ukrainian, had some contacts [indecipherable] in the camp, you know, and he was -- communicated with him, so he knew where my father was. And on the night that he was going to be -- when the camp was liquidated they were taking -- he escaped from the caboose of that steamroller while the Germans were waiting outside, asking to get dressed, he escaped through a rear little window -- it's on -- on -- it's on his tape -- and ran away and hid, you know, for a couple nights, and joined my father -- was able to join my father in that hiding place. And he was with my father for a full year, until liberation. And the -- and -- and wa -- L'vov was liberated, I believe in July of '45. No, not in July of '45, I'm sorry, no, no, I'm wrong, I'm wrong, cause the war ended in May of 1944. It was liberated I think it was in -- if I'm not mistaken it must have been in the -- I have it written down. I think in July of '44, possibly, '44. He -- so they -- that was a very tough time for them, but they managed to survive in this hiding place. And -- and what happened is they moved to -- to -- to Lublin, my father, you know, moved to -- moved to Lublin after -- after the -- the liberation, and established himself there -- tried to establish himself there. And one of my cousins, who was a partisan in one of the forests of -- near Lublin, which was not far from Tarnogrod when my mother was there, he knew that my mother died in a -- in a mass shooting, liquidating the small remnant of that Jewish community in 1943. 1943. She worked as a nurse, apparently and then that -- so that's how I found out, cause he was one of the survivors, too.

Q: And you found this out within a year or so?

A: Right, yeah. These were very chaotic times and -- a-and just -- just -- just th-the remnants of the survivors and the chaos and the -- and the -- trying to find survivors, trying to look for survivors and -- and as I said before, you know, my father had four brothers. They all were married, had children, and for the -- the two cousins, one cousin my father's brother's son, and they -- my father's sister's daughter were the only two other of the family that acta -- that s -- that survived of my father's family. So -- so that was -- you know, of course, we all looked bad, you know, kind of emaciated and -- but fortunately not in terribly bad health at all, you know, somehow. And when I heard of my mother's death, you know, that was very hard for me. I was really -- it's kind of a -- hit me very hard. Especially in the light of the fact that if she had stayed with my father, if my father didn't divorce her, because he did it, she would have survived. You always think about that, you know. And she was so young, 38 years old, you know. She was very good to me. Bright, intelligent. Very socially aware. My father accused her of being a Socialist, which was -- was the strongest insult he could use, you know, cause he was obviously not. And she st -- he always accused her of being too free thinking. Too -- too -- too sympathetic to the -- to the strikers, to the laborers, you know, to the workers, and all that. So -- so that was very bad. That was a bitter pill, especially in the light of our very bad relations with the stepmother, you know, it was -- it was very, very bad. That has caused me a lot of anguish. And you never forget that, you know. And on the top of it all, after many years when my father separated from Genya, and they didn't live -- for [indecipherable] years they were separated, he would say, "If I could only bring your mother back alive." And you know, I mean that was, you know, if I could only do that. So, after so many years he had regrets, as it were, you know. So it was -- it was pretty hard. But -- but it's ancient history now. Maybe not so ancient for those who still remember it.

Q: It doesn't seem like ancient history.

A: Hm?

Q: It doesn't sound like ancient history --

A: Doesn't sound like it, I know.

Q: -- when you're talking.

A: I know. But I feel blessed being alive, having a wonderful family. Having a wife who can put up with me. Over 46 years now.

Q: Right.

A: Having children, grandchildren. I thought I would never live long enough to have grandchildren, it's wonderful to have them. And being privileged -- and I mean this sincerely, not sounding patriotic, over pa -- you know, that I am blessed to -- you know, to live in thi -- in this country and -- and f -- and I feel like I'm American citizen. I love America. I love democracy, and I think for those who went through this, they don't know how to appreciate democracy. And it's only natural that we take democracy for granted with all the -- with all the weaknesses of it, and with all its inherent problems. There's nothing better. There's nothing better than what we have. And hopefully it's going to get even better as time goes on. I sure hope so.

Q: Can we just stop the tape for a minute, please?

End of Tape Six

Beginning Tape Seven

Q: Okay. Michael, I want to take you back just a little bit because there's a couple of questions that I missed. When you were in the Warsaw ghetto, did you hear --

A: L -- L'vov ghetto, you mean.

Q: No, no, no, I mean -- I don't mean the Warsaw ghetto, I mean when you were in Warsaw --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- outside of the ghetto. Did you hear people talking about Jews?

A: No.

Q: Not at all? Not nasty comments, not too bad at what's happened, nothing?

A: Nothing. The -- the people that I lived with in Warsaw and worked with, were basically very staunch Polish Nationalists. You know, they -- they -- they really hated the Germans. And maybe because of that, they took a sort of a stand of they didn't -- they didn't ex -- they didn't want to express any anti-Semitic feelings, even though they may have harbored them. But I did not hear anything really negative per se at all about -- about Jews. In fact, nothing was said about Jews at -- at -- in -- in -- during our th -- there was no remarks made, or cracks made about -- about the Jews. I don't know whether I was -- whether the Poles in Warsaw perhaps were more -- more worldly in a sense, in general, as opposed to maybe L'vov, which was so heavily uk -- Ukrainian and Polish and all this strife and all this constant turmoil. Warsaw was more homogenous in terms of the Polish population. Maybe more sophisticated, I don't know. But I know that -- and I didn't hear this, so it's not a direct answer to your question, but -- but during the -- the Jewish uprising, there was some help given to the -- to the Jewish aba -- by the Poles. So there was some contacts made with the Polish underground, per se. And I was not aware that the Poles actually helped at all, the Germans to fight the Jewish ghetto, you know. Unlike in L'vov, for example,

where -- where there were just volunteers galore, you know, to -- to help to enter the ghetto. In fact, the -- the guards of the -- of the Jewish ghetto were actually Estonian and Latvians, many of them, which I don't know whether this is well known. And the reason for it being is that the Latvian and Estonians and Lithuanians had great hopes for having independent -- you know, want to be independent of Russia, you know, they always been an -- you know, under the Russian thumb, as it were, you know, and so maybe that -- somehow they felt that that would be some way of -- of maybe getting Germans to give them some independence. In the same ways the Ukrainians were hoping that they were -- that the Germans would give them a -- a country -- a statehood, or a bas -- or some kind of independence, some kind of autonomy. But they were, and they were [indecipherable] ferocious, you know, from -- so -- so I think perhaps in general, maybe -- and I don't know whether this is a fact, this is only my -- my -- my -- my impression, because I didn't hear any overt anti-Semitism within my immediate surrounding, perhaps this was maybe typical of -- of other urban Warsaw people, you know, of the -- of the urban people, the people who live in Warsaw itself. Now that is just supposition at this point.

Q: So y -- even when you were hearing and smelling the burning of the ghetto at the uprising, did you -- were you outside, and you -- you would see? And did people look? I mean --

A: I would see -- I would see it just walking down the street, you know, I could see it from a distance. But then, you know, life was going on and then as one of those -- you know, I mean, there was no -- I didn't see any crowds of people cause there -- they weren't doing it anyway, they weren't allowed to do that, there was no, you know, congre -- people were not allowed to congregate, p -- Poles were not allowed to do that [indecipherable]. But I could see, you know, from the distance, I could see the smoke and hear some explosions and hear gunfire and that kind of -- kind of stuff, you know? And that I said -- oh, I did see once a column of people being

marched away, nearby. I don't know where I was there, maybe I was getting closer because I was curious. But I never was actually close enough to actually see the ghetto wall, per se, or be close enough because I -- I didn't want to do that, I was scared, really, to -- to get too close to it, you know. One thing is to -- to try to avoid it, but not -- not to really, you know, tempt it too much, you know, to be -- to be too close to it.

Q: Right. I can't even quite imagine what it's like to be passing as non-Jewish, knowing what's happening to the Jews, that they're -- that there's sort of no resting place inside yourself.

A: Of course. Of course there isn't, yeah. It was always very bad. I had a terrible -- and my problem is I couldn't show it.

Q: Right.

A: I couldn't share it with anybody. I couldn't go back to my -- my workplace and look sad or look unhappy. I had to pretend like nothing -- everything was normal, you know, I went and did my work, you know, and kibbitzed with the -- with the guys that I worked with and -- and -- and you know, and all that. I mean, these guys were all pretty heavy drinkers while they were working, and -- and so I had to kind of play, you know, be wi -- you know, talk na -- shop talk and all that. And -- while inside, you know, I had this -- this -- this horrible, horrible feeling, I mean, tha -- it's almost like reliving some of the images of the ghetto, you know, because I was away from it for awhile, you know, and then I -- I was -- inside I was reliving all of that, you know, an-and -- and -- and -- and so forth. And that was a terrible feeling of -- of helplessness and -- and anguish again. But I ha -- I couldn't do it, I couldn't --

Q: Right.

A: -- ever show anything like that. You see, as I mentioned before, I had to watch my step, I had to -- on one hand pretend like -- not overcompensate, not to be too skittish, too nervous, or make

some offhand remark, you know, which we -- you know, you cou -- you could in a moment of -- of -- of -- of -- of a strong feeling say something. I mean, even saying some few words could -- could -- could cause me a problem --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- so it wasn't just a matter of the anatomy itself, but just as important was the actual overt behavior, your body language, as it were. Your facial expression. You know, I -- yeah, I -- I -- I had to be this innocent, sort of this -- this -- this apprentice kid, you know, the one that was kicked around by the -- by the -- by the -- by the journeymen, you know, pushed around and -- and so forth, you know, and scolded for doing bad work or -- or whatever, you know. Take all that -- that tough talking, you know, and -- well -- and that's -- was part of the training, you know, to keep you in line, you know, to -- not to make you feel like you know what you're doing. And -- and concentrating on it, you know, while thinking about that, doing all your work, you're not making mistakes, you know, you didn't want to ruin the piece of leather, it was very precious.

Q: Right.

A: You see, I mean to -- to cut something up and make -- you cut a pattern you know, and you -- you make a long cut, you know, you're in big trouble. Or -- you know. So -- so that was -- that's the [indecipherable] with being a chameleon, you know, you try to -- to change your -- you try to remember to -- to -- how to -- to -- the pretense. And that is -- that's wearing. And as I said, I mean, you know, I was fortunately young enough to be able to -- to handle it, and -- and so I'll play along and play the game.

Q: Did you like that work at all?

A: I find it interesting.

Q: Did you?

A: Cause I work with my hands. It was -- it was -- in a way it was [indecipherable] I could concentrate on. I had to concentrate to learn it. After awhile it became sort of automatic, you know, and in some cases mindless, you know, you just did it, because you learned how to do it, but -- but for awhile -- took a long time to learn. And it was hard work, too. So -- so that part of it was -- was actually very fortunate because it -- it took time, you know, and you kill time by doing it, and -- and you -- you glad you -- you -- you done with it, you know, when you're done. And -- and I didn't want to show off like I knew better, or I did it better than the other kid or something. I had to keep in line, just do my --my work and -- and try to be modest about it, and -- not that I was necessarily that skilled, but I mean, I -- I learned. You know, I -- I applied myself to it, in fact, probably more than maybe the other kid because I wanted to -- to do a good job, you know, so they would keep me instead of kicking me out and saying go back to Zaremba, you know, we don't want you. Which could have happened any time. Or if they didn't have enough work, they may have just said, hey go. I don't know what would have happened if they said -- whether the Zarembas would take me back or not, you know, or else -- who knows? So -- so I really had to kind of walk a thin line, you know, just to be sure of doing that. In fact, pretending sort of like I was more -- more, you know, like I didn't have all that good education, you know, and I was more of a -- perhaps more of a simple, you know, kid, you know, learning a trade.

Q: So you were pretty entrepreneurial in your own way, weren't you, a little bit like your father in --

A: Oh, in some --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- in some ways, oh sure, I had to kind of always -- I had to always sharpen my wits, as it were, you know, I have to be always aware of it. But again, being careful, being very careful. It was tough. You never knew for sure whether you were doing the right thing or not. I -- e -- I even had some -- some concerns about getting too -- too involved with Danka, you know, because who -- who n -- who knows what -- if she found out. You know, if I had maybe all of a sudden spilled my guts, you know, because I had to talk to somebody. I an -- had a need to share my feelings, my anguish, my -- my concern and -- but -- but I -- I felt I -- somehow I -- I -- I felt comfortable about it, eventually you know, and -- and she didn't ask me too many cract -- too many questions, too many de -- it was more like a casual sort of you know, friends who just -- who pass time and -- and so forth. There wasn't much to do really. I don't think I ever went to any movie or anything. They had a lot of movie theaters there with the German propaganda. I think I may have seem maybe one.

Q: Oh, you did?

A: I -- once I think I did. I saw one. But there was always this concern about th -- because the -- the -- the -- the underground was -- there were -- they were using sometimes explosives in the movies too, there -- there would be -- trouble began very soon -- not too -- not too long before the uprising, things were stirring, you know, and there was all kind of -- all kind of problems. Because again the -- the Polish underground was very, very tough and very strong at -- in its beginnings, you know. Was a real historical fiasco, the whole thing was just incredible.

Q: W-Were you surprised that Danka was not surprised that you were Jewish when you told her?

A: Well, I didn't have a cha -- I didn't really discuss it with her that much --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know. When I mention it to her, I just said to her, and -- and she -- she didn't sound -- she may have been surprised, maybe she didn't want to get involved too much in it. But my desire to leave and see my -- find my relatives was so strong that I didn't -- I don't think I lingered long enough to really get into it. I don't know whether she had told her parents or whatever. She may not even mention anything to them about it, I don't know. Did she think I would come back and maybe -- or something? I don't know either. We didn't have much -- any contact after that. It was in a different world, you know, I mean --

Q: Right.

A: -- I -- I -- I was no longer Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn, you know, he was -- I was Mundek Wertman again, you know. Was a na -- I -- I knew that I was an -- I knew -- my old -- I became my own identity as it were, you know. And -- and my major thing was to find family, to find my mother, to find relatives, and to -- but -- but in one experience, the Warsaw experience, one thing that it taught me in a kind of a [indecipherable] very unusual way, is that I had an opportunity to live with a Gentile family, which was totally alien to me. And I learned how the other peoples -- you know, how to learn, I mean I -- I think that sort of those germs of human -- humanism kind of began to -- to -- to -- to take root in my psyche as it were, because -- because they were people, they were a -- they were pe -- they were not Jewish, but they were people who -- who -- many of them had -- had the good qualities about them. They were warm, and human, you know. And so that experience was in some ways also kind of interesting, it kind of gave me another dimension as it were, you know, that I was not -- while living in -- in L'vov, you know, I wasn't isolated in terms of the big city, I mean, I could see other people. But our social life was totally Jewish, you know. I didn't have any non-Jewish friends. The only non-Jews were the pre -- pe- people that worked for my father, because I was encouraged -- you know, tha-that was not -- that

was not the style of life at that time at all, you know. There was in some ways a social ghetto, if you -- if you know what I mean, which maybe some viewers might not appreciate that comment, but -- but that's what it was.

Q: Right.

A: So that gave me that additional -- additional dimension that I brought back with me. And of course, the fact that z -- Zaremba knew, that also l-lasted with me as a fact that he was a Polish --

Q: Who didn't denounce you.

A: -- who -- who didn't denounce me, who didn't inform on me, and his wife. And of course there were other cases, like my brother, who had a Ukrainian farmer nearby, near the camp, that was helping, that was some -- of some assistance. Unfortunately there wasn't enough of them, you know, because if there were many of them, more had -- would have survived, of course, you know. So -- so that was the situation there. And as I mentioned before, when we went back to Lublin, these were very chaotic times, there were people going back and forth and trying to find each other and -- and we were greatly helped, of course, by the refugee organizations, you know, by the Jewish agency and so forth, and -- and people just didn't know what to do with themselves, you know, the survivors, you know, they were -- there was no job, this -- that they could get jobs, or they established businesses, or reclaimed businesses. I mean, the Polish -- the Polish government itself was -- was virtually nonexistent, I mean trying to establish -- their own country were destroyed really, I mean the destruction was enormous in many cities. Kraków -- Kraków was spared, basically, but -- but L'vov was damaged badly, Lublin was all bombed, and -- and many of the cities and -- so the destruction was enormous because the Russians in 1939 when they came in, they were, you know, there was bombardment there, you know, because they

invaded Poland from the east, so there was some fighting going on then, [indecipherable] the Germans from the west, you know. Polish had that -- has that geographic --

Q: Misfortune.

A: -- misfortune of being buffeted by --

Q: Right.

A: -- by all these things, you know, by -- being from all sides, you know, like -- which is one of the curses of -- of the -- of -- of the Polish existence as it were, you know. So --

Q: Was it easy for you to adjust to being Michael again, or Mundek?

A: Mundek?

Q: Mundek.

A: Was not very hard.

Q: Wasn't very --

A: Not very hard, because I knew that the other one was a temporary thing. It wasn't real me, you know. So Mundek came back very, very easily to me. I didn't have any problem with that at all.

Q: Do you remember the first time that you saw your father after the war?

A: Yeah, I do remember when I saw him.

Q: Was he shocked to s -- that you were alive?

A: Well, he was -- he heard about it. He was out of town but somebody already told him that and -- and of course this was very -- it was very, very emotional, he was very -- it was quite a -- quite a remoti -- emotional thing because he went -- he didn't have any idea as to what happened, and I guess deep inside he probably was very proud of the fact that what he did succeeded.

Q: Right.

A: You know? You know, that was --

Q: Even more than you [indecipherable]

A: Exactly, oh no, yeah, to him I'm sure that was a great personal victory, you know, that he -- that -- that his plan worked out, you know, that -- that succeeded in that. But -- but oh sure, I mean, you know, the fact that that was a -- it was a miracle in itself, just being able to -- to see each other and say hey, we made it, as opposed to so many others who did not.

Q: Right.

A: But what really grieved me and -- and -- and -- and enormously, is the fact that I couldn't find any of my schoolmates, and I couldn't find -- you know, that -- that -- that -- and you didn't know this until the war ended, until you were liberated, so all that loss of all these -- I didn't reali -- I didn't have to de -- until the -- the actual liberation, I had no idea of the enormity, of the scope and the enormity of this annihilation of people, you know? I just had no -- no concept, no -- I knew about camps, I knew about this, I knew about the -- the -- the -- the -- the Warsaw ghetto, of course, but I -- I just somehow in my mind, I -- I didn't really have that -- that -- that -- that concept of this -- this -- this enormity of that -- of that thing, especially where the -- with all the families of my father, or all these -- these schoolmates and classmates and the -- and kids that I, for years you know, played with and grew up with and went to school with, you know, I mean I'm talking about dozens and dozens of -- of -- of -- of -- of kids, you know, like through the grades, and -- and -- and so forth. And -- and realizing that, you know, was just a terrible, terrible shock to me of knowing that -- knowing that they -- they -- there was no record of them, you know. You know, first -- first -- cause nobody said they -- that they would -- th-the -- the answer was there's no record, you know, until such time as you really knew that obviously they perished. Because they were gathering records, so sometimes you had hope well maybe -- maybe

some did still survive, you know, until you -- until the cold realization that they did not. They did not. Because the registry was still active, you know, people would register, and sometimes they were late and they were away somewhere and they would come back and so forth. So after awhile, with the stark reality of all of that, became more and more apparent.

Q: So liberation turns out not to be such liberation.

A: Oh, of course not.

Q: Right?

A: Oh sure. Because when you were liberated, you per -- you personally felt that okay, I'm free. But what about the others, where are they? Where are the relatives? Where are -- where are the people that you knew, that you grew up with? Your friends. And who survive, who did not? I'm -- can you imagine living through that whole period of not knowing, you know? It's like -- it's like 9/11, you know. On a -- on a -- on a scale, on a -- right? Where you --

Q: So --

A: -- di -- didn't know who -- who -- who was -- who escaped or who did not.

Q: So what process did you go through? Did you -- did you start mourning in a way, or there's no body, there's no funer -- there' no [indecipherable]

A: There was nothing --

Q: There's nothing.

A: -- there was just an emptiness, you know, there was a total emptiness, total -- total -- total yu -- we knew there would be no bodies, obviously, you know, there would be nothing to, you know. I don't know whether my mother, whether she was buried at all, or not, or what, you know, I mean it was just that's it, you know. I know she -- she -- she was killed and --

Q: That's the end of it.

A: -- and that was the end of it. You didn't know any --

Q: Right.

A: -- there was no -- there was no bodies. So -- and of course the -- the -- the -- the also the -- the stark reality was also what now? Okay, we survived. Now what kind of a life are we going to have now? We knew we couldn't establish ourselves and we couldn't get jobs, there was no jobs. I mean, a lot of the Poles who were forced labor, Poles themselves, were just coming back to their own homes, trying to recover their own things, you know? I mean, you couldn't -- there was no jobs available. And -- and in some ways there is also a feeling of resentment if not outright hostility by some of the Polish people, who many of them suffered too, of course not -- not like the Jews, who -- who were -- in some ways there was some jealousy too, because they -- the Jews were getting help. The Jews were getting American money from the Jewish agencies and so forth, you know, so -- so they weren't hung -- they weren't hungry, I mean they were getting money, they could get some food and they were helped and all that, you know? So that in itself created frictions and tensions which later resulted as you know in -- in outbreaks of -- of anti-Semitism and -- and -- and killings and so forth. So -- so it isn't like the Jews who survived felt welcome, or felt -- they didn't feel any different in some ways than way before, you know, although there wasn't any of that overt antise -- anti-Semitism, it certainly wasn't a welcoming place. It wasn't like coming back home.

Q: Right.

A: There was no home.

Q: There was no home.

A: There was no home. And there was no place to go really, you didn't know what to do with yourself, until you began to think about emigration, you know, until you begin make contacts

with the -- with -- with the -- you know, with the Canada, America, Australia, you know. You couldn't go to Israel because until 1948 Israel was not a state. As we mentioned before, you know, the -- the -- the -- the British had a embargo, you know, and they were constantly capturing these boats, you know, and -- and putting them to -- into internment camps in Cyprus and others. Now who wanted to go back into a ghetto again, into a camp, you know? And even though in the internment camp was obviously not a ghetto, there weren't -- but still, you know, you -- you -- your -- your freedom was gone again. So many of the Jews, like in Poland, didn't -- didn't want to go, didn't want to take that -- that risk. You didn't feel like going there. You wanted to be free. You wanted to -- to -- to -- to -- to recapture some of that loss, you know. I never went to high school. I never experienced a high school life and the high school sports. My education stopped at the grade six or f-five and a half. I had no education, no high school. I didn't -- you know, it -- all I was is just ap -- an apprentice for a few years, so I didn't have all that experience. So I had no skills, per se. I mean, I certainly wasn't going to work in a leather shop, and then what leather shop would -- would even take me? There was -- you know, I mean, there was a -- there was no need for my skills. So -- so there was like an emptiness, you know, really. And -- and at the same feeling of sort of a carefree thing, you know, from one day to the next, you know, you felt like. So as a result, people are roaming around. They were going -- going -- get on trains, traveling, going places, you know, hoping to find something there, something here and -- and in fact George and I ended up in Romania, you know, we thought we maybe going towards -- towards Palestine, trying to maybe get there. We still thought maybe there was a way of -- of doing it. And by the time we reached Romania we -- we -- we couldn't go any farther, they -- they wouldn't let us go -- go through, we couldn't get to Greece, so -- so after -- for a few months of traveling and [indecipherable] we finally end up going back to

Poland, cause at that time there was no -- we couldn't -- there was no emigration as yet, it wasn't all set up yet, it was chaos. Just think about trying to reconstruct these things, you know, trying to get people together. And so we ended up in the -- in the western part of Poland, which is originally German, you know when -- you know the deal that was made by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. They gave eastern Poland to Russia, to Soviet Russia and they took away part of the western Poland -- western Poland -- I mean eastern Germany, including Danzig to the Germans. So these were sort of the new territories, and we had hoped maybe could establish ourselves for awhile there. So we ended up in -- in Leignitz, Legnica Leignitz which is one a -- which is a town in the -- in that part of Poland and try to -- to maybe open a store or something, trying to make a living there. So -- but that -- for awhile, that didn't last very long either. And in the meantime my father ended up in Munich, Germany, 1946, and Germany become the major, major staging area for emigration. All the DP camps, displaced person camps were all established in a lot of Germany, Munich and other places and so forth. And that's where he eventually ended up. And I got there in 1947. And end up and then I -- it was another stage in my life there, you know, as a DP in Germany for about three years.

Q: We need to stop the tape.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape Seven

Beginning Tape Eight

Q: Okay, Michael, you've now come to Munich and it's 1940 --

A: Seven.

Q: -- seven. And you're 19 years old.

A: Right. Okay, I came to Munich and my father was already there with Genya and Helen. And my brother married since then.

Q: That was fast.

A: He found -- yeah, he found his spouse and still while they were in Poland, and he actually con -- made contact with her in Romania. And her name was Frieda, they're still married to this very day. And so he was there, too, and then I arrived, and I took a little room in [indecipherable] of the apartments outside the DP camp. And my first interest was in trying to get some education. And I want to learn English, I want to learn French. So I had a pridis -- some private lessons, but of course I want to get a job, too. So I joined the international refugee organization, IRO, and I was assigned to the desk where they handled hardship cases. Now hardship cases were -- primarily meant expectant mothers, you know, displaced person expectant mother, because they were to be expedited sooner so that they would get to the -- wherever they were going, and have their babies there, instead of having them in the DP camp itself, where conditions weren't really that good. I mean, they were -- they were fine, you know, but they were camps, basically refugee camps. So I handled those cases too, tho -- mainly those cases and worked there and -- and then I became an allied civilian as a result of that, which gave me PX privileges. Now you know PX privileges, at that time, for a -- for a boy like me, you know, from the -- from the ghetto, was a big thing, because I was able to go to the PX and buy all the American, you know, goodies, you know, the candies, and the -- and the cigarettes at that time, of course, too, you know, and -- and

so forth. But at any rate, that was interesting work. And -- and of course the idea was to -- to emigrate, you know, obviously the -- living in Germany post-war was -- was -- it was not -- you know, you -- you didn't feel comfortable. They -- there was still a time when a lot of the German prisoners of war were coming home, you know, they were recovering from the war. They were released, of course, much sooner than '47, but they were still recovering and -- and there was a lot of shortages of food, you know, there were rations. And Munich was badly damaged in the war too, so there was a lot of poverty around and -- and -- and of course, I spoke German well, so I had no trouble communicating. Wer -- you know, living quarters were very crowded, they were crowded in with other German families. You had a room, and there were other German families in the other rooms, you know, in the same apartment, etcetera. But I enjoyed the work very much, you know. It gave me contact with the English speaking people because the people in charge were Americans from the United States, from the agencies, from the IRO, from -- from HIAS and AJDC, which is the -- the a -- American Jewish --

Q: Is it --

A: -- committee --

Q: -- Jewish Joint --

A: -- Joint committee.

Q: So the IRO was an offshoot --

A: Well, the IRO was sort of a -- I think it was a s -- was established -- I wonder whether that was a United Nations agency possibly, but I think there was under also as a s -- as in under the auspices or under some connection with the -- with the AJDC and -- and HIAS, but which handles the Jewish part.

Q: Right.

A: Because the DPs were full of non-Jews as well. Those DP camps were not only Jews, they were all kinds, there were Poles and -- and all kinds of nationalities, all -- all people that were displaced, you know, people that were displaced persons who -- who were in German work camps or something and they didn't go back, you know, they wanted to emigrate. So -- so the IRO was more of a -- of an overall umbrella, as it were. And HIAS and the AJDC were kind of affiliated, or sister agencies that were working with the -- with the Jewish people, so I was --

Q: Did you ge -- sorry.

A: Sorry.

Q: Did you get a salary?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: They paid you?

A: Oh yes, I got -- well, that's how I got my money for the -- yeah --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- that was -- that was -- that was like my first paying job, you know, because I didn't get much money when I was an apprentice.

Q: Right.

A: Maybe some pocket money and food, that's about all. See, I -- I had to get a salary, not very much, but I get a -- got enough, so I lived fairly comfortably then, and -- and then it -- where I began to re -- slowly began to feel maybe I'm getting back into a normal mode of life. And then my father was sponsored by someone in Canada -- you see, you ha -- you still had to have sponsorship, which is kind of really tough because -- because on one hand here you're s -- you're a survivor and then you have to wait for a year -- or for two or three years, which is terrible, I mean that's something that I -- was very hard for me to understand as to why -- why these -- you

know, the Canadian, American [indecipherable] people at that time were so reluctant to bring these people in, even though you were carefully checked medically, you know, if you had tuberculosis they wouldn't let you out, you had to be treated, and blood tests and all kinds of things because they didn't want to obviously bring in sick people into -- into the country, into Canada or the United States. But you had that waiting period and these people in the -- in DP camps, while -- while it was a far cry from being in a ghetto, still I mean, they were -- they had food and they had some clothing, but that's about -- you know, they didn't have -- there was no work, you know, per se. And there was just like waiting, waiting to -- to -- to -- to emigrate, and many of them I guess had to be absorbed, and then -- and then maybe in European countries and so forth. So this was -- it was going on for a number of years. Because when I left -- left in 1950, when I emigrated Canada, the DP camps were still ac -- still -- still in existence. So that's another aberration if you will, of -- of history and some sense that -- that these people were still sort of second class citizens, even though they were -- many of them were Jewish survivors and many of them were -- were others, you know, other nationalities. So my f -- I'm sorry.

Q: I was going to ask you, did you know someone named Amy Gottlieb, who worked for the JDC in Munich?

A: Not -- I --

Q: No.

A: -- didn't ring -- doesn't -- not -- not in that camp, there were several camps --

Q: What camp were you in, actually?

A: It was in the Munich camp, I'm trying to remember the name of it, there was a large camp right -- right outside -- right -- right -- right outside of Munich, one of the -- one of the big ones,

and I may have the name of it in my files somewhere, but I don't -- I don't have it -- maybe I still have it with me, I can look it up.

Q: So it took you three years to get out of --

A: Yeah, so my father got -- got out, I think, in 1949, when he got out first and then I followed him. He kind of -- he was sponsored by -- by -- by people at -- that he made contact with in Vancouver, British Columbia, and then he sponsored me, and then I followed him, and then I ended up in 1950, in Vancouver, British Columbia, in Canada.

Q: Did you feel really liberated then?

A: I felt -- yeah, well, it was an adventure, was a new country, I -- finally I found maybe this was a new -- new beginnings and new world for me, yes indeed, yeah, right. That was a -- a time when I -- and of course I was aware that I was older than most kids of my age who were -- went to high school and so forth, because I was already like 22 -- close to being 22, I think it was, early in 1950 and I was born in August. But you know, 22 years old was kind of old even for -- for a freshman in college, and I had this desire to go to college, and my father wasn't really totally encouraging cause he felt that I should maybe get a trade, you know. His idea at that time was I should learn how to repair typewriters. That would have been a big help to me, right, later on, you know, to repair typewriters, you know. Yeah, right? He thought that was a great thing, you know, from his vantage point, you know, typewriters was a -- was a mechanically advanced, you know, equipment, you know, and so forth. Repairing typewriters would give me a ma -- give me a pretty good living, you know, so -- and of course, I -- I didn't think that was attra -- exactly what I wanted to do. So what I did was -- is I went to a college entrance preparatory school in Vancouver, by the name of Surepass, which was a funny name of the --

Q: Showpass?

A: Because you were -- you were sure to pass, you know, right, so it's called Surepass, that was the name of it.

Q: Surepass?

A: Surepass. And I took for one -- one year, you know, I took this matriculate -- I took the examination and I was able to get my college entrance examination at the University of British Columbia.

Q: Wow.

A: And -- and this was with -- with -- only with a five and a half or five grade hi -- school, you know. But I studied hard, you know, and I took some courses and -- in that school and they -- they kind of knew what to learn, what to study and maybe they had a history of re -- you know, they knew -- didn't know exactly what exam would contain, but they had a backlog of -- of the kind of exams that they would give, and so they steered the courses towards -- but you know, I got a fairly good -- good background, and I enter -- and I entered the University of British Columbia, and went to college then, and so -- and my father was at that time -- of course tuition was only like maybe 300 dollars a -- a semester or something like that, so it wasn't a terrible burden to my father because my father when he got the -- came to Canada he had some money with him, and then he got in the construction business and he built a -- a rental property, so he was okay, he was always the entrepreneur, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: This was -- this was his great, great forte is to -- is to make a living, you know [indecipherable] to -- to be able to -- to do that. It was, I guess, in his genes. And so I went to the University of British Columbia, and then I took summer jobs, you know, like working for the Hudson's Bay, you know, as a clerk and doing all kinds of things. And then I -- after a year I

lived on campus of the University of British Columbia. And -- and then I took a year out before this -- before the final year, before the -- the -- the -- the senior year and worked full time just to make some money, and this is during that time I met Ethel. You know, and I lived by myself. Relationship with -- with Genya was very bad. And my father had big problems there, too. George was in his own business, he was in the -- he was always mechanically inclined, so he got into -- into the dry cleaning supplies business in --

Q: In Canada, also?

A: -- in kota -- in Canada and Vancouver also. And I was very fortunate that I graduated ahead of the class of 1955, head of the graduating class and the faculty of arts. And I got the -- the -- the Governor general's medal for -- for the -- for number one, and so that was -- that was a -- and on the strength of that I got a fellowship for -- for Yale, you know. So I kind of made up for a little bit of lost time.

Q: So you got a Master's from Yale?

A: I got Master's from Yale, yeah.

Q: In languages?

A: In -- no, in foreign area studies.

Q: In foreign area studies, uh-huh.

A: Yeah, international. I had at one time maybe -- I had an idea of perhaps going into the foreign service, but then I was handicapped because in order to go into the foreign service, the United States had the law that you had to be a citizen for 10 years before you could join the foreign service. So 10 years, and I -- I didn't ob -- obviously not, and I didn't -- I -- I was not, I was just a -- just a -- I was only a -- a ra -- you know, a -- a resident with a -- for one year when I got my Master's degree, so I -- I didn't want to wait that long. So I thought that maybe I would go to --

then I got another fellowship for Columbia to continue for a PhD., perhaps in -- in -- in that area. And I got restless, I -- somehow academia did not attract me a-any more, I felt I need to get with the mainstream, I wanted to -- to maybe establish my -- I -- I had great, great desire to mix, to be in a mainstream, because of this isolation of all the years, you know, I -- I wanted -- I didn't want to be isolated in the -- in the fee -- in the academia. And the close I got to the academia, I got very restless with the faculty life and the -- some of the backbiting that I came across, you know, in this, you know, so -- so -- so in a kind of an historical interesting thing too, is that when I got my fellowship for Columbia University, the director of the Russian Institute was no one bu-but Zbigniew Brzezinski. And it's interesting speculate what would have happened if I had continued. And he was Polish, as you know.

Q: Right.

A: Whether I would have been his right hand, or -- or maybe I would have continued with him and -- and ended up in the high echelons of -- of -- of government and you know, and that -- and so forth, you know, and the -- but I didn't take that route and I decided to go into the -- into the business world. And interesting, my father never thought I would be a good businessman. Yeah, he always thought that I had two left hands, which is [indecipherable] his expression. I -- I was too -- I was too soft, I was too sensitive, you know, I wasn't tough enough. I wasn't cut out for the business world. Well, I proved him wrong, because I was very, very successful in the business world. And I did climb the corporate la -- you know, a corporate scale and I got some very important corporate jobs and -- and was president of companies and sit on board of directors and all that kind of stuff, until I retired and I got into my own -- my own business, but -- so I did prove him wrong, you know, so -- because when I -- when I joined the -- when I went into -- into the retail business, I went on the executive training of Macy's in New York, he thought that I

wasted all that time going to college. You know, was a total waste, even though I told him that without a college education they wouldn't accept you into -- into executive training. But he couldn't -- he couldn't -- he thought I was -- I was just -- just talking nonsense, he said he couldn't -- he couldn't understand. He said, you don't need a college education to be -- to go to work in a store, you know. He thought I was, you know, the clerk or something, I mean who wants to -- who needs a college education to -- to stand behind the counter and -- you know, and -- and sell and sell the haberdashery or whatever, you know, or housewares. So at any rate, so that was -- that was basically what has happened and -- and of course having been fortunate enough to meet Ethel and to put up with me and with all my baggage that I carried with me, it wasn't -- wasn't easy and -- and it was this cultural gap, too, you know, when you -- and I -- I was very self conscious about my background. I was self conscious about -- about my accent, about not speaking English well, you know, I had such a terrible, terrible desire to fit in, to be one of the -- of the masses. I didn't want to be a -- a -- a outsider. I didn't want to be asked, hey, you speak, you know, where you from, you know. You have an accent, you know. That used to bother -- bother me a lot, you know. Maybe it was me, you know, maybe it was -- you know, was maybe foolish on my part of -- to feel that way, but in Vancouver, which is more of a provincial town, you know, people wouldn't hesitate to ask you. In New York you can speak all kinds of language, nobody pays attention to you. But in Vancouver, you know, you open your mouth and -- and not that they were that terribly interested in you, all they want to hear where you from, you know. They didn't know -- they didn't want to say wow, gee, you know, where you from and how -- when did you come or anything like that. All they wanted to know is where, you know, just to satisfy their superficial curiosity as it were, you know. So -- so that bothered me quite a bit, and -- and of course my accent was much, much heavier, you know. In fact, Ethel

kids me about the fact when we first started to date, you know, I -- I still didn't know how to say t-h properly, and I -- I would say wiz instead of with, you know. And that sort of thing, so --

Q: You seem to be doing okay.

A: Oh, I'm doing fi -- I think I'm doing better, you know. I seem to be doing better.

Q: And with Ethel you've had two daughters?

A: Two daughters.

Q: And now you have three gran --

A: Three grandsons.

Q: -- thre-three grandsons.

A: Yes. Very much [indecipherable]

Q: Let me just ask you one question.

A: Yes.

Q: This is the first time you've agreed to be interviewed.

A: The very first time.

Q: Why now?

A: Well, actually, I was lucky because I -- all I did was return -- I had the form from the museum, which sat on my desk for about two or three years. And there was a name which I don't think that lady is -- is any longer with -- with your department, but if you gave me the name I may recall that.

Q: Amy Reuben?

A: No. There was somebody else.

Q: Arwin?

A: Mm-mm. Well, maybe it was more than even two or three years ago. At any rate, it sat on my desk and I had maybe -- whatever it was, I had a survivor's block, I didn't register because that was a kind of a form very similar to the -- to -- well, it was the original form that I sent in, that was the -- the very same form that I sent in. And I finally filled it out and I put down, you know, and all that, with the Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn business and all that, and I got a call. I didn't expect to get a call. I didn't expect to -- to be a -- to ask for the interview. I didn't know whether I would qualify, whether my background was dramatic enough to -- you know, to qualify for that. So lo and behold, I get this call from Elizabeth, would I be willing to do that, and I said of course I would. And that happened to be coincidental with -- with star -- I started to write, I have like a chapter of my memoirs, I started to do that. So there was [indecipherable] for two this really, that I did. Why didn't I do it sooner? Again, I -- I just -- I didn't -- maybe I -- because I didn't feel that my story was -- was that important, you know, in the scheme of things. Maybe I didn't want to go through this whole -- the past, you know, trying to relive all that and go through this -- through these very painful, terrible memories, you know. You know, maybe I didn't want to do this so I don't lose faith in humanity, you know. Because I've always been an optimist and I still am. I believe that humankind can be better. I strongly believe in that, and I strongly believe that -- that life is sacred, that human life is sacred, whether it's one or one million or six million or whatever, you know. Every human life is sacred in my -- and I deeply believe in that, that's my -- that's my religion, as it were. I am a member of the Ethical Culture Society. And this is my religion, ethical humanist. So I have a very strong feeling about that. So maybe I didn't want to do that because I didn't want to -- to nibble at that -- at that st-strong feeling. I didn't want to lose, maybe -- maybe come bitter again, you know, a-about that, or lose -- lose faith in humanity, become distrustful, you know. And so I'm very happy, I'm very happy

now. I'm happy to be alive. And I'm very happy to be able to tell you my story. And I sure hope that it -- it'll be of interest to -- to other viewers and I'm ready and willing and able at any time to -- if they have any further questions or anything more t-to -- to talk about, because there's so much --

Q: Right.

A: -- that -- I said a lot and there's maybe more to be said.

Q: I'm sure there is.

A: So --

Q: Well, I want to thank you for being so open.

A: I want to thank you very much. You have no idea -- you'll never know what you did here is -- is just -- I'm most, most grateful and appreciative of that. And -- and I want to, from the depth of my heart, I really thank you so much.

Q: Thank you from my heart too.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape Eight

Beginning Tape Nine

Q: And what is this photo here? Now you can explain.

A: Okay, well this is a picture of my mother when I was about eight years old, would have been the year of 1936.

Q: And she would have been how old do you think?

A: About 31.

Q: And -- and her name?

A: Her name was -- was Leah, the -- we used to call her Liecha in Yiddish, what today would have been known as Lisa.

Q: Lisa Sarah?

A: Lisa Sarah wert -- Lisa Sarah Wertman. Maiden name Truk. These are pictures of my mother's parents. Their name was Truk, and Sarah was the -- was the mother and Zander was the father. And this was taken about the same time, about 1936, where they lived in Danzig. And they both perished in the Holocaust.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay, this is one of the earliest pictures I have of myself, I was about four years old, taken on a horse, which was kind of a staged picture at the time, and -- course it was taken in L'vov. This is a street scene in L'vov when my grandmother was visiting and it's a picture of her and my mother and myself, and I may have been about what, five years old at the time. As you can see from it, that -- we were -- it was cold weather and I'm kind of well covered for the -- for the elements here. Okay, this was taken in a town called Sopwot, which was near Danzig. It was a resort town and a beach, and I was four or five years old at the time, one -- on one of my visits to Danzig. And on the picture, starting from the right is my mother, next to her is my grandmother.

Next to her, standing, is the sister of -- my aunt, sister of my mother. And sitting right behind me is Abrun Truk, who is one of -- one of the brothers of my mother. And I have very -- very, very pleasant memories because that was still a time of peace and it was a beautiful resort area. And I had a lot of -- lot of fun at the time, on the beach, playing in the sand. Okay, this was taken a bit later, I was at that time, possibly 10 year old, 10 or 11, shortly before the war, and again it's -- it's -- brings back memories, of course, of my childhood. Kind of a little bit studied picture, but -- but it -- it ref -- it shows -- shows pretty accurately my -- my Aryan look. Now this is a very interesting picture because it shows my mother and her brother Ben, who was very dear to us, just before he left Danzig, in 1939, he was able to escape from Danzig and my mother was still in Danzig at that time. So she was the only one of her sisters and brothers who was -- who stayed behind, while the others were able to leave Danzig and survive abroad. Okay, now this is a shot of -- of my typical work day when I was working as an apprentice, and when I was the Aryan Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn, and my work was at the sewing machines, sometimes it was away from the machine doing other things. But I did a lot of sewing and as you can see, there are patterns hanging behind, and pieces of leather. So that was a typical -- typical work day shot for me. Okay, the other picture, the small picture shows me with a typical apron that we all wore because we did a lot of cutting leather and dirty work as well. Just in the -- in the courtyard of the -- of the workshop that I worked in.

Q: The one on your left.

A: Okay, this is a street scene, one of the ladies I befriended. I didn't know her for very long, but we happened to be walking down the street and there was a shot taken. And this is typical, with the hat, that I looked at, and -- and again it shows -- it shows me in -- in -- in Warsaw. This shot was taken when I was visiting the family, the Bozym family in the -- in the suburb of Warsaw

and the woman in -- that is with me a -- the young lady is one of the sisters of the family that I -- that I was friendly with. It just shows my blonde hair and my overall looks at the time. Okay, this was Mr. Bozym, who was the father of the -- of the family and he was a carpenter and he is the one that I worked with at that German infantry unit in the -- the artillery unit where I was injured working with him at the time. And he was a very gentle soul, and a very, very friendly chap. Okay, now this is actually a post-war picture, that was 1947, taken in Munich when I was 19 years old, but it pretty much illustrates what I looked like and how I was able to -- to pass as an Aryan with my wavy blonde hair, blue eyes, and at that time not -- not very prominent Jewish nose. Was in [indecipherable] already, I'm not sure when he moved. Wait now, this is a very, very early picture of my father, it's very interesting because he was only 25 years old at the time and the woman beside him is the mother -- his first wife, the mother of George and Mordechai, and was taken 1920, and it shows my father with a beard and a typical hat worn at that time, so reminiscent of -- of "Fiddler on the Roof." And he -- I don't ever -- I don't remember ever him having -- with a beard, so it must have been way back when, and then when -- he decided to shave his beard when he moved to L'vov. This is a photo of my brother George and his wife Frieda, taken in Munich in 1947. He was, by then, pretty much recovered from his ordeal on the -- in the -- in the camp of Winniki, and trying to estab -- get himself established and of course waiting for emigration.

Q: And George is the son of your father --

A: Right, and George is the son of my -- my father's first wife. Yeah, my -- my half-brother, seven years older. This is a shot of my -- my father and I, taken 1948 in Munich, Germany. And again it shows my appearance, and my father didn't really look that stern, but he always had a very serious expression on his face. And at that time he had that mu -- moustache, which he

would later shave, but he had that moustache for many, many years. We sometimes kidded him about it, saying why do you w -- why do you wear a -- why do you have a Hitler moustache, but it was the fashion of the time. [indecipherable] after the war, but -- okay, now this -- this piece of paper is very interesting and important historically because it d -- it authenticates my name of Mieczyslaw Wereszczyszyn. It was taken right after the war, where I had to register with the local authorities. My other documents were -- were lost and destroyed, but this survived. And it actually shows that I registered under that name and I also paid a fee for the registration.

Q: You were t --

A: Okay, this is a -- I never, of course, had my original birth certificates, all those documents were lost, you know, in the Holocaust and in 1993, when I applied for Medicare, I was encouraged to try to obtain a birth certificate because the Medicare authorities felt that it's a good -- good thing to have for the record. So I wrote to the authorities in Warsaw, Polish authorities, giving my name as Wertman, Abraham, because that was my original birth certificate name, and ga -- giving them th -- my -- my address in L'vov and the place and the street where I was born, without giving them the name of my parents and sure enough, they were able to actually dig up all the records and this is in Polish, saying that this a -- a copy -- an abbreviated copy of my birth certificate, listing of course my name as Wertman, Abraham, showing the date of August 30, 1928. City of birth, L'vov, and the name of my father, Chuna Wertman, which is correct, and of course -- and my mother's Sarah Leah Truk, which was her maiden name. So I was glad to actually have a -- an -- a real, authentic birth certificate. Ba -- four -- thr --three -- three -- four years ago, three years ago -- wait!

Q: Oops, my mistake, go ahead.

A: About three years ago, my brother George and Frieda, shown here decided t -- to take a trip to Poland and to -- just as part of their itinerary. And they went to the street with -- where I was born, where we all lived, and the two photos show the outside, which is a street that's numbers still there, 6A, and the street name, Pilnikarska, which is not shown here. And of course it's -- it's in disrepair, but that's sort of the gate where we -- where we -- the entrance to it, and the upper windows is where we lived, and the lower part, which is on the -- on the right hand side here, were some other apartments that my father would rent out, and it shows the interior -- interior court, and on the right hand side was a stable where my father kept some horses for his -- with a wagon and where he would get milk from the -- from the railroad station for his processing of milk and for the milk products, and so forth. On the left was the -- part of the factory and the store, and it looks boarded up now, so it's really in -- in bad repair, but interestingly it's still -- it's still there.

End of Tape Nine

Conclusion of Interview